

Kings and philosophers:

[Religion](#), [Jesus](#)



Kings and Philosophers: Great Influences on Abrahamic Religion Brian Benavidez Philosophy 160 Dr. Jonathan Seidel December 8, 2010 Every major school of thought has its authors, its influencers, and its divine chosen, if you will. These men and women influence everything from macro economics and political science to the physical sciences of the known universe. Without the contribution of these grand individuals, academics would be destined to their origins, they would cease to develop and many would not even exist. So it is on the existence of these great minds in which we invest our confidence for an ever-growing world. There is one topic in particular, though, whose existence and development is greatly attributed to these individuals: religion. Dr. Jonathan Seidel, a professor at Oregon State University, defines Abrahamic religions as “ The world's three primary monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which share a common origin and values. ” (Seidel) The three main inspirational figures in these religions-- Maimonides, Jesus Christ of Nazareth and the Saudi Arabian King Abdullah Bin Abdul-- are major contributors to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths, respectively. Every religion owes its creation and maturity to a multitude of individuals and events, but without the aforementioned people, the three Abrahamic religions would not be what they are today.

Maimonides, although not the oldest of the three, has had a significant impact on the history and formation of Judaism. Maimonides's full name was Moses ben Maimon; in Hebrew he is often known by the acronym of Rambam, meaning Rabbi Moses ben Maimon. He was born in Córdoba, Spain on Passover Eve, 1135, and died in Egypt on 20th Tevet, December 12, 1204 (Broyde and Jacobs). Maimonides was a philosopher, astronomer,

and physician. When he was young he received his early rabbinic education from his father and various distinguished Arabic masters of the time. Given a choice between converting to Islam or being killed, Maimonides and his family fled their homeland before he had reached his teens. It was during these nomadic years that Maimonides composed a commentary on the Mishnah entitled "Kitab al-Siraj", a code of Jewish Law called the "Mishneh Torah", and the philosophical work "A Guide for the Perplexed". Maimonides' major contribution to Judaism remains the Mishneh Torah. His intention was to compose a book that would guide Jews on how to behave, by reading the Torah and his code, without having to expend large amounts of time searching through the Talmud (Zeitlin). Needless to say, this confrontational foundation did not help Maimonides' relation to many traditional Jews, who were concerned that people would begin to rely solely on his code rather than study the Talmud itself. Despite an early opposition, the Mishneh Torah has become a standard guide for Jewish practice; it later served as the model for the Shulkhan Arukh, the sixteenth-century code of Jewish law that is regarded as authoritative by Orthodox Jews to this day (Telushkin). What makes Maimonides distinguishable from many other philosophers or religious authors is how his work transcends Judaism alone. Vitali Naumkin, a Soviet scholar, said during a Paris conference on Maimonides, "Maimonides is perhaps the only philosopher in the Middle Ages, perhaps even now, who symbolizes a confluence of four cultures: Greco-Roman, Arab, Jewish, and Western." Additionally, Time magazine said of him "Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, and quite possibly of all time." (Time magazine, December 23, 1985) The work of Maimonides has, and

continues, to influence Jewish thought and modern scholars. His notoriety in Judaism is only shadowed by the that of Jesus in Christianity. Of all the ministries of religion throughout time, none overshadow that of Jesus Christ's in the first century CE. In a mere 18 months, Jesus succeeded in beginning what is now the world's largest religion (Oxtoby and Segal), an accomplishment unmatched in the history of the known spiritual world. To the Christian community, and even to other secular and non-Christian religions, Jesus represents, either literally or in context of the New Testament as a story, selflessness, sacrifice, and altruism at its best. Evidence of the benevolence of Jesus can be found throughout the New Testament, much of it being in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. One passage in particular, known as the Sermon on the Mount, is found in the gospel of Matthew and wholly reflects his righteousness and piety. Perhaps the most well known part of this passage is, "do not set yourself against the man that wrongs you. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left" (New English Bible). It is from these teachings of Jesus where men and women of Christian faith find their renowned propensity for love and forgiveness. However, despite being so notorious in the world of religion, there is very little hard evidence on the details of Jesus' existence. The only accounts of Jesus' life on earth are found in the aforementioned gospels in the beginning of the New Testament. There is a quandary, though, having to do with the substantiation of these gospels. Dr. Seidel pointed out these dilemmas in a presentation on Jesus in November of 2010, stating that the descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament were "skewed and biased by the later Christian communities" and that they "represent the 'split' which was

happening already between the nascent Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians. " (Seidel) So while the stories and quotes of Jesus find themselves shadowed by uncertainty, it is undeniable that his preaching had, and still has, an impact on Christian and non-Christian communities alike. The last and most recent of these three world-changing individuals is the current King of Saudi Arabia, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. While not as historically significant as the previous two religious leaders, King Abdullah's influence on the contemporary Muslim faith is undeniable. King Abdullah has been named the most influential Muslim in the world for both 2009 & 2010 and is on track to continue that trend. King Abdullah has significant influence in the global Muslim community through his rule over the two holy sites of Mecca and Medina, two of the most important places in the worldwide Muslim community. Mecca is the main pilgrimage site for 1.5 billion Muslims. Of those, 2.4 million visit Mecca annually in order to fulfill their religious obligation (Ghazi). The King also happens to rule the land with the largest oil reserves in the world, giving him massive political influence during a time of heavy reliance on petroleum products. He has used these resources to make Saudi Arabia, and ultimately the Muslim community, a fine example of a compassionate nation. King Abdullah donated \$50 million in cash and \$10 million-worth of foreign aid after the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake in China, and pledged \$1 billion in donations toward the reconstruction of the Palestinian coastal territory during the Israeli war on Gaza (Ghazi). But how does this massive presence in the geopolitical world affect Islam as a religion? Willard Oxtoby and Alan Segal outlined the complications for the future of Islam in their text A

Concise Introduction to World Religions saying “ Muslims can accomplish much in the West if they work with their non-Muslim neighbors to promote justice and moral consciousness” and that “ if future generations of Muslims are to remain active as Muslims in the pluralistic Western societies, it is more important than ever to change old images and ideas. ” (Oxtoby and Segal)

King Abdullah has led the way in this intercultural relationship between Muslims and the rest of the world by convening a global interfaith summit in 2008 and subsequently issuing the Madrid Declaration, which calls for tolerance between religions and a culture of peace. King Abdullah was also the first Saudi monarch in 51 years to address the UN General Assembly and the first reigning Saudi monarch to have met with a pope, Pope Benedict XVI, in November 2007. King Abdullah is making history for the Islamic community. The work that has been and is currently being done will transform the animosity that much of the political and religious world has towards Islam into a supportive community that can finally work together for the greater good. Like Maimonides and Jesus, King Abdullah seeks to extend an accurate perception of his religious community, promoting peace and understanding between those who are willing to accommodate the concept.

Born in three different millennia, in three different countries, these three religious figures have had a major impact on religion in very different, but equally important, ways. Maimonides, Jesus, and King Abdullah are three very different people on the exterior, yet extremely similar in their contribution to the greater development of their respective religious community. These men’s sacrifice is an example that should be emulated by spiritual leaders and individuals who hope to make an impact on the world. If

such a feat could ever be accomplished, we would find ourselves working together for a better future, in which we can live side-by-side rather than struggling in our ignorance and misunderstanding of religious diversity

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