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An Examination of Common Worship and Ceremonies among the Abrahamic Faiths: Implication for Religious Tolerance in Nigeria

Omomia, O. Austin

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria
Department of religious studies
E-mail: austin.omomia@yahoo.com

Abstract

Abrahamic faiths refer to the three most popular religions that traced their origin to Abraham. These religions are Judaism (the earliest of the three), Christianity and Islam (Islam is commonly adjudged as the most recent). This paper examined the common worship, customs and other religious ceremonies prevalent among the Abrahamic faiths. It also identified the common areas of agreement between the Abrahamic faiths with regards to the common religious related customs. It is on this strength that the paper argued that the Abrahamic faiths should emphasize on areas of unity rather than widen the gulf of disagreement. The paper employed the historical and sociological methods of investigation. It is recommended that the Abrahamic faiths should explore areas of unity in order to strengthen the cord of tolerance and peace in the world in general and Nigeria in particular.

Keywords: Abrahamic faiths; Ceremonies; Religious tolerance; Worship.

Introduction

Abrahamic faith, Abrahamic religions or Abrahamism refers to the three most popular religions, monotheistic in nature and tracing their origin to Abraham. They are noted to have the highest estimates that are about 54% of the world's population (that is, about 3.8 billion people) belong to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three most popular religions are referred to as Abrahamic faith or Abrahamic religion. About 30% of the world's population belongs to other religions, while 16% are said to belong to no religion at all. The three Abrahamic religions are commonly adjudged to have originated from the Middle East. It is also stated that the Abrahamic religions in order of founding can be arranged chronologically as: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The three Abrahamic religions carry out different practices, customs, and ceremonies that indicate their distinctives. It is important to note that they all claim that the attempt in pursuing their different customs, religious practices and ceremonies, is to establish a closer relationship with God. Apart from this act of worship, they are also challenged to earn piety and spiritual advancement. These goals notwithstanding, it is common knowledge that the three Abrahamic

religions, though pursuing the same essence, differ greatly in their expressions of custom, worship and ceremonies. Are there glaring benefits accruable from this seemingly differences? This forms a great part of the focus of this paper.

The writer will attempt to discuss the different worship, customs and ceremonies among the different Abrahamic faith. Suffice it to state unequivocally that they all differ in their practices and expressions with respect to the issue at stake. It will definitely be outside the scope of this paper to capture all the customs, ceremonies and worship among the Abrahamic faiths. The following will be considered:

Judaism Rites, Ceremonies and Worship:

Judaism is believed to be the earliest of the three common Abrahamic faith. It is commonly argued that the rites and ceremonies observed in Judaism cannot easily be divorced from the general way of life of the Jews. These practices, directly or indirectly reflect the major core of the Jewish culture and custom.

The writer will state in an orderly manner, some common customs, ceremonies and other practices in Judaism. They include the followings:

1. The Rite of Circumcision: According to Nadler (2012), the most important, primal and very first rite of Judaism both in terms of its historical origins and occasion in life is the circumcision of all baby boys at the age of eight days. It is believed that God initiated this rite when He instructed Abraham to circumcise himself, all the males in his households and his descendants. This was a sign of the divine covenant between God and Abraham's progeny, who were the "chosen people". Nadler (2012), further explained that, in the Rabbinic tradition, any male who is not circumcised is "cut off" from the community of Israel, both in this life and from enjoying his "portion in the world to come". The uncircumcised is believed to have his soul perish with his body. It is also believed that he will not experience the anticipated resurrection of the dead at the end of days that will accompany the messianic era. He further narrated that a specially trained ritual surgeon referred to as **mohel** performs the circumcision rite. This is followed by a ceremony, where the child is given his Hebrew name. In Jewish culture like in Judaism, girls are not circumcised. However, they are named within thirty days of their birth and this is commonly done in a synagogue ceremony on a Sabbath morning.

2. Shabbat: This is a very important observance in Judaism. It is said to play a pivotal role in Jewish practice and governed by a large corpus of religious law (Jewish Identity, 2012). It is the weekly day of rest in Judaism. It lasts from shortly before sundown on Friday night to nightfall Saturday night. The Sabbath is believed to be a commemoration of God's day of rest after six days of creation. During the commencement of the Sabbath at Sundown on Friday, the women of the house welcome the shabbat by lighting two or more candles and reciting a blessing. The evening meal begins with a blessing recited aloud (this is Kiddush) over a cup of wine. The blessing is also recited (Mohtzi) over the bread. The two braided loaves of bread on the table are referred to as challah. During the Sabbath, it is forbidden to be engaged in any activity referred to as work. There are thirty nine categories of such activities referred to as Melakhah ("work"). It includes lighting of fire, writing, using money etc. The sabbat is obeyed with strict adherence in Judaism.

3. Prayers in Judaism: In Judaism, prayers are recited three times daily. These are Shacharit, Mincha and Ma'ariv. There is however, the fourth one, Mussaf. This is added on Sabbath and holidays. An important aspect in most services is the declaration of faith. This is referred to as the Shema. This is a recitation of a verse from the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4): "Hear, Israel ! The Lord is our God! The Lord is one". Prayers in Judaism can be recited in solitary prayer, but communal prayer is preferred. In communal prayer, the quorum is ten adults. This is referred to as minyan. In Orthodox Judaism only males are counted towards this communal prayer.

4. Marriage in Judaism: In Judaism it involves a double ceremony. In ancient times, this was separated by one year. The first year is the betrothal, referred to as erusin. This involves the reading of the marriage contract, known as Ketubba, and the giving of the ring with a declaration: "Behold you are consecrated to me by this ring according to the Law of Moses and

Israel”(www.Britannica.com,2012). These are all accompanied by benedictions. At the close of the one year, the marriage proper (referred to as nissu in) is done. It consists of reciting of the seven marriage benedictions. The marriage ceremony is performed under a huppa, a canopy which symbolizes the bridal bower. This is regarded as very sacred in Judaism.

5. Laws to maintain ritual purity:

In Judaism there are elaborate laws intended to maintain ritual purity especially in relationship with worship in the Jerusalem temple. However, with the destruction of the temple, most of the laws concerning personal purity became less emphasized. It is argued by Nadler (2012) that in spite of this, two vital aspects of the laws of purity derived from the “code of holiness in the biblical book of Leviticus, have remained in full force to this day. According to him, they include the dietary laws (or Kashurt). This prohibits the consumption of any of the species of animals, birds and fish classified by the scripture as unclean. The second law is the laws of family purity (referred to as taharat ha-mishpacha). It requires menstruating women to avoid intimate contact with their husbands until a week after the end of their immersion in a ritual bath known as mikvah. Apart from this use, the ritual bath is also observed by Jewish men on the eve of sabbat and Jewish holidays. Apart from this, men and women also observe the ritual bath on the eve of the Day of Atonement. This is to purify themselves before the holidays. The converts to Judaism are also immersed in the ritual birth as a symbol of their rebirth into Judaism.

6. Holy days in Judaism:

These are some of the holy days in Judaism. According to Jewish identity (2012), they include:

- **Passover (Pesach):** This is a week-long holiday. It begins in the evening of the 14th day of Nisan (this is the first month in the Hebrew calendar). It commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. It centres on home service. All leavened products are removed from the house before the holiday and are not consumed throughout the week.

- **“Pentecost” or “Feast of Week”:** This is the celebration of the revelation of the Torah to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. It coincides, in the biblical times, with the wheat harvest. During this time, there is all-night study marathons, eating of dairy foods (for example cheese-cake), reading the book of Ruth, decorating homes and synagogue with greenery and wearing white clothing as a symbol of purity.

- **“The Festival of Booths” or Tabernacles:** It commemorates the Israelites forty years of wandering in the desert on their way to the Promised Land. During the celebration, temporary booths known as Sukkot are constructed. They represent temporary shelters of the Israelites during their wanderings. This festival coincides with the “fruit harvest” and marks the end of the agricultural cycle. The Jews eat in the temporary booths for seven days and nights, as the festival is concluded with prayer for rain. It is celebrated with singing and dancing with the Torah scrolls.

The three festivals considered above are the major Jewish Holy days. They are referred to as “regalim” in the Hebrew, meaning “regel” or foot. It was customary in Judaism to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices in the Temple during these special Holy days.

The other Holy days in Judaism include the following:

- **Day of Remembrance” or “Day of the Sounding of the Sholar”.**

This is the Jewish New Year. It is referred to literarily as the “head of the year”. It falls on the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. This period “marks the beginning of the 10days period of atonement leading to the Day of Atonement. The period involves blowing the Shofar or ram’s horn in the Synagogue, eating apples and honey and pronouncing blessings over some symbolic foods like pomegranates

▪ **The Day of Atonement:**

This is the holiest day of the Jewish year, kept in Judaism. It involves communal fasting and prayer for forgiveness of one's sins. The entire day is spent in the synagogues, with short break in the afternoon, with reciting of prayers from a prayer book known as "Machzor"

▪ **Purim or "lots":**

This is a joyous holiday which commemorates the deliverance of the Persian Jews from the hand of the evil plot by Haman. He sought to exterminate the Jews as recorded in the Book of Esther. Its features include the public recitation of the Book of Esther, mutual gifts of food, drink, charity to the poor and a celebratory meal (Esther 9:22). Other activities include drinking of wine, eating of special pastries, dressing up in masks and costumes and organizing parties and carnivals.

▪ **Festival of lights or "Dedication"**

It is an eight day holiday which starts on the 25th day of the Hebrew calendar. It is observed by kindling lights in homes on each of the festival's eight nights

▪ **"The Ninth of AV":**

This is a holiday of mourning and fasting to commemorate the destruction of the first and second temples and the expulsion of the Jewish people from Spain.

▪ **"The Holocaust Remembrance Day" and Israeli Independence Day:**

This is to commemorate the horrors of the Holocaust and the achievement of Independence.

▪ **Synagogues and Religious building:**

This is the house of prayer and study in Judaism. It consists of a separate room for prayer (the main sanctuary), smaller rooms for study and an area for educational use. The synagogue consist of the followings: the ark (where the Torah, scrolls are kept). The elevated reader's platform, where the Torah is read and services conducted. The eternal light, this is a continually lit lamp or lantern. It serves as a reminder of the lit menorah of the Temple in Jerusalem. There is also the pulpit, this is a lectern facing the Ark where the prayer leader stands while praying.

7. **Dietary Laws:** In Judaism only mammals that have split hooves and chew the cud are eaten. The pig is not eaten, though it chews the cud. For sea foods, the ones considered to be eaten should have fins and scales. For birds, the list is given in the Torah.

8. **Professional clergy in a Synagogue:** They include the Rabbi. This is a Jewish scholar who is charged with answering the legal questions of a congregation. We also have the Hazzan, who is a trained vocalist. The choice of the Hazzan depends on: a good voice, knowledge of the traditional tunes, understanding of the meaning of the prayers and sincerity in reciting them.

9. **Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah:** This ceremony is celebrated by the boy on reaching the age of 12years (he is a Bar Mitzvah) and the girl at the age of 13years (Bat Mitzvah). According to the Barmitz.htm (2012), "the Bar Mitzvah ceremony formally, publicly marks the assumption of that obligation of adulthood along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services, to count in a Minyan (the minimum number of people needed to perform certain parts of religious courts) and to marry. It further stated that during the Sabbath service, after celebrating the Bar Mitzvah, he is called upon to the Torah to recite a blessing over the weekly reading. He is required to also do this during the Monday or Thursday weekday services.

This is the age when a person is accountable for his actions and minimally qualifies to marry. However, Ronaldrivas.tripod.com (2012), argued that, the only difference between the orthodox way of celebrating it and the unorthodox way, is that the women are not called up to read the Torah, and lead the service. It also submitted that reformed Judaism has, in the late nineteenth century, replaced this with a confirmation ceremony for both boys and girls in their late teens.

10. Burial service in Judaism: The service is adjudged as very simple. The body is prepared by the “Holy society”, dressed/clad in simple shroud. No coffin is used. The body is interred as soon as possible after death. The mourning period of thirty days is observed; out of this the first seven days are the most rigorous. Eleven months after death, the bereaved is expected to recite a particular form of synagogal doxology (referred to as Kaddish) during the public service as an act of memorial. This doxology is devoid of any mention of death and it is expected to express praise to God and pronouncement of prayer for the establishment of the coming kingdom. This doxology is also recited annually during the anniversary of the death (www.Britannica.com, 2012).

There are several customs, ceremonies and religious rites in Judaism. It is commonly argued that most of the ceremonies in Judaism are closely related to the Jewish culture. This is succinctly put by Jacobs (2012) when he opined that the Jews are ethno-religious group and includes those born Jewish and converts to Judaism. He further opined that, “orthodox Judaism maintains that the Torah and Jewish Laws are divine in origin, eternal and unalterable, and that they should be strictly followed.

The general aspect of the Customs, Ceremonies and Culture in Judaism can be captured in the thirteen principles of faith as highlighted in the core tenets. This is outlined by Jacobs (2012) as:

- I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created; He alone has made. Does make, and will make all things.
- I believe with perfect faith that the creator, Blessed be His Name, is One, and there is no unity in any manner like His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be.
- I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, has no body, and that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that there can be no (physical) comparison to Him whatsoever.
- I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the first and the last.
- I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, and to Him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to any being besides Him
- I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.
- I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the Chief of the prophets, both those who preceded him and those who followed him.
- I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that s now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him.
- I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah will not be exchanged, and that there will never be any other Torah from the Creator, Blessed be His Name.
- I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, knows all the deeds of human, beings and all their thought, as it is written, ‘Who fashioned the hearts of them all, Who comprehends all their actions’ (Psalm 33:15).
- I believe with perfect faith that the creator, Blessed be His Name, rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those that transgress them.
- I believe with perfect faith in coming of the Messiah: and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming
- I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, Blessed be His Name, and His mention shall be exalted forever and ever.

The author will also consider customs, ceremonies and worship in Christianity, which is the second Abrahamic faith, chronologically.

Christianity Rites, Ceremonies and Worship:

On the basis of chronological founding, Christianity is commonly believed to be the second among the three Abrahamic faiths. It is important to note that there is also marked level of variation in the Christian faith on the basis of the proliferation of denominations. Although, in Judaism, we have the orthodox and the reformed, such marked variation as in Christian worship is not as prominent. However, in spite of the obvious variation in Christian worship (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2012), we still find the following forms of worship, religious rites and ceremonies are prominent:

1. Worship: Most Christian denominations have set aside Sunday, the first day of the week, as a day of worship. However, the order of worship varies from denomination to denomination. In the catholic worship, it is guided by the Roman Missal and other documents. For others, the form of liturgy is determined by the denomination concerned. However, it is worth noting that some forms of liturgy that will guarantee the right worship is followed. It is worth mentioning that the Seventh –day Adventist Church (SDA), which embraces most Old Testament rules and regulations, observes the Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of worship (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2012).

The Christian worship is guided commonly by a time of prayer, reading of the scriptures, singing of hymns/choruses, sermon/preaching, offertory and others. There is actually no strict adherence to this order, but the necessary constituents of full worship as viewed by the denomination concerned, are often embedded in worship.

2. Baptism: This is one of the most important Christian rites. In the catholic denomination, this rite is referred to as Sacrament, while in most protestant denominations; it is referred to as an ordinance. According to Davies – Stofka, (2012), the early Christians saw baptism as a sign of moral purification, the beginning of new and eternal life and an indication of the Christian’s readiness for the coming Kingdom of God. He further averred that, the first Christians carried out baptism by the process of total immersion in water. Although this is still the practice among many Christian groups, but others practice the sprinkling of the head with water, he further submitted. It is also noticed that some denominations baptize infants, while mostly the Protestants, teach that only adults should be baptized.

3. The Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper:

It is the belief of Christians that Jesus Christ instituted the practice of the Passover meal that He shared with His disciples before His arrest and death. To commemorate His death and resurrection, Christians meet to observe the Lord’s Supper. This is in accordance with 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

In most denominations, the frequency of observing the Lord’s Supper varies. For the Roman Catholic Church, the Lord’s Supper will often be observed in their weekly services and on holy days throughout the year, while other denominations may likely observe this on a monthly basis. The elements used during the Lord’s Supper by most denominations include bread or small wafers, wine or grape wine. According to Davies-Stofka (2012), the Roman Catholic Church believes that upon blessing of the bread and wine in the ritual of the Eucharist, these food items literally become the body and blood of Jesus or embody his presence in a special way. This is referred to as transubstantiation. However, other denominations see this as merely symbolic, and intended to memorialize the action of Christ in this regards. Most Christians, however, agree that the Lord’s Supper is held to remember the first coming of Christ, anticipate his second coming and create a unity of believers.

4. Marriage: This is seen as a union between a man and woman. In Christianity, it is often emphasized that monogamy is the biblical prescription (Genesis 2:25), the man is to “cleave to his wife”. Marriage is seen as a divine worship and not only as a civil contract. It is carried out by the couple in the presence of God, while the minister and the congregation act as witnesses. It is emphasized that only death can separate such a union.

5. Death in Christianity: This is viewed as a passage to the eternal life promised by Christ. The funeral emphasizes the need for joy and confidence with regards to the promise of the resurrection. The funeral also calls attention to the brevity of life and the destiny of the soul. To most Christian denominations, you do not need to pray for the dead (Hebrews 9:27).

However, the Roman Catholic Church, see praying for the Christian close to death or dead as a sacrament that prepares such a person for God’s mercy. It is important to note that Christians generally do not have a prescribed time of mourning for the dead.

6. Circumcision in Christianity:

As earlier on considered in Judaism, circumcision is seen as a matter of religious obligation. However, this view is different in Christianity. The 'early church is said to have decided that circumcision is not required for Gentile Christians' (Acts 15- the Council of Jerusalem). According to the Ecumenical Council of Florence (2012) this was also prohibited by the council of Florence in the 15th century. Supporting the prohibition of circumcision, the Catholic Catechism (2012), calls it an immoral act (Dietzen, 2012). They argued that "non-medical amputation or mutilation is immoral. It is also on record that many countries that have majority of Christian adherents are said to have low rate of circumcisions (Ray 2012). However, Coptic Christianity and Ethiopian Orthodoxy is said to still observe circumcision rite (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2012).

7. Food Restrictions and Christianity

The aspect of strict food laws as indicated in some portions of the Old Testament are not considered as relevant by the contemporary church. There are however minor exceptions (Schuhmann, 2012). It is further submitted that the Roman Catholic Church believes in observing abstinence and penance. For example, all Fridays through the year and the time of lent are penitential days. The law of abstinence requires a catholic from 14years of age until death to abstain from eating meat on Fridays in honour of the passion of Jesus on Good Friday.

It is also worth noting that the Seventh - day Adventist Church (SDA) embraces several Old Testament rules and regulations. This includes Jewish food laws. They do not eat pork, shell fish or other food which are referred to as unclean in the Old Testament law. It is stated in their "Fundamental Belief" (2012) that their members are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the scriptures (Leviticus 11:1-47). It is often argued by some that in the Bible, the consumption of strangled animals and of blood was forbidden by Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:19-21). It is common knowledge that the Jehovah's Witnesses, on the strength of the scriptures above, abstain from eating blood and even allowing blood transmission.

8. Conversion in Christianity: Christianity, especially among the protestant churches, embrace and encourage evangelism as exemplified in the scriptures (The Great Commission-Matthew 28:18-20). They send missionaries to other non- Christian world. Christianity condemns forced conversion. However, non-Christians have made some allegations towards Christian forced conversions. They cite examples like the conversion of pagans during the time of Constantine, the crusaders, the Spanish Inquisition and the Aztecs, (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2012). The church condemns forced conversion as sinful. The position of Pope Paul VI puts the stand of the church concerning forced conversion aptly: Thus it is stated: it is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man's response to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced to embraced the Christian faith against his own will (Pope Paul VI, 1965).

9. Christian worship Building

The type of architecture employed often depends on the denomination concerned. Most "orthodox denominations" lay emphasis on the acquisition of different materials littering the church walls and others. While the Protestants are satisfied with the presence of the pew and pulpit, with little or no complex internal materials. In all, the essence of the church building is to generate a sense of spiritual awe and worship.

There are other ceremonies, rites and customs observed in Christianity. Suffice it to say that some of them differ on the basis of the denomination practicing it. It is important to note that the similarities among the Christian groups with regards to the slight difference, has made the Christian faith to be adjudged as still sharing the same rites, customs, ceremonies and worship.

The most recent of the Abrahamic faiths is Islam. Some of her customs worship and ceremonies will also be considered.

Islam Religious Rites, Ceremonies and Worship:

The word Islam is an Arabic word which means “surrender” or “submission”. According to Hamza (2012), the historical origins of Islam dates back to the seventh century Arabia. The prophet Muhammad, an aristocratic Arabian, born and raised an orphan in the sanctuary city of Mecca, experienced a revelation in his fortieth year. Yuhe stated that after thirteen years of suffering with patience and endurance, he migrated to the nearby city of Medina. The prophet is said to have orally transmitted the Quran (Koran), which Muslims believed was revealed from archangel Gabriel, (Hamza, 2012).

Islam is believed to be the youngest of the Abrahamic faiths. It builds its theology and others on the Koran, Hadith and the basic beliefs, referred to as five “pillars”. It is on these that everything else is built, Hamza (2012), averred.

Five basic beliefs in Islam:

a. “Testimony” or “Witnessing”: This is referred to as Shahadah, and it is observed by declaring to two witnesses the foundational creed of Islam. This is the first pillar that makes one a Muslim. The full declaration is: “I witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad is God’s messenger”.

b. The Pillar of Prayer: This is the second pillar in Islam. In Islam, every adult, male and female are expected to perform prayers five times daily. These times are determined by the perceived movement of the sun and each day is seen as representing the life of man. According to Hamza (2012), the dawn prayer as one’s coming into the world, the midday prayer as the end of the youth, the afternoon prayer as old age, the sunset prayer as death, and the evening prayer as the beginning of the descent into the darkness of the grave. This second pillar is considered to be most important after the first pillar –testimony of faith.

c. Paying Zakah: This is the third pillar. This is obligatory alms that is given once every lunar year. It is paid from the standing capital of each adult. Although some people erroneously believe that Zakah is the same as income tax. But this is wrong, since Islam prohibits income tax. This is actually capital tax on wealth that has been stagnant for a year. It represents one-fortieth of a Muslim’s liquid assets. The Koran orders that eight categories of people should benefit from Zakah distribution, with the poor and needy as the greatest recipients.

d. Fasting: This is the forth pillar in Islam. It means fasting the entire lunar month of Ramadan. This commences with the sighting of the new crescent (moon) for that month. Fasting is obligatory on adults who are healthy enough to do so. They are to abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from dawn to sunset.

e. Pilgrimage to Mecca or Hajj: Mecca holds a lot to the Muslim and the religion of Islam. They believe Mecca to be the site of the first house of worship built by the prophet Adam and his wife Eve and then restored millennia later by the prophet Abraham and his son, the prophet Ishmeal. At the end of his mission, the prophet Mohammad restored its monotheistic purpose by destroying the 365 idols in it that the Arabs had been worshipping prior to Islam (Hamza, 2012). The period of pilgrimage to Mecca gives the Muslims an opportunity to perform rituals that follow the footsteps of Abraham and his second wife Hagar. It is also symbolic as it prepares them for standing before God on the Day of Judgment.

Apart from the five pillars of Islam, Davies-Stofka (2012) outlined other Muslim rites and ceremonies:

1. **Male circumcision:** This is an important religious duty and believers are expected to perform this on their newborn sons. He argued that it may have been adopted from Jewish practice, while some people argue that it is intended to imitate Mohammad who was also circumcised.

2. **Marriage in Islam:** In Islam, marriage is seen as a civil contract as well as a religiously public and joyous ceremony. During marriage, passages of the Koran are read, and there is a feast. It is permissible for men and women to initiate a divorce and there is a “mechanism for annulling a marriage. Marriage in Islam is referred to as nikah, it is revocable.

3. **Death in Islam:** The dying person is surrounded by family members and friends. The Muslim sees death as the most important event in a person’s path. Passages of the Koran are read to the dying person. It is an opportunity for him/her to repent of his/her sins, and may perform rituals of purification if possible. The body of the deceased is buried as soon as possible, preferably by sunset. The family of the deceased is responsible for preparing the body for burial and saying the funeral prayers. The body is buried in white shroud, but if the person went on pilgrimage to Mecca he is buried in the pilgrimage garments.

4. **Dressing in Islam:** Muslims are expected to wear modest clothes, both for the men and women. However, the women are expected to cover their hair and entire body with the exception of their hands and face when they are in the presence of unrelated males.

There are also other common Islamic customs, traditions and culture. These are highlighted by Amjad (2012) as follows:

i. **Pronouncing God’s name before eating or drinking:** This serves as recognition of God’s blessings and asking for its continuation.

ii. **Using the Right Hand to Eat and drink:** It reminds them that on the day of Judgment they should strive to get their Judgment in their right hands.

iii. **Muslim greeting and its Response:** It is a supplication for peace and blessing for the addressee.

iv. **Blessing after sneezing and its Responses:** It is to thank God for the relief after sneezing while the response is asking for mercy for the person.

v. **Reciting of ‘Adhaan in the Right Ear of a Newly Born:** The words are said to be fixed, indicative of the transmission of the parents’ spiritual beings into the child.

vi. **Trimming moustaches, removing Hair from the pubic Area and from under the Armpits, Clipping Nails:** They are a part of our physical cleansing and purification and were part of the teachings by the prophet.

vii. **Keeping the Nose, the Mouth and the Teeth Clean:** It is a form of cleanliness among others. The prophet also commanded it.

viii. **Washing after urination and Defecation:** This is referred to as “Istinjaa”. It means cleansing the related organs after urination and defecation. It can be performed with water, with pebbles of dry earth or with any other suitable things”.

ix. **Refraining from sexual contact during a woman’s menstruation and her puerperal discharge:** This does not mean that the woman is untouchable at such time, but it refers to only conjugal relationship with her.

x. **Bathing after menstrual and puerperal discharge and after sexual uncleanness:** This is said to be important also after sexual contact, especially “before offering Salah”.

xi. **Day of Special Prayer:** Islam does not see the seventh day as a day of rest. They argued that creation does not make God tired; hence He did not need rest. They hold Friday as a special day of prayer.

xii. **Prohibited foods:** There are some foods that are prohibited in Islam. Chiefly amongst them is pork.

An examination of the different Abrahamic faith shows that they differ considerably in their rites, customs and ceremonies. What could be responsible for this striking differences?. The writer will attempt to examine this.

Why are there differences in the rites and ceremonies among Abrahamic faiths?

There are some glaring differences among the Abrahamic faiths and some reasons can be adduced for these variations in their rites, ceremonies and customs. The followings are some of the reasons that could be adduced by the writer:

1. **The Culture of the different areas where the religions took “strong roots”:** This does not necessarily refer to where the religion actually started. It is generally agreed that we cannot extricate religion from culture. For example; Islam is more prominent in the Arab world. No wonder some of the customs and ceremonies in Islam have close resemblance with the Arabian culture. The gestures, greetings and other practices in Islam can actually be said to agree with some of the Arabian culture. The same goes for Judaism. It is said to have influenced the Jews in their way of life. While their culture has also found expression in their religious world view. For Christianity, though it originated from Palestine, its spread was actually through the West (Europe and others). On the strength of this, the culture of the Europeans has also influenced, to some extent, the Christian ceremonies and others. For example, marriages and other popular Christian customs

2. **The position canvassed by those who founded the religions:** This, to some extent will affect the theology of that religious group. Islam accepts Mohammed as the founder, thus the revelations he claimed to have received guides their religious practices and expressions. For Christianity, Jesus Christ is seen as the founder, thus, the Christian theology is built around Him. In Judaism, Abraham, Moses and other prophets are held in high spiritual esteem. Hence, most practices are guided by the positions they expressed.

3. **The different scriptures and other materials:** The Christians are guided by the Holy Bible. The Muslims are guided by the Koran and the Hadith. While Judaism is guided by the Torah (this is basically the law and the prophets). They all contain revelations as claimed by the different groups. On the strength of this, since these revelations differ among the different religious faiths, there is bound to be differences in theology and practice

4. **Occasional expression of intolerance:** The different groups, even though they claim their descent to Abraham, sometimes express great level of intolerance. This further widens the gulf of spiritual separation amongst them.

5. **Spiritual arrogance and pride among the different faiths:** It could also be incriminated as one of the reasons for the differences among the Abrahamic faiths. Each of them claims superiority over the other. This has built rivalry and bitterness.

6. **The leaders of the different faiths have also participated in widening the gulf of separation:** Each leader claims to be the true harbinger of the customs of the different faith. They believe that they can best interpret the customs and rites of the different faiths they belong to.

Building a consonance among the Abrahamic faiths

Are there areas of agreement among the Abrahamic faiths? The writer believes that there are some areas of agreement among the Abrahamic faiths. Some of these are outlined below:

- a. They all claim to have divine scriptures that guide their actions and beliefs.
- b. The different Abrahamic faiths emphasize the value of right moral living.
- c. They all believe in life here-after and the sacredness of the soul.
- d. The different Abrahamic faiths subsist in some regions and they have mostly indirectly embraced the culture and customs of such localities
- e. They all emphasize the value of modesty in lifestyle and world view.

f. All the Abrahamic faiths claim to emphasize on the sanctity of life

The above considerations could be said to be outstanding bridges that could enhance lasting consonance if well galvanized. This should be well articulated by the different religions in Nigeria in order to achieve lasting religious tolerance.

g. Most importantly, the Abrahamic faith, that is Judaism, Christianity and Islam, claim to have originated from Abraham. Put in another way, they all accept that they have unflinching relationship with Abraham.

Conclusion

The Abrahamic faiths, it is commonly agreed, took root from Abraham. It is the view of the writer that they should emphasize on the areas of agreement, thus weaken the cord of disagreement. It is also important to stress that their customs, ceremonies and religious rites would continue to remain different in some situations. However, these distinctive, should be explored for the entrenchment of peace and unity, not acrimony, unwholesome division, intolerance and hatred that presently pervades their relationship.

Recommendations

The different Abrahamic faiths should appreciate the fact that they are from the same root-Abraham. Therefore they should eschew acrimony and embrace peace.

- Their similarities should be explored as tools for enduring dialogue.

- Although “unity” is not synonymous with uniformity”, they should appreciate each other's distinctive.

- Appreciating their different customs, ceremonies and religious rites will build the spirit of tolerance among them.

- The different adherents should appreciate that the claims of the different Abrahamic faith is to build their moral “fibre”, thus, leading them to a secured life hereafter. Their various beliefs tend to converge here.

The study, examined the various ceremonies and rites observed by the Abrahamic faiths. The writer is of the opinion that even though they differ in some of their practices, they all claim to converge at leading their adherents to God. This point of agreement is a wholesome locus on which to build the cord of unity and tolerance. This can then be emulated by the different religions in Nigeria. Consequently enhancing religious tolerance and peace.

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