

Monotheism: a critical review of judaism, christianity and islam in the european ...

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Monotheism is seen by many people to be the belief in one Supreme Being who controls all activities in the universe. In the Ancient European context, the predominant view was that there were many gods and many spirits that ruled and controlled affairs in different parts of the universe. The Ancient Greeks had numerous gods for various events in the natural cycle – a god of thunder, a god of rain and others. The Romans also had various approaches to spirituality, where the Greek gods were renamed with a twist of more spirituality and consultations with deities and spiritual powers. The idea of a Supreme God that controlled everything seem to be a Semitic idea that can be traced to the teachings of Abraham in Ancient times which spread into Europe.

The purpose of this paper is to critically review the main features of the three Abrahamic religions that are considered to be monotheistic in Eurocentric discourse – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All three religions profess the belief in one single unique God who created the Heaven and the Earth and runs affairs within this universe. The fundamental question of this research is to examine the features of the three Abrahamic religions and deduce their differences and similarities in relation to the concept of monotheism. The paper will examine whether there are more similarities than differences in the three monotheistic religions or not.

Monotheism in the Three Religions

Monotheism in most Semitic languages (Hebrew and Arabic) refers to the idea of a belief in the Creator who can be perceived in the human mind in the abstract sense. This Creator is the Supreme Being and is the source of power and authority in every situation and matter in the universe. The power

of being all-powerful comes with the feature of omniscience which is about the ability of the creator to have a presence everywhere and in everything. In Judaism, the idea of monotheism relates to the absence of any other gods and the view of a Nefesh HaChayim (The Soul of Life) which gives life and existence to everything that exists in our universe. Therefore, the central thought of Judaism is that there is a Supreme Being who has power and authority and controls everything. And to the Jew, there must be no perception or view of any other God but the Supreme Creator.

The central theme of Judaism is that the Supreme God, is one and He is the God of Israel or the Jewish people and no the Jewish people must not have any other God beside Him. This is to be recited twice each day by a Jew and it should lead to the channeling of a Jew's resources in total, towards this one single and unique Creator.

Judaism also teaches that God has no form and there must be absolutely no attempt to depict Him in any way or manner. However, Judaism right from Beresheit (Genesis) Chapter 1 which describes the creation of the world integrates ideas and concepts of Angels and other powers and authorities that helped God in the Creation. Thus, in Beresheit 1: 28, it says that God said " let us make man in our own image". The word " us" in the text opens to door for the discussions about angels and their work in relation to God. This seem to suggest that Judaism supports the idea of some kind of division in the power and work of God. However, works in mainstream Judaism seem to emphasize on the fact that angels are no more than an extension of God that represents the will of God in totality and in absolutism.

Judaism also presents several characters who seem to have elevated

statuses including the character of Melchizedek who is like some kind of a divine being. There are many cases and situations where angels visited human beings and played roles that were similar to a depiction of God. Also, there were times where the greatest Prophet of Judaism, Moses also had a face-to-face encounter with God.

Christianity built on Judaism and it appears that Christianity expanded on the ideas of Judaism and integrated the concept of the Trinity. The Trinity is the presentation of God in three forms, but within the three forms, He was to be seen as one. This is clearly not monotheistic, but people who believe in the Trinity accept that God had three different forms and this includes the Supreme God who exists above all other powers and the same Supreme God came into the world as Jesus Christ to teach humanity and save the world. Jesus in his lifetime said on many occasions that he is the Son of God. And this implies that God the Father also existed in a completely different form and different manner. After Jesus ascended to heaven, he told his follows that he will send the Holy Spirit, which is the third branch of the Trinity. Christianity is clearly a religion that maintains its monotheistic thought in the context of the abstract belief in the Trinity. This gives Christians the impetus to view Jesus as a Son of God who was an elevated Angel who took a greater role and a greater power in the affairs of Heaven after he came into the world and complete an unusual mission and task. Another element of Christianity is that it introduces the idea of Satan or the Devil which is meant to present an organized anti-Christian system that the makes it necessary for Jesus Christ to act to redeem humanity.

The central belief in Islam tends to establish and reinstate the principles of

monotheism and institute it in a very thorough and complete manner different from Judaism and Christianity. These beliefs can be summed up into three main pointers:

- Tawheed: Belief in the oneness of God;
- Risalah: Mohammed is the ultimate messenger of God;
- Aakhirah: Life in the Hereafter

Islam is such that it contains components that seek to support the oneness of God in a very strong and profound way. This is because it makes a conscious effort to state that Mohammed is a messenger of God and all the angels and other powers are all subject to the will of Allah. This implies that all people and all spirits and powers are to be seen to be organized in such a way that it is subjected to the will of God.

Islamic tradition tends to focus on the Afterlife and the fact that God will reunite the souls of the righteous with him, whilst the wicked will burn in hell. This indicates that God has some kind of plan for all the good and the evil people of the world. This supports the monotheistic thesis in Islam.

Commonalities of the Concept of Monotheism in the Three Faiths

All the three Abrahamic religions accept the idea of the Creator who is an all-powerful being and heads all powers and all spirits of the world including those that are known and unknown. Therefore, there is the belief in a God that is supreme and all-powerful and this is a central theme that runs through all the three Abrahamic religions.

All the three religions give credence to a man named Abraham (Avraham in Hebrew and Ibrahim in Islam). This implies that they all accept that the view

of Abraham is authentic and his attempt to bring monotheism into the world is something they all recognize as an important and vital element and aspect of the religion.

All three Abrahamic religions accept that God has no form and as such, they do not actively endorse the attempts to create images and symbols that actively present any form or part of God. Save for Christianity which presents Jesus, the son of God in various forms, Judaism and Islam are clear and strict about any attempts to present God in any form or manner. Therefore, all religions are in consensus about the fact that God must not be depicted in any way or manner.

All the religions accept that God is all supreme. However, they also accept that there are some kinds of extensions that are connected to the Supreme God. And these include angels and other powers in the spiritual realm that are higher than humans but are subjected to the will of God.

Finally, all three religions believe that certain people lived exceptional and exemplary lives that allowed them to have a closer view of God in their lifetime. This includes the Patriarchs and other persons who achieved great feats in life and as such, were viewed as an important part of God and His divine plans and processes. They all give credence to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael as well as other top persons who were exceptionally close to God like Noah and Enoch.

Divergences in the Concept of Monotheism in the Three Faiths

Aside these commonalities, there are major departures in the way and manner in which the three monotheistic faiths exist and operate. First of all,

the Creator is seen to be the sole authority and power in Judaism and Islam. However, Christianity presents the idea of Jesus who is the Son of God who is elevated above the angels. This shows that Christianity departs from the Jewish and Islamic thought that God is one and has no extensions and no other supporters and assistance.

All the religions agree on the abstractness of God. However, Christianity gives room for some kind of consideration and integration of Jesus as the Son of God. This is a completely different view and idea of Christianity that is not accepted anywhere. And whereas Islam accepts almost all the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, they reject the idea that Jesus is the Son of God but they accept him as a prophet and messenger who came before Mohammed. Judaism does not accept Jesus as a prophet, savior or son of God. Judaic sources do not have anyone by the features of Jesus except one person who was said to have features of teachings that were seen to be divergent to Judaism. Therefore, the idea of Jesus and his elevated status in Christianity is not accepted.

Judaism and Christianity do not recognize the connection of Mecca to Abraham and the attempt to use Ishmael instead of Isaac as the sacrifice Abraham was commanded to make. Judaism and Christianity do not recognize Mohammed as a messenger or prophet of God. Hence, Islam is unique in viewing Mohammed as a messenger of God. At the same time, Christianity asserts that Jesus and his followers are the last and ultimate followers of the principles of the Bible. However, Islam does not accept this and they present Mohammed as the ultimate.

Judaism views the “satan” as anything that prevents a Jew from doing what

is required of him. It includes temptation and other things that prevent a Jew from doing the commandments of God. Christianity on the other hand presents the idea of Satan as a being who controls an organized kingdom of Darkness that brings evil into the world. This brings a justification for the need for salvation through Jesus Christ. Islam presents the idea of the devil as a power that is subject to the power and authority of God. This is similar to the Jewish position on the matter.

Finally, and perhaps the most significant difference between the three faiths is their sources of authority. Each of the three monotheistic religions accept the Torah given to God by Moses as a true source and authoritative source given by God to humanity. However, they all vary in the interpretation of the Torah and the duties of human beings in relation to the laws of God. First of all, Judaism is centered on an Oral Tradition and a set of rules that they believe was given directly to Moses by God. This sets out an elaboration of how the 613 commandments of God given in the five books of Moses are to be carried out. Therefore, Judaism is about adherence to the oral and written Torah. On the other hand, Christianity is based on the teachings of the New Testament which is a totally different set of instructions about how people could get a better life on earth and in the afterlife. Finally, Islam also comes with the Quran which is a totally different set of revelations made by the Prophet of Islam which provides a set of different ideals that are somewhat unique in its own sense.

Conclusion

The study indicates that the fundamental ideals of monotheism in Semitic religious concepts run through all the three Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They are all based on a central idea of a Creator who is omnipotent and all-powerful and controls all affairs in the universe.

Therefore, all the religions view and accept the fact that faith and religion is based on one single supreme power and authority who controls everything. They also believe that God is abstract and has absolutely no form. They all forbid the creation of a graven image and other forms of idolatry. These are core principles that guide the views, ideas and principles.

There is evidence from the study that all the three religions are based on the same ideas but there is a sense of difference that relates to the cultural and historical contexts within which the three religions developed. Thus, Christianity and Islam have adopted various elements and concepts that relates to European (Roman/Greek) and Arabic cultures respectively. This includes the development of different authoritative texts that excludes and includes some components from the central Jewish texts. There are also various views about angels and other agencies in relation to the power of God. Christianity focuses on the concept of the devil and presents the idea of the son of God. Islam validates the teachings of Mohammed and connects Mecca with Abraham. However, these divergences are minor and they only affect the context within which the religions are interpreted.

Therefore, the study concludes that there are more similarities in the Abrahamic religions than differences. This arises from the fact that they are

all based on the central theme of the existence of one unique and powerful God who controls everything and all powers and authority.

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