Comparative Review Of Angels Within Abrahamic Faiths

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Introduction

The terminology "Abrahamic Religions" relates to the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The claim they all share is their belief in Prophet Abraham being their mutual forefather. These three religions presently comprise about half of the world's population. The claim is further explained through Jews' consideration of Prophet Abraham as their ancestor, Muslims' belief in Prophet Abraham's son, Ishmael, as their ancestor, and the firm Christian belief in Prophet Abraham as the "Father of Faith." This claim promotes the understanding that all three religions originated from a single source.

"Abrahamic Religion" as a term links back to the repeated mentions and references made in the Qur'an. However, there are several mentions of Abrahamic Religion in the Bible and Torah as well. From the Jewish perspective, Abraham is regarded as their most respected ancestor, or Patriarch, translated as "Our Father Abraham." Christians present their belief in Abraham by associating him with a spiritual forebear instead of referring to him as a "direct ancestor." This is exemplified by Christian iconography depicting him as an early witness to the Trinity, in the form of three angels who visited him. The viewpoint of Christianity holds Abraham as a valued and revered model of faith. This is based solely on Abraham's selfless act of offering Isaac. The act itself is a holy representation of Abraham's pure intentions of faith and obedience to God. Muslims, on the other hand, present Ibrahim (Abraham) as part of the lineage that starts with Adam (mentioned as the "Prophet" in Genesis 20:7), while addressing him as the "First Muslim." The Muslim belief further states that it is Ishmael instead of Isaac (Christian claim) who is sacrificed. However, despite these differences, all three sister monotheisms share a common belief that aligns them.

Description

Considering all points of mutual belief between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the concept of "Prophetic" tradition is found to be precisely the same, with the same enumerations in each religion. However, from the detailed explanation of Semitic origins, it is found that Islam and Judaism belong to the Semitic traditions, more commonly associated with Jews and Arabs, whereas Christianity stems from Judaism. The upright orientation elaborates on the similarity between the three monotheistic

religions and talks about an individual owning a choice between good and evil, relating to obedience and disobedience directed toward God. The perspective of praying, however, adds a difference between these monotheistic religions. Islam and Judaism pray to a divine deity, a supreme being who is worshipped and revered as one being, whereas Christianity believes in the concept of the Trinity, which Judaism and Islam disapprove of (Afdillah, 2016, p. 97). The word of God has always been spoken and conveyed to humans via his messengers, referred to as angels. They have diligently served and are known to be in perfect obedience to the order of God. The mention of angels in these monotheistic religions has slight variations and various enumerations, but they share a common belief in their existence (DIX, 1927, pp. 233-250). The Prophets, being the bearers of God's word and conveying it to their people, were found to be in contact with these angels and received revelations from them. These revelations became the main source of teaching for each of these respective religions.

Judaism

The followers of Judaism are referred to as Jews and are known to occupy a major portion of Israel. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine over land ownership highlights that Judaism spread far and wide in ancient times. Judaism is the most ancient religion and has the first scripture in the Abrahamic faith. Torah is the foundational text of their practices. This terminology is used to describe Jewish people's culture, practices, and religious philosophy. The fundamental belief of Jews leads them to believe that they are the children of God and superior to followers of all other religions. Even in their practices, some of their beliefs state that God established a covenant with the Children of Israel (Afdillah, 2016, p. 97). Judaism encompasses religious texts, theological positions, and different forms of organized practices linked to the Torah, which is also known as the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. Later, the scriptures were extended in the form of the Talmud. Judaism is the tenth largest religion in the world, with a population ranging between 15 to 17 million worldwide.

When looking at the history of the people with Judaist faith, the first settlers were found to be residing in Sydney in 1844. Around the 1930s, Jewish people living in Australia increased in abundance due to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Aside from the Australian Jews, there were traces of Jewish populations residing in Palestine as well. However, over the years, the conflicts with Palestine led the Jewish population to settle in Israel. Currently, most of the young Jewish generation resides in America due to the opportunities offered by the United States of America.

Coming to the concept of angels in Judaism, it can be seen that Jews believe angels to be the messengers of God. In Jewish Rabbinic literature, angels have been classified into different groups according to different hierarchies. The Scripture of Midrash has defined the four angels who are chiefs of the other angels and surround the throne of God. These four angels exhibit particular attributes that set them apart from the other angels. In Talmud, four angels have been mentioned, and they have been referred to as 'archangels'. According to the rabbinic literature, it has been stated in the Talmud that the archangels surround the throne of God, as has been stated in the following lines:

“As the Holy One blessed be He created four winds (directions) and four banners (for Israel’s army), so also did He make four angels surround His Throne – Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael.” (Midrash Rabbah, Numbers 2:7-10)

There is also a reference to Angels’ way of living, as three angels have been identified who visited Abraham and consumed food that was prepared for them by Abraham, which shows that despite not having a physical form, they could still eat food. The scriptures explain different aspects regarding the appearances of the Angels; for example, in Midrash, it has been included that Michael is made up of snow and Gabriel is on fire. There are multiple sources in the Midrash that indicate that Michael is a defender of Israel in adverse circumstances and consider him an angel who favored the creation of humans. The Talmud talks about two angels, one who is bad and the other who is good, representing the concepts of evil and good. Both angels are given the duty of writing down every activity carried out by humans.

The origin of angels is still questioned in scripture, as it is believed that they have existed since the time of creation and have been serving God from the start of the world (DIX, 1927, pp. 233-250). In the Tanakh, there is a narration that introduces the Angel of God in Genesis and Exodus. Those events are briefly explained, such as the event stating that a whole army had been defeated with a single blow. However, many Jewish speakers are of the view that angels are manifestations of God and have existed since the beginning. A different hierarchy of angels was defined by Maimonides, who was a 12th-century Jewish scholar. Maimonides rewrote the version of the Torah in which Torah teachings and the nature of angels have been highlighted.

Yesodei Hatorah 2:8

“All these types of angels are alive. They recognize G-d very intensely, each in a manner commensurate with its level. Even the highest level, however, is incapable of grasping God’s true nature, as its intellect – like ours – is limited. Each category of an angel does understand God’s nature more fully than those on lower levels. Even the lowest level, the Ishim, knows God in a fashion superior to anything of which man is capable, but none of these levels can know God the way He knows Himself” (“Yesodei HaTorah – Chapter Two,”).

There are ten levels of angels according to differences in their hierarchical status. The hierarchical status has been defined according to Angels’ attributes that set them apart from others. Maimonides mentioned in the Mishneh Torah the ranks of angels from the highest to the lowest, following the Jewish angelic hierarchy. Furthermore, Jews believe that angels are known to God. They know God better than humans, and they have strong connectivity with God.

While angels do not have free will and do not differentiate between good and bad deeds, they are innocent. The concept of the fallen angel in Judaism can be found in studies of the Second Temple era, while both traditionalist and rationalist Jews do not believe that Satan is a fallen angel.

Christianity

Christianity is the most expanded universal religion around the world. Based on his life, teachings, and theology, Christians believe in Jesus and consider him the Son of God, also known as Christ, who is the focal point of their faith. Over 2.4 billion people in the world currently practice Christianity. The religion of Christianity has played a prominent role in the development of Western civilization (Lamoureux, 2010, pp. 433-437).

Christianity is considered to have originated in Jerusalem, a society that was not entirely occupied by Jewish society. The early Christian doctrine is believed to have been influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. Both Christianity and Judaism were recorded as having certain similarities that led to confusion in ancient times. Without the Church and Rabbis, it would have been difficult to tell a Christian apart from a Jew or a Christian text from a Jewish text. By the end of the 4th century, there was a state-developed church during the regime of the Roman Empire. Later on, it spread around the world during the time of colonization and was embraced by many people in different colonization sectors.

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The theology of Christianity is summarized in the Creed, which defines the profession of faith to be made by a person to be a Christian. It states that Jesus died and will return to grant eternal life to his true followers. Christians have a strong belief in the existence of angels, as there are many passages in the Bible that are dedicated to them.

“Angels were created by God, but it doesn’t say when they were created. They are depicted as praising God at the time of creation, which suggests that they existed before that moment” (cf. Job 38:4-7)(“Bible Gateway passage,”).

“The role they have as God’s servants” (cf. Heb. 1:14)(“Bible Gateway passage,”)

The Angels have been regarded as important beings according to the scriptures of the Christian faith. Apart from having a strong faith in their existence, Christians believe that the first Angel that appeared was Daniel, who played a crucial role as he was the main messenger of God and is also considered to have been very close to God. Daniel is also conceived as God’s instrument.

“The angel is something different from God himself but is conceived as God’s instrument” (Daniel 10:13)(“Bible Gateway passage”).

There is a hierarchical order followed in Christianity in which Angels are put into three different levels because of their status and closeness to God. The first level or first order is based on the Angels who are closest to God, and they are considered the strongest spirits in the world. They sing the praise of God and manage or regulate heaven; they purify the world with their purified spirit. In this order, the Seraphim are the highest angels. Also, they support the throne of God manifested with his judgments.

The second order consists of the priest-princes of heaven, who help stabilize the universe and keep it functioning as it should; it is believed that they can appear in the world in human form and meet humans physically. They are called Chesed. Gevurah is also under this category, which considers miracles applicable on Earth, and these are considered the most shining angels, decorated with the instrument of passion. They work hand in hand and reward people physically regarding tools.

There is important recognition from the second order as they must control the fallen angel from taking over the world, keep the balance of the universe, and provide powers to intellectuals for their mental growth. The third order is based on the ministering angels, which include principalities having duties to protect religions and guard holy cities and religious rulers; there is also a possibility of seeing them in human form (Lindsay, 2017, pp.1-18). Archangels are the chiefs of all angels, of which four include Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. The last order includes the angels, who are closely connected to humans and serve as intermediaries between God and mortals. These angels assist humans in every way from birth to the end of life and into the afterlife; they will be in the service of humans in heaven (Davidson, 1994).

In Christianity, angels do not have free will and are innocent; they do not do anything without the will of God, and they serve him fully. The concept of the fallen angel appears in Christianity, in which Christians believe Satan had power and led the angels, but because of his attitude, he was cast out of heaven and is therefore considered a fallen angel.

Islam

Islam is considered a fairly recent religion to be added to the Abrahamic faiths. It started with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, with its scriptures in the Arabic language and a uniform practice. The fundamental teaching of Islam teaches that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is a messenger of Allah. Islam is regarded as the world's second-largest religion. Presently, studies show Islam to be growing steadily, with over 1.8 billion people, comprising 24% of the world population. The belief in Islam is that all powers reside in the hands of God (Allah), and as Muslim individuals, people have to spend their lives according to the principles of Islam and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. This practice is known as Sunnah, which is composed in the form of narratives called Hadith (Otters, 2012, pp. 59-70). The scripture, according to their belief, provides basic knowledge of life, and the Qur'an presents a clear description of the way of life. The Qur'an is the Holy Scripture, and Hadith (a collection of the narrations of Prophet Muhammad) forms the fundamental basis for various practices and laws. Muslims consider Islam to be the compilation of various teachings offered by the Prophet. Further classification of Islam reveals two dominant sects: Sunni, which is about 90%, and Shiites, who make up the remaining 10%. While both sects have similar fundamentals, their belief in angels is also the same (Geisler and Saleeb, 2002).

They refer to angels as Malaikah, following the belief that they were created from light by God. It is essential to believe in the existence of angels because, without them, one cannot be called a Muslim.

It is an important part of Islamic belief, and every Muslim has to testify to the following statement, known as Imaan e Mufassal, a complete declaration of faith.

“I have faith in Allah and His Angels, His Books and His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment and that all good and evil and fate is from Almighty Allah, and it is sure that there will be resurrection after death.”

The first mention of angels in the scripture can be found in the 2nd chapter of the Quran Al Baqarah, verse number 30.

“And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” They said, “Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?” Allah said, “Indeed, I know that which you do not know(“Surah Al-Baqarah [2,”).”

Islam does not explicitly define a hierarchical structure in its teachings, although there are four archangels, including Jabrail, Mikael, Izrael, and Israel. Also, there are other prominent ones, such as Kiraman Katibeen. In Chapter 30, the topic of Al Infitar, verses Numbers 11 and 12 tell about them.

“Noble and recording; they know whatever you do. (“Surah Al-Infitar [82,”)”

Muslims believe that these angels are always with them, with one sitting on the right shoulder and one on the left, noting down each of their deeds.

Islam has no belief in a fallen angel cast out of heaven. Both schools of thought agree on this, rejecting Satan as an angel and categorizing him as a jinn. Jinn are beings made of fire, and Satan, being one of them, has been thrown out for his arrogance. The act of pride he displayed was the sole reason for his banishment from heaven and removal from the leadership of the Angels (Lindsay, 2017, pp.1-18).

Conclusion

Angels, being of the purest intentions and servants to God, are devoid of all sin and tasked with the deliverance of God’s word to the prophet and the people. Throughout the three monotheistic religions, angels have been presented as beings that obediently follow through with God’s orders; they are not to be perceived as objects of worship, and worshipping them is strictly prohibited as well as condemned. There are various enumerations of “Archangels” in the traditions and writings of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Smith, 2012, pp. 580-580). In post-Exilic Judaism, mention of two out of the seven archangels is available. The names of Gabriel and Michael can be seen in the scriptures, which later on were accepted by all Christians as canonical. Raphael’s name is enumerated several times in The Book of Tobit, whereas the names of the other four archangels, Raguel, Uriel, Jarahmeel, and Sariel, are found in chapter twenty-one of The Book of Enoch. Slight variations regarding angels

can be seen in these three monotheistic religions, but their roles remain the same, as mentioned in the Abrahamic faiths.

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