# CULTURE SHOCK

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Culture is something people claim to have and others are accused of lacking. Culture reflects a person's style, sophistication, upbringing, and values. Culture is ever-changing and constantly updated.

As first and second generation Coptic Christians, we are often confronted with a culture clash that leaves us confused and unsure. To which culture do we belong? That of the "old country" or that of our adopted, new homeland? Are we conservative or liberal regarding the social questions of our day: music, clothing styles, haircuts and the more consequential issues of abortion, gay marriage, divorce, cohabitation, etc?

We are often pulled in two directions, hearing very different opinions from Church, family and old friends on the one side and pop culture icons, newer friends, and politicians on the other. What to do? Reconciling the two cultures that undoubtedly determine our choices and plot our direction in life is an on-going chore. Young people very often feel the need to blend in to the current cultural trends of the day. Tattoos and body piercing were considered outrageously unacceptable but a few years ago. Scripture even has an opinion about it in (Leviticus 19:28) **"You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD."** Nowadays, such so called "body art" is on display for all to see, most generously provided by admired professional athletes, idolized movie stars, beloved music artists, and even among business professionals from all walks of life.

Why is that which was considered so offensive and unappealing a short time ago, now readily accepted and desirable? The answer lies in the rapidly shifting sands of culture.

No one can ever claim that any culture is perfect. No culture can dare claim absolute superiority. It is, therefore, our job to select those good and profitable aspects of the cultures to which we are exposed.

Egyptian culture may be characterized in many ways. It is at its worst admittedly stubborn, condescending , rigidly conservative, sexist, meddlesome, overly sensitive, and chaotic. At its best it is

proudly generous, kind, caring, family-centered, communal, spiritual, and deeply rooted.

Similarly, American culture, at its worst, may be characterized as careless, intellectually lazy, promiscuous, violent, and patronizing. On the other hand, at its best it is visibly disciplined, punctual, organized, efficient, and generous.

People all too often simply select those attributes of cultures that are easily attained and temporarily gratifying. Man is very easily predisposed to short-sighted decisions, preferring to turn a blind eye to Scripture's call for sobriety and alertness:

· **"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."** (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

· **"Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded"** (Titus 2:6)

· **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."** (1 Peter 5:8)

As Christians, it is our purpose and calling to always focus on the best that the world has to offer: **"but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all"** (1 Thessalonians 5:15). To emulate and select those things which help us to grow and become more Christ-like.

I should be proud of my rich Egyptian heritage and culture and cling to those elements of my motherland's culture which are edifying and reject those things that are so clearly negative. Many young people take pride in calling themselves Americans and avoid a connection with their Egyptian roots. At the same time, one can detect in them some of the negative aspects of Egyptian culture listed above. Unfortunately, they also very often choose many of the negative aspects of American culture, as well, thus giving a new, unintended understanding of the "melting pot" concept.

Why not extract the good from both cultures? St. Paul commands us to **"Test all things; hold fast what is good"** (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Why not develop a personality that is disciplined, organized, and punctual while at the same time retaining my Egyptian culture's attributes of kindness, family-centeredness, and spirituality? In this way, I will have taken the best of both worlds and solved the dilemma of seemingly contradicting cultures.

What are your thoughts about this issue? What do you think about American and Egyptian culture? Do you struggle with parents, friends, etc. about this? We want to hear from you! Send your comments to **mightyarrows@suscopts.org**

May our Lord Jesus Christ teach us the wisdom and art of choosing wisely that we may fulfill St. Paul's exhortation when he says, **"brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable–if anything is excellent or praiseworthy–think about such things"** (Philippians 4:8). To Him be the glory forever. Amen.