The Parable of the Three Rings:
An Allegory of the Interconnections among
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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Abstract

If we understand intercultural philosophy as an endeavor to give expression to the many voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts and, therefore, generate a shared, fruitful discussion granting equal rights to all, we can then envision a philosophy that facilitates an attitude of mutual respect, listening, and learning among the major Abrahamic faiths: i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. One of the most challenging theological issues of our time, how to account for the great number and diversity of world religions and at the same time to acknowledge their correspondences, is also one of the most troubling social issues confronting humanity. Disputes and disagreements over religious beliefs have been and continue to be sources of conflict around the world. Yet upon careful observation of the basis or foundation of most religions, one will find correspondences among the basic beliefs behind them. This paper hypothesizes, therefore, that the three Abrahamic faiths have common values; and that while religious persecution is built on ignorance, peace can only be achieved by knowledge and understanding. Some would argue that the struggle for political power, especially between ethnically and religiously identified constituencies in so-called democratic processes within the modern state, is a major factor. But this proposition does not explain why people with certain common religious values would be convinced otherwise. This paper therefore bases its hypothesis on *The Parable of the Three Rings*, a classic allegory for religious tolerance and understanding. For data collection, this paper employed expert interviews and the document analysis technique, and relied on both historical and contemporary sources, namely passages from the Holy Torah, the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an, as well as scholarly books, journals, and Internet sources. The findings generated after a qualitative analysis of the data elucidate the fundamental correspondences among the three faiths and suggest that religiously inspired terror is unwarranted and unjustified.

Keywords: peace, Abrahamic connections, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the parable of the three rings

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Introduction

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are brother/sister religions which together comprise about four billion adherents, accounting for more than half of the world's population. Yet, just as in the story of Cain and Abel, which they all share, they are at constant odds with one another. Judaism, the oldest practiced Abrahamic monotheistic religion, sprung from the desert and nomadic cultures of the Middle East almost 6,000 years ago. From Judaism, Christianity developed. In the Christian tradition, Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him; henceforth, PBUH) fulfilled the prophesied ideas surrounding the Messiah and, thus, brought completion to the Jewish faith. Islam, which is the youngest of the three practiced Abrahamic monotheistic faiths and the fastest growing faith in the world, embodies the traditions of both previous Abrahamic religions and includes newly revealed scriptures from another and final (in the Islamic faith) Prophet, Muhammad (PBUH). These three faiths trace their roots back to Abraham (PBUH) and, thus, to Adam (PBUH). Their common lineage to Abraham (PBUH) has termed them as Abrahamic. All three faiths are spiritually based, and their historical backgrounds in the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an converge and diverge at some points. Having most of the same prophets (Peace Be Upon Them; henceforth, PBUT), didactic stories and morals, the three faiths have much common ground. This commonality, however, is a point upon which little focus is placed. This lack of knowledge about similarities in faiths and understanding about theology has led to increased tension, prejudice, and general discord.

Thus, as noted theologian Hans Küng once said, "There will be no peace among the peoples of the world without peace among the world religions" (Haring, 1998:173). Nearly four-fifths of the world's population identifies itself as religious (Smith, 2003:57), and the allegiances stemming from this basic fact transcend partisan, national and ethnic lines. For hundreds of millions, the most important community tie seems to be born of faith, not nation; the most authoritative pronouncements seem to be those of religious leaders, not statesmen; and the most effective provider of social and cultural resources seem to be churches, mosques, and synagogues, not the state. Faith-based loyalties and providers typically seem to outshine all others in terms of their ability to mobilize energies and tap into human resources. And yet, religions seem to remain one of the major engines of deadly conflicts.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC were a prime example of religion and its role in deadly conflict. And as a result, of all the religious communities, it seems as if it is only the Muslims who feel being constantly under attack. In the media, they are presented as the new threat since the fall of communism. After any terrorist attack by "jihadists" from the September 11, 2001 attacks to those in Bali in 2002, Madrid in 2004, and London in July of 2005, religiously legitimated terror was attributed to Islam.

Consequently, the recent terrorist attacks cannot be understood without a grasp of Islam and the concept of Jihad. Jihadism is not a tactic, like terrorism, or a temperament, like radicalism or extremism. It is not a political pathology, like Stalinism, a mental pathology, like paranoia, or a social pathology, like poverty. Rather, it is a religious ideology, and the religion with which it is associated is Islam (Khaled Abou, 2002:32). And so "Jihadist Terrorism," a new catchphrase for

many journalists and politicians, is by no means synonymous with Islam, which is a very sophisticated religion and contains many competing elements. Islam can be, and usually is, moderate, whereas terrorism is inherently radical (Khaled Abou, 2002: 34). Therefore, if the Western and secular world's short-term goal is to stymie the terrorists, its long-term aim must be to discredit terrorism in the Muslim world.

Concomitantly, if we understand intercultural philosophy as an endeavor to give expression to the many voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts and, therefore, generate a shared, fruitful discussion granting equal rights to all, we can then envision a philosophy that facilitates an attitude of mutual respect, listening, and learning among the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This is more so because intercultural philosophy entails a new orientation which insists that in order to acknowledge the cultural *situatedness* of philosophy, claims must be proven interculturally, and cultures must be consciously kept in view as the context of philosophizing. Of course, the study of interculturality of religions is nothing new, albeit rare. A recent example is Wim van Binsbergen's essay titled "Derrida on Religion: Glimpses of Interculturality" (2000). In the essay, van Bisbergen examines Derrida's argument, in which sacrifice, wholeness and righteousness become increasingly central as one reads on. According to van Bisbergen, the main purpose of the circulation of Derrida's text is the "articulation of philosophical problems of interculturality, and the suggestions of possible routes towards possible answers, specifically from the context of religion or, perhaps more generally, vaguely, and state-of-the-art-like, 'spirituality'" (2000:1).

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the three major world religions, especially Islam, and the concept of *Jihad* (meaning "to struggle" or "to strive" in the way of God—SWT). This paper aims to elucidate the overwhelming commonalities shared by the major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and discredit the many stereotypes and misconceptions. It also seeks to answer the age-old questions of why humans continue to battle over religion, why people cannot simply get along, and how they are to promote religious tolerance.

The paper briefly explores religious strife throughout history, starting with the Roman Pagans and Hebrews and ending with the recent "War on Terror." It examines fundamental elements surrounding religious conflict and utilizes a comparative analysis of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

More specifically, however, the essence of this paper is the revelation that all founders of the faith communities simply shared the same goals and objectives—liberation of self against oppression. By illustrating the major commonalities of the three major world religions, this paper aims to stress the importance of knowledge and understanding as the only path toward peace. Since the basic values and tenets of the three major world religions are inherently the same, religious strife is simply outdated and unwarranted—there is no logical reason as to why people cannot get along.

Literature Review

The studies that have been done in this area of research focus on the history of religious strife as well as tolerance and understanding throughout history. The existing theories and/or approaches

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on this topic are interpretations of religious texts, notions of power, and the core similarities of humankind. This study contributes to the sample of literature reviewed because while it incorporates the history of religious conflict and future possibilities of religious tolerance, it also uses a close analysis of specific passages from the Bible, the Qur'an and the Torah to identify the fundamental similarities shared by the three major world religions and, thus, suggests a path towards world peace and tolerance.

Although not translated into English until recently, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's play, "Nathan the Wise," in *The Parable of the Three Rings* (1894), is arguably the single-most magnificent story concerning religious tolerance. It argues in a beautiful paradox how the religion most beloved by the other two will turn out to be in possession of the true ring. The play elucidates the shared knowledge of different religious traditions. Basic patterns of mutual understanding, pluralism, tolerance, and dialogue—still relevant today—are drafted. As Hilary Le Cornu (2004) points out, the parable is told, among others, by Boccacio in the *Decameron* (1353), a medieval collection of short stories. Actually, it should be noted that in *Decameron*, the play corresponds very loosely to the third story on the first day. Le Cornu adds that the earlier versions of the parable were told for the purpose of indicating that the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—cannot be ranked inferior or superior to one another.

In order to study the clash of religions and the path towards peace, one must look back on the history of clashing religions. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (1998) consider the issues of tolerance and intolerance faced by Jews and Christians between approximately 200 BCE and 200 CE. Francis E. Peters in *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition* (2004) provides a way for readers to at least try to imagine what it must be like to live in a quite altered religious system with its different views of God (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala; henceforth, SWT, meaning "Glorious and Exalted is He/Allah").

Building upon the clash of religions and understanding why people do not simply get along, Richard Wentz in *Why People Do Bad Things in the Name of Religion* (1993) deconstructs religion to its elements and examines how fanaticism and wrong doing in the name of religion have developed. He further explains how all humans are in some way religious and how people allow that religiousness to be imprisoned within walls of their own mind's making.

Adding to the study of religious tolerance and ways to promote peace, Louis Hammann and Harry Buck in *Religious Traditions and the Limits of Tolerance* (1988) provide a collection of essays and insight that gets at the heart of how people are to balance individual belief systems and subsequent faith with holistic world views. Also, Martin Forward in *Inter-religious Dialogue* (2001) draws on a wide array of sources. This guide examines the past, present and future possibilities of inter-religious dialogue.

Other in-depth studies have looked at the impact of misinterpretations on religious conflict. Through a close reading of the Qur'an, Khaled Abou El Fadl shows that injunctions to violence against nonbelievers stem from misinterpretations of the sacred text in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (2002). Kathleen M. Moore in *Al-Mughtaribun: American Law and the Transformation of Muslim Life in the United States* (1995) examines pluralism and religious tolerance in America, viewed from the vantage point offered by the experiences of Muslims in the United States, a

significant and growing part of an increasingly pluralistic society.

There is a growing body of texts concerning different religions of the world, but Michael Coogan's *The Illustrated Guide To World Religions* (2003) provides an in-depth analysis of seven major world religions all in one book. Each chapter in this volume examines one of seven major world religions—from Judaism to Christianity and from Islam to Buddhism—and contains detailed information about each one.

Steven Smith in *Getting over Equality: A Critical Diagnosis of Religious Freedom in America* (2001) delineates a way for people to tolerate and respect contrary creeds without sacrificing or diluting their own beliefs. He also argues that people do not have to pretend to believe in a spurious "equality" among the variety of diverse faiths.

As the world's collective eyes focused more closely on the Middle East and made the recognition that the region would be the epicenter of its attention, interest in the three faiths of that region has grown. Because of this increase in awareness, many scholars have begun writing extensively on Muslim, Christian and Jewish relations. A compilation of essays written about the development of Islam, Christianity and Judaism and their shared backgrounds, *Muslims and Christians, Muslims and Jews. A Common Past, A Hopeful Future* (1992), edited by Marilyn Robinson Waldman, places much emphasis on the past growth of the three faiths. Their shared lineage is discussed.

The Abraham Connection: A Jew, Christian and Muslim in Dialogue (1994), compiled by George B. Grose and Benjamin J. Hubbard, is a collection of discussions among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Through their conversations, an ambiance of mutual understanding may be achieved.

In the book, *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions* (1998), John Corrigan et al. discuss the foundation of the three monotheistic faiths. From this platform, the doctrinal beliefs and traditions of each are explained. The work also examines the places from which rifts occur.

Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding (2002) edited by David Smock discusses the idea of dialogue as a means to peacebuilding and how dialogue may be applied in an interfaith setting. This work also gives advice on how better inter-religious relations may be increased through discussion.

Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue (2003) discusses the way in which Christianity relates to other faiths and the role of God (SWT) in Christianity. The work further describes the way in which dialogue may be used in an increasingly more religiously divided world.

The article, "Religion, Dialogue, and Non-Violent Actions in Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" (2004), by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, examines the way discussion in an interfaith setting may increase understanding and lead to peace. This article specifically references the Israeli-Palestinian model; however, suggestions made to increase dialogue may be applied in any setting.

Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Relations (2005) is another compilation of conversations among Muslim, Jewish and Christian theologians from editors Bradford E. Hinze and Irfan A. Omar. This book uses the dialogues of the three theologians to create an understanding about the three faiths' interfaith relations and discusses thoroughly the

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heritages of the faiths and dialogue among them.

Terence J. Lovat's article, "Educating about Islam and Learning about Self: An Approach for Our Times" (2005), discusses the importance of increasing education about Islam and its historical and shared backgrounds with Christianity and Judaism as a means for creating peace. This article is closely aligned with the current study, and similar conclusions are hypothesized to be reached.

Methods for successfully studying the scriptures in an interfaith setting with members of the three Abrahamic faiths are discussed in the article titled "An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims" (2006) by David F. Ford. The use of Ford's models for scriptural analysis may be applied to the archival research of this study.

W. T. Dickens argues that interfaith dialogue may occur even while each faith maintains its own truths. His article, "Promoting Peace among the Abrahamic Traditions through Interreligious Dialogue" (2006), states that recognition of the disagreement taking place must be made in order for progress to be made in discussion.

Although there exist studies concerning the clash of world religions and religious intolerance, there is a glaring omission in texts that combine all of the information concerning the world religions, religious warfare, promoting tolerance, etc. in the hope of educating others as a path towards peace. To that end, this study will augment the existing works on the subject and determine whether the three major world religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) do share commonalities and, if so, if there are misinterpretations that have perpetuated intolerance and impeded the path towards peace.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This paper incorporates theoretical postulates from Socrates and the German playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The rendering of Socrates is that every deity whatsoever should be worshiped in just the manner ordained by that god (Peters, 2004:86). This theory is useful because for that very reason, it became a matter of the supreme necessity with the Roman pagans to refuse to worship the God (SWT) of the Hebrews (Peters, 2004:88). For if they were minded to worship Him in a method different from the way in which He had declared that He ought to be worshiped, then assuredly they would have been worshiping not this God (SWT) as He is, but some figment of their own imagination. Yet, if they were willing to worship Him in the manner in which He had indicated, then they could not but perceive that they were not at liberty to worship those other deities whom He had forbidden them to worship (Peters, 2004:91-4).

This theory guides this study because that same logic applies not just to polytheists but within the monotheistic family as well. Again, the problem seems to be not so much (or not just) in the iniquity of believers, but more pervasively in the logical structure of the religions themselves. All three monotheistic religions trace their origins back to a definitive revelation in history (Peters, 2004:114), and this may be where the problem lies.

In addition to this, Lessing is crucial to this study because in his play, "Nathan the Wise," from the book, *The Parable of the Three Rings* (1778), he tries to resolve this problem—not just the problem of tolerance but more crucially the dilemma of revelation's uncertainty and its attendant exclusionary clause. His play is useful to this study because it suggests that perhaps the only

solution seems to be understanding—or more precisely, the kind of civilized, sympathetic, and self-confident appreciation that is willing to look inside the belief system of another without abandoning its own.

The methodological approach used in this study is a qualitative case study. It is qualitative because the study analyzes various religious texts and the different aspects of religious conflict throughout history using non-numerical data. According to Kaplan and Maxwell (1994), the motivation for doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes from the observation that, if there is one thing, which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is their ability to talk. Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994:18)

Researchers have used the case study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods. Researcher Robert K. Yin defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (1984:23).

This study employs qualitative analysis to establish the foundation on which to test the efficacy of the religious allegory of *The Parable of the Three Rings*. After discussing the tale, it addresses the fundamental elements surrounding religious conflict and utilizes a comparative analysis of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism to test the hypothesis that the three religions share common values and are related to one another—that neither of them advocates violence and that while religious persecution is built on ignorance, peace can only be achieved by knowledge and understanding.

The unit of analysis in this study comprises the three major world religions in relation to the issue of religious conflict throughout history. The levels of analysis vary. On the individual level, this study focuses on aspects of the individual experience—why one would engage in religious warfare, what deters one from religious tolerance, and how one is to promote peace. On the interactional level, this study explores the interactions of opposing religious groups that have resulted in warfare. And lastly, on the structural level, which focuses on social institutions and patterns of social behavior, this study examines the perpetuation of religious strife throughout history.

The technique used for data collection was document analysis of books, scared texts, Internet publications, and scholarly journals, because it is a study of references and an analysis of their contents. The factors that shaped the choice of the data collection technique were availability of information and its relevance to the topic.

Analysis

To the casual observer, it may seem that the major world religions have clearly separated people, for religions seem to attach themselves to nationalistic governments that are in political competition with other governments, setting up one religion against another (Forward, 2001:66).

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And because religions most often seem to demand allegiance from their followers, they tend to give the impression of superiority over others. In order to achieve peace or some type of resolution to the age-old war of leading religions, what is needed in today's world is something very different: something that can unite people. Religion seems to separate people. That is the generic problem. In spite of religions and religious fervor, social and economic injustice, racism, and violence continue to exist in societies where the belief in a deity is so overwhelmingly present and fervently adhered (Forward, 2001:2-55).

In order to examine these issues in this essay, the following subsections deal with *The Parable of the Three Rings*, the history of religion in brief, ignorance and intolerance, religious conflict, religious tolerance, the history of religious tolerance, religious tolerance today, and a comparative analysis of the three major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam).

"The Parable of the Three Rings"

A work that deserves to become a part of the resolution to the age-old conflict of religious supremacy resulting in warfare is "Nathan the Wise," a verse play by German critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing first performed in 1779, albeit Iris Shagrir (1997) has traced the allegory to its Muslim origins. The play revolves around three main characters: (1) Nathan, a wealthy Jew from Jerusalem; (2) Sultan Saladin, and a (3) Christian Knight.

Saladin, although noble and generous, needs money for his armies and attempts to get it from Nathan by challenging him in an intellectual bet. Nathan is to say which of the three religions of the Book is the true one. Yet Nathan is in a bind: name his own faith and antagonize the Sultan; name Islam and betray his own religion; name Christianity and betray Judaism while also offending the Sultan. Nathan then, known as "the Wise" for good reason, escapes the trap by telling the Sultan a story.

The story is of a wealthy merchant with an opal ring that bestows the power to be loved by both God (SWT) and man. The merchant has three sons and foolishly promises each of them, in secret, that they will inherit the ring. The father, feeling death approaching, commissions a jeweler to make two replicas of the ring. They are so fine that he himself cannot tell them from the original, and he gives the three rings to his sons. After the father's death, each son claims to have the true ring and with it the privilege of heading the family. They appeal to a judge to settle the dispute. He declares:

> My counsel is: Accept the matter wholly as it stands.
> If each one from his father has his ring,
> Then let each one believe his ring to be
> The true one. Possibly the father wished
> The tyranny of just one ring!—And know:
> That you, all three, he loved; and loved alike;
> Since two of you he'd not humiliate...Let each strive
> To match the rest in bringing to the fore
> The magic of the opal in his ring!
> Assist that power with all humility...
> And with profound submission to God's will!

In the end, even the knight, who started out prejudiced against Muslims and Jews, accepts the benign message of the three rings: the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of all men and women under God (SWT).

Seen across from the Crusades to the Holocaust, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and fanaticism of every sort that enlightened spirit seems almost heartbreakingly dated. But the *Parable of the Three Rings* seems to be the antithesis of the crusading spirit and describes to what most of the West seems to adhere.

This belief can be viewed as the spiritual notion that holds all religions and cultures to be equally valid. Or it can also take a more rigorous form that respects other people's faith while insisting on the distinctness of one's own. Many Christians, Jews, and Muslims insist on the unique truth of their religions, but they seem to seek to enforce that truth with a strong focus on their differences, instead of acknowledging the core similarities.

Islamic extremists are very similar, if not no different from the West's Crusaders. The Islamic extremists may be seen as today's Crusaders, seeking to rid Holy Lands of "infidels." Even former President Bill Clinton, to illustrate some of the West's own misdeeds, recalled that Christian fighters massacred Muslims during the first Crusade (Madden, 2002).

So in order to ever achieve peace, religious fanatics seeking justified warfare in the name of their own religion must heed to the conclusion of the judge's ruling in "Nathan the Wise":

> And when the magic powers of the stones
> Reveal themselves in children's children's children:
> I bid you in a thousand, thousand years,
> To stand again before this seat. For then
> A wiser man than I shall sit as judge
> Upon this bench and speak.

But can the world really wait "a thousand, thousand years" for that decision?

The History of Religion in Brief

As seen from the preceding discussion on the *Parable of the three Rings*, the ideological clash between the leading world religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—is an age-old issue confronting humanity. Therefore, in order to understand the current conflict of religious intolerance, it is necessary to explore the roots of religion among the different peoples of the world. As I frequently tell my students, history is the most important subject matter because everything begins with history, for history is the basis for philosophy. If one gets ill and goes to see a doctor, the first thing the doctor will request is the person's medical history.

Looking back to history, religious conflict seems to lie not only in the iniquity of believers, but more so in the logical structure of the religions themselves (Stanton and Stroumsa, 1998:12). From the beginning of time when man started to lead his life guided by something other than instinct, he has seemed to feel the need to acknowledge, to see, to feel, that something greater than him exists and tried to reach this ideal (Laursen, 1999:64). So, it seems as if this is why religion was born. And looking back to history, man seems to have always fought because of his beliefs. He

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sometimes committed crimes, atrocities, and wars in the name of or because of his god, or stood united in front of an enemy, or perhaps it is because of this concept.

Furthermore, in examining the history of religious warfare, the opinion of Socrates that "every deity whatsoever should be worshiped in just the manner ordained by that god" (Peters, 2004:86) is relevant. This is because for that very reason, as stated earlier, it seemed to become a matter of the most supreme necessity with them [the Roman pagans] to refuse to worship the God (SWT) of the Hebrews (Peters, 2004:88). For if they were minded to worship Him in a method different from the way in which He had declared that He ought to be worshiped, then assuredly they would have been worshiping not this God (SWT) as He is, but some figment of their own imagination. On the other hand, if they were willing to worship Him in the manner in which He had indicated, then they could not but perceive that they were not at liberty to worship those other deities whom He had forbidden them to worship.

Perhaps what is more important is not just the immense complexity of each religion but more importantly how layered these religions have become, with their assorted historical accumulations and culture-specific beliefs (Smith, 2001:132). Philosophical speculations on God (SWT) tend to return time and again to certain well-worn themes, like theodicy and divine simplicity. But because each monotheistic religion began with a revelation that constituted—and continues to shape—a historical community, the complexities pile up and give to each religion a unique contour that no philosophy can blur, let alone obliterate (Smith, 2001:135-6). And that is just the point: no one can seem to hope to achieve peace without an understanding of these religions or without taking into account their complex layers.

Ignorance and Intolerance

Albert Einstein once said that "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding" (http://rescomp.stanford.edu/~cheshire/EinsteinQuotes.html). If peace is to be promoted, education is to be encouraged. In order to administrate dialogue in the hope of attaining conflict resolution, there needs to be an emphasis on educating people on the similarities of the clashing leading world religions. The fact of the matter is that violence is perpetuated by ignorance; and as the ignorant notions of religious supremacy are passed down generation after generation, religious warfare has and will continue for the years to come. A prime example of this is President George W. Bush's "War on Terrorism." As mentioned earlier, it seems that of all the religious communities today, it is the Muslims who feel that they are constantly under attack (Moore, 1995:1-31). In the media, they are falsely portrayed as advocates of violence in the name of Jihad—their religious justification for it.

Jihad, routinely translated as "holy war," often makes headlines. For example, Yasir Arafat's May 1994 call in Johannesburg for a "jihad to liberate Jerusalem" (*Middle East Quarterly*, 1994:50) was a turning point in the peace process. The Israelis thought they heard him speak about using violence to gain political ends and questioned his peaceable intentions. But Arafat then clarified that he was speaking about a "peaceful jihad" for Jerusalem.

This incident points to the problem with the word jihad. What exactly does it mean? Two examples from leading American Muslim organizations, both characterized as fundamentalist,

show the extent of disagreement this issue inspires. The Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Washington-based group, flatly states that jihad "does not mean "holy war." Rather, it refers to "a central and broad Islamic concept that includes the struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense...or fighting against tyranny or oppression." CAIR even asserts that Islam knows no such concept as "holy war" (www.cair-net.org). Yet in abrupt contrast, the Muslim Students Association distributed an item with a Kashmir dateline titled "Diary of a Mujahid." The editor of this document understands jihad very much to mean armed conflict: "While many dream of jihad and some deny it, while others explain it away, and yet others frown on it to hide their own weakness and reluctance towards it, here is a snapshot from the diary of a mujahid who had fulfilled his dream to be on the battlefield" (www.mynet.net/~msanews/). It is necessary to note here that the words for "holy" and "war" in Arabic are *muqadassa* and *harb*, respectively. Thus, Jihad does not mean "holy war." The concept is unlike its medieval Christian term, "crusade," which means "war of the cross."

Does jihad mean a form of moral self-improvement or war in accord with Islamic precepts? There is no simple answer to this question, for Muslims for at least a millennium have disagreed about the meaning of jihad. But there is an answer. Warfare is only one interpretation of the concept of jihad. The root meaning of effort never disappeared. Jihad may be an inward struggle directed against evil in oneself or an outward one against injustice. A Hadith defines this understanding of the term. It recounts how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), after a battle, said: "We have returned from the lesser jihad (*al-jihad al-asghar*) to the greater jihad (*al-jihad al-akbar*)." When asked "What is the greater jihad?," he replied: "It is the struggle against oneself" (Al-Hujwiri, 1911:200-2001). Although this Hadith does not appear in the Qur'an, it has had enormous influence in Islamic mysticism (Sufism).

Sufis understand the greater jihad as an inner war, primarily a struggle against the base instincts of the body and also resistance to the temptation of polytheism. Some Sufi writers assert that Satan organizes the temptation of the body and the world to corrupt the soul. Al-Ghazali (1059-1111), arguably a prominent figure in Islam's development after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), describes the body as a city, governed by the soul, and besieged by the lower self. Withdrawal from the world to mystical pursuits constitutes an advance in the greater jihad. Conversely, the greater jihad is a necessary part of the process of gaining spiritual insight (Renard, 1988:225-242; Hoffman, 1998:196-200). By the 11th Century, Sufism had become an extremely influential, and perhaps even the dominant, form of Islamic spirituality (El Fadl, 2002). Judging from a variety of texts, to this day, many Muslims seem to conceive of jihad as a personal rather than a political struggle.

The common misconceptions and stereotypes of "Jihad" are only a few of the many examples of how ignorance perpetuates violence. If people were to take the initiative to educate themselves on Islam, or any other religion, then perhaps it would be far less likely that misunderstanding leading to violence would occur. And this notion takes this study back to its original pursuit: Why can't we all just get along?

Religious Conflict

In order to understand the reason peoples of different faiths around the world cannot simply get

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along, the examination of why people so vehemently adhere to their proscribed faiths is essential. Richard Wentz explains in *Why People Do Bad Things in the Name of Religion* (1993) that people belong to a particular religion either because they are born into it and do not even think of it as a religion (rather as *their* people, *their* way, *their* cosmos), or because people discern the community that they so desperately need as social beings. In the modern world, people tend to "convert" because they find in a certain religion the support they need. It is important to understand that the social expression of their religiousness gives power to the verbal and practical expressions. *People* believe these things, these propositions, *people* tell these stories because this is who the *people* are. *People* do these rituals and abide by these rules and practices because that is what their people do (Wentz, 1993:45-48).

More specifically, however, Wentz explains that people "rage" in the name of religion because they are defending their world, their identity, and their memories. They are "raging" on behalf of the most important thing in existence, the relational symbols and realities that are the very heart of life. There is a sense in which every war is, in large measure, a conflict "in the name of religion." He adds that even the so-called secularist who rages for "human" (whatever that is), economic, or political "reasons" is doing so on behalf of his "cosmos," his universe of order and meaning, his identity as one who belongs to an "enlightened" or magnanimous people. Secularism and humanism do not avoid the analysis of the scholar of religion. And that as a matter of fact, they, too, often rage in the name of religion—in the name of their particular way, their kind of people (Wentz, 1993:52-4).

Religious Tolerance

Clearly, the topic of religious tolerance is both crucial to a people who try to understand and address conflicts throughout the world and extremely complex in its boundaries, definitions, and implications. As Jay Newman in his work, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance*, exclaims, "intolerance is the most persistent and the most insidious of all sources of hatred. It is perhaps foremost among the obstacles to civilization, the instruments of barbarism" (1982:3).

As I explain in *Islamic Peace Paradigms*, "The paradigm of conflict resolution contains numerous methods of resolving conflicts, all of which attempt to reach agreement without bullets flying" (Bangura, 2005:71). I also note that "In analyzing conflicts, defining those parties involved becomes crucial to delineating interests" (Bangura, 2005:73). And further state that "the larger question becomes that of pluralism within Islam. In analyzing conflicts between religious groups, it is imperative to understand pluralism with religious beliefs and in the world at large" (Bangura, 2005:76-7).

In terms of Western history, it is perhaps the case that the earliest concrete attempts to understand the meaning of tolerance came in the 16th Century with the rise of the Reformation. The term was used in Germany and the Low Countries, and also in France, to mean permission or concession in relation to religious freedom (Champion, 1999:2). The main issue came to be whether more than one religion could be tolerated in the Christian state, with tolerance actually meaning "permission." The theologians agreed, of course, that "permission need not mean approval" (Lecler, 1955:vii-x). In the 16th Century, it was clear that tolerance was understood

strictly as a theological concept, "far different from its connotations in the anti-clerical atmosphere of the age of Enlightenment" (Lecler, 1955:x). Even politics was "theology-minded," as the discussion ranged over the extent to which the state could be involved in matters of religion.

Nonetheless, there also were influences from movements of Christian humanism and spiritualizing mysticism (Lecler, 1955:476). Joseph Lecler in *Toleration and the Reformation* makes this interesting observation:

> In spite of the stiffening attitude of the various denominations, which became so pronounced after 1560, the Christian humanists still hoped to bring about religious unity. Unfortunately, they followed a dangerous road. In their wish to overcome the divisions of Christendom and to keep it open for increasingly radical sects, they reduced the dogmatic requirements to less and less. This, as experience showed, led to a gradual frittering away of the substance of Christian belief.... (1955:480)

In essence, the possibility of religious tolerance was of deep concern to many people who feared that tolerance may have to lead inexorably to the abandonment of deeply held beliefs and the ultimate dissolution of faith. For many, it was manifested in their deep concern about the possible encroachment of "syncretism."

This possibility of "frittering away," as mentioned earlier, of course, still seems to be of deep concern to many people today. Some Muslims today are calling for an end to the term "interfaith," on the grounds that it will inevitably blur the lines of distinction between faiths, and propose instead the adoption of "multi-faith" as a category for religious engagement with the other. Yet, true pluralism involves the coexistence of profoundly different, but equal, values.

To put the notion of religious tolerance without abandoning one's faith, I would essentially concede that it is important to make a distinction between tolerance of those persons who adhere to another faith tradition and the tradition itself: that is, one can be tolerant of Confucian, or a faith practitioner, without needing necessarily to be tolerant of what people call Confucianism or Shamanism. For example, Mormon practitioner Robert Paul argues that in light of his commitment to the necessary relationship of human beings to God (SWT) and the love of God (SWT) for all of God's (SWT) spiritual offspring, there is no moral or spiritual justification for not expressing genuine tolerance for those of another (or no) faith, even if one may not accept the tenets of that faith (Mozjes, 1990:23). And to reinforce this notion, Jay Newman says that "Tolerating a religious belief, then, does not involve a half-hearted acceptance or endurance of the belief in itself, but rather it involves acceptance or endurance of someone's holding [a] belief... that one considers to be significantly inferior to one's own alternative belief" (Newman, 1982:8, 10).

It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that religious tolerance, or more so pluralism, as a solution to religious conflict resolution is far more complex. People cannot assume that any religion, culture, or political system gives equal credence and/or value to any academic discipline. And if pluralism is attainable, perhaps diversification is possible. I then concede that in order to incorporate pluralism into conflict resolution, it is necessary for people to take into account practices associated with their religion, whether or not they reflect the historical or cultural "underpinnings" of their own professed deity.

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Education and the Similarities Shared by the Three World Religions

If people are to respect pluralism and, therefore, shed light upon the practices of others associated with their own religion, it is imperative that they educate themselves on other religions and their customs in order to realize that their own religion, among the many different types and branches of others, shares common values with and is related to the others. More importantly, people need to understand one another's traditions, rituals, values, heritages, legacies, and cultures in order to accept one another and stop their conflicts. Religious tolerance, promoted since the 18th Century, should be one of the most important aspects of international and intercultural concerns.

Values in all religions seem to be the same, more or less. The only difference seems to be given by a people's mentality, which actually does not seem to come from religion—it seems to come from its leaders. If people could find a common ground, they could reach a consensus of living, unaltered by prejudiced judgments. The following is a discussion of some of the shared aspects of the Abrahamic faiths.

Y-w-h/Allah/God (SWT):

To begin with, faith in the Supreme Being is the basis of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, expressed mostly by public and private acts of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, petition, and repentance (Coogan, 2003:41). More specifically, theism (the notion that a deity created the universe and continues to actively participate in the world's activities and in human history) is shared by the three religions (Coogan, 2003:74-6). All of them believe in monotheism: that is, the belief in a single God (SWT). It should be mentioned here, however, that between 1570 and 1085 BC, Pharaoh Amenhotep IV of Egypt became the first to introduce monotheism to Kemet and the world (Zulu, 1992:249).

All three religions admit an Ultimate Reality, a Supreme Being, who many call God (SWT), that is eternal and unchanging, and this Ultimate Reality is only one omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (present everywhere), and omniscient (knows everything past, present, and future) Being. Christians, Jews, and Muslims have the same concept of God (SWT): He is unique, greatest, kindest, etc. The only difference is that Christians believe that God (SWT) is a single authority but composed from three persons: (1) the Father, (2) the Son, and (3) the Holy Spirit/Ghost.

More specifically, as described by Michael D. Coogan in *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions* (2003), there are three fundamental ways in which Ultimate Reality is defined: (1) personal being, or a personal and loving God (SWT); (2) an impersonal being, as origin and target of all personal beings; or (3) an eternal truth or principles that govern the universe, as in pagan religions like Wicca or Masonry (2003:112). Through his analyses of the three major world religions, Coogan (2003) reveals that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are similar in that they all define God (SWT) in the same fundamental way—as a personal being.

While some people have questioned whether Muslims worship the same God (SWT) as Jews and Christians, it is quite clear that since Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is treated as one of the spiritual ancestors of all three religions, it can be said that all three are closely related *Abrahamic*

faiths. There are, undoubtedly, some differences among them, but there are more similarities among them.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe that there is only One True God (Allah in Arabic), who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is self-Sufficient or self-Subsistent. God (SWT) is without gender. Nothing is comparable to Him. He is all-mighty, all-holy, all-peace, all-wise, omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and immanent (all-present). God (SWT) is the Ever-Living, the Eternal, and has no beginning and ending. He is just, righteous, perfect, and infinite. He is the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Most High and Great. God (SWT) is the source of wisdom, truth, justice, and mercy. God (SWT) alone is absolute being, totally independent.

Islam, Christianity and Judaism believe God's (SWT) attributes. According to the African theologian and philosopher, St. Augustine of Hipo, God (SWT) has three attributes: (1) Being, (2) Knowledge, and (3) Love (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2000). In Islam, the "99 most beautiful names" describe the attributes of God (SWT), and these names and attributes are eternal. The concept of God (SWT) in Islam, Judaism and Christianity is strictly monotheistic. None can be equal to the perfect, infinite, self-sufficient, absolute, and only God (SWT). He is beyond comprehension. All three religions also abhor deification of any human being. Muslims agree with Jews and Christians wholeheartedly that it is heretical to contend that a human being can become God (SWT).

Islamic scholars have defined three aspects to *tawhid* (Islamic monotheism):

(1) *Tawhid-ar-Rububiyyah* declares oneness of the Lordship of Allah (SWT), Who is Creator, Sustainer, Planner, etc.

(2) *Tawhid-al-Uluhiyyah* declares oneness of the worship of Allah (SWT). Only Allah (SWT) has the right to be worshipped.

(3) *Tawhid al-Asma' was-Sifat* affirms all the Names and Qualities or Attributes of Allah (SWT). The Attributes of Allah (SWT) are the 99 Names, such as the Real, the Mighty, the Most Gracious, the Powerful, etc.

Tawhid and *shirk* are two important Arabic concepts in knowing Islamic monotheism. *Tawhid* means "declaring God (SWT) one," and *shirk* means "associating partners with God (SWT)." Therefore, *tawhid* is monotheism, and *shirk* is polytheism or idolatry. In Islam, *shirk* is the greatest sin that Allah (SWT) will never forgive (Qur'an, 4:48, 116, 5:72).

Tawhid is a basic tenet of Islam. The Qur'an affirms the following: "…we worship none but Allah" (3:64). The first of Islam's five pillars says that "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." This profession is found at every juncture of a Muslim's life. It is recited throughout the whole life of a Muslim.

"He is Allah, (the) One. Allah-usSamad [Allah—the Self-Sufficient master, Whom all creatures need (He neither eats nor drinks)]. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him" (Qur'an, 112:1-4). Obviously, the Islamic concept of monotheism rejects any plurality of Godhead (Qur'an, 2:116, 19:35, 88-89). The running

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commentary of the Holy Qur'an by Dr. 'Allamah Khadim Rahmani Nuri notes 112:4 as "admitting no plurality of any kind in the Godhead, 2:163, 21:22."

Religious Duties:

Muslims, Christians, and Jews all consider their first duty to be to recognize this Supreme Being, to adore Him, to praise and give thanks to Him. The second duty of these three world religions is to take good care and love the creatures of this God (SWT), the universe, nature, and mainly the human beings considered by most religions the greatest achievement of God (SWT) (Coogan, 2003:2006).

Each major world religion has a person that started it all, even if the knowledge came from God (SWT) "directly" as a message or if it came from studying and realizing what is best for humanity. In both cases, people are dealing with something called a spark, as divine intervention. This being represents the symbol of his religion, even if he did really exist or not.

Christians hold the Bible to be true and have Jesus of Nazareth (PBUH), regarded by them as the Christ (PBUH), who reformed Judaism about 2,000 years ago and gave a new vision on human essence (Coogan, 2003:206-7). Muslims have Muhammad (PBUH), the Great Prophet to whom the Qur'an was revealed. And Jews have Moses (PBUH) who led the Hebrew nation out of Egypt, through the desert, to give them the Promised Land, Palestine. Moses (PBUH) also received a great part of the Torah, but he is a prophet, a founder, even though many Jews are still waiting for their Messiah to come (Coogan, 2003:291-3).

Core Beliefs:

The sacred texts of the three world religions reveal many commonalities within their beliefs and doctrines as prescribed in their scriptures. The following are some examples:

(a) *The Golden Rule:* Islam, Christianity, and Judaism preach and try to practice the Golden Rule: love one another, because all people are brothers and sisters in God (SWT). In Judaism, the Torah states: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. Talmud, Shabbat 3id... Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus, 19:18, NIB). In Christianity, the Bible testifies: "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the law and the prophets...All the Bible! (Matthew, 7:1). It also states: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke, 6:31 NIB). And in Islam, the Qur'an attests: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself" (Hadith recorded by al-Bukhari, Sunnah).

(b) *Sin*: Confession of sins is a very important ritual in each world religion—this is the emphasis on honesty and responsibility for one's actions as a common value. "Sin" seems to have always been a term most usually employed in a religious context, and it describes any lack of conformity to the will of God (SWT); especially, any willful disregard for the norms revealed

by God (SWT) is a sin; any bad ethical behavior is actually a sin; but the greatest and most deceiving sin for most religions is the lack of faith in God (SWT), in the Ultimate Reality, in the Supreme Being.

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all acknowledge the sins of every individual and of the society in general, and preach to avoid sins and errors. Yet still, in Judaism, God (SWT) is said to have 13 attributes of mercy (Coogan, 2003:303-5):

(1) God is merciful before someone sins, even though God knows that a person is capable of sin.
(2) God is merciful to a sinner even after the person has sinned.
(3) God represents the power to be merciful even in areas that a human would not expect or deserve.
(4) God is compassionate and eases the punishment of the guilty.
(5) God is gracious even to those who are not deserving.
(6) God is slow to anger.
(7) God is abundant in kindness.
(8) God is a God of truth; thus, we can count on God's promises to forgive repentant sinners.
(9) God guarantees kindness to future generations, as the deeds of the righteous patriarchs
    (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) have benefits to all their descendants.
(10) God forgives intentional sins if the sinner repents.
(11) God forgives a deliberate angering of Him if the sinner repents.
(12) God forgives sins that are committed in error.
(13) God wipes away the sins from those who repent (Talmud, tractate Rosh HaShanah 17b).

Similarly, in Christianity, "Jesus Christ on the Cross at Calvary paid for all the sins of humanity...and to appropriate His redemption, His ransom is easy, free, by grace, without any effort, without any work, Just have faith in Jesus, do what He tells you, and your sins will be forgiven, completely erased, all of them" (Coogan, 2003:220). The Bible states: "Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1John, 1:29, 35). "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew, 26:28). "Jesus appeared so that he might take away our sins" (John 3:5). "The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin" (1 John, 1:7). "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark, 16:16). "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They replied, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts, 16:30-31).

Also, Jesus gave to his disciples the power to forgive sins or not to forgive them. The first item in the first apparition to the Apostles Jesus (PBUH) told them: "receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (1John,.21:23). "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John, 1:9).

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And finally, Islam sees sin (*dhanb*) as anything that goes against the will of Allah (SWT). Muslims believe that God (SWT) is angered by sin and punishes sinners (*jahannam*), but that He is also the Merciful (*ar-rahman*) and the Forgiving (*al-ghaffar*), and forgives those who repent and serve Him. To support this statement, one can refer to the Qur'an, when it says: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (Qur'an, 39:53). Additionally, although some of the major sins are held to be legally punishable in an Islamic state (for example, murder, theft, adultery, and in some views apostasy; see *Sharia*), most are left to God (SWT) to punish (for example, backbiting, hypocrisy, arrogance, filial disrespect, lying).

(c) *Places of Worship and Supernatural Entities*: All Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—present worship places generally accepted as temples. A Christian temple is called a church and is a place where God (SWT) "touches" people. They come to pray and for their sins to be forgiven. They have to admit their sins in order for them to be forgiven. The same thing happens in a Hebrew temple known as synagogue, which is also a place for offerings, prayer, and serves as a worshiping school. The synagogue also has an educational value, teaching young men. Lastly, in Islam, Muslims gather in Mosques or Muslim temples. They are places where adherents come to pray and to worship Allah (SWT).

To shed light upon yet another similarity among the three world religions examined in this study, in each one, there are forms of spiritual beings, grouped as demons or angels. Proponents of supernaturalism claim that their belief system is more flexible, which allows them more diversity in terms of epistemology (ways of understanding knowledge). For example, scientists accept the findings that the Earth and universe are many billions of years old. Among members of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, however, there is a wider range of beliefs that are based on claims of divine revelation as opposed to verifiable facts. Some have a literal interpretation of Genesis, and they believe that the earth and universe are only 6,000 years old in contradiction to all verifiable evidence; other Christians accept the results of science which show the Earth and universe as many billions of years old in terms of age.

Shared History, Convergent Backgrounds: The Abrahamic Connection

The title given to the three monotheistic faiths, Abrahamic, is rooted in their rich histories and their ties to Abraham (PBUH) in the book of Genesis. Thus, the history of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims from the world's creation to Abraham (PBUH) is a shared history. Furthermore, understanding Abraham (PBUH) as a critical figure of all three religions is pertinent to developing an understanding of the schism of the faiths, but more importantly the locus of the monotheists' convergent backgrounds.

Following the great flood, the three sons of Noah (PBUH) had sons of their own and perpetuated humanity. Abraham (PBUH), originally Abram (PBUH), was a descendant of Shem, the son of Noah (PBUH). This is important because Noah (PBUH) is a key figure in both Judaism and Christianity, and is considered one of the first prophets of Islam: "… indeed, all of Qur'an 71 is devoted to him…[Furthermore,]…Noah was, like Muhammad, a messenger (*rasul*), sent to a

people who rejected him…" (Peters, 2003 v. I:2). From prophet to prophet, Abraham (PBUH), like his ancestor Noah (PBUH), received many messages from God (SWT). In a critical message from God (SWT) to Abraham (PBUH), God (SWT) promised: "I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing: I will bless those who bless you, And curse him that curses you; All the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you" (The Torah, Genesis, 12: 2-3).

After this annunciation, Abraham (PBUH) did indeed have his first son, Ishmael, who was born to Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid of Abraham's (PBUH) wife, Sarah, as Sarah was barren and could not conceive (The Torah, Genesis, 16). Thereafter, Sarah did conceive and bore a son, Isaac. At this point, God (SWT) told Abraham (PBUH) that he would make a covenant with Isaac. However, Abraham (PBUH) asked God (SWT) to bless Ishmael. God (SWT) granted this request and promised that Ishmael, like Isaac, would go on to be a patriarch of many tribes and the father of a great nation (The Torah, Genesis, 17:19-21).

Isaac went on to become the father and patriarch of Christianity and Ishmael's descendants, the Ishmaelites, became the Arab people from whom Islam sprang. It is no wonder then that Muhammad (PBUH) made quite clear that Islam was "nothing other than a 'religion of Abraham'" (Peters, 2003 v. I:7). Furthermore, for Muslims, the Ka'ba, the central structure of Mecca around which the *Hajj* or pilgrimage is focused, was built by Abraham (PBUH) and Ishmael (Peters, 2003:7). As stated in the Qur'an,

> If the People of the Book rely upon Abraham, let them study his history. His posterity included both Israel and [Ishmael]. Abraham was a righteous man of God, a Muslim, and so were his children. Abraham and [Ishmael] built the Ka'ba as the house of God, and purified it, to be a centre of worship for all the world: For God is the God of all Peoples (The Holy Qur'an, S.II. 121. C. 48).

Truly, Abraham (PBUH) is a central focus and convergent point for both Islam and Judaism. Abraham's (PBUH) connection to Christianity lies in Jesus Christ (PBUH) himself. Christ (PBUH), a Jew, was a descendant of Abraham (PBUH) himself as established in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke's gospels (Holy Bible, Matthew, 1:1-17; Luke, 3:23-38). Furthermore, Christians maintain that Christ (PBUH) was the Messiah (Anointed One) and the fulfillment of the prophesies of the Torah. Thus, Christians maintained that Christ (PBUH) and Christianity were the completion of Judaism and "in direct continuity with Judaism" (Arnaldez, 1994:6). Christ (PBUH) discussed this exact issue: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Holy Bible, Matthew, 5:17).

Thus, Christianity, as Christians believe, is a growth from Judaism and not a replacement. It is seen as a completion of the Prophesies, the Laws, and the Faith, and Christ (PBUH) is the modus operandi of that conclusion.

In sum, all three faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—were born from a past in Abraham (PBUH). With Abraham (PBUH) as their patriarch and *uniter* of backgrounds, they each have forged their own place and traditions. They cannot, however, forget their common ancestry.

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Shared Scriptures, the Identity of God, and the Ten Commandments as Sources of Value Identification

The written tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is a shared attribute which perpetuates the three faiths. The stories, values, and expressions of faith are, in written form, preserved *ad infinitum*. The faiths' reliance on the scriptures binds them together. A unique pattern arises in the scriptures and the way in which they were created and shared.

According to the tradition of the faiths, the Torah was given by God (SWT) to Prophet Moses (PBUH) to write down. This is only partially true, however. The distinct book which Moses (PBUH) wrote contains the laws and history of the Jewish people. Nonetheless, it is only a part of a more complete anthology which is broken into the categories of "the Laws, the Prophets, and the miscellany called Writings" (Peters, 2003: v. II:1). The Torah was the book which was used and taught to Jesus Christ (PBUH) as a Jew. Consequently, the Torah, or Old Testament, as it is known in Christianity, became the basis of the new Christian faith.

Uniquely, Jesus' (PBUH) story, the New Testament or Gospel or Bible, was not written by Jesus (PBUH). "The Gospels are accounts of Jesus' words and deeds set down, in approximately a biographical framework, by his followers" (Peters, 2003 v. II:1). In addition to the descriptions about Christ (PBUH), the "Acts of the Apostles" and various epistles of Christ's (PBUH) disciples were also set down in this "New Testament" which was to complete the Torah in the same way that Christ (PBUH) fulfilled the prophesies of the Torah (Peters, 2003 v II:1).

Finally, the Qur'an was sent directly from God (SWT) through the Archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to be written down. The Qur'an is the only text written in this manner, directly from God (SWT) (Arnaldez, 1994:25-26). Furthermore, the Qur'an teaches a unity of the three faiths and uses all three scriptures and their teachings and stories as precedent for itself as illustrated:

> God's truth is continuous, and His Apostles from Adam, through Noah and Abraham, down to the last of the Prophets Muhammad, form one brotherhood. Of the progeny of Imran, father of Moses and Aaron, sprang a woman, who devoted her unborn offspring to God. The child was Mary the mother of Jesus. Her cousin was the wife of the priest Zakariya, who took charge of Mary. To Zakariya, in his old age, was born a son, Yahya, amid prodigies: Yahya was the herald of Jesus the son of Mary, and was known as John the Baptist. Jesus was of virgin birth, and performed many miracles. But those to whom he came as Prophet rejected him and plotted for his death. Their plots failed, for God's Plan is above man's plots. So it will be with Islam, the Truth from all eternity (The Holy Qur'an, S. III. 30. C. 56.).

Together with Judaism and Christianity, Islam shares ties and a common base. Each faith builds off the last in a unique phenomenon. Christianity builds on the Torah with the Gospel and New Testament. And Islam adds to the previous two with its own message brought by Muhammad (PBUH).

As the faiths share a continuity of text, a convergent background in Abraham (PBUH), and build upon the precedent of the last, it is not unreasonable to recognize that all three faiths

celebrate only one God (SWT). Furthermore, the God (SWT) of each faith is the same God (SWT), albeit with three messengers and three [slightly] varied interpretations (Arnaldez, 1994:1). Judaism sets the precedent in the Ten Commandments, which Moses (PBUH) set down at the order of God (SWT): "You shall have no other gods before Me" (The Torah, Exodus 20:3). As a Jew, Jesus (PBUH) maintains the Jewish monotheism: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Holy Bible, Mark, 12:29). And Muhammad (PBUH) asserts one God (SWT) in Islam by conveying God's (SWT) monotheistic message. He takes it a step further in doing what this paper sets to do—that is, joining the three faiths in one understanding: "Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not lords and patrons other than God'" (The Holy Qur'an, S III. 64).

Although the idea of one God (SWT) is shared, the way each faith views that God (SWT) may be varied. This complication can be seen as a root of schism. However, all the faiths describe the nature of God (SWT) and His will and actions in similar terms. This, and not the differing views, should be the focus of dialogue in dealing with the nature, will, and actions of God (SWT). The Abrahamic faiths deal with God (SWT) on two levels: (1) the universal and (2) the particular. The universal relates to God (SWT) and His dealings with all the world and humanity. The particular discusses God (SWT) and his behavior towards specific people and in a set time period (Swidler, 1998:43). The universal is that which is most helpful to dialogue, as it is that which is most unified in description and, thus, will be that which is here discussed.

Universally, all three faiths describe God (SWT) as being the singular maker of the world and universe or Heaven. Thus, the Jewish and Christian scriptures begin by affirming that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis, 1:1) and the Qur'an likewise declares that "Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six spans" (10:3) (Swidler, 1998:43). As described by John Hick in the anthology, *Theoria—Praxis*, edited by Leonard Swidler, all three faiths have commonalities in how they describe the overarching nature of God (SWT): "God…[is] understood within each tradition to have a moral nature encompassing both the more demanding attributes of justice, righteous wrath, absolute claim, and the more tender and giving qualities of grace, love, mercy, forgiveness" (Swidler, 1998:43). Hick cites several scriptures in showing these commonly described attributes:

> … [A]ccording to the Hebrew scripture Yahweh [(God)] 'judges the world with righteousness' (Psalm 9:8) and yet is 'merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love' (Psalm 103:8). And according to the New Testament 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness' (Romans 1:8), and yet at the same time 'God is love' (I John 4:8) and 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (I John 1:9). And according to the Qur'an 'The Lord is quick in retribution, but He is also oft forgiving, most merciful' (7:167). (Swidler, 1998:43)

Thus, in creation and in nature, the Abrahamic faiths have unity in their God (SWT). In this universal perspective of God (SWT), the religions can find accord. Truly, it is only in the particular study of God (SWT) where there is difference. But in finding unity and in promoting dialogue,

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differences must be cast aside and discussion must be focused on the similar: the universal perspective of God (SWT).

Another front of dialogue may be around the centrality of the Ten Commandments or Decalogue. The Ten Commandments, written down by Moses (PBUH), preceded Abraham (PBUH) and, thus, are pertinent to all three Abrahamic faiths (Magonet, 2003:80–89). Each faith has taken to heart the overriding messages and rules of the Ten Commandments, and in each faith their effects can be seen (Magonet, 2003:84). First and foremost, the Decalogue makes known that there is only one God (SWT). As from before, all three faiths have this ideal in central importance. Second, the faiths reject idolatry; each in its own way, and in some manners more critically than others (Magonet, 2003:84). Also, the idea of a Sabbath in establishing a regulated system of work and leisure, a tradition based in Middle Eastern culture, also pervades the three religions (Magonet, 2003:86). It is around this shared, central source of values where even more critical dialogue can occur. The realization of this centrality of law and values is critically important to enhancing dialogue. Thus, the Ten Commandments may be elevated from their revered place within each faith to the table of religious dialogue.

The ultimate question then is whether or not there is hope that the adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths have the potential to live in lasting peace. The following subsection entails some evidence from Anthony Teke Quickel's survey, although a bit dated, that seems to suggest that with education and dialogue, this is possible.

Quantitative Findings from Anthony Teke Quickel's Survey

In 2007, a student of mine by the name of Anthony Tele Quickel, working under my supervision, conducted a survey designed to discover the level of understanding between the three Abrahamic faiths. The survey posed general questions about these faiths to discover what a sample of adherents of each faith understands about the others and their faith's similarities to the others. A simple random sample of 200 respondents was done in the Washington, DC community. Based on the United States Census Bureau demographic estimates in 2007 of 591,833 residents, with 65% being Christians, 10.6% being Muslims, 4.5% being Jews, and 19.9 being adherents of other faiths, the population sample comprised 130 Christians, 22 Muslims, eight Jews, and 40 adherents of other faiths. The following is the survey instrument:

(1) Of the three monotheistic faiths, which are you? Christian   Jewish   Muslim
(2) Which scriptures do Jews use?   Torah (Old Testament)   New Testament   Qur'an
(3) Which scriptures do Christians use? Torah (Old Testament)   New Testament   Qur'an
(4) What scriptures do Muslims use?   Torah (Old Testament)   New Testament   Qur'an
(5) Which faiths have the following figures or elements?

    Jerusalem: Judaism   Christianity   Islam
    Abraham: Judaism   Christianity   Islam
    The Ten Commandments: Judaism   Christianity   Islam
    Noah: Judaism   Christianity   Islam
    Adam and Eve: Judaism   Christianity   Islam

After eliminating those respondents who were not followers of the three Abrahamic faiths analyzed, the following results were extrapolated from the given survey by Quickel.

As can be seen in Table 1, there is extremely little variation in the recognition of the faithful to the scriptural usage of their own faiths and that of the other religions. This suggests that there is high interfaith understanding of the scriptural backgrounds of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Table 1: Scriptural Usage

Faith of Respondent	Judaism uses Torah*	Christianity uses Torah and New Testament*	Islam uses Torah, New Testament, and Qur'an*
Judaism	100%	78%	83%
Christianity	98%	99%	84%
Islam	97%	89%	97%

* Scriptural usage headers based on the real usage of scripture

Table 2 demonstrates again little variation in the results. This indicates that a high percentage of those surveyed recognized that the figures and elements about which they were surveyed exist in all three faiths.

Table 2: Figures and Elements of Faiths

Faith of Respondent	Jerusalem*	Abraham*	Ten Commandments*	Noah*	Adam and Eve*
Judaism	99%	85%	75%	96%	94%
Christianity	99%	93%	94%	95%	98%
Islam	99%	99%	100%	100%	100%

* All faiths have this figure or element

The results from both tables demonstrate a high amount of understanding about the general backgrounds of the three Abrahamic faiths amongst those surveyed. This conveys that there is little disjointed perception amongst the followers of the faiths. The reality, however, is that Washington, DC, the survey area, has one of the highest education rates in the United States. Based on the United States Census of 2000, 42 percent of adults have a Bachelor's degree and additional 19 percent have a Master's, Professional, or PhD degree (McNally, 2003). Thus, the idea that there is increased understanding and perception with education may be accepted. This concurs with a major idea of the paper at large: that is, learning and dialogue lead to understanding and altruistic perceptions.

Conclusion

Albert Einstein once claimed that "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing" (http://rescomp.stanford.edu/Quotes. html). The findings presented in this study do indeed support the hypothesis that the three major world

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religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) have common values and are related to one another—none of them advocates violence and that while religious persecution is built on ignorance, peace can only be achieved by knowledge and understanding.

Before going further, it should be stated that there must be a place for the acknowledgement of all traditions. Yet peace cannot be realized through deities and religious traditions which are in competition and whose claims to superiority are won by violence. The only hope for success is that the individual traditions of people will be secondary to the broader, more comprehensive, unity that can become the basis for peaceful co-existence. Whatever the process for the future will be, all people must be integrally involved in it. If the goal for the future is peaceful co-existence, then people will need to adjust to the beliefs and values of others. Power, might, and control are no longer an acceptable model in a world of peaceful co-existence. Mutual respect is essential.

Therefore, in a socially, racially, and religiously plural society, people must recognize that there is a need for a change of attitudes. All founders of the faith communities fought for the liberation of self and against oppression. Religious communities today have the task to fulfill the mission of their founders. The human quest of the religious mission must be directed toward equality and justice and the challenge of religious discrimination. The key to success is openness to universality, rather than the parochialism to which what people seem to be so fascinated and accustomed. The pride in one's own tradition must come not from what separates him/her from others, but rather in what unites him/her with others. That should be the major change in human thought. Indeed, the findings from Quickel's survey and the work being done by organizations such as the Abrahamic Faiths Peacemaking Initiative (http://www.abarhamicpeacemaking.com) and academic institutions such as the Center for Global Peace in the School of International Service at American University (http://www.american.edu/cgp) and the Lubar Institute for the Study of Abrahamic Religions at the University of Wisconsin (http://lisar.lss.wisc.edu) are quite promising signs for such a change in human thought.

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