

## One God for all Abrahamic Religions -- 本是同根生; 相煎何太急

by Pat Wong

Comparative Religion is the branch of the study of religions concerned with the systematic comparison of the doctrines and practices of the world's religions. It can be considered as the science in religions. Thank God there is no religion in science -- they tried though, with the introduction of Intelligent Design.

In Comparative Religion, there are three major religious groups:

(1) Indian religions include Buddhism, Hinduism, among others. They believe in reincarnation. Hindus believe in many Gods and that the atman (spirit or soul), the true self of every person, is eternal. Buddhists, however, embrace the concept of impermanence -- forever changing. Hence, there is not an eternal soul for an individual but his collection of karma that reincarnates from one life to the next. One high priest explained to me the following, which I found helpful: It is like the 49er (San Francisco football) team where the personnel is forever changing while the team spirit, its culture and accomplishment, linger on from generation to generation. Deities play no role in salvation; instead, you must work on the Dharma to improve yourself to achieve Enlightenment. There is no short cut or instant gratification.

(2) East Asian religions include Taoism, Confucianism, among others. You know them better than I. I think the religion scholars may have turned philosophy into religion.

(3) Abrahamic religions include Judaism, Christianity, as well as Islam. They are the monotheistic faiths (as opposed to polytheistic ones in ancient Egypt) emphasizing and tracing their common origin to Abraham or recognizing a spiritual tradition identified with him<sup>[1]</sup>. They worship an exclusive God, though known by different names. All of them believe that God creates, rules, reveals, loves, judges, and forgives. I was ridiculed, when I claimed that Allah and Jehovah (耶和華) are one and the same, as being confused. Let me try to defend myself better, if you venture to read on. Notice that I only claim that they worship the same God; their similarity stops there.

(A) Judaism is the oldest of the Abrahamic religions. Hence, there is not much to do here to show that they all worship the same God. The logical step is to establish that it is monotheistic worship of the one true God, and later to show that the other Abrahamic religions also worship the same God.

The conception of God in Judaism is strictly monotheistic<sup>[2]</sup>. God is an absolute one indivisible incomparable being who is the ultimate cause of all existence. Jewish tradition teaches that the true aspect of God is incomprehensible and unknowable, and that it is only God's revealed aspect that brought the universe into existence, and interacts with mankind and the world. In Judaism, the one God of Israel is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who is the guide of the world, delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, and revealed His laws and commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai as described in the Old Testament.

The Shield or the Star of David, is a generally recognized symbol of the Jewish community and of Judaism. They do not consider Jesus as divine, the Son of God, or the Messiah<sup>[3]</sup>.

(B) Christianity derived from Judaism after Jesus Christ was born as they shared the Old Testament. Hence, they worship the same God and I don't see any one would object to that. The Christian Bible personifies God as the creator who speaks, who loves, who judges and forgives<sup>[4]</sup>. He is transcendent; hence, scriptures that urged Christians to look inward for God didn't make it into the Bible<sup>[5]</sup>.

Christians believe Jesus to be the son of, and the incarnation of, God as a human being, which is the main theological divergence with respect to Judaism and Islam. The doctrine of Trinity sets Christianity apart from others as well and it defines God as three divine persons: the Father (the authority figure), the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit (works inside every Christian).

I suppose Modern Physics can help us understand Trinity. The photon and electron possess both the properties of a particle and wave; we need to embrace both properties, to get a holistic picture of them.

(C) Islam teaches that God is the same God <sup>[6]</sup> worshipped by the members of other Abrahamic religions. Islam believes that God does not have forebears nor offspring. Hence it doesn't consider Jesus as the Son of God and only acknowledges him as a prophet. Islam also acknowledges that Jesus had a virgin birth <sup>[7]</sup> that is more than we can say for the Mormon faith <sup>[8]</sup>.

While Islam shares the Jewish tradition that the first prophet is Adam, it differs in that the last prophet is Muhammad (570 ~ 632 AD). He was the revered figure of Islam. Muslims believe that Islam was not invented by, but was revealed to, him by God. Most consider him to be the last prophet and the restorer of an uncorrupted original monotheistic faith. The revelations which Muhammad reported receiving until his death formed the verses of the Quran which is regarded by Muslims as the "Word of God" and around which the religion is based. The Quran presents Muslims as the followers of Abraham and acknowledges the same line of the prophets as the messengers of God <sup>[9]</sup>. It is difficult to imagine that the same line of prophets could have carried messages from different gods.

You cannot find similar acknowledgement of Islam in the Bible because by then, the evolution of the New Testament was completed and canonized.

As to religion, many Lighters are still living in the pre-Copernican era thinking that the Sun and all other terrestrial bodies revolve around the Earth. It is not my calling to convince you otherwise. I just want to show you, and other 蔡蘇's advocates, that a widely accepted modern interpretation does exist. Those who subscribe to it, are not confused but enlightened.

It will broaden your horizon a lot by taking a course in "Comparative Religion" in your local community college. A good thing to add to one's bucket list. I am not here to shake your Christian faith, I just hope that having an understanding in others' perspectives would render you more tolerant to many contemporary social issues.

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Foot Notes and References:

[1] <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_in\\_Abrahamic\\_religions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Abrahamic_religions)>

[2] <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_in\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Judaism)>

[3] <<http://judaism.about.com/od/judaismbasics/a/Jewish-View-Of-Jesus.htm>>

[4] <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_in\\_Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Christianity)>

[5] The Gospel of Thomas. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel\\_of\\_Thomas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Thomas)>

[6] The Quran, Surah 29.046: (Pat's note: I paraphrase it a bit to modern English)

Argue not with the People of the Scripture and say to them: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our Allah and your Allah is One, and to Him we submit.

[7] The Quran, Surah 003.045:

Behold! the angels said: O Mary! Allah gives thee glad tidings from Him. His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter and in the company of those closest to Allah.

[8] If you substitute the name of Muhammad by Joseph Smith and Islam by Mormon and move forward by about 1,250 years, you get the story of how the Mormon faith was found. Mormons believe that God restored the early Christian church through Joseph Smith. They consider Jesus is the literal Son of God so it satisfies the minimum requirement of being Christian; however, they don't subscribe to virgin birth.

[9] The Quran, Surah 004.163:

We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms.