COMMON GROUND BETWEEN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM:
AN ISLAMIC VIEW OF THE MONOTHEISTIC PATH TO MORALITY*

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Islam has a pre-history in the religion of Abraham, which is a pre-Islamic Islam, or monotheism, a religion of implicit obedience to the will of God, a surrender to Allah; indeed, in Arabic, Islam means surrender.

The story of Abraham is told in the Qur’an in many verses;¹ as it is told in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament and other places in the Bible.² In effect, the story in Genesis ends with Ishmael’s (Ismail’s) banishment, which is where the Qur’an takes up the story. The wilderness of exile is Mecca, where the father and son together build the House of One God, the Ka’ba, where to this day Muslims go on pilgrimage and towards which they face in their daily prayers.

The Qur’an describes the religious route from Abraham to Prophet Muhammad thus: “Say (O Muslims), we believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ismael and Isaac and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered [i.e., become Muslims].”³ Of all the prophets, Moses is mentioned most. Thus, the Biblical prophetology becomes part of Islam, even Zachariah, Elisha, Jonah, Elias, and Lot are accepted.⁴ David and Solomon, who are kings in the Bible, are in addition Prophets in Islam. The Psalms of David are accepted as a holy book (Zabūr), and so also the Torah (Tawrāt)

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper, under the same title, given at the Conference on Monotheism and Ethics at the Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel on December 17, 2008.
⁴ Qur’an, 2:336.
⁵ Ibid., 6:74, 85, 86.
revealed to Moses is accepted. In the Qurʾan, Jesus is referred to as the word (kalima), the messiah (masiḥ), and the holy spirit (al-rūḥ al-quds) and son of Mary, but never as the son of God. Jesus’s virgin birth and Mary’s chastity are emphasized; so is Jesus’s resurrection, but he is a human being as is the Prophet Muhammad. None of the prophets are divine.\(^5\) The miracles associated with Jesus, as with Abraham and Moses before him, are miracles of God, not of the prophets who are human and have no divinity. Rev. Parrinder in his book *Jesus in the Qurʾan* says that Mary is mentioned more times in the Qurʾan than she is mentioned in the New Testament.\(^6\)

In the Qurʾan, Abraham is referred to as *Khalīl Allah* (the Friend of God), Moses as *Kalīm Allah* (the Communicator with God), Jesus as the *Rūḥ Allāh* (the Spirit of God) and Prophet Muhammad as the *Rasūl Allah* (the Messenger of God).

There is another route from Abraham to Prophet Muhammad, i.e., ethnic and not religious. The Quraysh of Mecca—the Prophet’s own tribe—regard themselves as descendants of Abraham through his eldest son, Ishmael.\(^7\)

The Hebrews, cousins of the Arabs, descendants of Abraham through Isaac, and eventually all Jews and Christians, together with their prophets, are recognized in the Qurʾan as peoples with valid revelations; these are the *Peoples of the Book* (Ahl al-Kitāb). Accordingly, a dialogue with them is advocated, as the Qurʾan states: “And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except in the best of manners, unless it be with those who have done you wrong. Say to them: ‘We believe in what has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and it is to Him that we submit [i.e., become Muslimūn].’”\(^8\)

There are two verses of the Qurʾan that have become famous for their religious liberalism, namely: “There is no compulsion in the matter of religion”\(^9\) (this verse follows the celebrated *āyat al-kursī* [the throne verse]), and “For you is your religion, and for me is mine.”\(^10\) About Jews, the Qurʾan states: “O Bani Isrāil, remember the bounty with which I have

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\(^5\) Ibid., 2:87; 3:42, 45, 47; 4:157, 158, 171; 19:33.

\(^6\) Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾan* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 60.


\(^8\) Qurʾan 29:46.

\(^9\) Ibid., 2:255.

\(^10\) Ibid., 109:6.