

**The Sociology of World Religions*:
Part One
The Similarities and Contrasts Between the Religions
of the East.*
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* The book consists of three parts: Part two on the Divine person and as a religion in Buddhism and Christianity. Part three on the prophet and the christ.

1 Methodological Considerations

This paper is concerned with the religions of the East, more precisely it is concerned with the similarities and contrasts between Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

There can be no doubt that this subject is a very important and one of the most difficult subjects in the fields of the sociology and comparative religion today. Its importance lies in the fact that if we can put our fingers on these points of similarities and contrasts between these religions, then we will come to the conclusion that, each religion in the geographical area had adopted many religions and cultural doctrines from the preceding religions. This means that the classical theological theories of the origin of these religions are not sufficient to explain these similarities and contrasts; and these theological theories cannot explain the appearance or the rise of these religions. Then, how can we explain the existence of these similarities and these contrasts between these religions? And from where each of them came from? And Why? It is true that these religions, in spite of its contrast in some doctrines and its similarity in other doctrines, came from one God? Or can we accept that this similarity came from the cultural contact between the peoples of this area; and on the other hand, we can explain this contrast by saying that it is the new elements which gave special characteristics to the new religion; and which reflected the view of the founder of this religion towards the old religions and his attitudes towards the new problems of his days. In fact, there is no one answer for this problem, that would be universally accepted as correct.

On the other hand, its difficulty lies in the fact that all the founders of these religions claimed that God revealed these religions to them. Thus, unless we have enough documents, it is clear evidence that it is impossible for any scholar to give a final statement about the fact that the founders of these religions influenced by the old religions and cultures. Here I want to mention that many theological attempts had been done to speak about the origin of these religions, but most of these attempts aimed to defend their religions and to refute the other religions and did not give any importance for the similarities and the contrasts between these religions.

However, to escape from all these problems, I will not make comparison between the Avesta and the Old and New Testaments and the Qur'an, but I will deal with religion as a culture and not as a Sacred Book and a Prophet.

It seems to me that we cannot speak about similarities and contrasts unless we mention the religious and cultural contacts between these religions.

2 The Religious and Cultural Contacts

As a matter of fact that Zoroastrianism was not the first religion of the Near East. But the fact is that, the Near East exhibited a complex fabric of religions and cultures. It was an area which give rise to the ancient Egyptian religion and the ancient Babylonian religion. In fact, these old religions had left a great direct imprint on Zoroastrianism. Furthermore, as L. H. Mills mentioned that for the historical connection we should notice the influence of the Buddhist scriptures and the theologies of Greek and Rome on this ancient Persian religions¹. Thus, in persia, the Iranian, Greek, and Indian religions lived side by side and their gods were represented².

It was till 569 when Zoroaster appeared on the scene to reform and reshape the Iranian fold religion. Before him, the persians had worshipped a variety of ancient Iranian gods and practiced the "Maoma cult". Zoroaster's creative act was the establishment of monotheism in ancient Persia by replacing these cults by worship of Ahura Mazda, the 'wise lord'. On these three pillars, pure thought, pure words, and pure deeds, Zoroaster reared the stately edifice of his ethical code. The creed of Zoroastrianism therefore, described as "the Religion of the good Life."³ Within a few centuries, Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the Persian Empire, which had developed a flourishing culture that embraced the whole area from Turfan to Abyssinia, from the Indus to the Aegean Sea; and so remained until it was overthrown by the victory of the Arabs over the Sassanid Kingdom in 642⁴

However, through the conquest of Alexander and through the Roman army, which at that period occupied a large part of the Near East, Zoroastrian ideas spread through all the Near East⁵. Also after the Exile of the Jewish people and later through contacts with (Jews of the Diaspora) many doctrines of Zoroastrianism influenced Jewish thought⁶. As we shall see later, certain beliefs about last things, Salvation Satan, the angels and the Messianic Deliverer stem from Zoroastrianism.

Some writers used to deny all connection of jews with Persia -- especially the religious influence and they believed that "the Creed of the Stage Iran was borrowed from jewish faith". Furthermore, they went as far as to suggest that the Zoroastrianism was a copy of judaism and Zoroaster was as to his origin a jew⁷.

In fact this theory had been denied by many scholars. According to Max Muller that when the jews, who were carried away, as captives to Babylon, were in constant contact with Iranians. They borrowed from the Zoroastrian faith various doctrines, such as the belief in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and future reward and punishment. These doctrines were entirely absent from the oldest phase of religion among the jews⁸. Moreover, some scholars emphasized that "Psalms and prophets, the Book of Job, and the New Testament, all written after the jews had become acquainted with Persian traditions"⁹. This view went far and considered that the book of Job has some appearance of being a translation, or adaptation from a Persian, or Assyrian text¹⁰.

L. H. Mills Also draws attention in his article on 'Zoroaster and Bible' to how extent that the religion of the mazad gave point and body to many loose conceptions among the jewish religious teachers, and introduced many ideas, which were entirely new especially the doctrine that "virtue is chiefly its own reward and vice its own punishment"¹¹. Also Mills asserted that the Avesta in no sense depends upon the jewish Greeks. But on the contrary, it was Philo who was indebted to it¹². As we shall see later, that Philo has great influence upon Christianity, especially on the doctrine of "logos", and some of the Muslim thinkers.

Christianity had in common with the cult of Zoroastrianism and judaism the idea that man could "get right with God"¹³. There was a Saviour God who had become a man to teach mankind a way of life, who had died who had been resurrected, and through whom those who had faith would save.

It had been said that "Christ built up his teaching upon the foundation of judaism and it was as a sect of judaism that Christianity first emerged"¹⁴. However, this reflect to us the influence of Christianity by judaism, which by its turn influenced by Zoroastrianism.

From judaism Christianity adopted the idea of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and the idea of later Saviours who would help mankind. From Greek came many philosophical ideas "the word;" the "logos," the "Godhead". In fact, the Hellenistic influence on judaism reached its height at Alexandria in the writings of the Jewish philosophers, Philo who tried to synthesize Greek and Jewish thought by identifying the wisdom of Jewish theology with the "logos" of Greek philosophy¹⁵. As a matter of fact, Philo's doctrine of "logos" is combination of the Platonic ideas and stoic universal causality. As a fact, Philo's "logos" had direct influence upon the early Christian Father. But the question whether St. Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel had read Philo, this question has not been decided¹⁶. Also Persian religions left their marks on Christianity through Mithraism,¹⁷ and Gnosticism,¹⁸ especially in the problem of salvation and the problem of the source of evil in our World.

The third and latest comer to the chain of the Near East religions is Islam. The prophet Muhammad made it clear that the religion he preached was the same religion God willed for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. However, it has been said that Muhammad based his religion on the biblical revelation and tradition. From judaism, it has been said, the prophet took the monotheistic concept of God. Jewish influence in Yaman and Medina had been considerable since ancient times. During that period the prophet acquired a number of ritualistic concepts from them; and much narrative material from the Bible had come to Muhammad by oral tradition¹⁹. The same thing with Christianity, especially the Nestorians sets, with which Muhammad became acquainted on caravan journeys²⁰. As we mentioned that Mohammed answered these claims by emphasizing that he did not bring a new religion but it is the religion of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and he considered himself to be perfecting the work of these prophets.

However, for our subject here, I will leave the problem of origin and will give importance to the religious cultural contacts. Before the advent of Islam, some places in the Near East were noted for Hellenic culture, such as "Jundi-shapur" in Persia, "Harran" in Mesopotamia, and Alexandria in Egypt. It was from these places that Hellenic culture passed to the Eastern people²¹. After the rise of Islam and its spread throughout the

Near East, Islam as a religion and culture faced not only the other religions but also the Hellenistic influences. Between Judaism and Islam, in that period, there were many polemical problems. Islam emphasized that the old revealed religions had been superseded by later revelations. Islamic polemic claimed that the text of the Bible had been falsified at later time.

The Muslim theologians advanced the argument that the Talmudic idea of God was anthropomorphic. On the other hand, Jewish theology had to refute the claim that the revelation given to Israel had been abrogated by Christianity and Islam. Moreover, they considered Muhammad a false prophet²². Islamic theology sought to bring proofs for the divine origin of Islam and Jewish theologians replied in kind.

In the day of Abbasid Caliphs, Islam had contacted with Christianity and Christian teachers were welcomed at the Muslim courts at Bagdad.

During this contact, the problem of the Qur'an as revelation of the word of God is eternal or created, was arose by the influence of the Christian doctrine of "logos". The discussions between Muslims and Christians were influenced by the Philo's doctrine of the "logos" and the Neoplatonic theory of "emanation". As opposed to the Christian Trinity, the Muslim theologians were consistent defenders of the doctrine of the Divine Unity.

The same thing had happened after the conquest of the Sassanid empire by the Arabs and the establishment of Islam in Persia; the Persian religion and its dualistic conception and the Gnostic systems continued a vigorous struggle with Islam²³. These religions, although Muslims treated them like Jews and Christians, "the people to whom a Book has been given," survived only in conventicles, secret, underground gatherings. And naturally these secret religions survived in a subtle fashion in the Sufi and Shi'ite literatures, especially their doctrines that God is a "Light" and the Messiah "al Mahdi" and his Second Advent. Thus, there is no doubt that Islam contacted with Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity, and of course, the exchange of ideas had been done during this contacts.

Thus, it is clear that in this geographical area, many religious and cultural contacts had happened, and naturally, the exchange of ideas had happened in two ways. Directly by the contact during the exile or invasions or the theological discussions. Indirectly by Greek philosophy, Gnostic systems, the secret movements, the acceptance of the new faith by those movements only to destroy it. Finally, I like to end this point by this

quotation "Through Christianity, Israel had stepped outside its own boundaries and had arrived among the Greeks. In the same way one might describe Islam as the form which Judaism took when, stepping outside itself once more, it broke into the Arab world"²⁵. And we already mentioned that through Judaism, Zoroastrianism had stepped outside its own boundaries and had arrived among Christians and Muslims.

3. Similarities and contrasts between the religions of the east :

We can say that, although Zoroastrianism and the Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have many features in common, they differed fundamentally in some doctrines. Let us then see the similarities and contrasts between those religions regarding these conceptions :

A. The Conception of God

No doubt that, fundamental to any religion, is its conception of the divine. For the peoples and religions of the Near East, we can say that, all the aspects of life : religious, social, cultural, are rooted in their understanding or their conception of God.

Generally speaking, the religions of the Near East teach that there is one God who is to be thought of as personal, and whose laws men must obey.

Although the religions of the Near East have many features in common, but in their conception of its nature they differ much. Let us then see what are the similarities and contrasts in their conception of the divine.

In fact, the religion which Zoroaster taught was a unique ethical monotheism. As we mentioned that before Zoroaster, the Persians had worshiped a variety of ancient Iranian gods. Zoroaster replaced these cults by worship of Ahura Mazda. From the ancient religion, Zoroaster took the name of Mazda, which means "the wise" or the "full of light;" and to that name he prefixed the adjective Ahura, which means Lord, making the combined word, Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, the Creator-Governor of the Universe¹.

Ahura Mazda is, to Zoroaster, supreme, and therefore, He is one. "There can be but one greatest of the gods who made the others, with this earth and yon Heaven, who made man, and amenity for him"². But according to Mills, He is a moral God. His supremacy is limited by His own

character for He is not logically responsible for the existence of evil. In other words, there were at the beginning of the world two spirits, the good spirit Ohrmazd and the spirit of evil or Ahriman. "Between them the wise chose the good, not so the fools. And when their spirits met, they established in the beginning life and the absence of life that the end the evil should meet with the worst existence, but the just with the Best Mind³".

Thus, we can say that this kind of dualist system is spiritual or ethical, and not a metaphysical one; that is to say, it is a dualism of two rival spiritual and moral forces, good and evil, light or darkness, Ohrmazd and Ahriman; but the classic problem of spirit and matter does not essentially enter into the question at all⁴.

However, Zoroaster himself solved this problem by making the supreme Good God at last completely victorious, all evil being eliminated in the final restoration. This is what Zoroaster meant by Supreme God. "He was one in adoration as well as in definition, supreme because His 'goodness' makes Him great, His unity being that of His truth, Benevolence, Authority, and sacred Energy⁵".

Also, Zoroaster taught that by the will of the one Supreme Lord, Mazda, all things come into being. "Who is by generation the Father of Right at the first? Who determined the path of Sun and stars? Who is it by whom the moon waxes and wanes again? Who upheld the earth beneath and the firmament from falling? Who made the water and the plants? Who yoked swiftness to winds and clouds? ... What artist made light and darkness, sleep and waking? Who made morning, noon and night, that call the understanding man to his duty? ... I strive to recognize by these things thee, O Mazda, creator of all things through the holy spirit⁶". In fact we will find the same conception of God in the religions of the Near East.

Zoroaster had spoken of the Attributes of God in a half personal way⁷. Mazda has about him six angelic beings who can be regarded as his various aspects and functions. These are "Vohu Manah, Good Mind; Asha Vahya, Righteousness or Truth; Khshatra Vairy, the Realm of Divine will; Spenta Armaita, Humility or Piety; Haruvatat, perfection; Ameretat, Immortality. Also, Ahura Mazda was supported by Mithra, light, and other gods, but he is only one of very many⁸. Ahura Mazda also has holy names; He defined Himself in twenty different names, such as,

"I am"; strong "one"; "perfect Holiness;" "Understanding;" "Knowledge;" "Most Beneficent;" "All-Seeing;"⁸ and so on.

It may be said that Judaism can be defined as the discovery of one God, who act in nature and the social and historical process. But as a matter of fact, "the early Hebrews were similar in every respect to their neighbors. They believed in the same supernatural beings, in holy trees, holy wells, holy stones, and other fetishes¹⁰. Also, the Old Testament contains references to gods other than Yahweh, or Jahveh¹¹. But in fact, all these do not upset the familiar claim that the basic contribution of Judaism to the religious thought of ancient Near East was monotheism. Although the text shows that there are other gods than Yahweh, yet the texts show that these other gods differed from Yahweh in two respects: First they owed their origin to him. Second, unlike Yahweh, they were mortal. These differences are sufficient to place Yahweh in a category that differs in kind from that of other gods¹².

Thus, Yahweh or 'Elyon, or Shaddai, 'Adon, Ba 'al, Melek, 'Elohim, came to be regarded not only as national god, but also as the one and only God of the Universe. Yahweh is a God of righteousness whose loving kindness is from everlasting to everlasting and whose tender mercies are over all his works¹³. In fact, this belief that yahweh's actions are guided by the will to bring righteousness, is very marked in Jewish conception of God. As we shall explain later, Yahweh is the guide of history. The tradition speaks frequently of Him as the God of the Patriarchs, of the Exodus, and of Sinai; that is of the past; or in terms of His Kingdom to come, of the future, in sum, as the God of the cosmic and the human adventure¹⁴. It is clear here, that there is a nationalistic tendency of which could connect with Yahweh only the idea of the expectation of salvation for His chosen people¹⁵.

Besides from this spiritual conception of God, we can also say that the anthropomorphism is very clear in the Old Testament. The early Jews imagined the ultimate reality as a person "walking in the Garden of Eden... He comes to Abraham in the shape of man and speaks to him... we also hear of a direct meeting between God and Moses. God is represented as having eyes, ears, hands, feet. Also the fact that man was created in God's image presupposes that to some extent, God is thought of as being human in shape¹⁶.

According to L.H. Mills, all these ideas which we can find in the Old Testament about Yahweh, such as : He is surrounded by spirits, angels and among them there is also the spirit of levi, He is one; He is transcendent, He is a jealous God; He is a Holy, He is a living and an eternal Being; He is the Creator, and He is the Saviour, are the same attributes of Ahura Mazda. Furthermore, he claimed that Yahweh Elohim is another name for Ahura Mazda.

It has been said that Christian faith is faith in Christ; "it is faith in God as known in Christ"¹⁸. In the words of St. Paul "God was known to him the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself... God commendeth his love towards us, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"¹⁹. Also the conception of God, has a relation with the Christian idea of love, of the Cross, and Christ. "The glory of God had been seen in the face of Jesus Christ. God is a Jesus was. The holy love of the Cross is the holy love of God"²⁰. In St. John's writings, we find the same conception of God. "No man has seen God at any time. Yet God may now be known. The only-begotten Son, has shown us what He is, we know God's glory in the glory of the Son... because of the same, we can be sure that God is love"²¹. Briefly, the writers of the New Testament believed that in Christ they knew God to be a God of love and Grace; it was through the Son that they knew the Father. Christ is the image, the portrait of the invisible God. To see Him is to see the Father"²².

In fact, we can say, we can not find in Christianity a conception of God, but what we can find is a faith, in other words, God in Christianity is not only a person who has given to men commands, but the conception of God is the faith that He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and in Him we may know the character of God.

However, during the first three centuries, Christian thought was influenced by philosophy of Philo. According to him, God made the world as an expression of his goodness to His creation, but between God and the world, the uniting links are a group of divine powers. The highest of these divine power is the "logos"²³. To him, the "logos" was the divine mediator of creation and revelation. Philo considered the "logos" in his relation to God's first of all Wisdom²⁴. God through the logos created the ideal man of whom actual man is a poor copy"²⁵. The "logos" stands

between God and man partaking of both natures. Finally, the "logos", according to Philo, "is the Mediator, the Heavenly Man who represents in The eyes threyes of God the whole family upon earth"²⁶.

As a matter of fact, the Philo's "logos" has direct influence upon the church, especially upon St. Paul and St. John. According to St. John, before Christ was born, "there was a pre-existent Christ; an ideal Christ, an idea of Christ"²⁷. This idea of pre-existence of Christ is called by St. Paul, Wisdom or Spirit, or sometimes described in the biography of Jesus by the term Logos or Word. The idea is very clear in the opening verse in the Gospel of St. John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"²⁸. Thus, like the "logos" of Philo, which became immanent in the created world, the "logos" of John became incarnate in the birth of Christ²⁹.

However, what is important to us here is the doctrine of Trinity. God as the ultimate divine reality exists or can be conceived in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, the Christian conception of God is: "One God, the Father-God, the Son-God, the Holy Spirit God"³⁰. God the Father is the supreme Being in the universe, the just judge and the gracious Father of man. God the Son is the redeeming Christ in whom the divine love for man becomes incarnated. God the Holy Spirit is Christ as continuing to live in the heart of each Christian and also within the fellowship of the church.

Mills declares that we can find a similarity between the Christian Trinity and the Trinity of Zoroastrianism³¹. According to Guillemin, Ahura Mazda is "the Father"... "the holy spirit proceeds from the Father as a Son. If the Father and this Son are regarded as one, then a trinity emerges, composed of the wise lord, justice, and God Thought"³².

Islam, like the monotheistic religions, stresses on the conception of one God the creator, of resurrection and judgement, and revelation. Although Islam accepted many ideas about the conception of God from Judaism and Christianity, but as we shall see, Islam differed with them in many aspects.

There is no doubt that the cornerstone of Islamic belief is "La ilah illa Allah". There is no god but Allah. Allah here means "the God" not a God". for according to Islam, there is only one, The God. In fact, oneness

is the key-note to the conception of the divine Being in Islam. It denies the plurality of Godhead and participation of any being in the affairs of the world. According to Islam, unless a man believes in the oneness of Allah, he cannot be a Muslim. This doctrine of Divine unity is a standing protest against polytheism, dualism, atheism and idolatry and it generally means that God is one in His person (Zât), one in His attributes (Sifât) and one in his works (af'âl)³³.

Also, God in Islam is one and utterly transcendent, he is never been a Father, and no one can be his son. "The Jews call 'U Zair a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth... Yet they were commanded to worship but one God; there is no god but He"³⁴. Against Christianity, Islam rejected the doctrine of Trinity: "They do blaspheme who say God is Christ, the Son of Mary..." They do blaspheme who say God is one of three in Trinity: for there is no god except One God"³⁵. Also against Jewish and Christian's anthropomorphism Islam emphasizes that "Say: He is God, The One Only; God the eternal, absolute; He begotten not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him"³⁶.

Islam also emphasizes on the universal conception of God. According to Islam, all the people of the world are the creation of the Creator, who takes equal care of all and who has created them alike. His is the Rabb ul-'Alamin, "the lord of all nations", and the creator of all the worlds. He is the lord of all, the lord of the heavens and the earth, the lord of the east and the west and the lord of the Muslims and non Muslims³⁷.

God in Islam possesses the attributes and acts of "High God". He is the all mighty, judge of the universe and master of the Day of judgment. He knows, sees, and hears everything, visible and invisible. He is the creator of heaven and earth. The world and all that is in it came into existence when he uttered his creative word «Be». In relation to both nature and men, He is almighty will, the Lord and controller of all that happens. There is no natural law except so far as God has imposed orderly ways upon the phenomena in the world³⁸.

The most important elements in Islam's conception of God is that "God is depicted not only as the sole God, but as the Sole Reality"³⁹. "The East and West is God's, therefore, whichever way you turn there is the face of

God⁴⁰ : Matter, time, space, all the laws of nature, the movement of the stars, the rise and fall of nations, in all these we can realize the unity of purpose and therefore the unity of the originator

According to Muslims, Allah has Ninety-Nine Beautiful or excellent name; more than seventy of these are found in the Qur'an, and the rest are derived from the passages in it. These names testify God's power, knowledge, justice, and mercy

But, according to Sufis, God is the only Reality. He is not the high God, but they looked to Him as the God of love, and they hoped of Union with Him; and for that we hear al-Hallaj after he reached unity with the Reality declares : "I am He whom I love, and Whom I love is I. We are two spirits dwelling in one body"⁴¹. Also Jala al - Din al - Rumi writes ?

"Ye who in search of God, of God, Pursue,
Ye need not search, for God is you, is you"⁴².

Or again :

"In the world of Divine Unity is no room for Number,
But number necessarily exists in the world of Five and Four;
You may count a hundred thousand sweet apples in your hands;
If you wish to make one, crush them all together"⁴³

4. Revelation and History

As we mentioned that God in these four religions is conceived as personal and active. He created the world and he will destroy it one day. However, according to judaism, and christianity, history is a creation of God. God had manifested himself to humanity either in historical events as in judaism, or in human shape, namely, jesus Christ. On the other hand, Zoroaster and Mohammad are in no sense regarded as manifestations of God. God in Zoroastrians and Islam, had revealed his will and his divine words in shape of Divine books. However, let us see how each of these religion understands the conception of revelation and history.

In the Gathas Zoroaster is depicted as the prophet of Ahura mazda, the supreme God, and as such he summoned men to obey "the truth and to shun the lie."¹ Zoroaster spoke of himself as the friend and praiser of

mazdai², and claimed to be a deliver in the sense that he and those who obeyed his teachings were hasteners of that time when God will triumph and His kingdom come³.

According to Zoroastrianism, God had revealed himself to Zoroaster and commissioned him to be his prophet⁴. The Gathas again and again set forth his claim that he had been called to his prophetic mission by Ahura Mazda himself, and that religion he taught was the final and perfect religion⁵. In fact, Zoroaster wished to be the messenger of God to all mankind.

As we mentioned, Ahura Mazda was conceived as the Lord of creation and universe; He was the Worker, through whom everything comes into life and exist. It is He who decides victory between the rival hosts of good and evil. Everything comes from Him and through Him, the Lord of all⁶. Moreover, He is the one who will be the final judge and redeemer of history⁷.

In fact, the meaning of history in Zoroastrianism lies in the history of the conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Therefore, the Gathas refers to "a period when the present cycle of the world will be completed, the process of creation will cease, and the evolution of the universe will have reached its destined goal⁸". In other words, the history will come to its final goal as contemplated and ordained by Ahura Mazda at the dawn of creation. As we will discuss later, Zoroastrianism claimed that in the end of history the last of the saviours will arise. "he will consummate the work of purifying and regenerating the world and completely removing every trace of the evil work of Angro Mainyu"⁹. Thus, what Zoroaster would like to say here is that, "in the endless chain of Boundless Time, human beings can contribute their share towards the establishment of the kingdom of Righteousness of earth"¹⁰. That is to say, in the end of history, the final curtain will be drawn on the conflict between good and evil, and there, the ultimate triumph of good over evil will be secured, the kingdom of Righteousness will be established, and men will enter into the everlasting joy of Ahura Mazda¹¹.

As a matter of fact, one of the most characteristic elements of the Old Testament teaching concerning God is the great stress laid on God's activity in history. According to Judaism, God who delivered the people at

a certain point in its history and adopted them as his own people. In a word, he is the God of the miracle, of history and of the covenant¹².

According to Jewish faith, Israel derives its knowledge of God from His activity in history on behalf of his people, particularly in Egypt and in desert. In fact this fact that God intervened in history was emphasized by the Jewish prophets. As they reported in history by his activity for the good of His people, God has revealed Himself as the living God who is near to His people¹³. Throughout the course of history, Yahweh intervenes at critical moments, "He follows his people, saving as well as judging them, and He controls their destiny. The whole life of the people passes under His eyes in times of disaster and prosperity; both are signs of His activity¹⁴".

Moreover, the Jews had set their hopes on the doctrine of kingdom of God which will be the final acts of revelation of God in human history¹⁵.

Thus, God according to Judaism, is the God who reveals Himself in history or the ruler of history, nothing, therefore, happened by accident. His hand was at work in every event in Eden, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the years in the wilderness- all these are signs of His activity in human history¹⁶.

However, besides God's activity in history, in Judaism there is also direct relationship between God and men through prophecy. It is found throughout the history of Israel and it is the most characteristic element of the structure of Judaism¹⁷. Here, God is not only the God of history, but "He is also the God who allows the man whom He has called to share in his activity by His Spirit of Word¹⁸".

Thus God's will according to Judaism is shown in his direct revelation to man through prophecy, and also by his works in history and nature. These two things go hand in hand.

Christianity, like Judaism, believes that all human history, past, present, future, is under God's control. That is to say, God in Christianity is the God of History, and that history has meaning and purpose. Let us briefly explain how Christianity explains this doctrine

According to Christianity, God is self revealing in his works, in his word, and in his son¹⁹. In other words, God reveals himself in nature, in history, and in Jesus Christ. According to Christianity, all these revelation can be only understood by faith²⁰.

According to Christian thought, in the beginning was God, the original and ultimate power. God then created the world, and later man, at certain time. From that point on, evolution works according to inherent natural laws. After the gradual evolution of man, is the beginning of what is called human history²¹. So, according to Christianity, the world is "a time process because it is created according to the purpose of God"²².

The period from the earliest first man to the birth of Judaism, under Moses, is called the "preparation of stage" of history²³. This means that Judaism was preparing the world for the Incarnation. To explain this we say, according to Christianity, God revealed His commandments through the Jewish prophet in the forms of human thought and in terms of the actual conditions of history. According to Christianity, God through those Jewish prophets seemed to be saying to men that He would reveal Himself²⁴.

Thus, according to Christian thought, when Jesus appeared, God incarnate appeared, in human history²⁵. That is to say, God came into human history in the person of Jesus Christ²⁶ and God was in Christ (reconciling the world to Himself^{26a}). Here God does not reveal a book containing the truth he wants men to believe, but he reveal Himself. According to the Christian thought, since God has always taught men's loving response, God demonstrated clearly His own love for men by giving Himself as man²⁷. Thus, when Jesus appeared, God Incarnate appeared in human history. Therefore, according to Christianity, the life and teachings and the cross and resurrection of Jesus are the fulfillment of God's promise to Judaism and mankind. Thus for Christianity, Christ is the center of history²⁸. That is to say, Christ's life was no other than the life of God in man. At time and place in history, God did his full work of love and grace and performed his act of redemption²⁹. All these explain to us why Christianity emphasized that Christ is the key to the understanding of history and its future and ultimate end.

The Christian view of history from the period of Christ until the end of history is that the process is a gradual realization of God's sovereignty, or

the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. That is to say, triumph of love and justice and good will not be complete until the end of history. The end of history thus means the fulfillment of God's purpose and the final establishment of His kingdom³⁰. In fact, the Christian view that the end of history means the final battle between good and evil, is very closed to that of Zoroastrianism. Both believe that in this final battle evil will be defeated and the triumph of good will be completed, and man will enter into the everlasting joy of God.

As we mentioned, God in Islam, like Judaism and Christianity created the world and He is its ruler and He is the controller of all what happens. According to Islam, Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets, and was the "seal of prophets," for in him God's revelation reached finality. Here revelation is not Incarnation nor a historical event through which God enters in relation with man. But it is a book. The Qur'an revealed to Muhammad, is the final work of God to mankind. According to Islam, this book, the Qur'an, is identical with a word of God which is written on "a heavenly scroll," the Qur'an is identical exactly with the heavenly original. Here Islam differs from Judaism and Christianity in emphasizing the divine original of the Qur'an.

According to Islamic view, Islam is the religion of God. In fact this statement reflects to us the Islamic conception of history. As God organized the world in the beginning he did also with man. For man there are laws which he ought to follow. According to Islam when God created man, ordained how men ought to behave both individually and in community. But man was given the faculty of choosing to conform or not to conform³¹. Those who accept these divine commands will find their reward in hereafter, while for those who reject it, there is punishment for them.

However, God according to Islam, has not left mankind without guidance on this matter how mankind should live and follow the commands of God. According to Islam thought, Adam was the first man and the first prophet. That is, God set men in the universe and at once revealed to him how he should live. This means, "human history opens with man knowing what he ought to do"³². But Adam proved disobedient and his successors neglected, or forgot the message. But God, as act of justice, sent down the message again. There was thus another revelation to humanity of what the eternal demands are. But this story repeated itself.

And God through Abraham, Moses and Jesus sent his revelation so that humanity might be reminded of the divine commands³³. But this story repeated itself again and again.

Once and for all, a final revelation was sent down; a messenger was chosen who deliver it to all mankind. It is Islam and the messenger was Muhammed. In this way, then Islam which had existed form all eternity came down into history in the seventh century A.D. and began its final, full career among men³⁴. As a fact, the main aim of Islam is to create a society or Ummah where justice and unization are its base. Therefore, Muslims through all the ages marched forward to historical achievement³⁵.

However, the conception of history in Islam can be summarized as follows :

1. Unlike judaism and Christianity, Islam treats the entire history of mankind as one whole³⁶.
2. According to Islam, the historical process takes account only of the practical conduct of affairs in human society. In other words, history is man's made.
3. According to Islam, God does not destroy any social group unjustly, while they are in a state of unawareness nor does He destroy any community while its moral conduct remain on an adequately satisfactory level³⁷. The conclusion which follows that "the course of history itself is a moral agency through which the morally superior elements rise to the top, while those who are morally inferior sink to the bottom. The historical process is, therefore, selective in the moral sense of the world³⁸".

C. MAN

As for their attitude towards men, generally speaking, we can say that all of these religions agree that man has been created by God and man is fundamentally different from his Creator. Man is formed by a union of two natures : the flesh, which he shares with all the animals, and the spirit which renders him a vicegerent of God. At death the soul, or the spirit, leaves the body. But in hereafter body and soul reunited to receive the judgement of God. The high place given to man by God in His world order. Man is the highest presence in the universe. On the other hand, all of these religions accepted the story of the "Adam's Fall, and his disobe-

dience to God". The punishment was the existence of man in this earth. But man is not alone in the earth, with him there are the forces of evil and Devil. Therefore, all these religions emphasized that man ought to take sides with good against evil. All these religions did not attributed evil to God directly, but they attributed evil to the Devil. This Devil is one of God's creatures, but he was a rebellious one. Let us now discuss how they each religion differ from other religions in their conception of man.

According to Zoroastrianism, the main problem of life is the problem of evil. On its solution begins the destiny of mankind¹. The physical world which men inhabits, is full of evil; therefore, man's life is steeped in sorrow and suffering. Hence Zoroaster called upon his followers to accept the challenge of the principle of evil and to inherit themselves as comrades in arm with the good God. If man does his duty, good, according to Zoroaster, will prevail at last.

As for the origin of evil in this world, Zoroaster taught that there was rebellion against that true God whose will he proclaimed. The late pahlavi texts tells how the first couple were led astray, as the story of Adam and Eve, by evil thoughts and began to worship the evil god rather than Ahura Mazda². However, the Zoroastrianism furnished a salvation of the existence of evil in this world by positing two primeval powers at war with each other. One of these principles is called prince of Darkness, Angra Mainyu, or the Druj, the evil spirit, and Ahura Mazda, the Beneficent spirit as the prince of Light. Everything that exists are dualistically split and assigned either to Ahura Mazda or Angra Mainyu³.

Man's salvation is to be found in obedience to the will of Ahura Mazda⁴ as it was revealed and taught by his prophet, Zoroaster. Man has to share in the struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, light and darkness, to affirm and improve the world, not to deny and escape it⁴. Here we can notice that this kind of evil is positive one. In other words, Zoroaster, "strikes the heart of his followers to positive hatred of evil, spurs them to join the crusade against the spirit of evil, and exhorts them not to evade the fight, or turn their back on the arch enemy⁵.

Finally, man according to Zoroaster is born pure, not as is taught in Christianity, defiled with original sin. ⁶ In fact Zoroaster emphasized the fact that we must work out our own salvation. Accordingly man is

responsible for the ultimate outcome of his struggle against evil and for the triumph of the good. In a word, according to this religion, man has freedom of choice, and he can choose between good and evil, and he is the master of his fate.

It has been said that the influence of Zoroastrian doctrines of men's dualism and the conception of evil on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literatures were very considerable⁷. As E. Mills appointed out, there is very close relation between the Jewish Satan in those exilic pre-Christian and Christian times and to Persian Satan, namely Angra Mainyu⁸. In fact, the transmutation of Satan and the rebel angels into figures not very different from those of Ahriman and his demonic host in the Judaic-Christian literature had appeared after the Iranian contacts⁹.

Also we find another influence in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where God is said to have "created man to have dominion over the world and make for him two spirits, that he might walk with them until the appointed of his visitation, they are the spirit of truth and error"¹⁰. Sources of light is the origin of truth, and the sources of darkness is the origin of error. Moreover, in the hand of the prince of light, is dominion over all sons of righteousness in the way of light they walk. And in the hand of the angel of darkness is all dominion over the sons of error; and in the way of darkness they walk. And the angel of darkness is the striking us all the sons of righteousness. ... but the God of Israel and his angel of truth have helped all the sons of light¹¹.

This dualism of spirit at flesh, light and darkness is clear in Fourth Gospel and in the First Epistle of St. John in the New Testament. However, at the end of the first century, A.D., the evil world was set against the world of light, and they became two opposed realms. This was clear in Gnostic view, which claimed that the world is controlled by the good, light, and evil, darkness, deities, respectively. And as we mentioned, Gnosticism was of Iranian origin¹². Let us now see how the three other religions look to man and what are the new attitudes that they produced to the doctrine of Man.

Man, according to Judaism, was originally created "in the image of God". This phrase denoted man in his peculiar relationship to God, in his

vacation to be God's viceregent on earth, but most of all "to reflect in his nature the nature of God, just as the child is the image of the father"¹³.

However, although man is God's creation and therefore essentially good, he is endowed with two principles or tendencies; a good impulse and an evil impulse. Each struggle to control man's desires and choices. In this sense, as in Zoroastrianism, man participates in the cosmic struggle between God and Satan¹⁴. According to Judaism, God's creation has gone astray because of Satan's rebellion and disobedience of men. Man, according to Judaism has to obey Yahweh and also has freedom to choose. He can choose to serve Yahweh, or to disobey.

According to Jewish faith, Yahweh made a covenant with his people, Israel, and as creator and lord of history, he controls all that happens. Therefore, the Jews explain such evils as defeat in battle, famine, disease, as a result of the failure to fulfill Yahweh's will.

Salvation of both individual and society, can be achieved according to Judaism by strict obedience to the Torah. Both individual and nature have to please Yahweh by fulfilling his covenant. Therefore Jewish prophets and priests, called for a return to Yahweh and his righteousness. All Jewish troubles were attributed to failure to follow the Torah. Briefly, salvation, according to Jews, had an historical dimension. They believed that just as the Fall occurred in the earliest period, so redemption would occur at the end of history¹⁵.

According to Christianity, Man (Adam and Eve) disobeyed God's command and thereby committed original sin. In fact this doctrine of original sin is considered to be the cornerstone of the Christian attitude towards man and his salvation. In Christian attitude towards man and his salvation. In Christianity, to believe that man can save himself seems to contradict the whole of human history and experience. Man, according to Christianity, cannot save himself; man is in need of help of redemption from the various forces such as Devil, Sin and death, which would enslave and destroy him. That is to say, unless man receives supernatural help, those forces of evil will engulf him¹⁶.

Man's salvation is only to be found in faith in Christ, that is, in acceptance of Jesus' resurrection from the dead as proof that God has power over

the forces of sin and death. For the Christian, the meaning of life has been revealed in Jesus Christ. "We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is"¹⁷. The Christian should live a life of obedience out of gratitude to God and also as proof of the fact of his faith. This life of obedience is possible with the help of the Holy Spirit, the true guide for Christian Living. Man according to Islam, is the vicegerent of God on the earth. Man's purpose in life is to realize the will of God in this world. According to the Qur'an, man accepted to carry the Trust, which the heavens and the earth refused to carry its responsibility and they were afraid to carry it. This Trust is the divine gift of Choice.

According to Islam, Adam's disobedience was forgiven, and therefore, man does not bear the fall of Adam. In spite of Adam's fall, if man follows the guidance, he is free from any fear from the present or the future. In Islam, the relationship between God and man is without any mediation. There are no mediators or priests between man and God. God is very close to man.

The responsibility of man is very clear in Islam; that is to say, all evils and sorrows are created by man's hands. Then, man must bear personal responsibility for his own deeds and not throw the blame on the others. On the other hand, besides man's responsibility, Islam emphasized God's justice. This means that there is no injustice that can be done to anyone either in this world or in the day of judgment.

As we mentioned that Islam means submission to God's will, therefore, man's salvation is to be found in complete submission of God's will. Man has to follow the laws of God which are also the laws of his own pure nature as made by God.

D. COSMOLOGY

In Zoroastrianism, the universe is the creation of Ahura Mazda, the creator, "but it has not come from nothing"¹. The stars, the sun, the moon, the sea, all things high and low are created by Ahura Mazda and they function in consonance with His own laws, but the growing act of His creation is man². The aim of the creation is the bliss and welfare of man; it was the desire of Ahura Mazda that His might, wisdom, and goodness should be utilized in promoting the happiness and enjoyment of mankind in this world³.

According to the later Avesta, at first the sky was created with all the celestial bodies, then water, the earth, the vegetable kingdom and the animal kingdom, and finally man⁴. The whole creation is bound by the law of production and destruction. "Ahura Mazda's might has two poles, one of which, the Spenta Mainyu, prospers and maintains everything, whereas the other, the Anra Mainyu, is the destructive force"⁵.

Also in Avesta, we can find many cosmological ideas, which we find in the later religions of the Near East, such as the Seven skies and earth; the order of creation, the seven immortals, angels or attributes, the water as the origin of every existent, and the cult of fire⁶.

Also we find in Zoroastrianism, the distinction between the two worlds, before the creation of the material world. "In the beginning Ohrmazd was on high and dwelt in the Endless light, he was characterized by omniscience and wisdom... Ahriman was in the depths and dwelt in the Endless Darkness, he was slow in knowledge and his will was to do harm. Between the kingdom of light and darkness was the void which some call Vay"⁷.

This briefly would seem to be a Mazdean view of the universe before Ahriman's attack on the kingdom of light and the creation consequent on it. This is the Zoroaster's view about cosmology; and it is clear that it reflects their metaphysic of morals.

Generally speaking, in semitic cosmology, we find that God alone created the heavens and the earth, and he gives breath to the people. He controls human history, forms the light, and created darkness; makes peace, and created evil. Heaven was His throne and the earth his footstool, for He transcended the whole creation. "He had stretched out the sky as a curtain, spreading it as a tent. . . and He made the clouds his chariot and the winds his messengers who laid the foundations of the earth"⁸. From Water God created everything; and the process of creation occupied six days of creative activity and followed by the rest of the creator on the seventh day. Many scholars mentioned that the creation story in semitic religions derived from Assyro-Babylonian and Zoroastrianism cultures.⁹ However, these Semitic religions speak of two worlds, this world and the world to come; here I will discuss their conceptions of this world and in the next point I will deal with their conceptions of Hereafter and 'last things'.

The Jewish cosmology starts with the first words of the Old Testament, "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth...; what is important

here is that God said, "Let there be..." this creative order does not in itself contain nor does it struggle against dark, or evil force; but creation here is described as good¹⁰. Here we can notice that Judaism against Zoroastrianism, who claimed that the world divide into mutually hostile principles, light and darkness, good and evil; but Judaism proclaimed God as the creator of both. God by his own unconditional choice brought it into existence. Also Judaism against Zoroastrianism, mentioned that there was no pre-existent matter that God used to fashion the world; in other words, God created the world out of nothing or "ex nihilo"¹¹. In Judaism, time was created with the celestial world, and timelessness remained an attribute of the uncreated God¹². Naturally, the ideas of creation out of nothing and creation of time, support and confirm Jewish monotheism.

In Judaism, the world is good, since goodness is its creator and its final aim. The story of creation expresses the perfect harmony between God's purpose and His work in the world, God himself spoke at the end of each day's creation "And behold, it was good"¹³. This idea gives the impression that this world is good, there is no fighting between good and evil but nature or the world by original is good. Also, the theological idea of the Sabbath derived from the story of creation.

In fact, in Judaism, we can notice that the activity of God in nature and the activity in history are parts of a single process; therefore, miracle by the old testament regarded as a "sign or proof" of the power of God, to whom nothing is impossible¹⁴. According to Judaism, God made a special covenant with the work of creation that "at the appointed time, the Dead Sea should divide before Israel; the sun and moon should stand still at the bidding of Joshua; that fire should not consume the three youths, Hananiel, Michael, and Azariah; that the sea monster should spit forth John the Baptist, and so on"¹⁵.

There is no doubt that the Persian influence gave Jewish angelology and demonology a different character. After the exile, became the belief that the demons were organized, they had a leader; this leader was Satan or ('Shaitan')¹⁶. In Judaism also different orders of angels arose, the number seven was adopted from the Persians and therefore, in Judaism, we have seven head angels¹⁷.

In general the angels carry out good or evil designs according to their commands from the Lord of Hosts. What is important here is that, the belief in angels served two functions in the development of monotheism. First of all, "it was a stage in the concentration of the divine forces, beginning with polytheism, continuing through belief in angels, and culminating in the one and only God of heaven and earth"¹⁸. Also, in the vision of God, certain elements had to be removed in the spiritualization of God, and it was found easier to transform these into separate beings, related to Deity Himself. "Thus, the fiery appearance of God to the eye or the voice which was manifested to the ear were often personified as angels of God"¹⁹.

In addition to the angels, who carried out Gods will in the universe, in judaism, there are other divine powers which mediate between God and the world of man and have coming power such as "the glory" of "the Name"; "the divine World," which will be the logos in Christianity; "Wisdom," "Spirit of God" or the Holy Spirit...²⁰.

Christianity, like judaism, accepted that God creates the world, all things visible and invisible. Also Christianity believed that creation means the free and unconditioned act of God; in other words the creation out of God is not conditioned by anything other to Himself. Like judaism, Christianity emphasized on the doctrine that the world was created by God, ex nihilo or "out of nothing." The world, according to Christianity could not exist at itself; its existence depends upon the eternal creative act of God²¹.

According to Christianity, God could not directly produce a world so unlike himself; hence, there must be an intermediate step in the process from the absolute unity and created universe. Under the influence of philo's doctrine of "logos", most of Christian thinkers believed that this intermediate step is the "logos," who appeared in Christ, who is the Word or Son of God, He is the Truth and life of all things which are exist²². This idea of the production of the world, of another being who is not God, is attained through the idea of the production of another being who is like God²³. Thus, Christ is a divine being and God's agent in the original creation of the world, so that God might not be conceived of as indirect contact with matter. Also in Christianity, we can find some thinkers who accepted the idea of emanation to explain the existence of the world. According to Platinus, "the world represents an outgoing from the One. Some inner

rebellion or disturbance within the one caused a 'fall' or an emanation from that complete and otherwise perfect one. This fall or emanation continued to lower and lower levels until it encountered the dark element of matter and the visible world came into being²⁴. Also, Gnosticism, under the influence of Zoroastrianism, accepted this separation between Matter and Spirit, and it considered the world of matter is evil, its creator and ruler is not the good God, but inferior and imperfect being²⁵.

In Islam, Allah created the world in six days. The world and all that is in it came into existence when God uttered his creative word "Be". Also in Islam, Allah created the world out of nothing. The nature; sun, moon, earth, sky, rain, clouds, and its laws under God's control.

Also in Islam there are other types of divine powers, the "word" (amr) from which derives the spirit (ruh) or "holy spirit" (ruh al qudus)²⁶

According to Islam, faith in angels is one of the principles of Islam. In Islam, God is surrounded by angels, pure, sexless being, some of whom bear the throne while other engaged in praising his holy or beautiful names.

Angels also serve as His messengers who are sent to fight with the believers against the heathen²⁷. Angels, according to Islam, can take any form; they surround men from all sides and are always in their company. They keep record of every action of man in this world and they will produce it on the day of judgment. Of these, the chief is Gabriel, the agent of revelation, who communicated the Divine message to the prophet.

Midway between angels and men are jinn (genie). Some of them have submitted to Allah and become believers; but many of them have rebelled against him, like their chief, Iblis, who is also called (shaitan); who and his assistants are busy tempting men to go astray²⁸.

E. ESCHATOLOGY

We can say that for first time in human thought, the conception of "last things" or the end of the world came into being in Zoroastrianism. According to Zoroaster's teachings, a general resurrection will take place at the end of the present world. This will happen when Ahura Mazda will triumphantly overthrow all evil and set up right-ousness on earth¹. Also, we can mention here to the Iranian theory of the world ages. According to them, "the world-ages is divided into four periods; each of these periods is

a period of 3000 years. Towards the beginning of the final 3000, Zoroaster was born. Towards the beginning of the second millennium of this period, evils increase, there are signs in heaven and earth and now Hūshētar is born; and he brings back the creatures to their proper state. Towards the beginning of the final millennium, Hūshētar- mān is born. In this time, creatures become more regressive and men do not die. But now evil again increase..., and at the close of the period Soshyant, the persian Messiah who makes the evil spirit impotent and causes the resurrection and future existence, is born. Now begins the new order of things... Ahriman and his hosts are defeated by Ahura and his angels, and perish in the conflagration... The earth is renewed and made immortal and extends to heaven...."².

In fact, we can say this passage reflects two things : first of all, here the idea of "the end of the world" has an ethical meaning. "The end of the world is connected with struggle between good and evil and how evil in the end will be conquered by the spirit of goodness. Also we can notice how this conception has a great influence upon judaeo-Christian eschatology, especially in their doctrine of "the Messiah" and "the future life". According to jewish eschatology, the doctrine of the end of the world has an ethical and political conception. According to them, the end of the world is related to the "Day of jahweh," and on that day jahweh will punish and destroy the enemies of Israel, who now take the place of the hostile evil power. Also Israel must also be judged and suffer on the Day of jahweh; a day of darkness, sorrow, and fear because she has neglected the ethical side of His religion³.

The jewish eschatology emphasized the belief in the coming of the Messiah, who also like God, will destroy the enemies of Israel, and its spiritual foes⁴. Then after the final judgment, the earthly kingdom will come to an end; and the world will be annihilated, and heaven will give place to a new heaven. After this renewal, the world will become everlasting, incorruptible, and invisible⁵.

From Zoroastrianism and judaism, the doctrine of the end of the world passed over to Christianity. According to them, "Christ will return on the clouds of heaven as the promised Son of Man who will be the judge of the Last Day"⁶. Also they believed that, his mission on earth had been to prepare the way for his second coming and when he will come the new

kingdom will start. According to Christian eschatology, at the last judgment earth and heaven flee away, or they will pass away along with the sea, and give place to a new heaven and earth, after the judgment. Like Zoroastrianism, most of the Christian thinkers believed that the destruction of the world will be by fire⁷.

As a matter of fact we find the same doctrine of the annihilation of the world in Islamic thought. In the Qur'an God will destroy or annihilate the world before the Day of judgment. Also we find in Shi'ism that the Mahdi will appear before the Day of Judgment.

As for the doctrine of the Day of Judgment, we mentioned that Zoroaster taught that men must work out for his elevation and he has the freedom to choose between good and evil. Therefore, man will receive reward or punishment after death according to his deeds in this earthly life⁸. In fact, Zoroaster emphasized the hope for a better world; for to him God is just and He will not allow wickedness to triumph over goodness⁹.

However, at the end of this world, when good gained victory over the forces of evil, all men would be resurrected to receive their reward or punishment. Besides this general judgement, we find also in Zoroastrianism the doctrine of individual judgment. Briefly, individual judgment follows shortly after death of the body. Each soul, good or bad, must face judgment at the Chinvat Bridge which crosses the Ahura Mazda's paradise¹⁰. At this bridge the record of the record of the soul is read. "The balance of merits and demerits is cast. If good deeds predominate over evil, the pointing of the hand will be towards paradise; but if evil overbalance good, the hand will point to the abyss below the bridge"¹¹. As we mentioned that this bridge extended over hell and led to paradise. For the soul of the righteous it widened, but for the wicked it narrowed to the breath of a thread and they fell into hell¹².

As L. Mills mentioned, these ideas of the day of judgement, the immortality and resurrection, reward and punishment and the Chinvat Bridge and paradise and hell, had left great influence on the judaeo-Christian eschatology and Islam¹³. Many scholars have pointed out that the doctrine of resurrection of the body, and the hope for rewards in a future life were derived from persian influence. After the exile, She'al, the shadowy land of the dead, was replaced by heaven and a hell¹⁴. Also we find after exile,

some jews began to speak of a resurrection form the dead at the last day and of a last judgment, a final reward of the good and condemnation of the evil¹⁵.

According to jewish eschatology there are certain signs "the signs of the end," the day of judgment. At last moment, with the sounding of "last trump," the Messiah would appear in the clouds, with all the heavenly angles round him; and he will be "the Righteous judge"¹⁶. At his appearance "the righteous on earth would be caught up to him in the air, and the dead would rise from their graves"¹⁷. Before the Messiah's seat all men would be judged. The bad would be sent away into everlasting hellfire, and good would enter a state of blessedness with their Lord and King¹⁸.

As a matter of fact, jewish and Christian eschatologies are based upon the doctrine of the coming of Messiah. Although the Gospels speak about the Father as judge, who will reward the righteous men and punish the sinners, yet Christ is considered as the judge, who will exercise this function on all men¹⁹. Jesus also will return again as Son of Man, when the dead will be resurrected. At this time he is to judge the world and establish the Kingdom of God by bringing God's rule to earth²⁰. Briefly, most of the doctrine of resurrection, the future life, heaven and hell, and immortality were inherited from jewish eschatology, which in turn influenced by Zoroastrianism.

In the Qur'anic conception of the day of judgment, we find that the coming of the day of judgment, (Youn al din) is a prove of the existence of God and his justice, on one hand, and man's responsibility on the other. Therefore, the future life, in Islam, is not a new life but only a continuation of this earthly one. During this day, the books in which each man's deeds have been recorded will be read, and eternal judgment will be passed accordingly²¹.

If we examine the Islamic culture, we find many ideas about the day of judgment were derived from the persian, jewish and Christian eschatology. After death all persons are visited in the grave by two angels, who examine them as to their faith. Accordingly, with the answer there will be special peace or punishment in the grave. In fact this idea is very closed to the individual judgment in Persian eschatology. Also in Islam culture and myths

there will be many wonderful signs that precede the last day. The Mahdi will establish a reign of righteousness, and "addajjal," or antichrist, will appear and be slain by Jesus, who will become a Muslim. It is clear that most of these ideas came after the cultural contact between Muslims and other religions.

4. CONCLUSION

The most obvious question that suggests itself at the end of this survey is : What have we gotten out of it ? Can we go with Arnold Toynbee in claiming that there are common ground that exists between the great religions of the World ? This common ground according to Toynbee is human nature, namely "the Original Sin in human nature"²². Or can we accept the view that all religions are one ?.

In fact, these views can not explain to us either the nature of religion nor the existence of those similarities and contrasts in the religion of the Near East. As a matter of fact there are some common functions between all religions. All religions display a unity of function in the service they perform in the lives of individuals and societies. All religions are trying to give answers for one's quest for the Divine and His relation to him: all religions are trying to teach man how to live better, and all religion are trying to give man a hope for living another life.

There are no doubt that there are great similarities between these religions of the Near East. But this similarity can be explained by saying it was the result of historical and cultural contacts. Similarity between religions does not mean the forgetting of differences. These religions like differing languages through which man has been seeking to express his faith in the Divine and his hope in future life. Each religion expresses in its own symbolic language and actions, this common quest for the Divine and this hope for future life. Each religion possesses not only characteristic symbols, belief, and practice of its own, but each has its own distinctive religious insight, and each has its own interpretation of religious values.

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