

The Consonance & Disparities in Semitic/Abrahamic Religious beliefs & in Doctrines of Christianity & Islam

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Abstract: *In this valuation I shall examine theological beliefs common to Christianity and Islam. After that I shall try to investigate their theological separation. Thus my aim is to show that the consonance and separation of Christian and Islamic dogmatic belief needs careful study. Towards the end of my article I come to the conclusion that the inter-religious/inter-faith dialogue for Christians and Muslims is even more significant and requires profound analysis because one of the causes of the frequent tension between these two major Semitic religions is the separation on fundamental issues.*

Key words:

Hierophany: Establish or strengthen as with new evidence or facts.

Tanakh: Jewish scriptures consisting of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.

Koine: a Greek dialect which flourished under the Roman Empire.

Septuagint: The oldest Greek version of the Old Testament; translated from the Hebrew by Jewish scholars at the request of Ptolemy II.

Tritheism: Christian's belief in the Trinitarian God considered heretical that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three separate gods.

Introduction: Semitic or Abrahamic religious belief is identified with Judaism, Christianity and Islam, stressing their common heritage. It indicates a family likeness and certain common dogmas because of their monotheistic belief. What is the accurate meaning of the term Semitic/Abrahamic Religious belief? It is to describe the three major religions that trace their ancestry to the patriarch, Abraham. The Semitic/Abrahamic religions have a family likeness, which expresses and worships the same eternal God. My aim is to investigate and evaluate what Semitic/Abrahamic faith might mean and what are the misconceptions followed through the long tradition. In section II I shall examine three recently developed levels of scholarly use of Semitic/Abrahamic faith which differ from the

dogmatic weight on the term.

In section III I shall deal with the Strength of the term Semitic/Abrahamic faith, general theological persistence between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In section IV: The Semitic/Abrahamic faith should be evaluated from many other perspectives yet this article shall restrict itself to the task that is already stated.

Section II:

Scholarly use of the term Semitic/Abrahamic faith: The term Semitic/Abrahamic religious faiths in academic discourse is used in various ways, as the following excerpts indicate.

i) Dickens: In his recent article Dickens says in his, 'Frank Conversations' in the first sentence itself uses the term 'Abrahamic traditions'- thus it is very clear that the term refers to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He flashes on the term as a written convenient and primary functional rather than theological.

ii) John Palkinghorne: In his book "Belief in God in an age of science" Palkinghorne says that future scientific and theological dialogue:

"Must broaden beyond the Abrahamic faiths to include all religious traditions."¹

He used the term as Dickens had as convenient written for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Later on in his book Polkinghorne writes, "The Abrahamic religions, Judaism Christianity and Islam share a number of common features stemming from their interlaced histories. They are surely seeking to speak of the same God, even

¹ J. Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, (The Terry Lectures; New York University Press 1998), page xiii.

though they make many different assertions about the divine nature.”²

John Palkinghorne uses the term in second degree, differentiating the term Abrahamic religious belief, conveys historical and theological commonality and reference is also made to Jews, Christians and Muslims seeking to speak of the same God. And then, immediately acknowledges separations in the three major Semitic religious doctrines of God, nevertheless the issue is still raised indirectly that the Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God. But up to the end of his book “*Belief in God in an age of science*” he does not make effort to contribute to discuss this question, it shows that his book does not pertain to the theology of religions and his comments on Semitic/Abrahamic faiths are accidental remarks.

The third level of faith may be found: In 1979 Sergio Cardinal Pignedoli at the American Academy of Religion’s annual conference in the keynote address says,

“These religions, united as they are in their acceptance of Abrahamic faith and the corner-stone of our religious encounter to be Abrahamic faith in the One God.”³

Mahmud ‘Awan in his paper presentation on “*Dialogue of the Semitic/Abrahamic faith*” says,

“Jews, Christians and Muslims stand under one and the same God whom they all acknowledge. This, after all, is the foundation of the Abrahamic faith to which they subscribe.”⁴

Whereas Seymour Siegel says, “Judaism, Christianity and Islam they all worship the same God; revere the same historical personalities; and

claim the same, revelation.”⁵

Thus we can see that Pignedoli and Awan are explicit in their belief, whereas for Siegel to some extent Jews, Christians and Muslims share the same faith and therefore worship the same God. Pignedoli explains the Abrahamic faith as follows,

“We profess one God, a God who is personal, the Creator of the world, provident, active in history but separated from it by an infinite gulf, the judge of men’s actions, and who has spoken to men through the prophets. The sacred books and the traditions of our three religions admit no shadow of doubt on this fundamental point. This basic unity of faith is of such importance that it allows us to consider our differences with serenity and with a sense of perspective: it does not mean that we minimize these differences and still less that we renounce the points that separate us. But it does mean that we can speak together in an atmosphere of understanding and friendship, because we are all ‘believe in the same God.’”⁶

In this level of the term ‘Semitic/Abrahamic faith’ asserts the one Abrahamic faith expressed through the three chronicle religions and expresses unity of faith to belief in the same God who is the author of Torah, The Holy Bible and the Quran and the source of revelations.

The review:

In the first stage and application of the term ‘Semitic/Abrahamic religious faith’, is a brief for disagreements between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The second stage of the term acknowledges significant dogmatic and chronological persistence and separation between Jewish, Christian and Islamic revelation as from the one true and universal God. Thus bearing in mind these three stages, we should go forward to evaluate the term.

Section III Theological persistence among three Semitic/Abrahamic faiths:

² J. Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (The Terry Lectures; New York University Press, 1998), page 111.

³ Cardinal S. Pignedoli, (The Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim Faiths: *Dialogue of the Three Abrahamic Faiths*) in a; Faruqi (Ed) *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, 1,4.

⁴ M. Awan, (The Faith community and world order in the perspective of Islam, in I. R. al Faruqi Ed., *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faith, Paper Presented to the Islamic Studies Group of American Academy of Religion*, 1995), 87

⁵ S. Siegel, (The National State and Social Order in the Perspective of Judaism) in al Faruqi ed., *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faith*, 38.

⁶ Pignedoli, (The Catholic Church), 2.

For Jews, Christians and Muslims Abraham is one of the great patriarchs and a model of faith. The Jews affirm that they are the descendents of Abraham through Isaac his promised son, whose son, Jacob, became the father of twelve tribes of Israel. For the Christians the Gospel of Mathew traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham. Muslims assert that Abraham's son Ishmael was father of twelve sons from whom descended the people of Arabia including Muhammad. The three religions claim that they are the heirs and physical descendents of Abraham, but for the Christians, the majority of Christians are not of Jewish ancestry and so too, most Muslims are not Arabs. The primary purpose of Semitic/Abrahamic religions is as a God fearing faith, especially in their rejection of idol worship and submission to the divine call.

This is equally true of Islam:

There are several chronological grounds of the oneness of Semitic religious beliefs; we shall try to examine only two ways:

i) Christianity and Islam share an ideology of oneness in that they both hold that the total corpus of believers should express their faith in a single historical community. In Islam there is the idea of the Ummah which referred originally to the formal community in Medina but today it is a universal Muslim community. Christianity as an ideal of a single united community uses the term the body of Christ or the Church which remains powerful even in its fractured historic existence.

ii) Under the conviction of these Semitic/Abrahamic religions that there is only one God and we should come under his rules. Jews, Christians and Muslims are committed to God's rules in the actual historical process which brings them into a direct collision-course with modern secularism with its canon of the privatization of religion. Thus both the religions confirm one personal and eternal God who is the creator and the ruler of the universe, who sends the prophets and angels with messages and reveals the divine will through inspired Scripture. Christianity and Islam assert that obedience to this creator is to be lived out historically, and assert that one day God will intervene in human history on the Day of Judgment and will determine for all humanity their eternal destinies of heaven or hell is based upon a person's beliefs and actions. Other religions and their philosophy cannot claim anything close to this level of doctrinal continuity. Thus it is understood that the term Semitic/Abrahamic religious faith as certain family likeness between Christianity and Islam, their view of reality is extremely similar.

This justifies the use of the Abrahamic faiths in the study of these religions conveys some amount of theological continuity.

Keeping the above elements in mind it is quite sensible to believe that the three Semitic/Abrahamic religions are one family since their overall view of reality is similar. This justifies the use of Semitic/Abrahamic faith in the study of religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, further more mysterious investigation is required. Let us turn to an examination of doctrinal separation or discontinuity in the three levels where I shall critically evaluate Semitic/Abrahamic faith by assessing whether Jews, Christians and Muslim share a basic unity of faith.

In section IV:

Theological persistency and separation should be evaluated from many other perspectives;

1) The person of Jesus Christ: For the Christians, Jesus Christ is the Messiah, is the Son of God. The divine revelation culminating in the person of Jesus Christ, the letter to the Hebrews says,

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, who he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”⁷

The authors of Hebrews stress the son of God. Thus the New Testament refers to Jesus Christ as, “In the form of God”⁸ and

“He is the image of the invisible God the first-born of creation.”⁹

“In the beginning was the word and the was with God, and the word was God.”¹⁰

⁷ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Hebrews I: 1-4, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 203.

⁸ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Philippians 2: 6, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 185.

⁹ Ibid., Colossians 1:15, Page 188.

¹⁰ Ibid., John 1:1, page 87.

“And the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.”¹¹

About Himself Jesus said “He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, show us the Father.”¹²

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”¹³

“Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel which means, ‘God with us.’”¹⁴

a) *The world Christian Community confesses:* The Nicene Creed has been accepted by all Christian communities in the world; it is the core of Christian faith, which affirms that, Jesus Christ,

We “Believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, born of the Father before all ages God from God, Light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven.”¹⁵

According to A. J. Torrance: Homoousion meaning we affirm; “the reality of God himself is present with us and for us in Christ.”¹⁶

b) *The Christian Gospel:* In the Gospels it is mentioned that Jesus is Immanuel which means, “God with us” (Mathew 1:23). He is the mediator between God and the Human person, thus through him God himself reveals his knowledge to his chosen people, and therefore the Holy Bible is called the word of God. But for Emil Brunner God is Subject person he cannot totally reveal himself, except in personal presence.

c) *Concept, as Divine revelation God must reveal God-self:* Pannenberg says, “The divinity of Jesus and his freeing and redeeming significance for us

are related in the closest possible way.”¹⁷

Sin is an immoral act considered to be a transgression or violation of a law or a duty or moral principle which are against divine law that is a sin in the eyes of God. Only God the created can overcome the conflict and the struggle and redeem the human being. Thus the first constitutes the essence of our faith; Christianity without the incarnation of God is meaningless or there is no existence of Christianity. Therefore Christian and Islamic beliefs about Jesus are not the same but contrary.

d) *The Biblical concept of sin:* An action that goes against the Divine law. According to the Holy Bible,

“Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”¹⁸

“All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal.”¹⁹

The sin of omission that is failing to do what is right,

“Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”²⁰

Thus “sin viewed as a violation of the creator and his purpose by his creatures. Hence to the extent that sin is sin against God, and not merely some problem internal to creatures, only god can be the Agent of reconciliation and forgiveness.”²¹

Thus only the creator can redeem humanity.

e) *According to the Bible, sin means;*

¹¹ Ibid., John 1:14, page 87.

¹² Ibid., John 14:9, page 103

¹³ Ibid., Colossians 1:19, page 188.

¹⁴ Ibid., Mathew 1:23, page 1.

¹⁵ Catholic Book Publishing Corp, *The Roman Missal*, (New Jersey 2011), page 379.

¹⁶ A. J. Torrance, ‘Jesus in Christian Doctrine’ in Markus Bockmuehl (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 203.

¹⁷ A. E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 320.

¹⁸ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, I John 3:4, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 223.

¹⁹ Ibid., I John 5:17, page 224.

²⁰ Ibid., James 5:17, page 215.

²¹

<http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/evangelical-quarterly>

“To miss a mark or to miss a target.” Literally meaning “would not sin.”²²

Therefore to sin is to miss the mark of God’s perfect yardsticks. Because God as the creator has the right to set standards for mankind, the Book of Revelation says,

“Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.”²³

Thus every knee shall bow to the Lord and every tongue shall give praise to God, because in the letter to the Romans, St. Paul says, “Each of us shall give account of himself to God.”²⁴

Thus Adam Dodds in his one of the article he says,

“If Jesus Christ was not a fully divine then reconciliation is merely an action between creatures, no reconciliation with God has taken place and we would be still in our sins, ‘that is why Jesus acts are saving acts, for they are divine acts.’”²⁵

On the other side, Islam accepts Jesus as a prophet and believes his virginal birth and second coming, and acknowledges that he was God’s messenger, but they deny the divinity of Jesus. For them the philosophies of God’s incarnation are excluded by Islam. Thus Isma’il al-Faruqi says, “God does not reveal Himself ... to anyone in any way. God reveals only His will... This is God’s will and that is all we have – and we have it in perfection in the Qur’an... Christians talk about the revelation of God Himself by God and for God-but that is the great difference between Christianity and Islam. God is transcendent, and once you talk about self-revelation you have hierophany and immanence, and then the transcendence of God is compromised. You may not have complete transcendence and self-revelation at the time.”²⁶

²² Cf., The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Judges 20 (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 232-233.

²³ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Revelation 4: 11, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 230.

²⁴ Ibid., Romans 14:12, page 153.

²⁵

<http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/evangelical-quarterly>

²⁶ Christian Mission and Islamic Da’wah: Proceedings of the Chambesby Consultation (The

The Anglican Bishop and Islamicist Michael Nazir-Ali say that, “Islam believes in the hiddenness of God and in the impossibility of knowing Him.”²⁷

Our understanding of different divine revelation should not be more ragged, and it should not lead to conflicts.

When Philip said to Jesus show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied, he was told, “He who has seen me has seen me has seen the Father.”²⁸

The hadith narrated by Masruq, Aisha said, “If anyone tells you that Muhammad has seen his Lord, he is a liar, for Allah says, “No vision can grasp Him.”

And if anyone tells you that Muhammad has seen the Unseen, he is a liar, for Allah says, “And with Him are the keys of the Ghayh (all that is hidden), none know them but He. And He knows whatever there is in the land and in the sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of neither the earth nor anything fresh or dry but is written in a clear, Record.”²⁹

“For Muslim the Christian belief in Jesus Christ is quite intolerable, Likewise, Christians find Islamic belief in Jesus quite insufficient.”³⁰

2) *The Crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus:*

We have Biblical authentic proofs of Jesus Crucifixion, death and his resurrection which proves that Christ was crucified for our sins, St Paul says;

“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on

Islamic Foundation, 1982), 47-48, quoted in Colin Chapmen, Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam (Leicester: IVP. 1995), 246.7.

²⁷ Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter (Regnum 1987), 20 Quoted in Chapman, Cross and Crescent, 246.

²⁸ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, John 14:9, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 230.

²⁹ Sahih International [al-An’aam 6:59]

³⁰ <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/evangelical-quarterly>

the third day in accordance of the scripture.”³¹ Whereas the Qur’an denies the death of Jesus Christ says,

“We have put to death al-Masiha Isa the son of Mariam, the Apostle of Allah. They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they mistook the crucified one for him.”³²

For Christianity the Cross is a perfect symbol for fulfillment of the mission of Christ and salvation of the world, thus the evangelist Mathew says, “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”³³

And the message of the cross is that of redemption and reconciling. St. Paul says;

“While we still were sinners Christ died for us.”³⁴

The cross represents the scandalous claim of Jesus that God lowered Him-self, not only to the point of becoming human, but to the point of humiliation, crucifixion up to the death on the cross. Thus we can see that Baptism and the Eucharistic celebration are central acts for Christianity, are centered on the death of Jesus, and also the death and the Cross of Jesus Christ represents the call for discipleship of Jesus. For that Jesus says;

“If anyone man comes after me let them deny him selves and take up his cross daily and follow me.”³⁵

After the resurrection of Jesus, when he was ascending to the heavenly glory He said to the disciples,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I

am with you always, to the close of the age.”³⁶ In the Acts of the Apostles Peter preaches to the crowd saying,

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”³⁷ “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, and then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.”³⁸

Thus the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the main and the basis of the good news, the message of Christianity, and an integrated part of the Gospel. Without the resurrection there is no Christianity and there is no more Universal Church. Therefore the resurrection affirms that sinful humanity is not beyond redemption. The Quran’s position on the death of Jesus is quite ambiguous; Nazir-Ali interprets the Qur’an to affirm the crucifixion, death and the resurrection of Jesus, whereas his views are rejected by the orthodox Islamic teaching. Nazir Ali says,

“The verse, which has dominated Muslim thinking about the death of Jesus, is 4.157... Muslims have traditionally interpreted this verse to mean that Jesus was not crucified but that either Judas or Simon of Cyrene was substituted in his place, while he was taken up alive to heaven. In order to reconcile this view with the other passages in the Qur’an which speak of Jesus’ death, Muslim commentators have often adopted the view that although Jesus was taken up alive, his death will occur at his second coming...”³⁹

According to Riddell and Cottrell says that the passage;

“They declared: we have put to death al-Masih Isa the son of Mariam, the Apostle of Allah. They did

³¹ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, I Corinthians 15: 3-4, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 166.

³² The Quran, Surah 4:157, (Beirut: Lebanon, Dar Al-Choura, 1980, page 71.

³³ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Mathew 28:19-20, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 32.

³⁴ Ibid., Romans 5:8, page 146.

³⁵ Ibid., Luke 9:23, page 66.

³⁶ Ibid., Mathew 28:19-20, page 32.

³⁷ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Acts 2:23-24, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 113.

³⁸ Ibid., I Corinthians 15: 14-19, page 166.

³⁹ M. Nazir-Ali, *Islam: A Christian Perspective* (Exeter: Paternoster press, 1983), page 17.

not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they mistook the crucified one for him.”⁴⁰

The actual meaning of the passage is not clear but, “The most obvious meaning is given by the majority of Muslim scholars that, Jesus was not crucified.”⁴¹

Muhammad acknowledged that the prophets could be rejected and killed but,

“Many Muslim find it hard to believe that a prophet like Jesus could be crucified ... since crucifix was a death cursed in the Old Testament. The control belief could behind the Islamic denial of the crucifixion of Jesus is the nature of divine providence-God would not allow his prophet to be so humiliated.”⁴²

Thus the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus is the major part of the Christian good news and the centre of their scripture without death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no Christianity, whereas Qur’an doesn’t accept this view of it, in this way Islam is separating from Christianity. Muhammad Zafrullah Kan perceives the implication of Islamic teaching on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus says that,

“If, it is established that Jesus did not die on the cross, there was no accused death, no bearing of sins of mankind, no resurrection, no ascension, no atonement. The entire structure of Church theology is thereby demolished”⁴³

Thus Kan understands of death and resurrection of Jesus is true. Therefore Christian and Islamic beliefs regarding the crucifixion and resurrection are contradictory to each other. Thus on the dogmatic level, bringing both the communities for the inter-religious dialogue is not easy.

3) *The Holy Bible:*

For the Jews and the Christians the Holy Bible is a unique witness to the revelation of God, to the grace of God at work in the chronology of Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a first harmonic source for all Christian theology and

⁴⁰ The Quran, Surah 4:157, (Beirut: Lebanon, Dar Al-Choura, 1980), page 71.

⁴¹ P. G. Riddell and P. Cotterell, *Islam in Context: Past Present, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), page 78.

⁴² <http://www.paternosteriodicals.co.uk/ev>

⁴³ *Deliverance From The Cross* (Southfields: London Mosque, 1978), Quoted in Riddell and Cottrell, *Islam in Context*, page 80.

ethics. It is sacred, sanctified, hallowed, was written by men under the direction and in the influence of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says, “All the scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”⁴⁴

Etymology:

The Greek word translated “God breathed” is ‘Theopneustos’ from that comes theos meaning “God” and pneo, meaning “to breathe or to breathe upon” and thus the English word comes ‘pneumonia’ from this Greek root. Hence God in the person of the Holy Spirit literally breathed the holy words of the Scripture into the writers of each of the books through supernatural means.

The Holy Bible is a collection of sacred scriptures, the product of divine inspiration and a commemoration of the relationship between God and the human being. There are many different authors who have contributed to this divine scripture. The canonical text differs depending on the traditions and groups. A number of Biblical canons have developed, with overlapping and deviating contents. Therefore the Christian Old Testament overlaps with the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Septuagint. The Hebrew Bible is known in Judaism as the Tanakh. Whereas the New Testament is the early Christians’ collection of writings, written by the disciples of Jesus Christ, written in the first century Koine, the Christian Greek writings consist of narratives, letters and apocalyptic writings.

Different attitudes on the Scripture:

In Christianity there are many denominations, there is disagreement about the contents of the canon. They have different approaches towards the Holy Bible, for example Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox Christians stress the harmony and importance of the Bible and sacred tradition, whereas Protestant churches focus on the ideal of scripture alone, for them the Bible is the only source of Christian teaching. Thus Bible is widely considered to be the best-selling book of all time, with estimated total sales of over 5 billion copies. Yearly, approximately 100 million copies are sold, and have had a major influence on

⁴⁴ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, II Timothy 3: 16-17, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 199.

literature and history.

Gordon Fee, the New Testament scholar, says; “The Bible is God’s word spoken in human words in history.”⁴⁵

Emil Brunner said, “The Bible is the soil from which all Christian faith grows. For if there was no Bible we should know nothing of Jesus Christ... Christian faith is faith in Christ and Christ meets us and speaks to us in the Bible, Christian faith is Bible faith.”⁴⁶

Murray Rae says, “Theology is reliant on apostolic testimony to the fact of God’s word, conveyed through Scripture and the tradition of the church. If that conveyance has become thoroughly corrupt, then theology has been cut off from its only possible foundation.”⁴⁷

Islamic attitude to the Holy Bible:

Islam affirms, but also has a negative position on the Bible. The Quran recognizes the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospel as the original scripture, for them Quran is the last revealed holy book, conforming to and superseding previous scripture. Quran says;

“Those that deny Allah’s revelations shall be sternly punished; Allah is mighty and capable of punishment. Nothing on the earth or heaven is hidden from Him. It is he who shapes you in your mother’s wombs as he pleases. There is no god but Him, the Mighty, the wise.”⁴⁸

However, there are significant differences between the Holy Bible and Quran; these have been explained differently from within and outside of Islamic faith.

Riddell and Cotterell say, “Encountering the Jewish and Christian Scriptures only orally, Muhammad was unable to distinguish between canonical Scripture and legendary accretions. Through the Quran, both alike were inverted with the authority

⁴⁵ G. D. Free, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), page 30.

⁴⁶ E. Brunner, *Our Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), page 7.

⁴⁷ M. Rac, ‘Prolegomena’ in P. Metzger (Ed.), *Trinitarian Soundings in Systematic Theology* (London & New York: T & T. Clark International, 2005), page 18.

⁴⁸ The Quran, Surah 3: 3-4, (Beirut: Lebanon, Dar Al-Choura, 1980), page 35.

of Islamic scripture, and both Jews and Christians were not slow in pointing out the discrepancies between their Scriptures and the Quran. This in turn led to the Quranic accusation that Jews and Christians had allowed their Scriptures to become corrupt, or worse, had knowingly corrupted them in favour of their respective theologies.”⁴⁹

Thus the Holy Bible is held by Christians as their sacred and original source to Christian theology, ethics and devotion. Whereas Islam theoretically affirms the Bible as originally given, but rejects the Bible extant today believing that it has been corrupted and replaced by the Quran. Christian and Islamic beliefs on the Bible remain impossible to reconcile.

4) The Triune God:

In the book ‘The Trinity and the Kingdom’ the author Jurgen Moltmann says;

“The New Testament talks about God by proclaiming in narrative the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, which are relationships of fellowship and are open to the world.”⁵⁰

Therefore Christian theology speaks about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see in the New Testament there is a primary trinitarianism which penetrates the apostolic writings, and in the Gospel of Mathew Jesus tell his disciples;

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁵¹

And Paul writing to the Corinthian Christian community, in his farewell speech and final blessing says,

“The grace of Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”⁵²

Thus we can say that the Christian theology has understood the doctrine of the Trinity as “tres

⁴⁹ Riddell G. Peter and Cotterell Peter, *Islam in Context: Past, Present, and Future*, (Fulton: U.S.A., Baker Books 2003) page 213.

⁵⁰ J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), page 46.

⁵¹ The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Mathew 28:19, (Bangalore: Collins for Theological Publication in India, 1988), Page 32.

⁵² Ibid., Corinthians 13:14, page 176.

peronae, una substantia” (Latin in west) and “one ousia three hypostases” (in Greek in East)

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is an advanced Christology;

“The importance of the Confession ‘Jesus is Lord’ is not only that Jesus is divine but that God is Christ-like”⁵³ Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is not only the exaltation of Christ but is more Christianization of the concept of God. Thus God cannot be comprehended without Christ and Christ cannot be understood without God.

The Islamic aspect of God of Christianity: The Islamic opinion of the person of Jesus and the Bible consists of persistence, and separation, affirmation and refutation. Quran has due respect for the God of Jews and of Christians as their own God. Thus the Quran says;

“And do not argue with the people of the Book except in the best way, unless it be with those among them who do evil. Say: we believe in that which is revealed to you. Our God and your God is one. To Him we surrender ourselves.”⁵⁴

Christian and Islamic concept of God: There is partial persistence, for Christianity and Islam there is one God who rules, reveals, loves, judges and forgives. There is also separation; Islam also pronounces a resolutely negative judgment on the Christian doctrine of God:

“People of the book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about Allah. Al-Masih, Isa the son of Mariam, was no more than Allah’s Apostle and His word which he cast to Mariam: a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His apostles and do not say ‘Three’. Forbear and it shall be better for you. Allah is but one God.”⁵⁵

Therefore it is very clear that Islam rejects the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, for them the trinity is no more than tritheism. For them Christians are not monotheistic but are associating other deities with God and have committed the sin of shirk that is associating other deities with God. For Islam shirk is the gravest sin, since shirk is the revolt against God, and this is the only sin that

Islam cannot forgive, since it denies Himself and prevents forgiveness. (Cf. 81) Whereas Christians want to distinguish between the Trinity and tritheism Muslims see no distinction. On this aspect of faith, thus Christians and Muslim beliefs could not be more non-continuous.

There are some elements of continuity in Christianity as well as in Islam, as seen above; these are the original sources of Christian-Islamic faith. Whereas the Christian theological view and the core of Christian beliefs is that the Triune God has once and for all time revealed God-self, in person, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the apostles in the Holy Bible, integral to Islamic faith is the absolute denial of these beliefs. In the book ‘Islam and the West’, the author concludes with an acute remark saying that, in Christianity and Islam,

“There are irreducible differences between non-negotiable doctrines ... The Christian creeds and the Quran are simply incompatible and there is no possibility of reconciling the content of the two faiths, each of which is exclusive, as long as they retain their identities.”⁵⁶

Whereas Christina Hitchcock explains: “Both Muslims and Christians would say that God is powerful, Muslims mean by this that Allah cannot be overcome, hurt or injured. Christians understand God’s power in light of Christ’s death and resurrection, which makes it clear that God can experience pain, sadness, and rejection, while at the same time He can truly overcome all the powers of death and hell. Even when Muslims and Christians use the same words to define their deities, those words rarely mean the same thing.”⁵⁷

Islamic belief on Jesus is both misleading, and a complete denial of Biblical theology. According to Quran when Jesus (Isa) returns, Judaism and Christianity will be destroyed, Muhammad taught that when Jesus returns he will break the entire Cross and kill the pigs and will make an end of the legal tolerance of Christians living under Islamic rule. Thus the Scholarly interpretation of this “hadith” means that, Jesus (Isa), the Islamic prophet, will force all Christians and all other

⁵³ A. M. Ramsey quoted in A. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, page 323.

⁵⁴ The Quran, Surah 29:46, (Beirut: Lebanon, Dar Al-Choura, 1980), page 293.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Surah 4:171, page 72.

⁵⁶ N. Daniel, *Islam and the west: The Making of an Image*, (Oxford: One world Classics in Religious Studies, 1997), quoted in Zebiri, *Muslims & Christians Face to Face*, 13.

⁵⁷ Christina Hitchcock, *A living god, a living word: Christian and Muslim revelation in perspective*, *Missiology*, October 2014 vol. 42 no. 4: 375-385, 382.

religions of the world to accept or convert to Islam at the point of the sword.Thus to their understanding, Jesus' return will be ferocious and arrogant. He will come to destroy the God created human beings, but Jesus has not been exposed in such a way in any of the scriptures. But "he will come to judge the living and the dead..." as the Nician creed teaches, and that is the faith of worldwide Christianity.

Thus Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani states: "Between Christians and Muslims however, there are areas of fundamental principles where no amount of logical discussion can bring the two sides nearer to each other and where therefore the existence of an impasse must be recognized. Issues like the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ and the Crucifixion, so central to Christian beliefs, have no place in the Islamic faith, having been categorically refuted by the Quran on the authenticity of which there is no discord among Muslims."⁵⁸

Christianity and Islam do not share a basic unity of faith because they do not claim the same revelation nor do they revere exactly the same historical personalities. Christians cannot accept the prophethood of Muhammad, such assertions are statements of faith rather than arguments. Which are supported by the evidence. Thus we can say that Christian concept of God and Muslim concept of God is not the same, is total contrasting. Yet the scholars find some concepts of faith are common in both the religions, but Christian and Islamic Gods differ, are not the same.

When Christian and Muslims say God they do not mean the same thing. Christian doctrine is as follows: "The Trinitarian doctrine affirms that the only way to know God is through Jesus Christ and that there is no decisive knowledge of God apart from this Mediator ...Therefore, without leaving Trinitarian parameters, it is extremely difficult for a Christian theologian to affirm an identity between this Trinitarian God and the God(s) of other religions."⁵⁹

For the Muslims, it is clear, "we believe in that which is revealed to us and which was revealed to

you. Our God and your God is one. To Him we surrender ourselves."⁶⁰

But for Christians especially it is not a simple matter to affirm that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. However to suggest that Christianity and Islam are in the same family of the Semitic/Abrahamic religions or are different species of the same genus, is to prioritise derivative Christian doctrine such as God's general providential activity in history over central Christian doctrine, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. It would place Christian dogma over the central tenets of the Christian faith. The incarnation life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Holy Bible are foundational to Christian faith, on which Christian faith is constructed. It cannot be built on another foundation.

The Origin and Meaning of Abrahamic Faith:

Abraham is the founder of the Semitic faiths: The religion of Abraham was the pre-Jewish and pre-Christian religion. According to the Quran, Abraham came before Torah and the Gospel that is (3:55-58) thus they say that Abraham was the first Muslim, who first submitted to God in absolute monotheism (2:127-134) Muhammad claimed to practice the religion of Abraham, but did not function as a uniting impetus in the modern interfaith sense. According to Islam, Judaism and Christianity were Abrahamic religions, but later on became corrupted. Thus Jews and Christians are invited to change to the perfect religion of Abraham by becoming Muslim.

Mark Durie says, "Thus according to the Quran, it is Islam, in contrast to Christianity and Judaism which is the religion of Abraham."⁶¹

Sura 2:135 of the Qur'an is not clear, "and they say: 'Be Jews or Christian then ye will be rightly guided.' Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters."⁶² Islam asserts that, "Christianity and Judaism are regarded as

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<http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/evangelical-quarterly>

⁵⁹ Karkkainen, Trinity and Religious Pluralism, page 161.

⁶⁰ The Quran, Surah 29:46, (Beirut: Lebanon, Dar Al-Choura, 1980), page 293.

⁶¹ <http://blog.markdurie.com/2014/01/the-abrahamic-fallacy.html>, emphasis

⁶² <http://www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk/evangelical-quarterly>

distorted derivatives of Islam...⁶³

Thus on this Durie in one of his articles says, “It is reasonable to ask whether this is a theological Trojan horse designed to promote an Islamic worldview of relations between faiths.”⁶⁴

The inter-faith/inter-religious dialogue encourages tolerance, inter-religious harmony, peaceful co-existence and reciprocal respect to each other. The term Semitic/Abrahamic religious belief promotes uncompromising Islamic intolerance of Judaism and Christianity. On evaluation of the term Abrahamic Religions, Aaron Hughes states,

“The previous six chapters have attempted to provide both a history and an analysis of how the category ‘Abrahamic religions’ came to be. I trust that I have made the case that the term is, for all intents and purposes, meaningless.”⁶⁵

His use of the term meaningless is full of meaning. “The term comes from Islamic da’wa while undermining the authenticity of Judaism and Christianity.” Thus the term Semitic/Abrahamic religious beliefs should be abandoned by scholars except in its original Quranic signification. Consequently, its usage should also be abandoned in inter-religious activities. a replacement term could serve an important role in future Semitic or Abrahamic inter-religious dialogue. F. E. Peters’ comes with “The Monotheists” and replacing the term Semitic/Abrahamic religion for better inter-faith or inter-religious dialogue which could bring unity in the diversity in the world.

The significance of Inter-religious dialogue for Christian and Muslim:

The inter-religious/interfaith dialogue is an international institutional activity which began in the 19th and has continued into the twenty-first century. Thus the entire world religious and political leaders have of necessity joined in the dialogues. The Semitic/Abrahamic religious belief has proved that the inter-religious dialogue is a

⁶³ Mark Durie-
<http://blog.markdurie.com/2014/01/the-abrahamic-fallacy.html>, emphasis original.

⁶⁴ Mark Durie-
<http://www.newenglishreview.org/Mark-Durie/The-Abrahamic-Fallacy/>

⁶⁵ Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On their Uses and Abuses of History*, (Oxford & New York: OUP, 2012), page 141.

powerful symbol of unity of Jews, Christians and Muslims. For a successful dialogue there should be a suffusion of trust, respect for the identity, integrity of the other and amicable willingness to question one’s own self as well as an openness to understand others on their own terms. For the Christians,

“Dialogue has its own place and integrity and is neither opposed to nor incompatible with witness and proclamation. We do not water down our commitment if we engage in dialogue; as a matter of fact, dialogue between people of different faiths is spurious unless it proceeds from the acceptance and expression of faith commitment ...In dialogue we are invited to listen in openness to the possibility that the God we know in Jesus Christ may encounter us also in the lives of our neighbors of other faiths.”⁶⁶

Frequent tension between Christians and Muslim: Christianity and Islam are missionary oriented religions, both the religions believe that they have been called by God to proclaim the good news of God, thus they invite others to join their respective faiths. They try in their own ways to bring others to the knowledge and worship of God. In a way they respect the freedom and dignity of persons and maintain harmony of the both religious communities. Muslims suspect that Christian missionary’s hidden objective is proselytism, but Christians say that they are disinterested in proselytism; they give their loving service,

“our ministry of witness among people of other faiths presupposes our presence with them, sensitivity to their deepest faith commitments and experiences, willingness to be their servants for Christ’s sake, affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them and love for them. Since God’s mystery in Christ surpasses our understanding and since our knowledge of God saving power is imperfect we Christians are called to be witnesses to others, not judges of them. We also admit that it is possible to be non-aggressive and missionary at the same time-that it is, in fact, the only way of being truly missionary.”⁶⁷

Conclusion: Christian and Muslim incorporate nearly more than half of the world population. The nature of the encounter between these two

⁶⁶ The World Conference on world Middion and Evangelism, San Antonio, Para. 28, 1989.

⁶⁷ The World Conference on world Middion and Evangelism (San Antonio, Para. 25, 1989).

communities is important for the welfare of the whole of human society, because the core of the teaching of Christianity and Islam is peace and brotherhood. Christians call Jesus the prince of peace. Their prayers for God's peace are at the heart of their spirituality. In Islam "as-salam" is one of the most beautiful names of God, Muslims greet each other with "as-salam alaikum", meaning peace be upon you. In the deadly threats today there is a significant contribution which both the religious communities can make. There are tremendous opportunities for the co-operation for these communities to work together for social justice, for the defense of human rights and people's rights, for the safeguarding and promoting of religious freedom, for resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner. Both the communities can share the spiritual revelations in the complex situations. When the opportunity occurs, both the communities have to collaborate in struggling towards shared political goals and work hand-in-hand in the common threat areas, for example in Indonesian independence movement and in the cause of early Arab nationalism. Thus in many instances political, economic and theological factors have combined in one direction to polarize Christians and Muslims into mutual adversary communities. In this astragal sooner or later both gain new insights about the God whom they worship and discover new and fresh resources, which can help them to become more human and more sensitive towards human needs and more responsive to the will of God the creator. Likewise one can fulfill the purpose for which God has created mankind.

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