

## Commonalities and Differences among the Abrahamic Faiths

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### Abstract

Abrahamic faiths namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam share the theology of monotheism. The three religions trace their origins to Prophet Abraham. Judaism is the religion of the descendents of Jacob, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. Christianity began as a sect of Judaism in the 1st century, and later on developed its own creed such as trinity. Islam began in the 7th century; it also traces its link to Ishmael, the son of Prophet Abraham. The three religions share mostly the same heritage, history, greatness and theology of monotheism. This essay attempts to highlight the common features of these three religions, while at the same time presents the differences in terms of the unique roles, perspectives and meanings of each of them.

**Key words:** Abraham, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Monotheism

### Abstrak

Agama Abrahamik iaitu agama Yahudi, Kristian dan Islam berkongsi teologi monoteisme. Ketiga-tiga agama ini boleh dijejak asal-usulnya kepada Nabi Ibrahim. Agama Yahudi adalah agama keturunan Nabi Yakub, anak kepada Nabi Ishak dan cucu kepada Nabi Ibrahim. Agama Kristian bermula sebagai satu mazhab agama Yahudi pada abad ke-1, dan kemudiannya membangunkan kepercayaan tersendiri seperti trinititi. Islam bermula pada abad ke-7; ia juga boleh dijejak semula kepada Nabi Ismail, anak kepada Nabi Ibrahim. Ketiga-tiga agama ini berkongsi sebahagian besar warisan, sejarah, keagungan dan teologi monoteisme yang sama. Esei ini cuba untuk menyerlahkan ciri-ciri yang sama, dan pada masa yang sama menunjukkan perbezaan dari segi peranan yang unik, perspektif dan makna setiap daripada mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** Nabi Ibrahim, Agama Yahudi, Agama Kristian, Islam, Monoteisme

### Introduction

Prophet Abraham is a very important figure in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Judaism, he is a famous patriarch and the recipient of a formative and original covenant from God, which was later refined as the Mosaic covenant. The second covenant is seen as one given to Jesus Christ. In Islam,

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Abraham is a heralded example of unwavering faith and monotheism, a prophet and messenger of God. The three religions share the tradition and heritage of the piety of Prophet Abraham.

In the Jewish and Christian scriptures, for example, the following verses are mentioned of the Prophet Abraham.

“But you, as my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, in the off spring of Abraham, my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and will not cast you off’ do not fear, for I am your God, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”<sup>1</sup>

The Christian scripture reads: “Abraham believed in God and it was reckoned to him as righteous and he was called friend of God”<sup>2</sup> and “Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendents of your friend Abraham?”<sup>3</sup> The Quran says “And who turns away from the religion of Ibrahim (Abraham) except him who befools himself? Truly, We chose him in this world and verily, in the hereafter he will be among the righteous.”<sup>4</sup>

From the quotations given it is evident that Judaism, Christianity and Islam accept righteous Abraham as a prophet of God, and due to the belief in One Supreme Being, these three religions are frequently classified as monotheistic.

The main statement of problem of this article dwells in the similarities and differences among the three religions. They claim to have received revelations from God. They too claim to have the same legacy of historical prophethood with some events reported differently. They share a common core of religious and ethical teachings although each of them has its specific doctrine and dogma unique to itself.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Isaiah 41: 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible*, James 2:23.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible*, 2 Chronicles 20:7.

<sup>4</sup> *The Quran*, 2: 130.

The methodology in this research is content analysis of the holy scriptures of the three Abrahamic faiths to evaluate them from the perspective of religious teachings and the concept of Unity of God. There are not many differences in the belief of the Unity of God among the three Abrahamic faiths according to their scriptures. Several of the verses from the scriptures are discussed in the following sections.

### **Unity of God**

A central tenet of Judaism is the unity of God. This is known as Shema and is mentioned succinctly in the following verse.

“Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your Might.”<sup>5</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus is reported to have said, these words of Shema when he was asked the greatest of all commandments. In Mark, it is written, “One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God. The Lord is one.’”<sup>6</sup> Further in James, the Unity of God is also stressed, noting that even the demons believe in God’s oneness. “You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the Demons believe, and shudder.”<sup>7</sup>

The Unity of God is also mentioned in Al-Quran, the holy book of Islam. The Quran mentions, “And your God is One God There is no god but He, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful”<sup>8</sup> and “He is God, the One and only.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **Attributes of God from the Beginning to the End**

The New Testament uses many illustrations to describe the greatness and majesty of God. One of the examples describing God is: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Mark 12:28-29.

<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible*, James 2:19-20.

<sup>8</sup> *The Quran*, 2:163

<sup>9</sup> *The Quran*, 112:1.

beginning and the end.”<sup>10</sup> A similar concept is in the Quran. “He is the First and the Last, the Most High and the Most Near.”<sup>11</sup>

There are also many verses in the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, indicating the Omnipotence and Omniscience of God. All the Abraham faiths stress that God is all-powerful and there is nothing beyond His competence and ability. Many verses from the Old Testament praise and glorify the unlimited power of God and the following examples illustrate the point.

The Lord said to Moses, “Is the Lord’s power limited?  
Now, you shall see

whether my word will come true for you or not.”<sup>12</sup>

“Great is our Lord abundant is His power, His  
understanding is beyond measure.

The Lord lift up the downtrodden and He cast the  
wicked to the ground.”<sup>13</sup>

“Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory,  
the victory and the

majesty; for all that is in the heaven and on the earth is  
yours, yours is the

kingdom, O Lord and you are exalted as head above  
all.”<sup>14</sup>

Daniel said, “Bless be the name of God from age to age,  
for wisdom and power  
are his.”<sup>15</sup>

In the New Testament, in Mark 10:27, Mathew 19:26 and Luke 18:27, similar words were quoted from Jesus. Jesus looked at them and said, “The mortal is impossible, but not for God: For God, all things are possible.”<sup>16</sup>

While in the Quran, the concept of omnipotence of the God is an essential aspect of Islamic teachings. There are several verses illustrating the omnipotence of Allah, as follows:

<sup>10</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Revelation 22:13.

<sup>11</sup> *The Quran*, 57:3.

<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Numbers 11:23.

<sup>13</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Psalm 147:5-6.

<sup>14</sup> *The Holy Bible*, 1 Chronicles 29:11.

<sup>15</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Daniel 2:20.

<sup>16</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Mark 10:27, Mathew 19:26 and Luke 18:27.

“Know you not that it is Allah to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth?”<sup>17</sup>

“The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein, glorify Him and there is not a thing but glorifies His Praise.”<sup>18</sup>

“Had they taken to worship in the heaven and earth other gods than Allah, then verily both, would have been ruined.”<sup>19</sup>

“He manages and regulates every affair from the heavens to the earth; then its affair will go up to Him.”<sup>20</sup>

### **The Ten Commandments**

One of the earliest classical expressions of an ethical systems recognised by Judaism and Christianity is the Ten Biblical Commandments as found in Exodus 20: 1-17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6-21. In summary, these commandments are:<sup>21</sup>

1. You shall have no other gods before one God.
2. You shall not make any graven images or idols of God.
3. You shall not take the names of your God in vain.
4. You shall remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.
5. You shall honour your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. Thou shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet your neighbours and neighbours' wives or their possessions.

These Ten Commandments serve as a basic underpinning of the Judaeo-Christian system of ethics. The Quran in various verses confirms the presence of the Ten Commandments but with different wordings.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Quran*, 2:107.

<sup>18</sup> *The Quran*, 17:44.

<sup>19</sup> *The Quran*, 21:22,

<sup>20</sup> *The Quran*, 32:5.

<sup>21</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Exodus 20: 1-17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6-21.

“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be kind to your parent. If one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt and repel them, but address them in terms of honour.”<sup>22</sup>

“And come not to adultery, for it is a shameful deed and evil, opening the road to other evils, nor take life- which God has made sacred- except for just causes.

And come not near to the orphan’s property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength. And fulfill every engagement will he enquired into (on the day of reckoning). And give full measure when you measure and weigh with a balance that is straight. That is most advantageous in the final determination.”<sup>23</sup>

“Worship Allah and join none with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbor who is stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer and whom your right hand possess.”<sup>24</sup>

The commonalities of the Ten Commandments of the Holy Bible with the Quran are in the preceding discussions. The beginning of Chapter 17 verse 23 of the Quran says, “Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him” is a decree similar to the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before God.” The verse, “Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set with Him (in worship)”<sup>25</sup> is quite similar to the Second Commandment, “You shall not make any graven images of God.” In a similar tone, the Quranic verse, “Make not Allah’s Name an excuse in your oaths against your doing good and acting piously,

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<sup>22</sup> *The Quran*, 17:23.

<sup>23</sup> *The Quran*, 17:32-35.

<sup>24</sup> *The Quran*, 4: 36.

<sup>25</sup> *The Quran*, 4: 48.

and making peace among mankind”<sup>26</sup> resembles the Third Commandment, “You shall not take the names of God in vain.”

The only difference is the Fourth Commandment in relation to the Quran. The Sabbath day (Saturday) was relinquished by the Quran with the revelation of the verse, “O you who believe (Muslims)! When the call is proclaimed for the prayer on Friday (congregational prayers) come to the remembrance of Allah and pray and leave off business and every other thing.”<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the verse, “And that you be kind to your parents. If one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt and repel them, but address them in term of honour”<sup>28</sup> is the same as the Fifth Commandment, “Honour your father and your mother.” The verse, “And do not kill anyone whose killing Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause”<sup>29</sup> is similar to the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder.” Similarly, the verse, “And come not to unlawful sex. Verily, it is a great sin and an evil way,”<sup>30</sup> is equivalent to “You shall not commit adultery” of the Seventh Commandment.

The remaining three prohibitions are quite identical though the equivalent Quranic rulings are more assertive as follows:

“And as for the male thief and the female thief, cut off their hands as a recompense for that which they have committed, a punishment by way of example from Allah,”<sup>31</sup> to the Eighth Commandment, “You shall not steal.” While the verse, “Do not withhold any testimony by concealing what you had witnessed, surely, his heart is sinful,” is a resemblance to the verse, “You shall not bear false witness” of the Ninth Commandment. Finally, the verse, “And do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbour who is stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet, and those slaves whom your right hand possesses,”<sup>32</sup> is similar to “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet you neighbour’s wife, or male or female

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<sup>26</sup>*The Quran*: 2:224.

<sup>27</sup>*The Quran*, 62:9.

<sup>28</sup>*The Quran*, 17:23.

<sup>29</sup>*The Quran*, 17:33.

<sup>30</sup>*The Quran*, 17:32.

<sup>31</sup>*The Quran*, 5:38.

<sup>32</sup>*The Quran*, 4:36.

slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour,” of the Tenth Commandment.

From the above comparisons, there is clear evidence that Muslims also have to adhere to the same commandments, except that the verse, “You shall keep the Sabbath day, keep it holy,” is different from the Quranic verse, “The Sabbath was decreed only for those who ended up disputing it (Jews and Christians) and verily, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection and that wherein they used to dispute.”<sup>33</sup>

Another law regarding the fundamental ethical principle of Lex Talionis is found in the Old Testament. Let us compare it to Islam. In the Old Testament, it is written, “If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”<sup>34</sup> Whereas in the New Testament, Jesus reportedly suggests that Lex Talionis should be softened with charity, mercy and forgiveness. In the New Testament, it is reported that Jesus Christ urged his followers not to insist on their rights under Lex Talionis when he said,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go for the second mile.”<sup>35</sup>

This is found in Al-Quran too. The Quran says, “We ordain therein for them: Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal. But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity, it shall be for him expiation.”<sup>36</sup>

In this verse, the recompense for an “injury is an injury” equal thereto but if a person forgives and offers reconciliation, his reward is due from God for God loves not those who do wrong. But indeed if any do help and defend themselves after a wrong is done to them, against such there is no cause of blame. The blame is

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<sup>33</sup> *The Quran*, 16:124.

<sup>34</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Exodus 21:23-25.

<sup>35</sup> *The Holy Bible*, Mathew 5:38-41 and Luke 6:21.

<sup>36</sup> *The Quran*, 5:45.

only against those who oppress men with wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice: For such there will be a grievous penalty. But indeed if any show patience and forgiveness, there would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs. The Qur'an says, "And who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, and who spend of what We bestowed on them. And those who when an oppressive wrong is done to them, take revenge. The recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof; but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is with Allah."<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the recompense from Allah is always better and takes priority, as in the verse, "But the recompense of your Lord is better, and He is the Best of those who give sustenance."<sup>38</sup>

From the words of Jesus Christ and verses of the Quran, there are similarities, even in being soft and using great wisdom in tackling evils. Our hearts according to the faiths should always love mankind and not to take revenge and cause harm as a way of pleasure.

## Judaism

Judaism is the "religion, philosophy, and way of life" of the Jewish people. Judaism, originating in the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Tanakh) and explored in later texts such as the Talmud, is considered by Jews to be the expression of the covenantal relationship God developed with the Children of Israel. According to traditional Rabbinic Judaism, God revealed his laws and commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai in the form of both the written and oral Torah.<sup>39</sup> The content of Rabbinic Judaism speak of Torah – that is, of divine revelation contained in Tanakh, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, or the Torah which is memorised.<sup>40</sup> The term "Jews" later replaced the title "Children of Israel."

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<sup>37</sup> *The Quran*, 42:38-40.

<sup>38</sup> *The Quran*, 23: 72.

<sup>39</sup> Jeremy Rosen, *Understanding Judaism*, (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob Nuesner, *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Inc., 1979), p. 13.

Judaism claims a historical continuity spanning more than 3000 years. It is one of the oldest monotheistic religion, and the oldest to survive to the present day.<sup>41</sup> Its texts, traditions and values comprise an inheritance to later Abrahamic religions including Christianity and Islam. Many aspects of Judaism have also directly or indirectly influenced secular Western ethics and civil law.

Briefly, Jews belong to the ethno religious group that includes those born Jewish and converts to Judaism.<sup>42</sup> In 2007, the world Jewish population was estimated at 13 million, of whom about 40% reside in Israel and 40% in the United States. The largest Jewish religious movements are Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Reformed Judaism. A major source of difference between these groups is their approach to Jewish law. Orthodox Judaism maintains that the Torah and Jewish law are divine in origin, are eternal and unalterable, and should be adhered to. Conservative and Reformed Judaism are more liberal, with Conservative Judaism promoting a more "traditional" interpretation of its requirements than Reformed Judaism.<sup>43</sup> Their typical position is that Jewish law should be viewed as a set of general guidelines rather than a set of restrictions and obligations whose observance is required of all Jews. The authority on theological and legal matters is not vested in any one person or organization, but in the sacred texts and the many scholarly rabbis who interpret these texts.

### Christianity

Christianity (from the Greek word *Khristos* or "Christ" literally means "anointed one") is a monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the New Testament. The Bible is the holy book for Christians. Christianity comprises three major branches: Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy (the two split from one another in 1054 A.D), and Protestantism came into existence during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Protestantism is further divided

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Golddenberg, *The Origins of Judaism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *American Jewish Identity Politics*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008), p. 303.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Rosen, *Understanding Judaism*, p. 115.

into smaller groups of varied denominations.<sup>44</sup> Most Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God, God having become a human being and the savior of humanity. Christians, therefore, commonly refer to Jesus as “Christ” or “Messiah,” “Son of God” and as one of the Holy Trinity but One.<sup>45</sup>

Adherents of the Christian faith, known as Christians, believe that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Bible (the part of the scripture common to Christianity and Judaism and referred to as the "Old Testament" in Christianity). The foundation of Christian theology is expressed in the early Christian ecumenical creeds, which contain claims predominantly accepted by followers of the Christian faith. These professions state that Jesus suffered crucifixion, died, was buried, and was resurrected from the dead on the third day. Then he ascended to heaven to those who believe in him and have trust in him for the remission of their sins (salvation).<sup>46</sup> The Christians believe Jesus as the Son of God was crucified to erase the sins of all men before he ascended into heaven where he rules and reigns with God, the Father. Most denominations teach that Jesus will return to judge all humans, living and dead, and grant eternal life to his followers. He is considered the model of a virtuous life, and both the revealer and physical incarnation of God.<sup>47</sup> Christians call the message of Jesus Christ the Gospel ("good news") and hence refer to the earliest written accounts of his ministry as gospels.

Christianity began as a Jewish sect<sup>48</sup> and is classified as an Abrahamic religion.<sup>49</sup> Originating in the eastern Mediterranean, it quickly grew in size and influence over a few decades, and by the 4th century had become the dominant religion within the Roman

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<sup>44</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1958), pp. 352-359.

<sup>45</sup> Charles A. Briggs, *The fundamental Christian faith: the origin, history and interpretation of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds*, (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1913), p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Sheek, *Theology and Sanity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 4-6.

<sup>48</sup> George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*, (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), p. 229.

<sup>49</sup> Jeaneane D. Fowler, *World Religions: An Introduction for Students*, (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press 1997), p. 121.

Empire.<sup>50</sup> During the Middle Ages, most of the remainder of Europe was Christianised, with Christians also being a (sometimes large) religious minority in the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of India.<sup>51</sup> Following the Age of Discovery, through missionary work and colonisation, Christianity spread to the Americas, Australasia, and the rest of the world. Christianity, therefore, is a major influence in the shaping of Western civilisation.

In early 21st century, Christianity had around 2.2 billion adherents.<sup>52</sup> Christianity today represents about a quarter to a third of the world's population and is the world's largest religion.<sup>53</sup> In addition, Christianity is the state religion of many countries.

### Trinity in Christianity

Trinity refers to the teaching that the one God comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons; the Father, the Son (incarnate in Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. Together, these three persons are sometimes called the Godhead although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead.<sup>54</sup> In the words of the Athanasius Creed, an early statement of Christian belief, "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are no three Gods but one God."<sup>55</sup> They are distinct from one another: the Father has no source, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Though distinct, the three persons cannot be divided from one another in being or in operation.<sup>56</sup>

The Trinity is an essential doctrine of mainstream Christianity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent both the

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<sup>50</sup> Christians were persecuted until Emperor Constantine made it an official state religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD.

<sup>51</sup> John McManners, *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 301-303.

<sup>52</sup> CIA, USA World facts, the world population is 6.7 billion. Christians is 2.2 billion.

<sup>53</sup> John R. Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 441.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, Michael Coogan (ed.), *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). p. 782.

<sup>55</sup> J. ND. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 56.

<sup>56</sup> John Bowden, *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 207.

immanent and transcendence of God. God is believed to be infinite and God's presence may be perceived through the actions of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>57</sup>

According to this doctrine, God is not divided in the sense that each person has a third of the whole; rather, each person is considered to be fully God (see Perichoresis). The distinction lies in their relations, the Father being unbegotten; the Son being begotten of the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and (in Western theology) from the Son. Regardless of this apparent difference, the three 'persons' are each eternal and omnipotent.

## Islam

Islam is the monotheistic religion articulated by the Quran, a text considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of Allah, and by the Prophet of Islam Muhammad's teachings and normative example (which is called the Sunnah in Arabic, and demonstrated in the collection of hadiths). Islam literally means "submission to God." The word "Muslim," the word denoting an adherent of Islam, and "Islam" are grammatical derivatives of the Arabic verb meaning "surrender," or "submit."<sup>58</sup>

Muslims believe that God is One and incomparable and that the purpose of life is to worship God.<sup>59</sup> They regard their religion as the complete and universal version of a primordial, monotheistic faith revealed in many places and different times previously including, notably, to the prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Religious practices include the five pillars of Islam which are the five obligatory acts of worship.<sup>60</sup> Islamic law or Sharia touches on virtually every aspect of life and society, encompassing everything from banking and warfare to welfare and the environment.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jeaneane D. Fowler, *World Religions: An Introduction for Students*, (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 1997), p. 58.

<sup>58</sup> Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Faith of Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: The Byline Sdn. Bhd., 1992), p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> *The Quran*, 51:56.

<sup>60</sup> John Esposito, *Oxford History of Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> Abdul Rahman I. Doi, *Sharia: The Islamic Law*, (Kuala Lumpur: AS Noordeen, 1984), p. 2.

The majority of Muslims belong to one of two denominations, the Sunni and the Shi'a. About 13% of Muslims live in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country, 25% in South Asia, 20% in the Middle East, 2% in Central Asia, 4% in the remaining South East Asian countries and 15% in Africa. Sizable communities are also found in China and Russia, and parts of the Caribbean. Converts and immigrant communities are found in almost every part of the world.<sup>62</sup> With about 1.57 billion Muslims comprising about 23% of the world population, Islam is the second largest religion of the world.

### **Differences of the Abraham Faiths: An Introduction**

Judaism is the oldest religion, followed by Christianity and Islam. There are many similarities in the three Abraham faiths such as God is One, creation of the universe and the love of God towards mankind and God's desire for us to live a good life on this earth. However, the followers of the three faiths frequently see only the differences and quarrel among themselves and even use war as a way of settlement, such as the Crusade wars.

Judaism does not take Jesus as a prophet or as the son of God and it also rejects the trinity concept of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as One God head, as believed by the Christians. It also does not believe in the original sin inherited from Adam and Eve. It takes Jesus as a false prophet and sees Prophet Muhammad in the same way.

Islam recognises all the prophets mentioned in the Old Testament. It also recognises that they received revelation from God, like the Torah for Prophet Moses and Injil for Jesus. However, they believe that Al-Quran is the final revelation from God, while Prophet Muhammad is viewed as a false prophet by both Jews and Christians; the Muslims take Prophet Muhammad as the last of the Prophets. This is similar and equal to the messiah still waiting by some pious Jews.

### **Islam and Judaism**

The relationship between Islam and Judaism is a special and close one. The two religions share similar values. Islam

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<sup>62</sup> CIA- The World FactBook.

incorporates Jewish history as a part of its own. Muslims regard the Children of Israel as a central religious concept in Islam. Moses is mentioned in the Qur'an more than any other prophets. There are forty-three references to Israelites in the Quran,<sup>63</sup> and many more in the Hadith. Jews in turn see Muslims as perfect monotheists and as adherents of the Seven Laws of Noah.

The seven laws listed by the Tosefta and the Talmud are:<sup>64</sup>

1. Prohibition of Idolatry: You shall not have any idols before God.
2. Prohibition of Murder. You shall not murder. (Genesis 9:6)
3. Prohibition of Theft: You shall not steal.
4. Prohibition of Sexual immorality: You shall not commit any of a series of sexual prohibitions, which include adultery, incest, sodomy and bestiality.
5. Prohibition of Blasphemy: You shall not blaspheme God's name.
6. Dietary Law: Do not eat flesh taken from an animal while it is still alive. (Genesis 9:4), as interpreted in the Talmud .
7. Requirement to have just Laws: Do not punish by unjust lessons.

The Noahide Laws comprise the six laws which were given to Adam in the Garden of Eden according to the Talmud's interpretation of Genesis 2:16 and a seventh one, which was added after the Flood of Noah. Later, at the Revelation in Sinai, the Seven Laws of Noah were given to humanity and to the Children of Israel along with the Ten Commandments which are part of, and not separate from the mitzvot. These laws are mentioned in the Torah. According to Judaism, the mitzvot or "commandments" given in the written Torah, as well as their reasonings in the oral Torah, were only issued to the Jews and are therefore binding only upon them, having inherited the obligation from their ancestors. At the

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<sup>63</sup> Martijn Teodore Houtsma, *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam 1913-1936*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), pp. 1146-1148.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Goldenberg, *The Origins of Judaism*, pp. 21-22.

same time, in Mount Sinai, the Children of Israel were given the obligation to teach other nations the embedded Noahide Laws.<sup>65</sup>

Because Islam shares a common origin with Judaism through Abraham, both are considered Abrahamic religions. There are many shared aspects between Judaism and Islam; Islam is similar to Judaism in its fundamental religious outlook, structure, jurisprudence and practice.<sup>66</sup> Because of this, as well as through the influence of Muslim culture and philosophy on practitioners of Judaism within the Islamic world, there has been considerable and continued physical, theological, and political overlap between the two faiths throughout the history since the inception of Islam.

In Islam, the Jews are known as Ahli al-Kitab, and the various prophets mentioned in the Old Testament and the revelations are recognised in Al-Quran. Even the seven laws of Noah and the Ten Commandments are not against Islam at all and vice versa.

### **Christianity and Islam**

The relationship between Christianity and Islam is unique and close. The two faiths share a common origin in the Middle East through ancient Semitic traditions. Muslims consider Christians as fellow adherents of the sacred Covenant between God and Abraham (and later the Children of Israel) and as the followers of the Messiah.

Despite the extreme closeness between the two faiths there are some basic theological differences. Islam categorically denies that God can be divided as in the Holy Trinity. It also denies that God has a son. Muslims see Jesus as the last prophet sent to the Children of Israel in the same vein as Elijah and Jeremiah, to name a few. Islam thus takes the Jewish stance on the issue of the holiness of Jesus Christ. In contrast, Judaism rejects Jesus Christ totally. Islam fully accepts Jesus Christ as the Messiah of the Jewish faith and as one of its Prophets.<sup>67</sup> However, Islam rejects the original sin of men, denies Jesus as the son of God and the

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<sup>65</sup> Jeremy Rosen, *Understanding Judaism*, pp. 38-41.

<sup>66</sup> Prager D. Telushkin, *Why the Jews? The Reason for Anti-Semitism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), pp. 110-126.

<sup>67</sup> Saeed Bin Ahmed al-Lootah, *The Essentials of Islam*, (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2003), p. 32.

concept of trinity of the Christians, and views Jesus only as a Prophet. The salvation through Jesus's crucifixion to save mankind is also rejected by Islam.

### **Christianity and Judaism**

Judaism insists on the notion of monotheism, the idea that there is One God, and God cannot consist of parts, even if those parts are mysteriously united. The Christian notion of the Trinity is that God is made up of God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit. Such a view, even if it is called monotheistic because the three parts are, by divine mystery, only one God, is incompatible with the Jewish view that such a division is impossible. The Jewish idea is that God is one. This idea allows for God's unity and uniqueness as a creative force. Thus, for the Jews, God is the creator of all that we like and all that we dislike. There are no evil forces with the ability to create equal to God's. Judaism sees Christianity's Trinitarians as a weakening of the idea of God's oneness. Jews do not have a set group of beliefs about the nature of God; therefore, there is considerable debate within Judaism about God. However, all mainstream Jewish groups reject the idea of God having three parts.

### **The Jewish View of Jesus**

To Christians, the central tenet of their religion is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, part of the trinity, and the savior of souls who is the messiah. He is God's revelation in the flesh. Jesus is, in Christian terms, God incarnate, God in the flesh who came to Earth to erase the sins of all humans and those who believe will receive God's grace and be saved. They are free from the inherent original sin of man. Those who do not believe are condemned to hell.

To Jews, this has no basis. Jesus was just a human, not the son of God (except in the metaphorical sense in which all humans are children of God). In the Jewish view, Jesus cannot save souls; only God can. Jesus did not, in the Jewish view, rise from the dead.

He also did not erase the sins of the people. For Jews, sins are removed not by Jesus' atonement but by seeking forgiveness and repentance. Jews seek forgiveness from God for sins against God

and from other people (not just God) for sins against those people. Seeking forgiveness requires a sincere sense of repenting but also seeking directly to redress the wrong done to someone. Sins are partially removed through prayer, which replaced animal sacrifice as a way of relieving sins. They are also removed by correcting errors against others.

Jesus, for Christians, replaced the Jewish law. For traditional Jews, the commandments (mitzvot) and Jewish law (Halacha) are still binding. Jesus is not seen as the messiah. In the Jewish view, the messiah is a human being who will usher in an era of peace. We can tell the messiah by looking at the world and seeing if it is at peace. From the Jewish view, this clearly did not happen when Jesus was on Earth or anytime after his death.

Jews vary about what they think of Jesus as a man. Some respect him as an ethical teacher who accepted Jewish law, as someone who didn't even see himself as the messiah, who didn't want to start a new religion at all. Rather, Jesus is seen by the Jews as someone who challenged the religious authorities of his day for their practices. In this view, he meant to improve Judaism according to his own understanding and not to break from it. Whatever the Jewish response is, one point is crucial. No one who is Jewish, no born Jew and no one who converts to Judaism, will believe in Jesus as the literal son of God or as the messiah. For the Jewish people, there is no God but God.

### **Free Will and Original Sin**

Judaism does not accept the notion of original sin, the idea that people are bad from birth and cannot remove sin by them but need an act of grace provided by the sacrificial death of Jesus as the atonement for all of humanity's sins. For Christians, there are no other forms of salvation other than through Jesus.

In contrast, the Jewish view is that humans are not born naturally good or naturally bad. They have both a good and a bad inclination in them, but they have the free moral will to choose the good and this free moral will can be more powerful than the evil inclination. Indeed, Jewish ethics requires the idea that humans decide for themselves how to act. This is so because temptation, and with it the possibility of sin, allows people to choose goodness

and thus have moral merit. The Jewish view is not that humans are helpless in the face of moral error.

### **Conclusion**

The Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have great commonalities and unique differences in their theologies, but there are many commonalities of which the adherents of their followers failed to remember. All the three religions taught men the love from the Al-Mighty God as a code of living from Him. There are not much differences in the Ten Commandments and that it should be obeyed by not only one group, only but all the three, Judaism, Christianity and Islam and adhere to them, accepting God All-Mighty as the only God, who created the world, the universe and all men are part and parcel of the three Abrahamic faiths. God wants all men to live a good life, with no stealing, no adultery and maintain good family systems. The people should live with good ethics and this is indispensable in their faiths. Love, respect and care for neighbours and never covet for others and what they possess are also the religious principles found in all three Abrahamic faiths. .

In the present day world, the three Abrahamic faiths comprises about half of the world population. If the people of the three Abraham faiths fought one another, there would be great disasters as the numbers of followers of Christianity and Islam are huge. As for the Jews and Judaism, though the numbers are relatively lesser but they are very influential in the corporate world as well as in the political sphere. Thus, the followers of the Abrahamic faiths must understand and embrace the commonalities of the faiths and at the same time be more tolerant on the differences of the faiths to preserve harmony, peace and co-existence as envisage by the teachings of each faith.