

Three Faiths

Religion may be defined as a combination of the relationship between an individual and a supreme being (or power) and a code of social justice revealed by the supreme being for communities and individuals to live by. This supreme being is usually termed God.

Three of the world's major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all sprang from the soil of the Middle East. Judaism is basic to both Christianity and Islam. God revealed His code of social justice in Judaism. Christians consider their faith to be a second revelation of this code of social justice toward which both Judaism and Christianity were striving.

In addition to their common roots, the three religions share many of the same beliefs and moral principles: the belief in one God (*Yahveh* in Hebrew, *Allah* in Arabic), the attainability of heaven, the importance of good works on earth and of love for one's neighbor.

Each of the three has special reverence for sites of worship in Palestine – in many cases these are the same sites. Jerusalem is the prime example; it is the most holy city for

Jews and Christians and one of three holy cities in Islam.

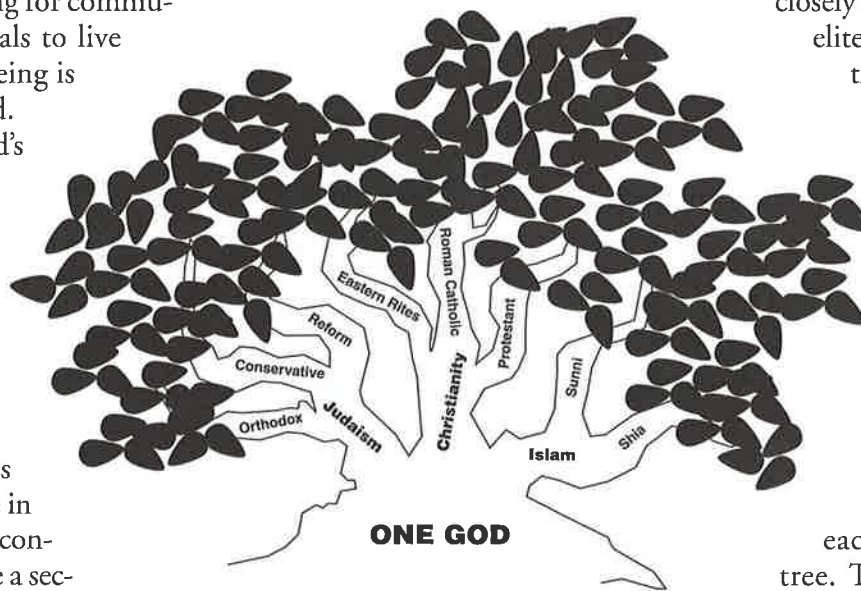
The followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are likewise all

especially those related to the prophets of the Old Testament.

The original followers of the three religious faiths were also all Semitic peoples who spoke, wrote, and read closely related languages. The Israelites of Judaism used Hebrew; the language of Christ was Aramaic; the Koran of Islam is written in Arabic. All of these languages are of the Semitic family and are ultimately derived from the same root or source.

As each of the three great religions grew in separate ways, so did divisions within each, as represented by the tree. The various sub-branches represent important variations in liturgy and doctrinal interpretation, but all basically share the same common principles.

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“People of the Book”, that is, the revelations received from God and written statements: the Old Testament or Torah, the Talmud, the Bible, and the Koran. The books share many of the same stories,

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Religion And Conflict

Throughout history, there have been conflicts between peoples of different religions. Sometimes these conflicts have been because of differences in religious beliefs; at other times, these conflicts were for other reasons.

In the Middle East, disagreements among peoples have frequently been described by classifying the parties involved according to their religious affiliation or by linking their religious identity to the conflict. This can be an unfair classification because it can give the impression that the parties are in disagreement over religious beliefs and/or that people of one faith have the same opinion on the issues involved. It is also a misleading classification because of the fundamental difference in attitude between the United States and the Middle East.

Hoping to avoid religious persecution, the United States instituted the concept of "separation of church and state" which means that one's religion is personal and not part of one's political relationship with the state.

However, in the Middle East, religion has both personal and political connotations. In the Middle East it was long ago thought that religious persecution could best be avoided by the "protection of the church by the state". In order to insure the continuation of all the religions and protect the rights of the

people of these religions, Jewish, Christian and Moslem communities follow their own codes of social justice with regard to many matters normally handled by the government in the U.S.

When the Ottoman Empire gained power in the fifteenth century, this special protection was



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formalized in something called the millet system. Leaders of the Jewish, Christian, and Moslem communities (or millets) were both the political and religious representatives of the people in their relationship with the officials of the Ottoman Empire. In matters of taxation, for example, the religious

leaders collected taxes from their communities, giving a portion to the Empire's rulers and keeping a portion for the maintenance of their communities. Decisions made by the religious councils in their sphere of jurisdiction were expected to be obeyed by the rulers of the Empire.

Today, each of the three major religions still has the authority to manage internally its own personal status laws, i.e., in matters of marriage, divorce, family law, and the like, while the state now manages civil laws of taxation, criminal justice, etc. In this way, people of the three faiths have lived peacefully together within Middle Eastern countries

and have done so for centuries. (For example, currently 10 predominantly Moslem countries have Jewish populations and nearly all have Christian populations).

It is important to remember that when one refers to a conflict in the Middle East as being between Jews and Moslems, it is usually not a religious disagreement. Instead, the religious groups are being referred to in their political sense. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians does not mean that Palestinians are against Judaism or that Israelis are against Christianity and Islam. Israeli Jews and Palestinian Christians and Moslems disagree over political rights of self-determination. ❁

Annual Fund Goal Surpassed!

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, ANERA surpassed its \$1.2 million goal for the 2002 Annual Fund (June 1, 2001 – May 31, 2002)!

Over \$1.3 million in donations raised through this year's Annual Fund enabled ANERA to continue high quality projects in education, health and job creation that strengthened thousands of communities in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. In partnership with local grassroots organizations, these projects are improving agricultural systems for farmers, providing low interest loans to small businesses, upgrading domestic water supplies and expanding health services. Your

gifts are improving academic training in key areas such as information technology, and increasing opportunities in education, culture and sports for youth, particularly,

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constructive projects with
positive results in these
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and need.*

boys and girls who are destitute, handicapped and orphaned.

In addition to building our long-term projects, your donations this

year enabled ANERA to carry out a major emergency relief program in Gaza and the West Bank, supplying over \$7 million in donated medical supplies, and over half a million dollars in food relief and providing cash grants to health and social service institutions serving the growing numbers of destitute Palestinian families.

ANERA extends its warmest thanks to the thousands of individuals and numerous foundations, corporations and civic institutions whose generous donations help ensure ANERA's ability to deliver constructive projects with positive results in these times of great difficulty and need. ❁

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If you have any questions concerning matching gift programs, please call Paula McNicholas, Director of Donor Development, at (202) 347-2558. ❁

Interns at ANERA

ANERA's important work this past year was made possible with help from the following hardworking and dedicated interns: Erin Neill, Lyndsay Thompson, Ariella Viehe, Luke Hall, and Maki Sato (in Jerusalem), and volunteers Lois Houghton, David Fabrycky, and Laura Merzig. ❁

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