Morocco's Ditties "Christianized"

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RABAT â€" Proselytizers in the North African kingdom of Morocco have broken new grounds to spread their faith, Christianizing the lyrics of popular folklore songs in the Muslim-majority country.

"The proselytizers have realized that folklore songs are a major pillar of the national identity and a way to reach many cross-sections in Morocco," Abdel Qadir Al-Sahli, a music critic, told IslamOnline.net Monday, April 23.

"They know that Moroccans, especially youths, are still very attached to these songs."

The proselytizers found their destination in the 1974 hit "Essiniya" by Nass El-Ghiwane, one of the most famous and oldest bands in Morocco.

They changed the lyrics of the immortal song, a mixture of politics and Sufism, but kept the melody.

The new lyrics are all about Jesus and Christianity.

Some of the lyrics read: "Folks! Can I have your attention please/I believed in Jesus Christ, who enlightened my life and put me on the right path/He sacrificed himself for me."

Nass El-Ghiwane's co-founder Omar El-Sayed could not be immediately reached by IOL for comment.

Whenever mentioned in the Western literature, Nass El-Ghiwane is referred to as The Rolling Stones of Africa.

They are living legends who merged the rich repertoire of traditional music of Morocco with modern subjects.

They were the voice of the oppressed lower class and were banned on some occasions to sell their records and play on venues for the incredible amount of energy and rebellion they delivered to their public.

Spiritual

Sahli said proselytizers are playing on the spiritual side of vulnerable Moroccans.

"They don't tackle in their twisted lyrics the complicated theologian aspects in Christianity," he said.

"But they rather go spiritual."

He said the proselytizers are eying popular hits highly charged with emotions.

"They are passing their messages and values through these popular songs."

According to IOL's correspondent Essiniya is not the only victim of the new trend.

The "artistic proselytizing" has targeted other popular ditties by famous bands and singers, he insists.

There are some 800 active European proselytizers in Morocco where some 1,000 people converted to Christianity in 2004, according to unofficial estimates.

Muslims make up 99 percent of the Arab country's population, while Christians and Jews represent a meager one percent.

Western and Arab reports have repeatedly spoken about an increasing proselytizing activities in the Arab Maghreb.

France's Le Monde newspaper estimated that some 500 Tunisians have converted to Christianity last year.

It claimed thousands in Algeria's tribal areas have converted to Christianity since 1992.