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TOPIC:

**Warm and Cold Sources of Conflict and Conflict Resolution in
Abrahamic/Semitic Traditions**

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Warm and Cold Sources of Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Abrahamic/Semitic Traditions

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ABSTRACT:

All the three Abrahamic religions are considered as the monotheistic sources of violence around the globe. The Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments are criticized for encouraging radical religiosity, chauvinism and othering leading to violence in the name of religion while the Quran is blamed for promoting highly political religion which encourages violence in the name of Jihad. Both the militant movements affiliated to these religions and their leftist critics cherry-pick the verses of these holy books and demonstrate them as the religious grounds of radicalism leading to violent extremism. The current endeavor highlights such “warm” sources from the main religious books of these religions which can be/are used to promote violence and become sources of conflicts. It is opined that such sources are highly contextual, and not meant to be generalized in every situation. On the other hand, “cold” sources from these religious books are also unearthed as the timeless teachings of these religions which are both eternal and meant to be propagated to general public for the nurturing the society on peaceful and cooperative grounds so that they avoid conflicts in the first place and even if conflicts do arise, resolve them nobly.

Key Words: Abrahamic/Semitic, Conflict, Conflict Resolution,

Introduction

Studying peace and conflict is a human necessity and its pursuance is as old as the conflict itself. However, the recent examples of both assimilation and fragmentation of humanity in a rapidly changing world demonstrate the emergence of new ways and means of conflict initiation and call for novel and more strong ways of its containment and reduction. These approaches and means of the reduction/containment are fostered in more effective and productive ways in the field of Conflict Resolution. Regrettably, despite of the vitality of the role of religion in social fabric, the relation of CR with religion has become a focus of academic enterprises only in the recent past. At first, the religions, especially monotheistic ones, were considered as the sources of many conflicts, radicalism and violence around the globe. However, later on, religion became a stake holder and is now recognized, both in and outside the academic circles, as an effective tool and source of resolution and peacebuilding¹.

The current article analyses the teachings of all the three Semitic or Abrahamic religious traditions i.e., Judaism, Christianity and Islam, regarding their vulnerability in initiation of conflict and their intrinsic standpoint about conflict resolution. It is a historical fact that all the three religions, despite of the immensity of stress they lay on the maintenance of peace within societies, have historical accounts filled with blood. In order to understand the reasons behind these incidents, it is pertinent to delve deep

into the original textual sources of these religions to identify the warm areas of their teachings which can be (and most of the times are) used to justify violence and act as sources of conflict. Similarly, instead of only invoking the strategic groups and peace workers to use religious bases for promoting peace, some of the textual religious grounds are identified and highlighted and made ready-at-hand for the conflict resolution practitioners as cold areas from the texts of these religions. The following section discusses the definitions of religion, conflict and conflict resolution*.

Religion:

The definitions of religion are divided into functional and substantive and those defining religion in terms of '*what it does*' are classified as functional. For example, formation of identities on the basis of a set of symbols evoking collective emotions creating social solidarity is considered as a functional dimension of religion². The substantive discusses the content or *what it believes in* and is excluded from the scope of this article to avoid lengthening.

Semitic Religions:

The word Semitic denotes a class of ethnicities and languages originated approximately in 4000 BC such as Canaanites, Aramaean tribes, Akkadians, Hebrews and Arabs. Their original locus is considered as the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia and Arabian Peninsula³. The biblical sources record that these people are the descendants of Shem, the son of Noah and hence the name Semite⁴. Modern philological and historical sciences use the term in a broader way to include all the peoples who originated from the Semites, however, the word Semitic in religious context is primarily used for the three major monotheistic religions which consider the prophet Abraham as their Patriarch. They include Judaism, Christianity and Islam⁵.

Conflict:

The word conflict is originated from the Latin word *configure* which means '*to strike together*'⁶. Galtung elaborates that conflict means '*shocking together*' and the things that shock together are "*goals held by the parties*" in a way that the fulfillment and actualization of one excludes and negates the fulfillment and actualization of the other⁷. According to James Schellenberg (1996) conflict means "*opposition between individuals and groups on the basis of competing interests, different identities, and/or different attitudes*"⁸.

Religious Conflict:

Religious conflict is commonly considered as the one in which the conflicting parties come from different religious orientations (either within or without different faith traditions)⁹. Firestone defines that it is an ideological state of war revealing aggression on the basis of "*threats to the sacred values of the worldview*". However, according

* These definitions are reproduced here arbitrarily in order to build an understanding of the discussed terms and outline the scope of study.

to him this may or may not include armed engagements for example in cases of Cold war and underlying Islamic Jihad or struggle with the infidelity of the world around it¹⁰.

Conflict Resolution:

Conflict Resolution is defined, broadly, by Schellenberg as “*a marked reduction in social conflict as a result of conscious settlement of the issues between parties*”¹¹. Ramsbotham et al. elaborates the ideal conflict resolution as a comprehensive process in which: “*the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and transformed. That the behavior is no longer violent, attitudes are no longer hostile and the structure of the conflict has been changed*”¹².

Warm and Cold Sources of Conflict in Abrahamic/Semitic Traditions:

The teachings which are used to justify violence in the name of Semitic religions comes primarily from the verses and sources which are cherry-picked by their proponents in order to enhance the impact of their politico-violent claims and strategies. The same approach is used here to *identify* and *highlight* the religious grounds of such manipulations. Those textual grounds which can be/are used to justify violence are termed as *warm sources*. While those which are used by the communities and pundits of these religions for establishing and maintaining peace in their surrounding societies are called *cold sources*[†].

Warm Sources:

It has been identified that along with many other vulnerable aspects of the religious teachings of Abrahamic faiths, the following are of utmost importance and are similar in all the three Abrahamic traditions.

1. God of War:

Considering the holy books of the Abrahamic tradition and the blatant manifestation of violence in the name of these religions[‡], it seems to the modern reader as if the God in these books is primarily interested in war and subjugation of His enemies through human efforts. For example, here are many passages of the Jewish Bible, which if cherry-picked, depict God as a warrior¹³. In such passages, God not only seems to direct His people to wage wars for divine cause, rather He Himself wages wars¹⁴. In the same way, the destruction of enemy seems to be of such great importance to the Jewish God that whenever He demands allegiance from the Israelites, He promises the annihilation of their enemies in return and vice versa¹⁵. Similarly, regarding Christianity’s approach of God, C. H. Ren says that the truth brought by Jesus Christ to the world is a “*banner of conflict*”¹⁶. To accept Christianity means to abandon every relationship one has and be in the state of conflict with the society around him¹⁷. This is endorsed by the declaration of Jesus who says that he has not been sent to bring peace to the earth but sword and fire, and that his message is meant to create cleavages in family relations and strain in the society through dividing it into the

[†] However, the relevant verses are not quoted directly in the following discussion to avoid lengthening.

[‡] See e.g, (Graf, 2005); (Juergensmeyer, 2003); (Kaminsky, 2007); (Schwartz, 1997) etc.

factions of believers and non-believers¹⁸. The same out-of-context selection of the passages from the Quran portrays the Almighty Allah as a god of war too, where He commands His prophet to rouse the believers for fighting¹⁹ and demands utmost sincerity in the religion by being involved in military Jihad²⁰.

All such misconstrued and non-contextual verses of the Bibles and the Quran suggest that the God of Abrahamic tradition is more interested in wars than in peace and prosperity of the humanity.

2. Election Theology/ Religious Chauvinism:

According to Jewish teachings, the election theology means the biblical notion of the divine election or the chosen-ness of the Israelites over all the other nations of the world²¹. This chosen-ness is not only an essential element in Jewish theology, it is one of the prominent factors of Jewish identity²². Despite of being a binding and sustaining force to keep Jewish nation alive throughout the history, it has also become a baseline for all Jewish militancy and discriminatory orientation. Neikerk Bermadevi elaborates that the chosen-ness of Jews suggest that they see themselves as *“superior, picked out from the rest of humanity because they are special, or better, or more deserving than any other group of people”*²³. The chosen-ness of Israelites is considered as one of the greatest sources of othering which becomes part of structural causes leading to structural violence²⁴.

Although Christianity does not overtly believe in election of Christians as unique and superior, however, the rebuking attitude of Jesus towards the Jewish leaders and temple priests²⁵ is used to promote religious chauvinism in his adherents. Such accounts and teachings, consequently, caused the church to grow into one of the most egotistical, selective and supercilious religious institute of the world²⁶.

Similarly, in Islamic perspective, the Israelites are now considered as deposed from the elected position and Muslims are considered as the new selected people of God for the service of mankind²⁷. Syed Qutb elaborates that to understand the true nature and position of Muslim nation, they should know that they have been *“raised specially for the purpose of assuming the leadership of mankind [at all times]”*²⁸. And adds that it is the duty of the believers that they should hold fast to their faith and take pride in it. Their adornments should mark them distinctive as servants of God and make them stand out and exceed all the other nations of the world²⁹. The inflated pride of being selected has created discriminatory attitude in the later generations of the Muslim Ummah because instead of considering the immensity of the task, they have become chauvinistic³⁰. Their literature contains theoretical grounds for this behaviour which creates an identity-based discrimination against ‘others’. Similarly, Al-Qahtani emphasizes more radically that even if a person abandons polytheism and pronounce the statement of Tawheed, he will not be considered as Muslim until he demonstrates his enmity, anger and opposition towards non-believers and polytheists³¹. Additionally, according to Al-Qahtani ‘enmity for the sake of Allah’ not only include

verbal denunciation, but practical aggressive actions such as taking up arms against God's enemies, shunning them, and staying far from them³².

3. Violence against other nations:

There are a number of passages in the Jewish Bible which can be used to provoke hatred against other nations and convince its followers to follow a path of aggression towards infidels. For example, in the verses in which the God promise Israelites to enter the land promised for them, He commands them to *“demolish them completely, and smash their standing-stones to pieces”* in order to acquire the land and live there as the chosen people of God³³. In other places, God promises them that He will do wonders and miracles for Israelites but they are in return required to thrash places of the worship of the enemies, and their sacred poles, *“because [Israelites] are not to bow down to any other god; since Adonai-whose very name is Jealous- is a jealous God”*³⁴. Jewish scriptures are replete with divine instructions commanding nations such as Amalekites, Canaanites, Hittites etc. to be smitten and crushed till their last men. Their conduct is always to be abhorred by Jews and Jews are instructed that if they followed these nations, misfortune will fall on them.³⁵. The most pernicious fact related to the blotting out of these nations is that many interpreters still believe that the annihilation of nations such as Amalekite is yet to take place in the messianic era³⁶. Many Jews consider Muslims or Christians as equivalent of Amalek even today³⁷.

The Christianity's New Testament does not contain verses inciting violence against other nations; however, they also believe in the Old Testament, therefore, they also possess discriminatory attitudes against other nations. This can be testified from the fact that such statements regarding Amalek and other nations were used by many racist Christians against the blacks in the civil crisis of 60s in American countries³⁸. Although, the New Testament does not contain such visible verses which demands violence against other nations. However, Christian history testifies that the Christian church has consistently remained anti-Semitic throughout the history³⁹.

4. Holy War/Just War/Jihad

The book of Joshua is replenished with stories of wars waged in order to capture lands and cities that come in the way of Israelites during their holy expedition towards the promised land⁴⁰. All of these wars were not discretionary, rather they were enjoined upon Israelites by their God⁴¹. Firestone refer to Israelites as 'armies of God' because he elaborates that in such passages God gives them strategies as warriors, commands them to uproot their enemies with genocidal tactics and participates in the fights Himself. He states that such wars should, therefore, be termed as holy wars because they are sanctioned, commanded and even waged by God⁴².

Similarly, Christianity has also displayed two types of responses to war and peace, two of which according to Paul Hanson are: a) Silence of the Church and b) Just war theory⁴³. The concept of just war was primarily conceived by Aristotle in the fourth-century BC⁴⁴ and was enhanced by Cicero after second-century BC. However, later

on it was developed and refined according to Christian's beliefs by Christian theologians and canonists⁴⁵. According to Christian teachings, Just War had to be the one based on seven conditions[§] according to classic writings⁴⁶, which can be summed up into two principles: a) the justifiable conditions to wage war^{**} and, b) the justified limits methods and strategies^{††} to be used in war⁴⁷. Historically, the attitude of Christianity regarding war was developed in three different strands which according to Jacques Ellul (1969) are: a) Just War as a Compromise with the traditions of the then world; b) non-violence; and c) Vigilantism/Violence carried out by Individuals⁴⁸. The validation of the state's power and violence by the Church was the compromise of Christianity with the tradition or fashion of the then world⁴⁹. This validation in turn became the bedrock of the development of the just war theory⁵⁰. Ellul maintains that instead of upholding its own core teachings, Christianity leaned on Roman traditions (especially after the conversion of Constantine⁵¹) and developed its attitudes towards the violence against external and internal fronts⁵². Similarly, despite of official disapproval, vigilantism remained prevalent in the history of Christianity since the beginning. Hermits of the third and fourth centuries near the Nile valley would descend to the cities and beat up people and smash everything in sight with their sticks as a notion of purifying violence. They based their behaviour on the famous biblical passages telling how Jesus lashed the merchants and drove them out of the temple⁵³. Such attitudes remained prevalent in the twentieth century in the form of attacks on the abortion clinics, night clubs etc.⁵⁴.

Like the two precedent religions, Islam also has Jihad as the most important, widely used, yet the most misunderstood/misused concept of Islam. The word Jihad has a very different meaning, however, in this passage, only the concept of Jihad in the sense of '*military struggle carried out in the way of Allah*', will be discussed. The types of academic orientations towards the concept of Jihad are divided into three types by Muhammad Abu-Nimer (2000-2001). These are: a) War and Jihad studies; b) War and Peace studies; and c) Peacebuilding and Non-violence studies^{‡‡}. For some scholars Jihad in the sense of fighting is carried out for obvious reasons in Islam, both defensively as well as aggressively⁵⁵. This approach is evident in the works of scholars who interpret the whole Deen as a divine directive for dominating goodness over evil through political and military endeavors and consequently, justify the establishment of religious statehood on earth⁵⁶. The aggressive interpretation of Jihad

§ 1. Just cause (self-defense against attacks; to retrieve something illegally taken and chastisement of evil[§]); 2. Sanctification as Just by a lawful authority; 3. Just maneuvers to subjugate the enemy; 4. The difference of the gains should be higher than the costs/damages; 5. Ascertainment of Victory; 6. war should be the last option; 7. The ceasefire/reconciliation treaty should end on deals not leading to another war[§]

** *Jus ad bellum*

†† *Jus in bello*

‡‡ The war and peace will be discussed in the *warm sources*.

is elaborated by Syed Qutb in his famous book, Milestones, in which he emphasizes that the establishment of “*dominion of God on earth, the abolishing of dominion of man, the taking away of the sovereignty from the usurper to revert it to God, and the bringing about of the enforcement of the Divine law (shariah) and the abolition of man-made laws cannot be achieved only through preaching*”⁵⁷. He emphasizes that Jihad should not only be pursued for defending Islam, rather, it should be carried out for demolishing any power that stands in its way and tries to hinder it from preaching its message freely to the public⁵⁸. Abu-Nimer, therefore, mentions that modern ‘studies of war and Jihad’ hypothesize that “*Islamic religion and tradition lend themselves easily in a unique way to the justification of war and violence as the primary means of settlement of conflicts*”⁵⁹.

The faction which explains Jihad as a defensive option base their opinion on verses which direct Muslims to fight the non-believers in self-defense. For example, the people who did not fight for helping the oppressed in other cities and places were condemned and scorned with divine displeasure⁶⁰. Therefore, scholars of this inclination suggest that Islam legitimizes violence only in defense “*in limited and well-defined contexts*” for the settlement of conflicts⁶¹. Scholars of this school of thought emphasize that the objective of Islam is to preserve faith and its value system by achieving peace in the society through justice. Since the defense of justice, peace and Islamic values, cannot be achieved only through nonviolent means, therefore, using conditional force is necessary and due to which consequently, some kinds of war become permissible and/or required while the rest of the types of war are forbidden⁶².

5. Messianism/ Apocalypticism:

Apocalypticism means the blatant conflict of evil and good which will be overcome by the will of God in the end of times, as a result of which the followers of God will find succor, success and salvation⁶³. Consequently, evil will be utterly destroyed and vanished. While Messianism means belief in a savior of humankind⁶⁴. Jewish Apocalypticism writings are based on the predictive doctrine of God’s intervention in the course of future events, judgement of the enemies of Israel, restoration of the Jewish kingdom through a militant Messiah and eternalization of this kingdom forever after⁶⁵. It suggests the eschatological messianic era in which the kingdom of God will be established in heavens and on earth after bringing judgement upon Gentiles and enemies of Israel⁶⁶. A Messiah, son of David ben Jesse, will come as a harbinger of the age of peace and tranquility⁶⁷. However, this optimistic era will be upheld on the discriminatory subjugation of other nations for the sake of Israel. Kingdoms and nations who will not serve Israel, will perish. The progeny of those who oppresses Israelites will bow down to her⁶⁸. And according to Eisen, God as a prejudiced, blood-spattered fighter⁶⁹ will smash the enemy nations for not recognizing Him and His foothold, Israel⁷⁰.

Similarly, Christian apocalyptic literature is primarily based on the already established

Jewish Apocalypticism with certain similarities as well as differences⁷¹.

The Christian eschatologists have used much of the Old Testament's books and passages for developing Christian concepts of apocalypse. However, Ernst Kasemann (a German, Lutheran theologian) states that: "*apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology*"⁷². This is because Jesus has always taught about the kingdom of God⁷³. Christianity also preaches that the Kingdom of God will mark the time of separation of good and evil. However, it does not predict the judgement of Gentiles only and differentiates salvation of groups according to their ethnicity. Rather, it emphasizes on individual deeds while emphasizing on affiliation with Jesus and affirming Him as the Son of God. According to Christian teachings those who do not acknowledge Jesus will not enter the kingdom⁷⁴. According to Stallman, Jesus preached that those who pretend as righteous will be judged because of their intrinsic wickedness. Stallman opines that these predictions might be considered against Jews due to their self-proclaimed righteousness and those Christians who do not live according to the ways of Christianity and only name themselves as Christians⁷⁵. Jesus taught that since Jews had rejected the anointed one, God will choose the unworthy and even the gentiles to inherit His everlasting kingdom over the Jews who considered only themselves to be its heirs⁷⁶. Norman Cohn elaborates that Christian Apocalypticism possesses the radical and revolutionary elements to violently transform the world to pave the way for the upcoming kingdom of God⁷⁷. The consequence of such violent theologies regarding the end times can be seen in many instances of the military actions of many Christians. For example, in 1999, a group of Christians was arrested by Israeli police and were deported to the US because they plotted a "*bloody apocalypse to hasten the Second Coming of Jesus Christ*". In order to make it happen, they planned to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock, which are the most holy shrines of Muslims in Jerusalem⁷⁸.

Few other aspects of Christian Apocalyptic theology include wars with Gog-Magog, the War of Armageddon and the role of Antichrist. Gog and Magog are biblical names for tribes or groups of people following evil forces and are against the people of God⁷⁹. The wars with Gog and Magog are considered as the curtain raiser and preliminary to the final battle of Armageddon in the end times. According to many Christians during and after the Cold-War era, the nation entitled as Gog was modern day Russia. They believed that even if America tried to make peace with Russia, it would not happen because according to them, "*there will be no peace until Christ returns and sits on David's Throne*"⁸⁰. Similarly, Antichrist, the notorious evil incarnate, polar opposite and enemy of Jesus Christ is one of the main characters of end times theology of Christianity⁸¹. He is, and has always been, considered as a Jew because to be a counterfeit of Jesus Christ, he has to be of Jewish origin⁸². Halsall states according to Christian's belief the Antichrist will lead the nations into the final battle by incorporating demons into their minds, and a bloody battle will take place⁸³.

Similarly, Halsall extensively discusses the implications of Armageddon theology⁸⁸ in the current world politics, its involvement in the establishment of Israel and the preparation of the Christian rightists for the end times. She points out that many people, especially those with fundamentalist orientation, strongly believe that the era in which they are living is the end times era and assert that people will themselves ignite this war which will lead to the subsequent destruction of the world by nuclear annihilation⁸⁴.

Until 15th century, it was taught that Christian church was the direct heir to the Hebraic religion and believed that the prophecies regarding the Jewish restoration in the land of their Prophets was fulfilled in the past with the return of the Jews to Palestine in times of Cyrus in 6th century BC⁸⁵. However, when the Hebrew Bible was translated into native vernaculars in that era, it became available for interpretations by many individuals. This started Hebraic or Judaic revival and instead of simple teachings of Christ, numerous Christian ministers relented to the war stories of Old Testament. It became the only reference of history for Christians which made them preoccupied with the world to come and turned them to millenarianism and Messianism. Both of these theologies are the remnants of Judaic traditions⁸⁶. These theologies made them concerned about the establishment of Israel and the return of Jews to their promised land. The Christian rightist in this case started to love Israel, without having love for Jews⁸⁷.

Islamic perspective of Messianism is similar to that of Christianity's, in that it also suggests that Jesus Christ will come in the end of time and will save the world from the enormity of mischief and will establish a time of peace and tranquility⁸⁸. Similar to Messianism, majority Muslims also believe in Mahdism which means the belief in a prophesized redeemer who will restore the prophetic mode of Caliphate and will be a harbinger of a new era of peace and harmony. He will be guided and will guide the Muslim Ummah to the path of success before the end of time and will make Islam prevail in all the world⁸⁹. According to Islamic concept, the apocalypse will happen through the following stages: the over-overflowing of earth with injustice and repression of Muslims by foreign forces, the ascend of two saviors i.e. Mahdi, who will unite the Muslims and Jesus who will support Mahdi and finally crush the evil. Although there is no reference made to such concepts in the Quran, the books of Hadith are replete with narrations related to the descend of Jesus and apocalypse (which are out of the scope of this article). According to a poll by Pew Research Centre in 9 majority-Muslim's countries, almost fifty per cent or more of the total population believe in the

⁸⁸ In the words of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Armageddon in Hebrew means the Hill of Megiddo (*Har* in Hebrew means mountain). It is a Palestinian city connecting Syria and Egypt and has remained as a spot of many wars in the past. This place is chosen as a symbol for cosmic battle in the end times in which the kings following the demonic leadership will carry out war against the forces of Almighty (Lerner, 2020).

appearance of Mahdi in their times (the concept is more prevailing in Afghanistan (83%) Iraq (72%) and more than 60% in Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan and Tunisia)⁹⁰.

According to a New York Times opinion writer Mustafa Akyol, it is not the coming of Mahdi which is problematic, the exploitation of these prophecies is harmful such as in case of Islamic State who claim that they are bringing the prophecies into reality⁹¹.

Cold Sources:

1. Attributes of God:

Despite of the notorious notions of Abrahamic God as the man of war, God introduces Himself in all the three religious' traditions with attributes demonstrating kindness, mercy and love for humanity.

In Judaism, the attributes defining Adonai include: Elohay Mishpat: The God of Justice^{***}; and Elohay Selichot: The God of forgiveness^{†††}. In Exodus, God introduces Himself as: “*ADONAI*] is God, merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in grace and truth; showing grace to the thousandth generation, forgiving offenses, crimes and sins; yet not exonerating the guilty⁹². Another attribute used for the God of Judaism is *Shalom*. The word shalom means peace but is also used for the merciful attributes of God. This shows that the God of Jewish people is magnificent and merciful, that he forgives and gives chances to his people so that they may learn to be good⁹³. Jewish teachings also describe God as Just. However, his justice is always mitigated and tempered by His mercy. He accepts sincere repentance of the sinners and forgives them and is always ready to extend His compassion to the one who is compassionate to his fellow beings⁹⁴.

Similarly, in Christianity numerous places in the New Testament demonstrate that the God is the one who values peace, mercy and compassion and is all-loving and compassionate towards His creation. In one of the passages of Matthew, Jesus reminds his followers that the previous law commanded you to love your neighbour and hate your enemy. However, in order to become sons of the Father in heaven, he orders them to love their enemies and bless those who curse them, be good to those who hate them and pray for the one who takes advantages of them and torture them. Because, the Father does not discriminate among His people and bestow His blessings, such as sunlight and rain, on them equally⁹⁵.

Like its predecessors, Islam also believe in a God who is both Compassionate and Merciful⁹⁶. He is all-Forgiving⁹⁷. He not only enjoins mercy and forgives the sinners; He orders His staunch believers to forgive in gravest situations rather than escalating negative attitudes⁹⁸.

2. Conflict Avoidance

^{***}Isiah 30:18 “And therefore the Lord will wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgement”

^{†††}Nehemiah 9:17 “... but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness....”

All the three Abrahamic religions emphasize avoidance of conflict either by commanding the followers to avoid evil deeds which can cause conflicts or by replacing evil occurrences with goodness. In Judaism, the Ten Commandments are essential for Jewish faith. These guidelines are meant to maintain the order of the society by nourishing it to avoid conflicts in the first place. For example, murder, adultery, false witnessing and coveting one's neighbours etc.⁹⁹. Each of these commandments when fulfilled in true spirit will ultimately make the society peaceful.

Some of the conflict avoidance strategies the Christian Bible suggests include: replacing evil with good, favoring collective good and virtue, preferring peaceful living, avoiding vengeance etc.¹⁰⁰. It stresses that the followers of Jesus should be ready to hear rather than to react and should be "*slow to wrath*"¹⁰¹. Similarly, it emphasizes that even if one gets angry in a conflicting situation, the sun should not go down upon his anger, i.e., he should overcome his anger as soon as possible and should not let the evil force overcome him¹⁰². Another strategy of avoiding conflicts in Christianity can be deduced from the passage of Matthew which commands the believers to either go for a dialogue with the brother with whom one is in conflict or arrange an arbitrator from among the community to resolve issue between him and his brother. However, if the aggrieved brother persists on his alienation from the one who is trying to resolve the conflict, then the latter should avoid him and consider him as heathen rather than quarreling with him further on¹⁰³.

Likewise, the teachings of Quran instruct its followers to follow a path where there is minimum encounter with conflicting situations. Islam teaches its followers to approach matters from the end which least result in reactionary conflicts. For example, Maulana Waheed quotes the first Quranic verse, "*Read*"¹⁰⁴ and says that Islam does not promote actions which would result in unnecessary hurdles. He explains that if at the beginning of the Islamic movement, Muhammad ﷺ would have started from cleansing the Kaaba off the three hundred and sixty idols, or Allah had commanded him to confront the Persian and Sassanid empires etc., none of these acts would have yielded anything but irresolvable conflicts in response and the targets would have remained unachieved. Conversely, the Prophet ﷺ undertook the path of conflict avoidance, that is, reading Quran and spreading it with one-sided peaceful tactics despite of the hurdles from the non-believers¹⁰⁵. Similarly, during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, instead of putting themselves in life-threatening danger, the Almighty commanded and encouraged the believers to leave the place and migrate so that they may not be subjugated to further unbearable persecution or, in turn, making unnecessary and unprofitable retaliations¹⁰⁶. In fact, those who did not migrate and remained under unnecessary persecution were admonished¹⁰⁷. Likewise, one of the main causes of conflict initiation is provocation. Allah prohibits the believers from provoking others by insulting their deities¹⁰⁸. The believers are also guided that even if they have to present their religion to other people, they should not take a rough and coarse tone and ridicule them. Instead, they are commanded to put forward your proposal "*in the best*

of manners”¹⁰⁹. Even if some of the people, meanwhile, want to debate and argue, it should be responded with kindness, gentleness and good speech. The importance and compulsion of such a behaviour can be derived from the incident that Allah commands Moses and Haroon to carry the best manner of speech even in front of Pharaoh¹¹⁰. The different teachings of the Abrahamic traditions regarding conflict avoidance can be clustered in different strategies, some of which are as follows.

a. Deterrence as means of Conflict Avoidance

Along with the Abrahamic laws to resolve conflicts by addressing the underlying issues, there are laws which deal to post-conflict situations and impose severe punishments and penalties on the perpetrators of the conflict and violence. The severity of these laws is considered as barbaric in Western mind; however, they are meant to be a source of deterrence. For example, in Jewish law it is said that if a man kills another man or kidnaps him, the culprit in both the cases shall be put to death¹¹¹. Likewise, in Exodus, God forbids His followers from troubling other human beings because He avows that He will listen to their cry of orphans and widows who are tortured and will kill the Jews with His sword to make *their* wives widows and children orphans in [the compensation of the aggrieved]¹¹².

Similarly, in Quran, Allah forbids the believers from making Fasaad⁺⁺⁺ in the world which is one of most abhorred things in His sight¹¹³. Similarly, He commands them not to weigh unjustly, make people short of their belongings, and spread disorder in the land¹¹⁴ causing structural violence (fasaad). Similarly, people spreading violence are commanded to be punished severely by authorities either by killing them, crucifying them or amputating them with opposite upper and lower limbs and exiling them from their land¹¹⁵. This severity in punishment again is meant to cause deterrence and curtailment of such acts.

b. Ethics as a source of Conflict Avoidance:

Abrahamic religions lay much stress on ethical conduct of the individuals. These ethical instructions not only build the individual personalities of its believers but also act as a source of harmony in the society. For example, the Jewish Bible condemns false reporting, deceitful planning against others and creating misunderstandings between people or groups¹¹⁶. It commands its followers to avoid spreading false rumors and joining perjured testimonies about others¹¹⁷. Psalm 5 stresses that God is not the one who takes pleasure in wickedness, in fact, He abhors the evildoers, deceitful people and liars¹¹⁸. Instead, in Psalm 1, people who reject wickedness, ways of sinners and scoffers are entitled as the blessed ones¹¹⁹. Some of the verses highlight the sources of social conflict such as theft (in all its possible forms), fraudulent dealings including even lying, coercion and following multitude in wrongful deeds¹²⁰ as sources of conflict. Therefore, Jewish moral teachings direct the followers to avoid

⁺⁺⁺ all sorts of evil activities, including violence, which lead to trouble in the society (P. 1230, ف س د, (Keranwi, 2001)

them in the first place. Even the dietary laws forbid the Israelites and the Muslims to eat things which are aggressive in their core. The animals which are allowed to be eaten are all those which possess docile and peaceful behavior¹²¹. This shows the commitment of the Abrahamic traditions to inculcate peaceful behavior in its followers and reduce aggression in them in any way possible.

Similarly, verses of the New Testament teach the following guidelines for the believers to acquire in order to remain pious in sight of the Father in the heavens and live peaceably in the societies. These are: abandoning fornication, murder, false witnessing¹²², endorsing equal and just treatment to others which one wants for oneself¹²³ especially in business dealings¹²⁴, prioritizing judgement, mercy and faith over petty rituals¹²⁵, avoiding anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and bad communication with other so as not to provoke them¹²⁶. Christianity also abstains its followers to avoid blaspheming and vain brawling because these things lead to ungodliness which in turn leads to strives¹²⁷. The followers of Christianity are also taught to remain loyal to administrative institutions and support them in their good work instead of disobeying them in hard times¹²⁸. Christianity does not allow its adherents to judge one another, but to keep the society harmonized and whole, it directs that people should look for the evil in a fellow's heart. This should not be done to ridicule him but to aid him to adhere to God's will¹²⁹. The impact of the moral upbringing of its adherents by Christianity is evident from the fact that although many Christians were emotionally stirred in the name of anti-Semitism, there were many German and other European Christians who fought Nazi's on every possible front¹³⁰. Along with the ideal teachings of replacing evil with good, Christianity also teaches its followers to nip evil in the bud¹³¹. It teaches that firm and timely action against the troublemaker restores the peace of a community. Since it is evil that disrupts the social harmony of the society and cause conflicts, therefore, eradication of evil is important¹³².

c. **Effective Communication**

Communication can become a major source of both initiation and resolution of conflicts, therefore, to avoid conflicts it is necessary to keep both the verbal and non-verbal communication in good bearings. Abrahamic teachings lay great importance on good, truthful¹³³ and effective communication. Some of the common teachings of Judaism and Christianity regarding conflict free communication comes from Psalms and Proverbs. These teachings assert that soft communication can even turn a bitter situation into friendly one while harshness in language can stir strives¹³⁴. Fitly spoken words are like golden apples fitted into silvers¹³⁵ and wisely used tongue ensures health in one's spirituality and dealings¹³⁶. Similarly, all the three Abrahamic religions emphasize on truthful speaking and avoidance of spreading rumors¹³⁷ and slandering others¹³⁸. The Quran commands its believers to talk straight to the point¹³⁹ and talk leniently even in front of harsh and bitter people as Musa was commanded to talk softly in front of Pharaoh¹⁴⁰. These religions invoke people to remain silent in most of the cases especially in times of anger and conflicts¹⁴¹. Although Quran, does

not directly talk about remaining silent, however, it does criticize useless talks¹⁴² and appreciates those who avoid vain gatherings and discussions¹⁴³.

3. Conflict Resolution

Despite of the above teachings of the Abrahamic traditions regarding conflict avoidance, when situations of conflict do arise due to human interactions, other injunctions are given to maintain the overall peace of the society regarding effective usage of different domains of life. These domains serve as effective sources of conflict resolution. Two of these are:

a. Compensation through Law:

In Judaism, it is reiterated in many places in the Bible that a loss of the aggrieved should be compensated equally even life for a life or monetary recompense¹⁴⁴. Such laws show the concern of the Bible to manage and resolve conflict from aggravating even on the grassroots level of the society by resolving it through curbing down the anger and loss of the aggrieved.

Although Christianity emphasizes to sort out conflicts and bitter situations through love rather than relenting on law, it still acknowledges the importance of abiding to the law of governing bodies in order to maintain peace¹⁴⁵. Islam proposes a complete system for maintaining the peace and resolving post-conflict issues. These injunctions include deterrent punishments of the culprit¹⁴⁶, arbitration in order to establish mutual consent and settlement¹⁴⁷, and moral teachings etc.

b. Forgiveness

One of the most effective and long-lasting strategy of the Abrahamic faiths to resolve conflicts is forgiveness. These faiths encourage their followers to forgive and disentangle themselves from unnecessary anger, revenge and conflicts.

It is promised in the New Testament that those who forgive others will be forgiven¹⁴⁸. Even when Peter asked Jesus about the number of times, he should forgive a person who trespasses against him, Jesus said “*Until seventy times seven*”¹⁴⁹.

Quran repeatedly mentions forgiveness as a virtue upheld by the successful people. It says that Allah’s love, His forgiveness and the paradise, encompassing the width of heavens and earth, will be earned by those who control their anger and forgive others¹⁵⁰ and, therefore, withdraw from needless reactions¹⁵¹. Islam does not rely only on idealistic principles which cannot be fulfilled at all times. Although, Quran asserts that one who defend himself with equal response of evil, will not be blamed. Yet, patience and forgiveness as a courageous conduct is deemed of high value¹⁵². Believers are not only motivated to forgive people of their own faith, rather, they are encouraged to forgive even those who do not believe in Allah and let them be judged only by Allah for whatever they have done because the paths of righteousness and evil are already clarified and everybody will be rewarded according to their own deeds¹⁵³.

4. Universalism/Respect of Humanity:

Abrahamic traditions are unanimous about the creation of man with somewhat similar notions of “*likeness and image of God*”¹⁵⁴. The Bible teaches that Adam was created

in the image of God and all his progeny is included in this status which means that it gives equal status to all humankind and include them, whether heathen or a believer, in the grace which God has bestowed upon them. Therefore, it is reiterated that when a foreigner stays in your land, do not wrong him, rather treat him well like a native-born. You should love him like your own selves, because *“you were foreigners in the land of Egypt”*¹⁵⁵. In cases of legal treatment, the same spirit is repeated so that the Israelites be kind and just towards foreigners. It is said that *“You are to apply the same standard of judgment to the foreigner as to the [native] citizen”*¹⁵⁶.

Similarly, irrespective of all the violent manipulation of Christianity in the history, its core teachings have always preached love for humanity. The teachings of Jesus have always advocated that if a follower wants to make himself acceptable to God and make himself worthy of the divine love and eternal salvation, he has to fulfil two requirements: one, love of God, and second, love with humanity¹⁵⁷. Instead of only verbal teachings, Jesus practically loved all the people, especially the lowly poor of the society, the diseased and the oppressed¹⁵⁸.

In John, it is said that: *“[Father] they all may be one as thou art in me and I in thee”*¹⁵⁹. C. H. Ren explains that if we are to be one with God, we also have to be one with each other¹⁶⁰. In Matthew it is said that once Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the law. The answer Jesus gave was that *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.... And the second... thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”*¹⁶¹.

Considering persecutions and consequent pain and frustrations that Christian community faced in the beginning helps explain their sensitivities regarding anti-Semitism but neither Jesus nor Paul rejected Jews, instead they continued to love them for the religious heritage they had received from Jews. Norris comments that their occasional verbal declamations of certain religious leaders of Jews do not form firm foundation of fanaticism against Jews¹⁶².

Likewise, Quran says that Allah has created all the people differently in many aspects, but these differences are neither meant for discrimination nor are they meant to be sources of conflict among the people. Humanity has been originated from one pair of parents, i.e., Adam and Eve¹⁶³. Ibn Kathir elaborates that all the humanity shares the respect of being the descendants of Adam and Eve and that Allah forbids people from belittling others as all of them are equal in their humanity¹⁶⁴. Islam, as a religion, can be shared by all humanity as Quran say that “whoever” and “anyone” who chooses to seek the guidance from Allah, Allah will guide him. It is not a religion of specific nation, creed or nation¹⁶⁵. The word ‘anyone’ and ‘whoever’ reveals the fact that Islam is not a religion of one set of people, rather it has come to guide anyone who seeks guidance and can achieve it without intervention¹⁶⁶. Similarly, Chapter 95 of the Quran shows that Islam promotes respect for every human being except for those who are persecutors or who are rebellious to God. Other than such people, the rest of humanity is the dearest creation of Allah which He has created in the best of manner¹⁶⁷.

5. Pacifism/Patience

Like other moral teachings, the Abrahamic faiths are also synonymous about the virtue of patience and ultimately pacifism in case of Christianity. In Jewish Bible and Quran, the role model of Joseph is depicted as the symbol of ultimate patience in harshest times. The Bible depict him as a sage who wisely and patiently endures all the hardships and eventually forgives his brothers for their deceits as he accepts everything as part of a divine plan which ultimately yields good¹⁶⁸. Similarly, the Jewish Bible asserts that patient people calm existing strives while a hot-tempered ignite new ones¹⁶⁹.

Christian teachings also remained pacifistic till the fourth century both regarding personal affairs as well as in political and military issues. Ellul states that there is no evidence to prove the enrolment of a Christian into army as a soldier until then. Conversely, people were threatened to be killed and were martyred for not serving in the army during hegemonic foreign rules. One of those martyrs was Maximilian who refused to serve in army and before getting martyred he uttered his most famous words that: *"I cannot be a soldier; I cannot do evil because I am a Christian"*¹⁷⁰. This is because, alongside the verbal teachings of *"love thy enemy; thou shalt not kill"* and *"turn the other cheek"*, Jesus manifested non-violent and non-resistive attitude practically by being crucified for truth rather than fighting back¹⁷¹. Later on, when the politicized clergy misused the concept of just war and legalized persecution of the heretical sects and minority groups and indulged in wars, Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century AD restated that *"war was always sinful even if it was occasionally waged for a just cause"*¹⁷². Clement of Alexandria^{§§§} and Apostolic Tradition of the third century also declared that *"he who holds the sword must cast it away"*. And if anyone of the faithful becomes a soldier, he must be rejected by the church, *"for he has scorned God"*¹⁷³.

Regarding interpersonal conflicts, Ren asserts that people who do not retaliate while being rejected, hated and insulted by other people in this world due to following the ways of Jesus, will be greatly rewarded in heavens¹⁷⁴. Similarly, it is reported in the Bible that when Jesus was carried away by the servants of high priest, Peter struck him with a sword and hurt him. In this gruesome situation, Jesus forbade him and said: *"put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"*¹⁷⁵.

Similarly, Islam stresses the importance of patience as it yields greater benefits than does momentarily reactions. The Quran says that Allah is with those who remain patient, hence enjoins them to seek help through patience and prayer¹⁷⁶. It gives good tidings to the one who at time of sufferings remains patient and says that *"we certainly belong to Allah and to Him we are bound to return"*¹⁷⁷. In times of conflicts

§§§ Titus Flavius Clemens: A Greek convert Christian Theologian, died in 220 AD. Once a presbyter in Alexandria, he was the father of Alexandrian Christian philosophy. P. 697, vol II, (Schaff, 1893)

and disputes believers are motivated that if they observe patience and forgive their adversaries, it is a courageous act to do¹⁷⁸. Patience and conflict avoidance are stressed so greatly that they are repeatedly discussed almost hundred times in the Quran¹⁷⁹. Maulana Waheed elaborates that freedom, as a prerogative of humanity, creates challenges, competitions and ultimately conflicts. However, the Quranic concepts of patience (صبر) and conflict avoidance (إعراض), enable us to learn to manage conflicts and endure differences in a better and peaceful way¹⁸⁰.

6. Pursuance of Peace:

Besides truth and justice, Judaism equally values peace¹⁸¹. The word *Shalom*¹⁸² used for the absence of war encompasses the wholeness of tranquil and prosperous state of affairs¹⁸³. In Christianity, it is considered as the moral obligation upon the followers to pursue the ways of peace in all matters until the last limit. The beatitudes of the Jesus declare that those who are merciful to their fellow beings and are peacemakers will receive mercy from the Father¹⁸⁴ and will be known as His children¹⁸⁵. The New Testament teaches that righteousness, good and virtue in the society can only be ensured by peace¹⁸⁶ which can also lead to its exalted way of living. However, the mouth of wicked ruins the peace and overthrow the society into fragments which ultimately ruins social harmony¹⁸⁷. However, the peace that Christianity preaches about is not a mere absence of war and conflicts. It means to up bring a society on firm bases according to which people live with one another on peaceful terms by taking care of the deficient, supporting the weak, patient with each other while remaining firm to goodness and cautioning the unruly in the society to not disrupt the harmony,¹⁸⁸.

Likewise, it is an established academic fact that Islam is a religion of peace¹⁸⁹. Allah has sent the prophets with Islam as a way of life according to which the believers will achieve peace both in this world and in the hereafter. In Islamic teachings and history, peace is an ultimate objective and choice while war is a temporary and exceptional reaction¹⁹⁰. In the words of Maulana Waheed ud Din Khan, "*War is something that undermines, rather than facilitates, the plan of human reform that Islam stands for*"¹⁹¹. He maintains that war and violence yield no real gain. Therefore, despite of all strategies to avert war, if a Muslim community is engaged in war, Islam guides it to put an end to the battle as soon as possible so that the real Jihad-the reformation of human life according to will of God- remains unhindered and humanity prospers¹⁹².

Similarly, Allah abandons the believers to become accomplice of each other in sinning and transgression rather, they should help each other in goodness and piety¹⁹³. Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi elaborates that no doubt the Qurayshites had persecuted the Muslims and had barred them from Masjid Al-Haram, it still didn't suit the believers of Allah to do aggression and violence in return. Therefore, Allah guided them not to damage the sacrificial animals of their opponents or create rioting in Haram among their pilgrims etc. He maintains that it doesn't befit the group which Allah has selected for enjoining good to others, to do the same mischief in response as

has been done to them¹⁹⁴. Maulana Waheed points out that Allah calls the ways of his guidance as the ways of peace****. Therefore, peace is not just an option; it is integrated in the very nature of Islam¹⁹⁵.

Conclusion:

It is evident from the previous discussion that the Abrahamic faiths, like any other human institution (especially of modern times) are vulnerable to manipulation. Their contextual injunctions can be distorted due to reasons both fair and unfair. It is also evident that the main teachings of these religions are unanimous about developing morality in the believers which leads to establishing societies on peaceful grounds. These religions encourage their followers to remain conflict free and even if conflicts arise, they should be resolved nobly. These religions aim to nurture their followers to be essentially peaceful so that the humanity as a whole prospers.

Suggestions:

On the basis of the above conclusion, it is therefore suggested that:

- a. The collaborative teachings of these religions regarding peace and conflict resolution should be encouraged in academic and scholarly circles in order to bring a shift in the perspectives of the followers of these religions from “*us vs. them*” into “*our prosperity*” paradigm.
- b. Practical examples of collaborative efforts of conflict resolution activities all around the world, especially in Africa, by the pundits and religious representatives of these religions should be publicised, both in academics and media, in order to develop public opinion regarding the above end.
- c. Research in creating models and theories regarding Abrahamic Conflict Resolution and Abrahamic peace should be encouraged.

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