

Creation of destruction: religion

Religion



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If there is one thing that could both connect yet destroy cultures historically, it would be religion. Religion is one's faith, belief, and devotion to a greater power; it is what people have turned to in the face of adversity across centuries of human history. There are two main generalizations of religion: monotheism and polytheism. Monotheism is the belief in one great being, whereas polytheism is the belief in many great beings. Despite their great differences in foundation, creation, and flexibility, they still share similarities on sensitive topics such as homosexuality and polygamy according to their sacred texts.

Age is one of the more obvious differences between monotheism and polytheism. Polytheism is much older than monotheism as one of the first records of human settlements is in Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamians were the earliest hunter-gatherers to have settled to form a permanent settlement, practice agriculture, and develop the earliest form of writing known as pictograms. Like most of the earliest settlements, they were polytheistic as they believed in natural phenomena and began to associate different phenomena to different deities. Although debatable, one can argue that the first monotheistic religion was either Zoroastrianism or Judaism, both of which came from civilizations following Mesopotamia. Regardless of which specific religion came first, many agree that polytheism is the older practice. Polytheism, in comparison to monotheism, is slightly more flexible regarding worship. Polytheism does not necessarily require its followers to worship every godly being equally as henotheism is an option in some polytheistic religions. Henotheism is when one acknowledges the existence of several godly beings but is a follower and worships one god of the many; it

is the grey between polytheism and monotheism. An example of henotheism would be the Greek gods: one could be a follower of only Athena or Apollo but still believe in the existence of other gods such as Hades and Demeter. Monotheism, however, is a relatively innovative take on religion as the thought of one transcendent being is comparatively new. This is a complete contradiction of polytheistic beliefs as they have the choice to follow one of the many gods; having one being wield the power of many was unthinkable in the past. This was why they had several gods but often with one leading god. There was either a god for every object and phenomenon or a god for each generalization of what exists.

As people in the past were heavily dependent on teamwork for survival, influence from the hunter-gatherers could be seen in the older polytheistic culture. By the time monotheism began to emerge, survival was much more likely even without a large group. At this point, there was a semi-established wealth and social status hierarchy. The fact that one person could have more power than a group is reflected in monotheistic culture. Although both polytheism and monotheism have many differences that often end with more than a heated debate, according to the sacred texts themselves, they both historically share common views. When talking of polygamy – the marriage of more than one partner at a time – most religions take a similar stance with certain conditions. Although mostly illegal and criminalized today, polygamy was normal in the past. In fact, in many cultures and religions, not only was it allowed, it was encouraged as a solution to the disproportionate population of men to women due to war (Freeman). This was most clearly seen, but not limited to, polytheistic communities, such as historical China, Rome, and

Middle Eastern countries. Even biblical figures have more than one wife. Islam is in support of polygamy under the circumstance that it is consensual and that each wife is treated equally. Another similarity between the two is the views on homosexuality. Strictly according to the sacred texts themselves, not many texts call out against homosexuality explicitly. In the polytheistic, historical Greece, homosexuality was common and widely acknowledged. Men would marry women, sometimes solely for the sake of passing on their genes and would sleep with young, pre-pubescent boys until they reached puberty. Afterwards, these young men would grow up to do the same as those had done to them, and the cycle continues. The Greeks, at this time, had yet to be taken over by Christianity and were still polytheistic. A number of polytheistic texts do not specifically call out on the discrimination or wrong doings of homosexuality. In fact, in Hinduism, it is encouraged to support any sexuality as long as no one is hurt. Even godless religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, do not explicitly speak down homosexuality; both speak only of sexual misconduct, such as infidelity. The Bible talks about homosexuality but never has it actually spoken against homosexuality. In fact, although heavily concealed, many practitioners of monotheistic religions secretly practice homosexuality, both through consensual and nonconsensual means.

Some of the more apparent similarities would be the manner in which polytheistic and monotheistic followers regard their equals and their god(s) with the utmost respect. Although some religion-based cultures have caste systems, which is a social hierarchy that one is born into, such as in Hinduism, those within their own caste are generally treated well. Nearly all

religions, be it polytheistic or monotheistic, have a sacred text they follow and a place of worship. Rarely does one ever see disrespect in places of worship and especially not towards the deities themselves in people that should know better. Polytheism and monotheism share a history full of bad blood; their historical differences have resulted in several wars, spanning decades. Despite this, they both share much more than is acknowledged, especially on sensitive topics, such as polygamy and homosexuality. Innovative thinking has not only enhanced living conditions but have also heavily influenced the growth and development of religion and culture throughout history.