

# **The Impact of Religion on Western Culture: A Mixed Legacy**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*Judaism, Christianity and Islam contributed to a moral revolution known as ethical monotheism. God was seen as a caring deity who entered into a covenant with the Jews requiring of them both belief in his oneness and ethical conduct: concern for the poor, the pursuit of peace and a day of rest for all creatures. Jesus Christ rearticulated and refined aspects of this teaching, especially the value of non-violence. Prophet Muhammad emphasized the value of philanthropy and complete submission to Allah.*

*All three faiths were instrumental in the promotion of learning: Judaism through a dedication to study that enabled Jews to make signal contributions to science and medicine, Christianity through the preservation of learning and steps leading to the formation of universities, and Islam through the transmission of Greek philosophy and the pursuit of mathematics.*

*The problem with these faiths was a triumphalism whereby each one trumped the prior faith (e.g., Christianity over Judaism), coupled with a conversionary drive that at times caused untold suffering to the politically weaker tradition. The Enlightenment and the American experiment with religious freedom have blunted Christian triumphalism, but it is still a problem in the conservative wing of Christianity and in many Islamic countries. Fortunately, the worldwide interfaith movement has provided hope for greater tolerance and understanding among religions.*

## **Introduction**

This paper surveys the “mixed legacy” of the monotheistic faiths by examining their benefits under two headings: improved morality (including philanthropy) and the cultivation of learning. It then looks at how triumphalism, coupled with a drive to convert members of the older and politically vanquished faiths, has hindered human progress.

## **I. THE POSITIVE LEGACY**

### ***1. CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMAN MORALITY IN JUDAISM***

**A. In the Torah.** In phrase, the Jews’ greatest contribution to the world was ethical monotheism—not just one God but a deity who was just and merciful, and demanded moral behavior from humans. The evolution of ethical monotheism took centuries, beginning with Abraham, coming into sharper focus with Moses and reaching its fullness during the period of the great classical prophets between about 750 and 500 BCE.

This single deity—single source of existence—was not found in nature, despite being its creator. God entered into a personal, covenantal relationship with the

Jewish people and in a broader sense with all human beings (see Genesis 9:8-11, the covenant with the whole human race after the flood). By contrast, the many gods of the Ancient Near East were a fickle band who treated humankind as playthings or slaves, not partners. In the Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, for example, we read:

Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage, “man” shall be his name. Truly, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they may be at ease (Tablet V: 5-7 in Pritchard: 36).

Israelite religion also moved beyond the circular world view of the Sumerians and other ancient peoples by emphasizing that history moved forward in a linear, purposeful way that promoted ethical progress (Cahill: 18-19).

Although the legal material in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy—the so-called “Covenant Code”—was influenced by the Code of Hammurabi (17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE), it differed in several ways:

- a. It is based on a covenant relationship with the God who had liberated the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, not on the edicts of an earthly ruler.
- b. The savage and multiple punishments of Hammurabi’s Code are absent in the Israelite Code.
- c. Equal justice is prescribed for all, regardless of social standing,<sup>1</sup> whereas Hammurabi’s Code made punishments lighter for the upper classes.
- d. The Covenant Code stresses the paramount importance of human life not property, as in Hammurabi and other ancient codes (Sarna: 1420-23).

There is another unique feature in this Code: the command to hallow the seventh day of the week by refraining from workaday activities.

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements (Exodus 20: 8-10).

The prohibition applies to everyone: children, slaves, cattle, and strangers. There is nothing else like this in the religions of the Ancient Near East. It is a special invention of monotheism, a Sabbath commanded by the one God, that has profoundly influenced not only Jews<sup>2</sup> but the world as a whole.

The commandment to hallow the Sabbath is part of the so-called Decalogue or Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-14 and, in a slightly different version, Deuteronomy 5:6-18) in which commandments one to four refer to obligations to God, and five to ten duties to other human beings. The Decalogue, too, is unique in the Ancient Near Eastern world where commands were usually conditional. For example, *if* you murder someone, *then* this is the punishment. Here the commands are absolute and enshrine universal principles: you shall not murder, steal, etc. under any

circumstances. Also unique to Judaism and the other monotheistic faiths is the idea that how a person treats another is of concern to God (Sarna: 441).

**B. In the Prophets.** The prophetic movement in Ancient Israel represents a high point in the development of ethical monotheism. The prophet Amos (8th century BCE) sums up one key aspect of this movement as follows:

I loathe, I spurn your festivals, I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies...Spare me the sounds of your hymns, and let me not hear the music of your lutes. But let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unfailing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

Without social justice, liturgy is hollow and hymns worthless. The prophets provide a necessary corrective to the stress in the Torah on the observance of holy days, and the sacrifice of animals and offering of produce to God.

In particular Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets were concerned for the rights of the poor and needy. "Devote yourselves to justice; aid the wronged, uphold the rights of the orphan, defend the cause of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17).

There is also in the prophetic literature a call to rely on non-violence rather than force of arms. The prophet Micah in the late 700s BCE longs for an ideal time when the nations

...shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war; but every man shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to disturb him (Micah 4:3-4).

The moral vision of the Hebrew Bible was adopted by Jesus Christ and the earliest Christians, as well as by the rabbis who enabled Judaism to survive after the destruction of the Jewish state and temple in 70 by the Romans. For example, the Mishnah, the first part of the Talmud, enjoins that there be a daily communal distribution of food for the needy and a weekly outlay of money for those needing long-term assistance (Mishnah, Peah 2).

## 2. *CONTRIBUTIONS TO MORALITY IN CHRISTIANITY*

As just noted, Jesus was profoundly influenced by the ethics of his own Jewish tradition. For example, when asked by a legal scholar to state which commandment is primary, he drew together two key verses from the Torah: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18:

The first is, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:29-31).

As in the Decalogue, love of God and neighbor are inseparable in Jesus' mind.

He also adds new ethical dimensions to biblical morality in the so-called Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Here Jesus stresses that one must love not only the neighbor, the friend, but also the enemy:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... (Matthew 5:43-44).

Although the Hebrew Bible nowhere commands the hating of enemies,<sup>3</sup> neither does it say that they are to be loved and prayed for. Jesus gives an existential demonstration of love of enemies while dying on the cross by saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Jesus also preached non-violence in the same sermon:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile (Matthew 5: 38-41).

This radical pacifism is demonstrated at the time of Jesus' arrest when one of his followers struck a slave in the High Priest's party and cut off his ear. Jesus reacts by stating, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who takes the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)

The vision of peace in the Hebrew prophets and the outright pacifism of Jesus led some early Christians to refuse conscription in Rome's legions and to suffer persecution as a result. The Christians were also persecuted for refusing to worship the emperor, for the practice flew in the face of their monotheistic beliefs. (Rietbergen: 65)

The net result of the moral vision of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament was to put the Christian movement at odds with a number of Roman practices such as the Circus Maximus with its bloody gladiatorial games, cruelty to animals forced to fight one another and, of course, execution of condemned criminals—and ultimately Christians themselves who were thrown to the lions.

The Christianization of the Roman Empire was a long and gradual process, involving politics as well as religion, but the moral superiority of the new faith was clearly a decisive factor. One striking example of this was Christian philanthropy that made no social distinctions and was much more comprehensive than that sponsored by the Roman government (Grant: 403).

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of Christian, Jewish or Islamic philanthropy, a topic I explored last year at this conference (Hubbard). Suffice it to say that all three faiths have regarded concern for the sick, hungry, homeless and destitute as absolutely demanded by the Ground of Existence, as the words of their prophets make clear.

### 3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO MORALITY IN ISLAM

Muslims believe that the same God (Arabic Allah) described in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament revealed himself to Prophet Muhammad confirming his oneness and making ethical demands on human beings.

Pre-Islamic religion in Arabia was polytheistic and superstitious. Morality was tribal and was based on the principle of the vendetta: the murder of a person from one tribe demanded the retaliatory death of a member of a rival group. Gambling, drinking and intertribal feuding were rampant; unwanted female infants were buried alive (Noss: 537-38).

Muhammad was dismayed by these practices. He had some understanding of Judaism and Christianity through contacts with members of these faiths. One Muslim scholar says the following about their influence on him:

If Muhammad had not known “historically” (as distinguished from “through revelation”) the materials of the Prophets’ stories, he would himself have been at a complete loss to understand what the Revelation was saying to him. (Fazlur Rahman quoted in Noss: 538)

Still, Muhammad’s revelations recorded in the Qur’an were unique and produced a moral revolution in Arabia. God’s absolute oneness was implanted in his followers with an intensity that has endured for 1,400 years. Charity (*zakat*) was enjoined at the rate of two-and-a-half per cent of one’s net worth per year. Consumption of alcohol, use of illicit drugs, and gambling were prohibited. Women were given legal rights unheard of at the time: to keep funds brought into a marriage, manage their own finances and own businesses. Regarding social justice, the following passage from the Qur’an is reminiscent of that from Amos quoted above:

It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West [i.e., the ritual gestures accompanying prayer]. True piety is this: to believe in God and the Last Day...to give of one’s substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveler, beggars, and to ransom the slave... (Surah 2: 173-4).

### 4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MONOTHEISTIC TRADITIONS TO LEARNING

**A. Judaism.** Jews did not found secular lyceums as the Greeks had, but did establish—especially in the rabbinical period after the destruction of the Jewish State in 70 CE—academies for the study of the Torah. In fact, the synagogue was called in Hebrew *Bet ha-Midrash*, House of Study. In the most famous tractate of the Mishnah, *Pirke Abot* or The Sayings of the Fathers, the sage Joshua counsels, “Provide thyself with a teacher, and possess thyself of a companion [fellow student] (*Abot* 6). And the famous Rabbi Hillel states that, “...he who does not increase [his knowledge] decreases [it]; and he who does not study deserves to die...” (*Abot* 13).

During the long centuries of vulnerability when Jews lacked a homeland, a temple and secular power, a special kind of learning enabled them to survive as a people: the study and interpretation of the Torah. The scholars at the rabbinical academies in Yavneh, Caesarea, Babylon and elsewhere debated the proper

implementation of Torah with its 613 commandments and reached decisions that allowed Jewish communities to function in all areas of life—worship and holidays, civil and criminal law, marriage and divorce, and agriculture.

These ongoing seminars provided identity, direction and inspiration to the Jewish communities of the Middle East and Europe for 1900 years. They also inspired a prizing of learning that has become a hallmark of Jewish culture. Consider the case of a typical Jewish boy in Poland in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. At home, he would speak Yiddish (the language created by Jews in the Middle Ages from German with an admixture of Hebrew), study and speak Polish in the secular world, and study both Hebrew and Aramaic in the yeshiva or rabbinical academy in order to read the Talmud.

When Jews finally attained a measure of political freedom in the 18th Century, they were able to utilize their zest for learning in the pursuit of secular study in the sciences, medicine<sup>4</sup> and law. It is no accident that Jews have been the recipient of dozens of Nobel Prizes in science and medicine since the awards were established in 1901. It is also fair to say that Jews have provided an intellectual haven in both the Christian and Islamic<sup>5</sup> worlds of considerable significance.

B. Christianity. Early Christianity in the second through the fifth centuries was preoccupied with two great challenges: gaining political acceptance in the Roman world and developing its theological teachings. This was the era of the Church Fathers such as John Chrysostom (347-407) in the east and Augustine (354-430) in the west who helped articulate Christian philosophy for centuries to come. Gradually, as these issues were settled, the monastic tradition emerged, and with it the preservation of texts from Greco-Roman antiquity and the cultivation of learning. By the twelfth century, for example, the Abbey of Cluny in France possessed some 570 volumes of manuscript texts, and the cathedral of Durham in England 546 (Rietbergen: 100).

With textual collections and scholars situated in key locations, the monasteries became centers of learning that produced scholars who would help shape European civilization. Women, too, excelled intellectually in their own monasteries. Lady Hildegard (1098-1179), abbess of the Benedictine monastery of Bingen, was part of a trajectory of religious women scholars that has stretched in the Roman Catholic Church right down to the present.

The monastic centers of learning ultimately gave way to the great universities of Europe. These emerged from the medieval bishops' schools that were part of the cathedrals (Miles: 152). Although the universities became independent of the Church, they were staffed in many cases by clerics and monks, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), and theology was a dominant subject.

C. Islam. Although Christian learning came into its own in the high Middle Ages, it was Islam that preserved and cultivated science and philosophy, especially in the two-hundred-year period from about 900-1100. This was particularly true of mathematics and astronomy. Muslim scholars also preserved and translated the works of the Greek philosophers, most importantly Aristotle. One key Aristotelian

philosopher was Averroes (Arabic Ibn Rushd, 1126-98), a lawyer and physician in Cordoba and Morocco. His commentaries on Aristotle influenced both the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1137-1204) and the Christian Aquinas. The other giant of this period was Avicenna (Arabic Ibn Sina, 980-1037), a renowned physician, philosopher and interpreter of Aristotle. Ironically his extensive medical writings were most influential on Jewish doctors who were almost the only scholarly practitioners of medicine in Europe (Rietbergen: 154).

Clearly, the moral vision of the monotheistic faiths had a revolutionary effect on human conduct in the West, and the cultivation of learning likewise has helped shape western culture down to the present.

However, the monotheistic faiths have also brought to western culture liabilities negatively affecting millions of people down through the centuries. I will examine two of the most notable, (1) triumphalism, and (2) the conversionistic program and oppression of minority faiths that went along with it.

## II. THE NEGATIVE LEGACY

### 1. *TRIUMPHALISM IN JUDAISM*

A passage on the lips of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy crystallizes the problem:

In the towns of the latter peoples [those living in the area promised to the Israelites], however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. No, you must proscribe them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God (Deut. 20:15-18).

In fact, these ethnic groups were not annihilated. They were conquered and in some cases assimilated, but the genocide called for in this text never occurred. The passage was probably composed long after the time of Moses and may reflect the idea that, had these groups actually been wiped out, the Israelites would not have had such a long struggle against idolatry (Plaut: 1381-82). Also, such genocidal conduct was not uncommon in the ancient world. Still, the triumphal and brutal attitude reflected here is hard to explain away. Furthermore, it certainly had an impact on the whole concept of “holy war,” whether involving King Saul’s slaughter of the Amalekites (I Samuel 15:7-9), the Muslim conquests of the Middle East, the Crusades and even the American notion of a “manifest destiny,” the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea that the country had a right to conquer the entire continent and its native population.

### 2. *TRIUMPHALISM IN CHRISTIANITY*

The early Church saw itself as having super ceded Judaism. This is the nature of a new religion: it views itself as improving on past beliefs and practices, fulfilling prophecies, completing the task. Buddhism understood itself as doing so vis-à-vis

Hinduism, Sikhism vis-à-vis Hinduism and Islam, Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism and Islam vis-à-vis Christianity. The problem for many historians of religion is not so much the fact that a new faith believes it has superseded an old one, but the way it then behaves towards the older religion.

In the case of Christianity, the New Testament is critical of aspects of Judaism. The Apostle Paul, for example, writes that the Jews:

...have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness (Romans 10:2-3).

The author of John's Gospel writes that Jesus, "...came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (1:11).

These and similar statements throughout the New Testament were not as such the problem, but rather the way they were used in later centuries—when Christianity held political power—to justify a policy of persecution and forced conversion of Jews. Two infamous examples illustrate the point.

- a. During the First Crusade in 1096 a popular slogan emerged: "It is preposterous to set out on along journey to kill God's enemies far away [the Muslims in Palestine], while God's worst enemies, the Jews, are dwelling at ease close at hand." And a second maxim proclaimed, "Who kills a Jew has all his sins forgiven" (Ruether: 206). Between April and July of 1096, 10,000 Jews in villages along the Rhine River, a third of all those living in northern Europe, were either murdered or forced to commit suicide (rather than convert).
- b. The Spanish Inquisition (1481-1808) was in part a response to the presence in Spain of tens of thousands of Jewish converts to Christianity. A vicious wave of persecution a century earlier had forced Spanish Jews to face the grim alternatives of conversion, or either death or loss of livelihood. Many converted under duress thereby creating a new class of Christians. Suspicions eventually began to arise that these "new Christians" were secretly practicing Judaism, as many were. To root out the culprits, the authorities of the Inquisition and their informants began looking for indications that the coverters were still Jewish, for example, not eating pork, not cooking on the Sabbath, or lighting candles at sunset on Fridays. The suspects were brought before the Inquisitors and asked if they were still Jewish. Those who admitted this immediately and produced the names of other clandestine Jews were simply forced to make a public confession. Those who only confessed after being "convicted," were strangled to death before being burned at the stake. Those refusing to confess even after their convictions were tortured in an attempt to force them to acknowledge the truth of Christianity and then burned alive (Telushkin: 191).



Christians made numerous attempts to convert Jews over the centuries, using political and economic pressure and even forcing Jewish leaders such as Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (1194-c. 1270) to publicly debate with a Christian scholar and converted Jew, Pablo Cristiani, in hopes of making the Rabbi see the light. Although ben Nachman more than held his own, King James I of Spain then ordered Jews to attend sermons delivered by Dominican friars. After ben Nachman wrote a book summarizing his four disputations with Cristiani and criticizing the Dominicans, the king ordered the book to be burned. Ben Nachman was subsequently banished to Palestine for two years (Carroll: 334-5).

Christian triumphalism did not end with the Jews, and was one cause of the Crusades (1095-1272). Christian attitudes towards Islam provided some of the inspiration for these bloody forays into Palestine. The influential Orthodox Christian theologian John of Damascus (c.675-c.749) referred to Muhammad as the Antichrist and as lecherous because he married more than the four wives permitted by the Qur'an.<sup>6</sup> John also considered Islam's holiest shrine, the Kaaba in Mecca, a shrine to Venus. Muslims in the period before the Crusades were considered pagans and Muhammad a depraved, sensual and violent man (O'Neill: 5). Although modern scholarship has refuted these caricatures of Islam, they still persist, especially among very conservative or fundamentalist Christians. The events of 9/11/01 and subsequent attacks by the Al-Qaeda network have helped keep negative perceptions of Muslims alive.

### 3. TRIUMPHALISM IN ISLAM

The treatment of Jews and Christians in the Muslim world has been mixed. As "People of the Book," they were treated as a protected minority (*dhimmi*); but they were second-class citizens in several ways:

- a. They could not be appointed to governmental positions.
- b. They could not build new synagogues or churches, or even repair existing ones without governmental permission, and could hold no public religious services.
- c. They were forced to wear a distinctive patch on their clothing identifying them as non-Muslims.
- d. They were forbidden to carry weapons, ride horses or build homes larger than Muslims ones.
- e. They were required to show respect by rising from their seats when a Muslim wanted to sit down and to dismount from their donkeys or mules if a Muslim passed by (Duran: 109-10, Firestone: 55).

In practice some of these restrictions were relaxed under more liberal Muslim regimes, such as that during Spain's "Golden Age" (950-1150) when Jews enjoyed considerable freedom. But, just as it was much easier to be a Christian than a Jew in Europe, so too, it was easier to be Muslim than Jewish or Christian in countries in the Middle East and North Africa that came under Islamic rule in the eighth and ninth centuries. It must be said in fairness that Christians, in these areas found certain aspects of Islam attractive, such as its less complex, non-Trinitarian monotheism and its absence of the kind of racism and political powerlessness that had made Mid-East Christians second-class citizens in the Byzantine Empire. Still, when the religion that

has triumphed politically in a region affords preferential treatment to its own, there is a strong incentive to join the victors.

### III. CONCLUSION

The power of Christian triumphalism began to recede with the Protestant Reformation and the blunting of Papal authority over Europe, and even more so with the Enlightenment and its challenge to Christian dogma. Enlightenment thinking—especially the writings of English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) had a profound impact on several of America's founding figures such as Franklin, Jefferson and Madison. The latter two crafted the First Amendment's guarantees of religious freedom and the prohibition of a state-sponsored religion. Nonetheless, a kind of state-sponsored political and religious triumphalism helped the nation justify the subjugation and near annihilation of the Indian nations.

In the Islamic world the demise of the Islamic Caliphate in Turkey after World War I has had the effect of blunting Muslim triumphalism. However, the terrible civil war just ended in the Sudan during which two million people, mainly from the Christian and Animist south of the country, lost their lives might be seen as another tragic example of the power of bad religion (cf. Duran: 56-7, 266-67). Furthermore, Islamic terrorism and the suicide tactics accompanying it are an example of the worst type of religiosity.

Finally, in Israel there are fundamentalist groups such as *Gush Emunim* (Block of the Faithful) who use the a few biblical texts (e.g., Gen. 15:18-21) to justify possession of all the areas where Palestinians live. Their settlement activity in the West Bank and threatened refusal to abandon settlements in Gaza, as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is advocating, have complicated peace prospects.

So the legacy of the monotheistic religions of the West is mixed. They have produced an inspiring vision of human dignity under a compassionate deity who demands ethical conduct, especially social justice. They have promoted learning to a remarkable degree thus benefiting humanity as a whole. But they have also fostered a triumphalism with at times disastrous effects on persecuted minority faiths.

During the past 100-plus years, there has been a significant attitudinal change away from triumphalism among the more liberal branches of both the monotheistic faiths and the other major religions: the worldwide interfaith movement. It began with the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago and was given impetus by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Since then, there have been two more Parliaments (Cape Town in 1999 and Barcelona in 2004) and the burgeoning of grass-roots interfaith groups, especially in the US, Canada and Europe. It is a hopeful sign of a new era of tolerance and understanding but faces strong resistance from extremists within Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other traditions.

The tragic dimension of the monotheistic religions mirrors the tragic dimensions of human existence generally. All aspects of human life—family life, politics, business, even the arts—are tinged with a falling short, an imperfection, or what Buddhists might call the elements of impermanence. Yet, the power of hope is

also an aspect of the human condition that has powerful roots in all faiths but perhaps most deeply in the messianic vision of monotheism with its belief that we are capable of great ethical progress.

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<sup>1</sup> The situation of Hebrew slaves is an exception, though there were rules for their humane treatment. See, for example, Exodus 21:2-11 which requires that Hebrew slaves be freed after six years of service.

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish writer Achad ha-Am stated that, “More than the Jews having kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews.”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus may have been quoting a popular slogan about hating enemies.

<sup>4</sup> Actually, Jews had been important medical practitioners since at least the start of the rabbinic era, in part because of Talmudic laws concerning hygiene and the laws of kashrut which included detailed inspections of the carcasses of animals to detect impurities.

<sup>5</sup> This was especially true during the so-called “Golden Age” of Spain (ca. 950-1150 CE) when Jews participated fully in the intellectual life of Muslim Andalusia. For example, the poet Judah ha-Levi (1075-1141) wrote elegant poetry in both Arabic and a revived Hebrew. See Menocal: 162.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad remained monogamous while his first wife Khadija was alive, and some of his multiple marriages thereafter were for the protection of the widows of those slain in the battles to conquer Mecca for Islam.

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