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11- Edward Said's account of his journey to visit his fatherland was published in three consecutive issues of *The Observer*, 1 November- 15 November 1992.

12- As for the origin of this ritual Dalrymple explains that he was told that a Syrian Christian girl struck down by some apparently incurable sickness had had a dream telling her to visit the shrine of the Muslim saint. She had done so, spent the night in the shrine and the next day had been healed. A sheep covered with flowers and ribbons like the Old Testament scapegoat was being slaughtered as an offering.

The ancient church in which Muslims pray alongside the Christians is a place which, according to the legends, was founded in the early sixth century, after the Byzantine emperor Justinian chased a stag on the top of a hill during a hunting expedition. Just as Justinian was about to draw his bow, the stag changed into the Virgin Mary, who commanded him to build a convent on the top of the rock.

13- These lucky few of course, will have difficulty in relating their knowledge to others. The others could not have direct access to their knowledge, but could only comprehend it through (a never-ending) process of piecemeal and partial interpretations.

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5- The literature on this subject has grown considerably in recent years. For a source which provides a useful account of the debates until late 1970s see F. Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, University of Illinois Press, 1979. For a more recent survey of the developments concerning the theories of science see, *The Philosophy of Science*, edited by R. Boyd (et. al.), The MIT Press, 1991.

6- The theory of relativity and the quantum theory along with their new variants such as the theory of quantum gravity have, among other things, helped to bring about a new central metaphor for understanding the universe. For the Newtonian theory the central metaphor was a machine, which once built would no longer require its maker. In this view of the world there is hardly any role for God. In modern theories, by contrast, the central metaphor is that of a symphony, whose composer though not identical with his work, cannot be separated from it. His presence is "visible" in every bit of his work. The new picture of the world in modern science and its bearing on religious belief has been discussed on a large number of recent publications. See for example, *Science & Religion: One world- changing perspective of reality*, edited by J. Fennema & I. Paul, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990.

7- A case in point is a recent survey published in the journal *Nature* concerning the strength of religious beliefs amongst the working scientists. See, E. Larson & L. Witham, "Scientists are still keeping the faith", *Nature*, vol. 386, 3 April 1997.

8- A vocal representative of this trend is the British zoologist Richard Dawkins. He has spelled out his views in his recent book, *Climbing the Mount Improbable*, Viking, 1996.

9- For a critique of the views of postmodern writers concerning empirical sciences see, Alan Sokal & Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures*, Profile Books, 1997; Ali Paya, "Reflection on the Sokal's Hoax", *Keyian*, Vol. 8, No. 43, 1988.

Abrahamic religions, there is much to be gained and almost nothing to lose in entering a constructive dialogue with each other and embarking on projects aimed at closer cooperation and stronger ties.

The very fact that in their past history, Muslims, Christians and Jews, have managed, on occasions, to sustain such a dialogue, is an encouraging indication for the possibility of re-launching this project on even large scales. However, for these attempts to be successful, or at least, not fail at the outset, some conditions must be fulfilled. One such condition, which is necessary though not sufficient, is the need for taking a critical, non-dogmatic attitude on the part of all the participants. This critical attitude amounts to the recognition that any claim to knowledge or truth is fallible, limited and not final, and therefore requires to be subjected to critical examination.

At the end of the twentieth century and at the dawn of the third millennium, Islam, Christianity and Judaism are faced with an all-important choice with far-reaching consequences. These three Abrahamic faiths with their long common history and large common heritage can either choose to work together and prepare the ground for a peaceful and fruitful coexistence, by starting a constructive dialogue. Or, they can move along the road to violence and hostility with dire consequences for the whole humanity.

Let us hope and pray that the People of the Book will use the wisdom of their great prophets and saints and opt for that solution which can bring about peace and prosperity for all mankind.

Notes

1- Cf. Alexander Koyre's book with the same title (Batimore, 1957) in which the French historian of science has discussed, among other things, the Cultural impact of the overthrowing of the Ptolemaic system and the acceptance of the Copernican system.

the present paper, the cognitive landscape of the modern man has changed drastically since the medieval times and especially in the course of the twentieth century. Great minds from among the human race have argued against dogmatic attitudes and have shown that there are no secure foundations for our (non- immediate and intersubjectively communicable) knowledge. It has become clear that each of us view reality from a particular standpoint and therefore, like those who were inspecting an elephant in a dark house with the palm of their hands, each of us can (at most) claim a limited and partial understanding of reality.

The realisation of the fact that the whole and final truth is not within reach of any mortal soul (save those lucky few God has chosen to impart such a knowledge diercely to them¹³) and that we have no other option but to strive towards truth via a long process of interpretation and re- interpretation (trials and errors, conjectures and refutations), has had a humbling effect on many individuals in their epistemological quest.

If, as Otto Neurath once said, we are in the same epistemic boat (9), then it makes sense to enter into meaningful dialogues with others. This, of course, requires a willingness on our part to learn from others and regard them as potential source of reasonable information. It also takes the attitude that Karl popper has always been emphasising, namely that, "I may be wrong and you may be right, and by effort, we may get nearer to the truth." (10).

Adopting this approach should not prove difficult for the followers of the Abrahamic faiths, since the notion of "emancipation through knowledge", and "spiritual freedom" is a common thread in these three traditions.

The above points should help to drive home a rather trivial point, namely, for the adherents of the three

For Muslims, Christianity and Judaism were incomplete versions of the Final Truth which was revealed by Islam. In this respect Muslims did not regard the Christians and the Jews as "the other". In fact, the very notion of the "People of the Book" reminds Muslims that the followers of the three Abrahamic faiths are members of the same family or household. However, apparently the same does not exactly apply to Christianity and Judaism. According to Lewis (7), for Jews, salvation is attainable for non-Jews, albeit to a lesser degree, provided that they practice monotheism and morality. Much medieval Jewish theological and legal writing is concerned with the question whether Christians and Muslims qualify under these headings. It was universally agreed among Jewish scholars that Islam is a monotheistic religion, but the often-misunderstood doctrine of Trinity caused some problem to Jewish theologians.

For Christians the accommodation of the claims of Muslims and Jews was somewhat more difficult. They retained and reinterpreted the Hebrew Bible, which they called the Old Testament, and added a New Testament to it. The Christian churches maintained that God's covenant with the Jews was taken over and Israel was replaced by the "true Israel", *Verus Israel* which is the Church (7). As for Islam, some Christian theologians could not accept its authenticity, since they maintained that Christianity was, so to speak, the end of the process of revelation.

4. Conclusion

There is no doubt that there are still many of the followers of these three Abrahamic traditions that would not endorse anything short of an exclusives interpretation of their faith. However, as pointed out at the beginning of

treatment he received from the Israeli authorities and the lamentable situation of Muslims and Christians who live under the Israelis rule.¹¹

The history of the hostilities between the "People of the book", of course, goes back to many centuries ago. However, this does not mean that throughout this long history, Muslims, Christians and Jews have never been able to live together and show a minimum degree of tolerance towards each other. On the contrary, as numerous historical evidence suggest and as many historians and scholars have pointed out in the past, the followers of the three established faiths, despite all their differences, have shown, to reasonable degrees, tolerance and civility in dealing with one another. But moreover, the cases of close relationships and strong bounds of friendship between them have not been a rare commodity. For instance, William Dalrymple in his study of the Christian Middle East, *From the Holy Mountain*(4) describes how Muslims and Christians have lived peacefully together in places like Syria for many centuries. He names a church at Seidanaya, where Muslim men and women, to this day, pray together with the Christians. He also reports how devout Christians sacrifice sheep at the shrine of a Muslim saint in the ruins of the old Byzantine city of Cyrrugus, north-west of Aleppo.¹²

To be sure, one can cite many more episodes of peaceful coexistence or at least reasonable working relationship between the "People of the Book". However, the snag seems to be that at a doctrinal level the prospect for a peaceful coexistence is not very promising. As Bernard Lewis has argued, the notion of "otherness" may prove to be a major stumbling block in the way of a meaningful cooperation between the followers of (at least some of) these three faiths (7).

However, it does not appear to be too far-fetched to suggest that a collective approach towards these problems stand a better chance of success than individual initiatives. It seems that a constructive relation and close cooperation between the three Abrahamic traditions could only be to their mutual benefit and therefore extremely desirable.

Yet, despite the desirability of closer ties, when it comes to forging good relations, the Abrahamic religions, at least on the face of it, do not appear to be very good at tolerating each other. Right now, there are many trouble spots in the world in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews are at each other's throats. The tragedies in Kosove, East Timor, Palesine and South Lebanon are to a large extent the product of religious intolerance amongst the followers of the three Abrahamic faiths.

To be sure, instances of animosity between the "People of the Book" as the Holy Quran would call them,¹⁰ are not just limited to these shocking tragedies. In many countries where Muslims or Christians or Jews are regarded as minorities, their situation is far from satisfactory: many of them, to varying degrees, are routinely experiencing harassment, abuses, and violation of their basic rights. While in America the Jews are enjoying a relatively friendly environment, in the Christian Europe today, anti-semitism is far from dead. In both continents Islamo-phobia too is unfortunately rife. Amidst widespread discrimination against Muslims in both America and the Europe, powerful image makers like Hollywood add insult to injury by depicting Muslims as negative characters and villains. Christians are also not immune from this type of animosity. Edward Said, the Palestinian - American writer, and a Christian, who in 1992 after forty - five years in exile decided to visit his homeland, has given a vivid account of the unfriendly

such an environment and under the banner of giving proper credit to the contributions of cultures and communities whose achievements have been neglected or undervalued that a rampant relativism is gaining ground and attracting a large number of followers. New social and intellectual fashions such as cults of physical fitness, alternative therapies, New Age mysticisms, and counter cultures which are now flourishing in almost all societies, are mostly relying on different variants of relativistic approaches and arguments.

3. The Main Problem

The problem for Abrahamic religions, of course, is not just confined to theoretical matters. Modern societies are facing with all sorts of undesirable problems. Problems such as vandalism, violent crimes, wide-spread drug addiction, family breakdown, neglect and abuse of children, money worshipping and enlargement of the poverty trap, and erosion of trust are not the antiques of few isolated societies mainly in the western hemisphere. Dr. George Carey the Archbishop of Canterbury has surely summed up the concern of many societies on the face of the globe when he emphasised that in present situation, "We are losing the art of judging right from wrong... We are in danger of becoming a shallow society." (15, p. 14).

The question that urgently needs to be answered by the representatives of the Abrahamic faiths is how can these established religions fulfill their own responsibilities towards their own followers, and at the same time positively contribute to the formation of societies which are genuinely pluralistic and multicultural, and fairly cohesive and stable, free from the ills of the modern time? This is certainly not a simple task which can be accomplished with ease and speed.

furniture - they may make gods disappear and replace them by heap of atoms in empty space.” (6, p. 70).

Quite recently, Joseph Rouse, a writer on the philosophy of science and postmodernism, has reiterated Feyerabend’s views in the following way:

“The idea that there is a “natural world” for natural science to be about, entirely distinct from the ways human beings as knowers and agents interact with it, must be...abandoned.” (11, p. 66).

And Jonathan Smith, a theologian who advocates using the postmodern methodology to comparative study of religion emphasis the point about the socially constructed nature of reality. He maintains that comparison is the product of the scholar’s mind and it is an illusion to think that the process of comparison somehow latches on to any form of reality. In his view:

“Comparison tells us how things might be ... ‘re-described’. ... Comparison provides the means by which we ‘revision’ phenomena as *our* data to share our theoretical problems.” (13, p. 52).

At the theoretical level, therefore, it seems the threats of an anti-religious secularism as well as a whole sale relativism are undermining the credence of the religious claims. What makes the theoretical challenge for the established religions more pressing is not only the fact that the hostile secularism is trying to put new variants of the argument from limitlessness of reason into good use. It is also that under the pressure of factors like globalisation, communication revolution, and mass migration, our societies are no longer homogenous and increasingly have become pluralistic and multicultural. In

returning to ideas of sacred, the writer, a female theologian at the King's College, Cambridge, points out that:

... There was already a well-established conjunction of the feminist and the mystical or sacred in the work of several postmodern thinkers, notably those who associated the question of woman with the psychoanalytic challenge to an implicitly masculine, and fixed, model of subjectivity. ... In the writings of both Irigaray and Kristeva, woman becomes a sign that points beyond the end of a masculine subjectivity shaped by patriarchy, and also beyond the end of philosophy, to a knowledge which is experiential rather than cerebral...[T]hese feminist theorists [also] point to the necessary redefinition of the holy which is implied in the postmodernism. Irigaray asks: "isn't God the permits the appearance name and place which of a new epoch of history?" (3, p.7).⁹

The notion of "reality" too has not remained immune from the onslaught of postmodern writers. Both religious quest and scientific endeavour are based on the notion of an "objective reality" which is not dependent on *our* languages, conceptual schemes, or conventions. Yet, this very notion is what postmodern writers are vehemently opposed to. Some years ago Paul Feyerabend, whose ideas was a forerunner of today's postmodern theories declared that:

"We no longer assume an objective world that remains unaffected by our epistemic activities, except when moving within the confines of a particular point of view. We concede that our epistemic activities may have a decisive influence upon the most sordid piece of cosmological

interaction of speaking and acting citizens within a worldly public sphere is primary and would override all other competing foundational principles (14).

Interestingly enough, while many anti-religious secularists are using variants of the argument Maimonides had referred to, a new trend of thought has emerged in the past few decades which is challenging all the known models of rationality. It now seems that in the wake of the so-called postmodernist trend the authenticity as well as the relevance of both science and the established religions are being strongly challenged. Apparently, while secularist were trying to uphold the power of reason against the faith, postmodernists are rejecting reason too in favour of a supreme principle, namely, "anything goes".

For postmodern writers notions like "truth" which both scientists and religious people regard as highly valuable, are reduced to mere construct of local language-games. Thus for instance, Zygmunt Bauman, a postmodern sociologist, says:

"It is this new cultural experience ... which has been distilled in the postmodern view of the world as a self-controlling and self-propelling process, determined by nothing but its own momentum, subject to no overall plan...the postmodern perspective reveals the world as composed of an infinite number of meaning-generating agencies, all relatively self-sustained and autonomous, all subject to their own respective logics and armed with their own facilities of truth validation." (1, pp. 790-823).

Likewise, the motion of "the sacred" which is central for the religious beliefs seems to have been given fresh "meanings" in the postmodernist literature. In a recent article on the topic of how the contemporary thinkers are

the efforts which of the philosophers of science, as well as other scholars, who have shown the epistemic and methodological limitations of modern science.⁵ Moreover, the introduction of new fundamental scientific theories which have managed to replace the Newtonian world - view with its materialistic - deterministic undertone, with a new scientific image of the reality, has also played a significant role in this respect.⁶

These developments, alongside the efforts of modern theologians to introduce new interpretations of religious beliefs, have all helped to create a new intellectual environment in which science and religion, by and large, appear to be partners rather than rivals.⁷ One, of course, should not conclude from here that one cannot find, amongst scientists as well as non-scientists, those who would still regard science as paradigm of rationality and would urge the public to reject established religions in favor of a creed based on scientific understanding of the world.⁸ However, it can be claimed that in the intellectual environment of the late twentieth century, science and religion have reached a new understanding concerning their respected sphere of activity and the possible areas of cooperation.

The Change in the relation of religion and science is certainly a welcome one, however, it does not mean that the threat to religious beliefs is over. There are many secularists who may not regard natural sciences as the paradigm of rationality, and yet insist on rejecting all references to religion and Divine faith, and emphasis on the necessity of replacing them, altogether, with man-made constructs. In view of some of the advocates of these brands of secularism, the modern experience of secular time stands opposed to the logic of Divine time. Secular time nurtures the political principle, vital for public life in a democratic society. In such a society the

religious schools. These people have mounted various attacks, on occasions of all effective ones, on the doctrines of these religions. Perhaps the most ingenious of all amongst these attacks has been the one which Moses Maimonides indicates in his *Guide of the Perplexed*.⁽⁸⁾ He more or less reports in his book that there existed in the Middle Ages a school of unbelievers who tried to show that there is no room for religious belief or religious faith, and their proof was based on the claim that there is no limit on reason, that is to say, all questions can be handled by reason and all problems can be solved by its power.

With the advent of the modern sciences in the aftermath of the Renaissance a new trend, which has persisted up until the present time, in various forms and with varying degrees of emphasis, gained prominence: many unbelievers have tried to present empirical sciences as the sole representative of reason and use it to force religious beliefs out of the scene. Of course, in the past the faithful had always tried to counter this move by various stratagems. Thus for example, Bishop Berkeley tried to challenge the truth claims of Newtonian mechanics by introducing an instrumentalistic interpretation of its findings ⁽²⁾. The same strategy was used with great subtlety by the French physicist Pierre Duhem in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century ⁽⁵⁾.

Apart from this of reasoned opposition to the claims of sciences, there has also been non-rational or irrational reactions, of which the Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a known representative ⁽¹²⁾. However, in the twentieth century, and as a result of a number of intellectual and social factors, it has been made clear that reason is not unlimited and therefore there are rooms for religion. Amongst the factors which helped to bring about such a change of opinion, one should mention

popular jargons we are now living in an “information age” in which the so-called “information explosion or information revolution” is shaping every aspect of our lives in ways which our forefathers could have not even dreamt of.

What are the consequences of such upheavals for religious belief systems? Does the emergence of a multitude of new and diverse ideas, along with sophisticated new technologies which help disseminating them, herald the beginning of a process of gradual weakening and eventual disappearance of the world established religions especially the family of the Abrahamic faiths? Are we going to witness, in the next millennium, the spread of numerous local and parochial new and varied religious cults which would satisfy the spiritual needs of their relatively small number of members. Or will it be the case that the *zeitgeist* will appear as a rather aggressive anti-religious attitude amongst the citizens of the global village of tomorrow?

Whatever patterns are going to emerge in the belief-ecosystems of this century, there is no doubt that the Abrahamic religions cannot isolate themselves from the changing climate which is now encompassing all intellectual ambience in all corners of the world. The main question now facing Islam, Christianity, and Judaism is, no doubt the question of survival: how can each of these major monotheistic religions weather the incoming storm and come out of it with the least possible damages? Or better still, how can they turn the storm into their own advantage and get the most out of it?

2. History of the Subject

Religious belief systems have never been without their discontents. There has always been people who have not been satisfied with the teachings of the established

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism: Can they live peacefully together?

Dr. Ali Paya*

Abstract

The Three Abrahamic faiths have had a rather uneasy relationship in the past centuries. Even today, many of the major conflicts in the four quarters of the globe have their origins in the conflicting views of the followers of these three major faiths. Against such a background, I shall be arguing that the ground for a peaceful coexistence, both at a theoretical level and at the practical level of living together in the same society, is reasonably within the reach of the adherents of these faiths. My argument will be concentrated on both the *possibility* of an honorable and peaceful coexistence and the *desirability* of genuine efforts to achieve it.

Key Words: 1- Islam 2- Christianity 3- Judaism

1. Introduction

The cognitive landscape of the modern man seems to be radically different from that of his predecessors. Phrases like "from the closed world to the infinite universe"¹, "paradigm shifts"², "changes in the episteme"³, "incommensurable world-views"⁴, and their like, are all devised to capture and represent the very idea of radical developments in man's conceptual schemes. According to

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