

The Tale of the Three Generals and the Three Sons AND LAND SOVEREIGNTY

Once upon a time there were three generals & three sons. As the emperor was dying, he divided up his empire among his three generals, who then ruled each his own realm without interfering in the others' affairs. But the father gave everything he had to each of his sons, who still each are striving to have it all.

The founder of the Greek empire was ALEXANDER THE GREAT. His generals were Ptolemy, Seleucus, & Lysimachus. (Actually, they & descendants did squabble among themselves over territory; but no one ever supposed he could take the whole thing.)

The father was ABRAHAM. HIS SONS ARE JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, & ISLAM. "Occupied territory," "the occupation," mean, for each, that the others are living someplace without submitting to his sovereignty: each claims the whole earth &, as the sole land-authority, each is totalitarian, because "The earth is the LORD's" (Ps.24.1), *their* Lord's. To be faithful to its codified call, each must try to persuade the others that their sovereignty claims are false--persuade, not coerce. But eschatologically, in the last analysis, "at the end of the day," the historical resolution of each's vision must be either the **incorporation** or the **annihilation** of the others.

1 While I'm the teller of that tale, the boldface words in its last sentence are those of Martin S. Jaffee in "One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism" (JAAR Dec/01 753-75). To get his thesis out on one Thinksheet, I've added, to his diagram, some reference-points:

2 Let's look at Jaffee's language. "Monotheism" can be viewed intellectually, philosophically. This he calls "metaphysical m." The only god, source, is (as is all of philosophy) impersonal, not really of religious interest. But the biblical God (1) is personal, (2) is the Creator (as UCC puts it, "calls the worlds into being"), & (3) calls Abraham & Abraham's "symbolic systems" children. He wills, & calls for obedience to his will: I would call this volitional m., but Jaffee wants to use the technical term "election," so he calls it "elective m."

Oddly, the current "creation science" & "intelligent design" pub.ed. controversy falls in between Jaffee's two subcategories & can be seen either as philosophical or as religious.

(Where's "Fig.1"? I've incorporated it in Fig.2 by adding numbers representing the general categories of "elective monotheism.")

3 I left God unnumbered to represent his transcendence. His? "The masculine pronouns are central to the monotheistic traditions' con-

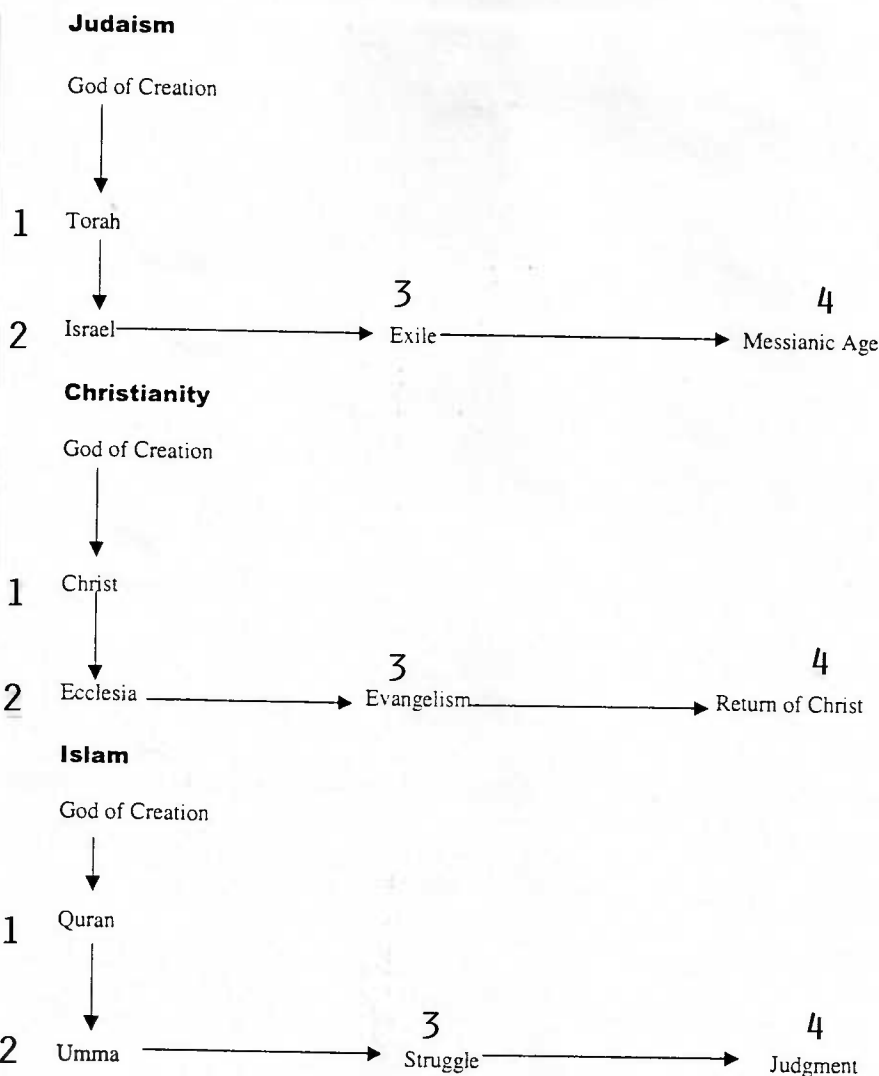


Fig. 2. Symbolic systems of elective monotheism.

ceptualizations of the unique God" (755) of each. What monotheism is to the cosmos (viz., "only" one deity), each of the three is to the other two & all others (viz., "[the only] one," unique, complete (needing no additions), exclusive (incorporating no rivals). (Communism is a secular version of this triumphalistic mentality.) 753: "Competition and conflict among monotheistic [historical] traditions is not a failure of monotheistic ethics but an expression of the fundamental intentionality of monotheistic discourses as symbolic systems." (Here, to Rodney King's "Can't we all just get along?" the essential-intentional answer is "No." But to the question "Must we get along together in the interest of God, humanity, & the good earth?" the answer is "Yes." This I see as the central cultural-historical project for the 21st century.)

5 PARADOX: The closer you look at the three Abraham religions, both the more alike & the more different they seem. Well displayed in SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH A MUSLIM, a thorough & authoritative work by Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq (Bethany House Publishers/80) on Christian evangelism among Muslims. *Now for the numbers I've added to the diagram:*

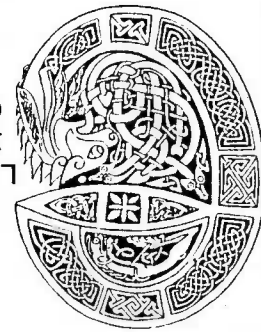
1 The Creator's **self-disclosure** in Torah(language)/Christ(person)/Qur'an(language). By incorporation, the 2nd supercedes the 1st (the general view in the NT) & (the Muslim view) the 3rd supercedes both of its antecedents. But Christianity says God, appearing in Christ, cannot be superceded by any subsequent literature.

2 The **recipient community**: Israel/Ecclesia/Umma.

3 The **historical drama**: Exile/Evangelism/Struggle("jihad"). Let's put it as three out-ofs: Egypt, the grave, & Mecca (to Medina, "hejira"). Three complete historical (not cosmic, as in Eastern myths) redemption-stories. Now, only Islam aims to "dominate the political order," with earth split between the Domain of Islam & the Domain of War (771). Each of the three continuously memorializes its story in liturgical time ("service") so as to live it out in real time ("servitude"), "bearing the sign of God's presence and the word of God's love and will to those who have not seen or heard" (765). (Secular version: To the Left, everything is struggle.)

4 The **resolution**: Messianic Age /Return of Christ/ Judgment. Each: single Creator, unique community, single resolution (persons either incorporated or experience "explicit physical and spiritual annihilation"). Elective monotheism "countervails" over the monotheistic impulse to universalism, which may blossom exchatologically. But to "hate intensely" is not a necessary historical response to "the capacity of God to love intensely and exclusively" (last sentence).

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One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism

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immensely attractive countervailing element of elective monotheism. This is, as I have argued, the mythos of the recipient community whose narrative of self-definition moves ineluctably along the vertical and horizontal axes of elective monotheism's historical discourse. The universalist moral implications of elective monotheism, which emerge in the calm interior of the theologian's study, have not much to do with the way in which monotheism is embodied in living sociohistorical systems of religion. As I have tried to show, the reason is that elective monotheism's universalism is predominantly enacted eschatologically rather than historically.

➤ History, that is, is the realm of struggle against the communal Other; the *eschaton* is the moment at which, if at all, that Other is identified with the Self and bound up in a universalist moral community.

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 Elective monotheism, as opposed to its metaphysical counterpart, is not primarily about God as he is in himself or in relationship to the created order of nature. It is much more about God as he is in relationship to historical human communities—a relationship characterized by the opposition of love and hate. Elective monotheism is driven by the assumption that the God who loves does not do so indiscriminately; rather, the divine love is a scarce commodity. Knowledge that it exists is disclosed only to a segment of the human community. The means of obtaining it are carefully preserved for those within the communal boundary. The mandate to celebrate it necessarily entails conflict with those who insist on their own traditions for gaining entry into the circle of divine love. The possession of divine love, at least at the level of the historical testimony to its presence within the community, is itself the warrant for ontological hatred of the very existence of the Other. It is perhaps some comfort that such hatred can be overcome eschatologically. But the eschatological ethic of inclusiveness in redemption makes only rare appearances on the historical stage on which the various elected communities struggle for domination. On the plane of history, the capacity of God to love intensely and exclusively is translated, as often as not, into the human capacity to hate intensely.