

Contemporary And Modern Hostility Between Abrahamic Religions

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Introduction

Of the three Abrahamic world religions today, Islam is the fastest-growing one. Christianity is the world's largest religion at the moment, and along with Islam, it has become a widespread religion that has left a great historical impact on its faithful. The two religions, along with Judaism, are closely connected to each other in terms of their values and common originality, and a significant majority have co-existed with each other. The theme of closeness, however, played an important role in relations between these major world religions. For Jewish people, it is central to their tradition that both Islam and Christianity documented, but both religions appropriate the title to themselves as well. Christian imperialism in Muslim lands, tensions between the Jewish communities living within Christian or Muslim lands, as well as Muslim expansion into previously Christian territories, have contributed to ill will and fear on all sides as well. The paper seeks to review many of the motives behind these hostilities as the three religions transitioned from the medieval era to the modern world.

Brief History

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all trace their history to the covenant of God that He made with Abraham, hence 'Abrahamic Religion.' Among them, Judaism is the oldest, which arose in the 2nd millennium BC. The Jews mostly lived dispersed as minorities in different communities until 1948, when the state of Israel was founded. Christianity began as an offshoot of Judaism with the advent of Jesus in the first century CE until when the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to it. The Holy Roman Empire was thus named after Constantinople. In the 7th century CE, Islam arose from the deserts of Mecca, which too built upon the Judeo-Christian tradition and spread into Arabia. It expanded quickly into areas controlled by the Sassanid Empire and the Byzantine Empire. Islam entered Europe, Central Asia, and North Africa by the mid-eighth century and continues to grow in some countries today.

Theological Rivalry

Despite having many shared aspects and values, the three religions have had hostility between their followers and disagree vehemently on some prime matters. Islam, for instance, sees Christianity and Judaism by their earlier versions, in which the original revelations by God became misinterpreted, misunderstood, and altered, and Islam was the complete, final, and most authentic revelation that

completed the mission. The Quran sees the Jews and Christians as being unfaithful to the legacy of Abraham, to which the Quran commands a return by replacing the Gospel and the Torah. The Jews see themselves as descendants of Abraham, from Isaac and Jacob, and their claim has not been disputed. However, Muslims and Christians view it as faith that establishes and links one to Abraham. The Jews and Muslims reject the idea of the Trinity, whereas the Jews do not acknowledge the Prophets of God, such as Jesus and Muhammad, to be so.

The Idea Of The Holy War

One reason that has led to hostility among the three Abrahamic religions is their beliefs in the ideas of 'Just War' and 'Holy Wars. Judaism is not a pacifist and sees the Holy War justified as survival to preserve Jewish life and lineage. The Torah and Jewish rabbinical traditions have discussed the issue of war as self-defence but mostly condemned aggression. Christianity, too, has historically favoured the idea of the Holy War or Crusades, which were fought over control of the Holy Lands to take it over from Muslim rule. Some Christians have taken pacifist positions and see war as regrettable, but just wars are largely accepted. In Islam, the concept of Jihad exists that refers to struggling or striving in God's path. It means to exert one's duty as a Muslim, and it also refers to the 'Holy War' for the defence of Islam and Muslims. Jihad is a command in Islam that is carried out under strict rules of war against those who persecute or oppress Muslims. Therefore, the concept of Just War is strongly endorsed as a holy war, the purpose of which is to protect and preserve rather than force others to become Muslim (Kung, 2005). It can be argued that the idea of holy war was present in all Abrahamic religions and could be historically and contemporarily presented as a motivation for war, although it could be masked by socio-economic or political motives.

Early Jewish-Christian Wars

From around 66 to 136 CE, there was a series of revolts against the Roman Empire by the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean, known as the Jewish-Roman wars. The Roman procurators were cruel and abused and disrespected Jewish traditions, who also opposed their presence in their lands. The revolts due to these reasons led to the defeat and expulsion of the Jews, which turned them back into a minority population persecuted and scattered around the globe. The grievances, as well as the religious tension between the Roman government and the Jewish populace, as well as taxation and economic impoverishment, became the most profound cause of the war as the Jewish populations started to become poorer (Aberbach, 2000). The economic and political grievances of the rebels were evident, and they were given a religious garb in this case.

Early Islamic Conquests And Byzantine-Christian

Rivalry

The Muslim views of Christians have ranged from seeing them as heretics to fellow possessors of God's revelation in the monotheistic tradition. Similarly, for Christians, Islam is either seen as a fellow Abrahamic religion whose followers worship the same God, to seeing them as an unrelated cult or a heresy. Islam's early expansion and conquest movement was astoundingly rapid, as it took only 30 years for Islam to establish a hegemony from the Nile to Eastern Persia. The Byzantine forces, led by emperor Heraclius were shattered by Muslim armies, that was seen as the work of soldiers that were inspired by their new religion. There were several hypotheses as to what drove such zeal and results, but historical records point mostly to deep convictions and commitment that led to the Muslim's success in conquest movements (Donner, 2007). Some tried to explain away the conquests as driven by the lust for spoils and love of rapine, but there is little historical evidence to support the claim. It can be argued that early hostilities that led to wars between Islam and Christianity were solely religious-based.

The Crusades

In the period between 1096 and 1291 CE, there was a series of political and religious wars fought by Christians to take control of the Holy Lands, which were initiated by Pope Urban the 2nd. The conflict had multiple motives, one of which was to assist the Byzantine Empire against the Seljuk Turks. Jerusalem was captured by the Crusaders in 1099 but was taken back by Muslims, who regrouped and unified against Crusader invasions through subsequent battles. The Muslims firmly took back control of Jerusalem and continued to rule it until the 20th century. For some Christians, the crusades meant salvation and received both earthly rewards and spiritual blessings. Forgiveness of sins or indulgence was also offered as a reward, along with plunder with forgiveness of debts, plunder from conquests, freedom from taxes, as well as political power and fame. Despite the fact that the Crusades were promoted in the name of Christ, the Crusaders were driven out of indulgence and special privileges. Scholars discussed socio-economic explanations that explained the crusades to have been motivated by Europe's overcrowding problem. Youth who were trained for combat required a secure financial base and a spiritual direction or risked them to become free-booty seekers who could terrorize Europe for material gain (Murray, 2015). Moreover, in Western Christendom, the vast majority of people knew or cared very little about Islam to have been driven out of sheer theological hostility. European powers also sought to consolidate their power at home by conquering territory in the Middle East by launching wars, whereas the Catholic church tried to unite Christians in Europe under a single banner using the crusades, hence solidifying the Church's authority in public life. The natural resources of the Middle East, rich in farmland, precious metals, and a comfortable environment, were also economic factors that drove the crusades (Damen, 2016).

Spain

Al-Andalus, or Muslim Spain, had a majority Muslim population composed of a balance of power among different groups. The Jews and Christians were large minorities under the rule that had significant socio-economic roles. The era was seen as a golden period for religious harmony and co-existence between followers of the three Abrahamic religions. However, during those times ethnicity or identity was perceived largely regarding religious affiliation, therefore regarded as discerned units regardless of their integration to dominant norms. Religion is the reference point and a crucial factor in differentiating between groups, as well as how many members of one group converted to the faith of the others, was an important factor in determining the position (Glick, 2005). Perceptions of hostility, as a result, were present. The Islamic conquest of Spain is traditionally supported by a plea for help against the oppressive Visigoth Spanish ruler for whom the Muslims entered their forces to rescue, but some historians point out that the decision may be more related to the drive to enlarge their territory.

On the other hand, the Spanish Inquisition expelled Jews from Spain, justifying it by arguing that its Christian beliefs were harmed by contact, communication, and intercourse with the Jews who corrupted faithful Christians from their Catholic faith. This was done in the name of establishing religious and political unity. The monarchy, as a result of the Inquisition, could intervene in private religious affairs without the Pope's interference (Kamen, 2014).

Ottoman Empire

In the 17th century, during the Ottoman period, mass conversions took place with widespread Islamization that was further driven by religious and economic elements. For the Balkans, agriculture was a prime source of revenue. Therefore, Muslim landownership led many to seek ethnoreligious stratification in the region for that purpose. Socio-political dynamics that led to nationalization provided the basis for religious frictions in this era. Furthermore, the quest for independence could be seen in resultant conflicts. Though nationalism and socio-political motivations were present in the conflict, the idea of combatting Muslim infidels was professed to become a shared Christian purpose. Another reason was the nationalization of religion that came as a result of centuries of religious segregation. This happened as religion was cloaked in a nationalistic character to make the prevailing socio-political order unquestionable. These motivations led to Assyrian and Armenian massacres, as well as the slaughter of Muslims during Greek independence. Under Ottoman Islamization, religious nationalism became a vital element that continues to be seen in modern-day pan-Islamist thought. These conflicts were not solely based on religion, but the ineffectiveness of religious coexistence underscored the religious element and provided justification for violence to be essential for national or ethnic survival (Li, 2017).

Jerusalem & The Modern State Of Israel

Jerusalem had been an important religious concept and symbol for Jews in the past as well as the present. Islamic rule had lasted 12 centuries over Jerusalem, more than any other religious rule. For many Muslims since 1967, Jerusalem has become a key symbol of resistance to the occupation of Arab territories by Israeli forces and remains a key issue to be resolved to establish peace in the future. Zionism, which led to the creation of Israel, was a secular political movement that inspired itself through religious symbolism and justification, although traditional Judaism to this day rejects the concept. This is one indication of how socio-political dynamics lead to mass hostilities that define Jewish-Muslim relations today, ones that are masked under religious garb. Protestant theologians' unconditional advocacy of Israel also drives resentment, as it blames radical Islam for the conflict instead of the Zionist occupation of Arab lands. Israeli lobbies continue to rely on evangelical Christian groups for support and, therefore, combined with some adepts of national Judaism, have become an obstacle to peace, where a political obstacle is rooted in religious discourse. The belief in the Second Coming of Christ is key to this support (Rabkin, 2012). Therefore, the issue of land rights that leads to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict becomes fueled by the religious overtones of Christian Zionists, one that is known to affect Jewish-Muslim hostilities and relations globally today. Continual encroachment of Palestinian lands is a socio-political and economic issue but is driving hostilities between the Arab and Muslim world and Jews and their Protestant supporters.

Conclusion

The followers of the three Abrahamic Religions have, for the majority part of their history, remained ignorant about one another and remained in a prolonged conflict with Muslims and Christians. Al-Andalusia proved that they could co-exist in relative peace and that there is a need for genuine dialogue between the faithful. The three traditions are unified in their view of the monotheistic God, the Creator of the Universe, who revealed Himself to the patriarch Abraham. They see the Creator as a source of moral law. However, their conflicts and hostilities have remained many at times due to religious rivalries, but that has mostly been supplemented by a sense of identity, as well as socio-economic and socio-political factors.

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