**HM5001 Research and Enquiry**

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**Representations of Jesus within the Abrahamic religions and their traditions**

Within the Abrahamic religions Jesus is represented as the Messiah, Son of God, and a Prophet with different traditions and beliefs surrounding this figure along with differing amount of influence within the three religions. Jesus the Nazarene or Jesus of Nazareth is also present in atheist and secular spaces as an historical figure whose ethics and religious teachings have affected aspects of society e.g., laws and the justice system. In the Old Testament, the Son of God is described to be a great warrior who would liberate God’s people, the Israelites, from slavery. The Son of God is imagined to be a masculine, soldier-type leader of the Israelites which contrasts with the New Testament more healing focused Jesus Christ however the passage of his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and his follower’s reaction to the soldiers. ‘Muhammed and Jesus of Nazareth are often compared as originators of faith and deliverers of scripture. However, as signs of ‘Heaven-sent revelation the comparison should be between Jesus and the Qur’an.’[[1]](#footnote-1) Throughout Christianity and Islam Jesus spreads the Word of God and Allah, with his mission could be described ‘as prophetic in its proclamation’ and his teachings and practices still influential in Christianity and Islam in the contemporary with Christology and influence in secular societies.[[2]](#footnote-2) Islam places Jesus or ‘Issa’ in high regard as a prophet of Allah and a vehicle for His message.[[3]](#footnote-3) These differing terms and representations of Jesus the Nazarene have developed over the centuries as a Messiah, Son of God, a Prophet or in some interpretations of the Gospels ‘main task was to convince non-Jews of the truth that ‘Jesus is the Church’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Judaism recognises his influence within the Torah before Jesus is named or sent to Earth in the New Testament. The Torah speaks of a warrior like figure who will be sent from Yahweh to help the Jews in their strife. This figure is described in masculine terms suggesting that he would be a forceful and influential figure in the fight against the oppression by the Roman Empire. This is reflected in the New Testament with a few aggressive and overt actions of resistance such as the market in the Temple and his declaration to Pontius Pilot as the ‘king of the Jews’ undermining Roman and Pharisees authorities.[[5]](#footnote-5) This aggression is alongside a Christian image of Jesus the healer of his possessive acts of disregard to the authorities via his teachings, healing of the women with haemorrhoids. As this goes against the Jewish law of a man being unable to touch a woman while she is menstruating or bleeding and touching a woman who is not your wife in public. The Messianic image of Jesus could be argued as a ‘false Messiah, but also a heretic, a seducer and a sorcerer.’[[6]](#footnote-6) The Jewish Messianic view of Jesus has had influence on Christianity with the belief of the Second Coming of Christ and achieving the Kingdom of God. During Jesus’ life he was thought of as a ‘Rabbi’[[7]](#footnote-7), signifying literally ‘my great man’[[8]](#footnote-8) with his teachings ‘apart from parables fall into the prophetic and apocalyptic category.’[[9]](#footnote-9) During his crucifixion ‘a titulus which read, Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews,’ this title was self-proclaimed by the figure, believed by the people and was used to mock him with the crown of thorns the centurions placed on his head and to mock the “blasphemous” figure while awaiting his slow death.[[10]](#footnote-10) This attribution of the King of the Jews creates an image of Jesus being the leader both religiously and politically with the sparking of rebellion during his time and after his death. Jesus’ teachings and Parables have influenced more contemporary philosophies, religion, and secular societies. Jesus Christ was ‘a prophet mighty in deed and word’ with his lectures and preaching, alongside the miracles he performed on anyone in need.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Alongside this title of Rabbi, creating a Rabbinical structure of Judaism and the morality influencing laws, social convention, and standards. Showcasing that Jesus’ influence was widespread and strong even after his crucifixion and into the contemporary world. With the ‘first man martyred for calling Jesus “Christ” did not himself know Jesus of Nazareth’ and ‘Jesus’ death by definition disqualified him as liberator of Israel, his followers still called him a messiah’ with his legacy continuing in Judaism and Christianity.[[12]](#footnote-12) Jesus’ morals and teachings have been transferred into contemporary laws and the justice systems of predominantly Western countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. While Judaism credits Jesus of Nazareth to be a Prophet with more emphasise on Moses, and Islam also sees him as a Prophet with more focus on Muhammed\*. Christianity credits Jesus the Nazarene to be the Son of God, Messenger of God, and the sacrifice for peoples right to enter the Kingdom of God.

Within Christianity and the Bible’s New Testament, this more passive, “feminine” portrayal of Jesus contradicts the Torah however, Jesus is still an integral part of Judaism is its history and Christianity with its Christocentric offshoots and the use of a crucifix. Alongside this view of Jesus being a “feminine”, more caring figure, during his time, ‘Jesus was known as a Prophet and that apart from parables most of Jesus’ sayings fall into the prophetic and apocalyptic category.’[[13]](#footnote-13) Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats, Matthew 25:31-46, ‘When the son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,’ relations the actions of Man on Earth directly correlates to their destiny in the afterlife, disregarding the Pharisees’ focus on public prayer being the key to the Kingdom of God.[[14]](#footnote-14) Bringing a new way to worship and follow the morals of God in order to access the Kingdom of God in the afterlife, separating early Christianity from the established Judaism. This disregard for social norms of the authorities led to ‘his [Jesus’] name was a source of controversy, a controversy that followed him to his death.’[[15]](#footnote-15) Alongside the former established Ten Commandments and expanding upon those ideas in his Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. Blessing the meek, merciful, the persecuted, relating them to the ‘same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’[[16]](#footnote-16) With this in mind, ‘Christological reflection cannot confine itself solely to Jesus’ experience of God, or his claims, or his ministry.’[[17]](#footnote-17) Jesus’ parables and miracles were the main influential things at the time and have carried through to strengthen their beliefs of his ‘reputation as a miracle-worker.’[[18]](#footnote-18)

Christianity’s followers have developed their relationships with the Divine over the centuries following Jesus’ death, with the continued celebration and importance of his death, crucifixion and rebirth making two big events in the Christian calendar. Julian of Norwich and her revelations of Divine Love, both contradict the medieval belief of Jesus being a warrior-like figure and contrasts the God-fearing Christians of the time. In her Revelations of Divine Love, she describes God as a nurturing and maternal figure, showing her ‘in a vision how intimately he loves us.’[[19]](#footnote-19) This maternal and feminine energy is linked to Jesus’ quiet, passive rebellion of his time and his miracles of healing, resurrection and of replenishment. Julian’s sixteen visions over two days were revelations of pain and suffering which transformed into joy by the unfolding unconditional maternal love of God. Alongside her experience of the trinity during these revelations, as she saw ‘three heavens, and all are of the blessed humanity of Christ; and none is greater, none is less, none is higher, none is lower, but all are equal in bliss.’[[20]](#footnote-20) Adding to the diversity of Christian denominations in the importance and worship of Jesus with Christocentric sects like Mormonism and Catholicism’s importance of the Holy Trinity influencing their lives and worship in all aspects. Christology has had many different interpretations forming different branches of Christianity such as Mormonism, with an international influence of Christianity due to invasion, conversion, and migration.

Christianity’s calendar is based around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With his death believed as the ultimate exchange in order for humanities sacrifice. Christian holidays such as Christians and Easter have become part of secular society such as England, as annual holidays of Christmas and Easter are celebrated by most secular atheist and agnostic families across the United Kingdom alongside the government’s acknowledgement of the Christian calendar, inspired by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Yet ‘the gap between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith would become a yawning, unbridgeable abyss.’[[21]](#footnote-21) Secular society in the United Kingdom and the United States America have close connections to the Christian Church, with the United States swearing on the Bible before going on the witness stand in court and the allegiance to the flag including the mention of ‘one nation under God.’[[22]](#footnote-22) Church attendance have decreased in recent years with new ways of worship such as a focus on spirituality over traditional prayer, linking to secular ideas of astronomy and neopaganism. The great influence of Christianity in England with the Church being an integral part of people’s upbringings and the links formed with the Church, some of these people carry these values throughout their lives. With some indicating on the national Census that their religion is Christian even when they don’t practice or even believe, with just their upbringing influencing this decision. Linking with the cultural aspect of Judaism, with Judaism being a cultural and religious identity, with some identifying with both, or sometimes one or the other.

Within Islam, Jesus is considered to be a Prophet of Allah, not the son of Allah unlike within Judo-Christian thought. Jesus Christ as a Prophet to God’s Word ‘whether known as a prophet or as the prophet, the recognition that the gift of prophecy had reappeared in Jesus is significant in itself.’[[23]](#footnote-23) Islam doesn’t hold Jesus in the same regard as Muhammed (peace be upon him) but as one of the messengers of God pre-Islam who had the right message just not the correct interpretation which Muhammed\* had when curating the Qur’an from God’s Word. However, Issa in Islam is a messenger of God’s word just not quite right and was helpful in getting Islam to where it needed to go by the time of Muhammed\*. One could argue that ‘Christian and Islamic descriptions of God and God’s commands… are sufficiently similar to allow the [argument that they]… worship the same God.’[[24]](#footnote-24) In the Qur’an there are ’93 verses that refer directly to Jesus in the Qur’an.’[[25]](#footnote-25) With Jesus the Nazarene being ‘looked upon favourably even in a society that disdains the Church.’[[26]](#footnote-26) Alongside his ‘teachings [being] valued by non-Christians and others are part of general culture.’[[27]](#footnote-27) The main difference with the representation of Jesus due to the claim that ‘Jesus is the son of God is firmly denied.’[[28]](#footnote-28) Jesus is not highly regarded nor celebrated within Islamic festivals but just as an Islamic figure than helped the truth of Islam emerge. Unlike within Christianity where his life dictates holidays and festivals across the year, and with some atheists and agnostics. Alongside some Jews who celebrate Christmas alongside Hannukah.

In conclusion, the legacy and representation of Jesus across all Abrahamic traditions are similar in that of he was and is a key figure in their teachings and within their history. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Jesus is a teacher and influences social norms and justice systems. However comparably Christianity and Islam both view him as a Prophet of God with varying levels of importance. Judaism and Islam both see Jesus as a Prophet, spreading the word of Yahweh and Allah and furthers their teachings while prioritising another Prophet in higher regard. Christianity has differing levels of importance to the figure of Jesus Christ, with the Son of God remaining as a truth throughout all the denominations. Catholicism holds the Holy Trinity in high regard, while others focus on God the father, Christocentric traditions such as Mormonism hold Jesus Christ in the highest regard, following his teachings and spreading the Word of God.

\*Peace Be Upon Him (pbuh)

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During the research process I formulated questions around the words and phrases Judaism, Christianity, and Islam used when talking about the figure. What titles do they use? How highly regarded is he? How important was he at the start of each religion compared with modern day? What are the differences between all three religions’ representation? How similar are these representations? Do they all celebrate him in the same format? How has Jesus of Nazareth shaped the secular contemporary world? What is the relationship between all three Abrahamic religions and traditions? How does the life of Jesus affect modern? Does it influence it at all? What morals and ideals have translated to contemporary United Kingdom and the United States of America. I engaged with the differences mentioned by Muslims and Christians, scholars, historians, theologians. I engaged with more comparative material than basic beliefs and practices that involved Jesus the Nazarene.

My basic knowledge of the three Abrahamic religions helped form the basic hypothesis of having similarities in authority and influence of Jesus, with differing levels of importance within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Reading material from a broad timescale including passages in the Bible and Qur’an helped with the testing of my hypothesis based on the religious beliefs and practices that derive from this figure. These books and articles helped broaden my search with different groups of people and different religious understanding and belief.

The results were very interesting in the way that each religion honour Jesus. For HM6000, I would like to explore the relationship British museums have with other religions and their artefacts. The morality surrounding bringing Islamic artefacts for example from the Middles East to Britain, and with these religious artefacts being in a museum could suggest that religion is dead. Or the religion that we knew is dead with the development of religions moving towards more of a cultural aspect of Islam.

Or the view on the Jewish diaspora, and the Holocaust affecting the education and acceptance of Judaism in the West. Perhaps linking Judaism and Christianity together, focusing on the close theological aspects of these two Abrahamic religions. How the expulsion from their homeland by the Ancient Romans and the diaspora around the world, with focus on Europe with the ideas of how the plague began with “Jews poisoning the wells”. And the integration of Judaism into not traditional Jewish countries. Discuss how schools teach Jewish history with heavy focus on the Holocaust and maybe with a more in-depth teaching of the Palestinian-Israel war and the recent developments. And how this focus distracts them front the rich cultural and religious influence Judaism has had on the world.

I think I communicated my ideas and findings pretty well, with the titles and influence of Jesus in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam alongside the relationship between these Abrahamic traditions and beliefs. And with Jesus’ lasting influence on society, especially the secular aspects of the United Kingdom and the United States with their legal systems, laws, justice system, calendars, school life.

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