Zoroastrianism and Christianity: Standing Close to One Another

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the relationship between Zoroastrianism and Christianity. The paper will discuss the issue of Christianity's colonization of Zoroastrian eschatological and theological traditions. It begins with a brief overview of Zoroastrianism and then moves to an examination of the theological and eschatological similarities between the two religions, including monotheism, ethical dualism, eschatology, savior/hero imagery, virgin birth narratives, and magi traditions. This paper concludes that there is ample evidence to show not only an influence of Zoroastrian knowledge on Christianity but also a colonization of that knowledge by Christianity as well as a continued postcolonial attitude of denial in the academy, all of which culminates in the suppression of Zoroastrianism and the further distancing of the two religions.

ZOROASTRIANISM AND CHRISTIANITY: STANDING CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER

In 2002, a New York Times article examined the recently released document from the Vatican discussing the relationship between Jews and Christians waiting for the Messiah.[1] The point of the article was to show that Jews and Christians could unite not only by looking to their shared history but also by looking to the future and the coming of the Messiah. In the article, when asked if Jews and Christians are waiting for the Messiah together, the response was, "No, but waiting close to each other." While the question of waiting close to one another is an obvious question for Judaism and Christianity, it is an equally intriguing question when applied to Zoroastrianism. This paper explores the potential for Christianity and Zoroastrianism to wait close to each other, given the Zoroastrian ancestral connection to Christianity and the resulting commonalities of theology and eschatology. Indeed, this paper will argue that waiting close to one another is essential. The paper will begin with a brief overview of Zoroastrianism, followed by sections discussing the obvious and some less obvious similarities between the two traditions. Finally, the paper will examine the argument for Christian colonization of Zoroastrian knowledge and why continued postcolonial practices make it difficult for Christianity to stand close to Zoroastrianism as they wait for the Saoshyant.

[1] Melinda Henneberger, "Vatican Says Jews' Wait for the Messiah Is Validated by the Old Testament" *New York Times*, Jan 18, 2002. http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/18/world/vatican-says-jews-wait-for-messiah-is-validated-by-the-old-testament.html

ZOROASTRIANISM BACKGROUND

Zoroastrianism originated in ancient Persia and is considered one of the world's oldest religions.[2] Its history is, therefore, extensive and complex with its beginnings in the ancient Persian religion of Ahura Mazda or Ormazd.[3] As with all living religions, there has never been universal conformity, but rather a set of shared beliefs which have been modified by different sects. According to Barr, there never existed a single Iranian religion.[4] He posits rather that there were at least five eras of development: the pre-Zoroastrian religion of Ahura Mazda, the religion of Zoroaster himself, the religion of the Achaemenid Empire, later Zoroastrianism, and finally the religion of the magi.[5] Beyond the specifically Persian religions, there is a linguistic and cultural connection between the early period involving the religion of Ahura Mazda and the Vedic Aryans.[6] Several scholars note that linguistic and cultural elements sufficiently connect the Brahmans of India and the Zoroastrians of Iran. For many, the common ancestry is the Aryan Migration. While different versions of the migration theory exist, in terms of the exact beginning and path, the idea is that the migration from the West split with one group moving into India and the other settling in the Iranian plateau.[7] The details of the theory and the controversy are beyond the scope of this paper.[8] Setting aside the cause, evidence shows a similarity in ontology, linguistics, and literature that indicates a relationship existed between the ancient Persians and the Indo-Aryans.[9] The significance of this relationship establishes great fodder for scholars but also assists in the dating

[2] M.L. West, introduction to *The Hymns of Zoroaster: A New Translation of the Most Ancient Sacred Texts of Iran*, (New York: I.B Tauris, 2010), 1.

[3] These names are used interchangeably and refer to the same god. The term Ormazd is a later development during the Parthian empire and a shortening of Ahura Mazda. Loren Harper Whitney, *Life and Teachings of Zoroaster, the Great Persian: Including a Comparison of the Persian and Hebrew Religions* (Leopold Classic Library, 1905), 12.; A.V. Williams Jackson, "Zoroastrianism and the Resemblances between It and Christianity," *The University of Chicago Press* 27, no. 5 (1906): 337, accessed August 9, 2017; Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 75.

[4] James Barr, "The Question of Religious Influence: The Case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 2 (1985): 221, accessed August 9, 2017.; West, *Hymns of Zoroaster*, 2.

[5] Barr, "Question of Religious Influence," 221.

[6] David S. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 354.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Those looking for more information may want to examine the Kurgan Hypothesis, Anatolian Hypothesis, and the Paleolithic Continuity Theory.

[9] *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, trans. and edit. Prods Oktor Skjaervo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1.

of Zoroastrianism. It also explains the development and use of the Palavi as informing documents in understanding ancient Zoroastrian epistemology.

While Zarathustra is credited with the development of Zoroastrianism from the earlier religion of Ahura Mazda, the biographical information regarding Zarathustra remains limited. Simply determining when he lived is a challenge. For example, 558 BCE was the date ascribed to Zarathustra during the Seleucid dynasty based on the calculations given by the magi.[10] However, *Aristotle,* himself dated in the fourth century BCE, claimed that Zoroaster lived 6ooo years earlier.[11] It is possible that this extreme date was a way of downplaying the politics involved in studying and revering a rival Persian.[12] Another date of 1000 BCE was given using linguistic markers, which ML West cautions is linguistically unfounded. In his opinion, "One cannot take a body of texts in an otherwise undocumented language and declare on linguistic grounds that they must belong to the second and not to the first millennium BCE."[13] The use of language could, it seems, be placed in the first and second millennium, but ascribing an exact reference of one century over the other is problematic given regional language use. Finally, traditional Persian ideology dates Zarathustra around 660 BCE, and this date has become the generally accepted date by modern scholars, although no universal agreement exists.[14]

The historical Zarathustra remains shrouded in the religious constructs. An example of this shrouding can be seen in Boyce's description of Zarathustra's birth.

> Then the creation of Zardusht sped down from before Ohrmazd to the Endless light; from the Endless Light it sped down to the sun; from the sun it sped down to the moon; from the moon it sped down to the stars; and from the stars it sped down to the fire in the house of Frahimruvanan-Zoish. From that fire it sped upon Zoish's wife, at the time when she bore the daughter who became Zardusht's mother.[15]

Imagery involving Zarathustra's birth also includes a "descending star or lightning-flash"[16] Indeed, the details of Zarathustra's life appear to be of less significance than his participation in

[10] Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, trans. and edit. Mary Boyce (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984), 15.
[11] Boyce, *Textual Sources*, 15.
[12] Ken R. Vincent, *The Magi: From Zoroaster to the 'Three Wise Men'*" (North Richland Hills, Texas: BIBAL Press, 1999), 13.
[13] West, *Hymns of Zoroaster*, 5.
[14] Noss, *History of the World's Religions*, 357.
[15] Boyce, *Textual Sources*, 72.
[16] Andrew J. Welburn, "Iranian Prophetology and the Birth of the Messiah: The Apocalypse of Adam,*" in ANRW 2:25.6* edit by W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin: deGruyher, 1988), 4786.

the religion itself making the historical Zarathustra less significant than his role in the religion of Ahura Mazda. Zarathustra then becomes the "Asho," the one endowed with righteousness. He is the one emulated as the supreme follower and, while not himself divine, "he is admitted into the presence of the divine and endowed with the wisdom of Mazda."[17] In later tradition, Zarathustra becomes a mythic figure to whom "miracles and heroic acts are ascribed."[18] The additions of these characteristics indicate the possibility that Zarathustra did not start out as or consider himself a prophet, but rather a devotional poet. The status of prophetic figure may have been a later characterization.[19] Using the Gatha, Zarathustra's message could be interpreted as that of poet, prophet, or both. What is clear is that his message focused on the importance of living an ethical life that promoted the emphasis on order and righteousness.[20] This focus on monotheism and ethical dualism has remained a central component of Zoroastrianism.[21]

OBVIOUS SIMILARITIES

This section moves from the basic background information regarding Zoroastrianism to the obvious similarities between Christianity and Zoroastrianism. As most readers will be familiar with the basic components of Christianity, the emphasis of this section will be on Zoroastrian theology and eschatology. This section functions only to note the similarities. Arguments detailing why these similarities exist will be explored later in this paper. One of the primary similarities between the two religions is established in Zarathustra's movement away from the early polytheistic religion of Ahura Mazda, which involved the worship of daevas, connected with elements of nature, and asuras translated as "lords" who existed among the gods.[22] The religion of Ahura Mazda also emphasized ancestral worship, similar to that found in the Vedic religion and

[17] Rose, *Zoroastrianism,* 233-4. Asho is a used similarly to "Christ" or "Buddha."
[18] Rose, *Zoroastrianism,* 238.
[19] Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Hagiography and Monotheism in History: Doctrinal Encounters between Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14, no. 4 (2003): 408, accessed August 9, 2017.
[20] Noss, *History of the World's Religions*, 358; Whitney, *Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*, 25; Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 234.
[21] Just as the dating of Zoroaster's life is a point of contention in scholarship, so too is his death. Little is known of the specifics of his death. It is thought by some that he died in Balkh amidst a battle between the king Vishtaspa, who was a convert and supporter of Zoroaster and his religious teachings, and the king's rivals, the Turanians. John W. Waterhouse, Zoroastrianism (San Diego, California: The Book Tree, 2006), 24.
[22] Noss, *Hisotry of the World's Religions*, 355-356.

Aryan people in general.[23] "As wandering pastoralists, the Indo-Iranians had no temples, and worshipped mainly in the open, without alters or images. The uttered hymns of praise and thanksgiving, and prayers while making a sacrifice and food offerings."[24] Worship included deities beyond Ahura Mazda, including Varuna, Mithra, and Indra.[25] However, even with the multiple deities, many traditions established Ahura Mazda "Lord of Wisdom."[26]

Zarathustra accepted the concept of Ahura Mazda as supreme and focused on the universal principle of order, righteousness, and truth, which was described in the term Asha or Arta.[27] Additionally, Zarathustra emphasized a monotheism involving Ahura Mazda's order as a means of establishing freewill and ethical dualism. As seen in other religions, including Christianity, forms of ethical dualism require complicated theology when attached to monotheism. According to Hintze, it is important to note that classifying Zoroastrianism based on terms such as monotheism, polytheism, and dualism is problematic and is a much-debated topic in Zoroastrian scholarship.[28] Such caution is reasonable regarding any religion to which these terms are applied as they can be used to over-simplify the theology, especially as a religion develops and divides. Additionally, these are later Western terms and must be understood to be embedded in Western linguistic constructs and theory. The terms are here employed as a function of comparative religion involving theological similarities between Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

The concept of ethical dualism in Zoroastrianism is complex and has undergone many changes throughout the religion's development. Without digressing too far into the theology, the tradition establishes the dualistic elements of Spenta Mainyu the Good Spirit of creation, connected directly to Ahura Mazda, and the Bad Spirit Angra Mainyu, whose relationship to Ahura Mazda is debated.[29] The Younger Avesta places Spenta Mainyu, associated with Ahura Mazda,

[23] Whitney, *Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*, 3; Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources,* 9-10.
[24] Boyce, *Textual Sources*, 9.
[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Ibid. As mentioned previously, there was never universal conformity in the Iranian religion; variation did occur. According to Ara, there are stories in which the god Indara is described as the creator of the world. Mitra Ara, *Eschatology in the Indo-Iranian Traditions: The Genesis and Transformation of a Doctrine* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008.) 93. Ahura Mazda, however, certainly held distinction among other gods in most cases, and, especially under the influence of Zoroaster, he became the supreme God.
[27] Ibid., 9, 13 & 38-39; Rose, *Zoroastrianism*, 20-21 & 34-36.
[28] Almut Hintze, "Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 2 (2014): 1.
[29] Noss, *History of the World's Religions*, 360; Choksy, "Hagiography and Monotheism," 413.

in opposition to Angra Mainyu but leaves vague the exact oppositional relationship.[30] As Boyd and Crosby note, in the Gāthā[31], specifically Yasna 30:3-4, Zarathustra explains the relationship between the Good and Bad twin spirits who, when they meet for the first time, "[create] both life and not-life."[32] Within this dualism, Ahura Mazda remains supreme and yet is discussed as also facing direct opposition from Angra Mainyu. Indeed, while the basic conflict is often described as being between Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu, the ultimate victory over Angra Mainyu belongs to Ahura Mazda. Furthermore, despite the association of the Spenta Mainyu and Ahura Mazda, Zarathustra claimed that everything, both good and bad, came from Ahura Mazda.[33]

A.V. Williams Jackson gives a solution to these issues by claiming that the period of Zarathustra does not reflect a true dualism in that Ahura Mazda claims eventual victory. He explains, " Angra Mainyu is coeval with God and is practically coequal but not eternal."[34] Later believers are grappling with these questions who developed a "truer" dualism.[35] One of the most well-known examples of the developing dualistic theologies is what Mary Boyce calls the one great heresy of Zoroastrianism, Zurvanism.[36] Boyce outlines the development claiming that Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu become represented as twin brothers born from Zurvan, a god represented as Time.[37] The tradition states that when Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu were in the womb, their father, Zurvan, vowed that whoever was born first would become king. Angra Mainyu came out first as a "dark and noisome" creature, which caused Zurvan to wait for the birth of the "fragrant and bright" Ahura Mazda. Though Zurvan preferred to establish Ahura Mazda as king, Angra Mainyu forced him to honor his vow. Therefore, Zurvan asserted that Angra Mainyu would rule for 9,000 years, after which Ahura Mazda would rule the world.[38] The discussion of

[30] Hintze, "Monotheism," 233; Boyce, *Textual Sources*, p. 12 states that "Ahura Mazda…had created the world and all that is good in it through his Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, who is both his active agent and yet one with him, indivisible and yet distinct."
[31] The term "Gāthā" refers to a portion of the sacred text of Zoroastrianism. The Gāthās belong to the portion of the Avesta known as the Older Avesta and they are thought to come from Zoroaster himself.
[32] James W. Boyd and Donald A. Crosby, "Is Zoroastrianism Dualistic or Monotheistic?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 4 (1979), 559. Boyd and Crosby used the translation by Barr and Boyce in Boyce's text *A History of Zoroastrianism* p. 192-193.
[33] Noss, *History of the World's Religions*, 359-360.
[34] A.V. Williams Jackson, "Zoroastrianism and the Resemblances between it and Christianity," *The University of Chicago Press* no. 5 (1906) 339.
[35] Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism*, 92.
[36] Boyce, *Textual Sources*, 96-97.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 97-98.

"true" dualism and Zurvanism is used here to provide an example of the Zoroastrian theological attempts to reconcile monotheism and ethical dualism. Zarathustra's teachings left many questions unanswered by simply asserting Ahura Mazda as the supreme deity and describing the antithetical relationship between good and bad, which left theological interpretation to later followers. It is interesting to note that similar monotheism/dualism discussions and theologies have been part of Christianity since the scholastic era.

Along with the issues of monotheism and ethical dualism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity share similar, but not exact, eschatological narratives. Boyce notes that the Zoroastrian apocalyptic texts begin with references to Zarathustra's three sons conceived by virgins after his death from seed stored in Lake Kayansih. Each of the three would be born "in his own time."[39] Ara relates the same Saoshyant narrative with the addition of the names; "Ukhsyatereta, 'he who makes the truth grow,' Ukhsyatnemah, "he who makes reverence grow,' and Astvatereta, 'he who embodies the truth.'" [40] The first two are to come in their time and will fight but not succeed in overcoming evil. The final *Saoshyant* will resurrect the dead and bring about the defeat of evil that will establish the kingdom of Ahura Mazda.[41]

Zoroastrian eschatology involves two judgments. Judgment of independent souls occurs after death when the soul appears at the Chivnat Bridge.[42] Those individuals deemed good are

[39] Boyce, Textual Sources, 90-91.

[40] Ara, *Eschatology*, 209; Antonio Panaino, "Pre-Islamic Iranian Astral Mythology, Astrology, and the Star of Bethlehem" *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World and Modern Astronomy* edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) also gives a summary of the three "posthumous sons of Zoroaster" along with their names and designations. It is noted in footnote 34 that the doctrine is "fully developed in the Mazdaean Pahlavi sources (240-1). It is worth noting that the term *Saoshyant*, is at times used specifically to refer to the final or True Savior, but also to refer to saints or those who pious "adherents who would be like him [Zarathustra]" Ara, *Eschatology,* 208. According to Welburn, Iranian Prophetology, 4758, C.Colpe notes that the term is used in the Yasna to refer to individuals that were continuing the work of Zarathustra and could be interpreted as priests, while in other places it was applied to "princes, warriors and royal figures." It is also considered by some that the *Saoshyants* are reincarnations of Zarathustra. The justification for reincarnation stems from the failure of the world to be transformed before Zarathustra's death. A similar crisis occurred in first century Christianity when the second coming of Jesus failed to occur Ara, *Eschatology,* 208.

[41] Boyce, *Textual Sources, 20-21* notes that the concept of division of the times for each *Saoshyant* is likely the Zurvanite attempt to adapt the timetable to Babylonian astronomy's "Great Year." This set the 'world year' of 12,000 years, which established the 12-month calendar and established the pattern of millennium division regarding the three *Saoshyants.*

[42] Whitney, *Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*, 96; Rose, *Zoroastrianism*, 26-27.

taken over the bridge to paradise, called "The House of Song" or "Endless Lights," and those individuals deemed evil fall into the "House of the Lie" or "Endless Darkness."[43] It is in these places that the souls remain until final Judgement. Within some traditions, both the House of Song and House of Lie have multiple levels, and in the House of Song, for example, the soul continues to rise until reaching the top level in which it will reside until the final judgment.[44] Final judgment occurs once the last *Saoshyant*, arrives and resurrects the dead.[45] Heaven and hell will be emptied, and all souls will walk through molten fire.[46] For the good, this experience will be painless. However, for the evil, the experience will be excruciating but will result in purification. In the end, the kingdom of Ahura Mazda will be established.[47] While there are specific differences between Zoroastrian and Christian eschatology, the question remains whether the two are more similar or more different. Similarity opens the door to further questions of influence and colonization; different creates arguments such as those claiming coincidence. This paper argues that, while there are three *Saoshyants* and one Christ, the differences may be simply in number or in interpretation since Christ returns a second time and in some Zoroastrian traditions the three *Saoshyants* as reincarnations of Zarathustra. Additionally, references to the single or dual judgment, along with similar Zoroastrian narrative imagery, can be seen in various Christian denominational traditions.

In terms of a final obvious connection, it is interesting to note that Zarathustra and Jesus share a commonality involving the historical details of their lives being subjugated to their roles within the respective religions. This has incorporated in both religions a vagueness involving biographical detail. However, there is one significant distinction between the two religious figures. While Zarathustra is considered the most revered follower of Ahura Mazda, Jesus becomes the Christ and is given divinity. Additionally, there is no suffering savior imagery in Zoroastrianism, leading to a vagueness regarding his death, whereas the suffering of Christ is significant, making his death and resurrection central to the religion.

[43] Rose, *Zoroastrianism*, 26-27.
[44] Noss, *History of the World's Religions*, 362
[45] Prods Oktor Skjaervo, intro., trans., edit. *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* (London: Yale University Press, 2011) 29; Rose, *Zoroastrianism*, 27-28.
[46] Skjaervo, *The Spirit of Zorastrianism,* 33.
[47] Rose, *Zoroastrianism*, 26-28.

LESS OBVIOUS CONNECTIONS

Scholarship provides ample evidence of a Persian/Jewish connection, particularly in the post-Exilic era. During this time, Zoroastrianism was the official religion in Persia. It stands to reason, then, that the two religions interacted with one another. In fact, Jewish advances in eschatology have been credited to Zoroastrian influences. Barr affirms the Zoroastrian influence on Judaism's development of angels, dualism, bodily resurrection, and eschatology. However, Barr cautions not to compare the two religions in such a general context as to depict them inaccurately and rather directs his readers to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship that exists between Judaism and Zoroastrianism. For Barr, context matters. While the two religions may share a word, idea, or symbol in common, it is important to ask if that word, idea, or symbol has the same meaning and significance in each religion. For example, regarding the Zoroastrian influence on Judaism, Barr posits that the lack of detail in the Hebrew Bible regarding the religion of Ahura Mazda signifies a lack of interest in the Persian religion.[48] He acknowledges that the benevolent ruling of Cyrus would have made the Jewish people more favorable to the political ruling, but it does not indicate an interest in their religion. While an important caution regarding the need to understand context, Barr's hesitation does not dispel the need for scholars to investigate the connection between these two religions. It does, however, remind scholars to maintain an accurate representation of each religion in order to deter acts of conflation. While heeding Barr's caution, it is significant that even Barr noted the Zoroastrian influence on Judaism. With the understanding that Zoroastrian eschatology impacted Judaic eschatology and as Judaic eschatology impacted Christian eschatology, it is reasonable to extend Zoroastrian influence to Christianity. This connection would account for the similarities noted in the previous section. However, connection between the religions appears to go beyond a mere transitive property argument. There is additional evidence of connection, but because of length, this paper will focus on only two.

First, a commonality exists between Zoroastrian narratives involving the *Saoshyant* and the Christ regarding virgin births. It seems significant to both narratives that the birth of both saviors involves virgins. Whether such a requirement is divinely ordained or necessitated by politics to mark the birth of a significant figure, the idea of a virgin birth is significant in both

[48] Barr, *Question,* 209.

narratives.[49] Brown, however, argues that there is no real similarity between the virgin birth of Christ and other virgin births. Brown notes the existence of other virgin births-claims including both religious and non-religious figures such as Buddha, Krishna, Perseus, Romulus, Pharaohs, Alexander, Augustus, Plato, and Apollonius of Tyana. He argues that there is no justification for claiming that first century Christians would have known these stories, or if they did, they would have no reason to pattern them. His reasoning hinges on the difference between what he calls the "pagan" virgin births and Christ's virgin birth. According to Brown, the pagan narratives involve, for the early Christians, "gross or amoral sexual conduct on the part of the deity who was thought to have begotten the child."[50] Additionally, Brown notes that the pagan births failed to parallel "the non-sexual virginal conception of Jesus described in the NT, where Mary is not impregnated by a male deity or element, but the child is begotten through the creative power of the Holy Spirit."[51] Brown focuses his analysis primarily on penetration. His assumption that early Christians would not use the penetration model because of its amoral connotations, while potentially eliminating "pagan" births, does not answer the non-penetration Zoroastrian means of impregnation.[52] Indeed, Brown appears to include Zoroastrianism in his analysis of non-Christian virgin birth narratives, but it is unclear. What is clear is that the Zoroastrian virgin birth narratives do not share the penetration model. The virgins enter the lake and the seed of Zarathustra miraculously unites with them in a way that allows for a vague and "creative power" impregnation similar to that of Mary. It is possible that Brown holds that the difference between the two narratives to rest in the fact that the seed from the *Saoshyant* originates from a human whereas the conception of Christ involved no human male.

The virgin birth may be additionally complicated by Boyce and Grenet's claim that much of the Christ virgin birth tradition is a "matter for conjecture" as the "the virgin birth of Christ…is held to be based on the Septuagint mistranslation of Hebrew *'almāh* 'young woman' in Isaiah

[49] It is worth noting that the divinely conceived virgin births tend to end in male offspring. Additional research is needed to explore the virgin/divine birth imagery in the birth of powerful male figures. It is also worth noting that the virgin designation may also involve concepts such as the virginal love goddess of Sumer and Akkad. The goddess was the "queen of fertility…adored in cults that spread to all sectors of the fertile crescent and beyond" (Noss and Noss 1994, 43-44).
[50] Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of The Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,* updated edition (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 523.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 522-523.

7.14."[53] Inserting Boyce and Grenet's claim here is not to insert doubt on the Christ birth narrative, but noting that the virgin traditions in both religions rely on a vague and creative conception that remains part of a traditional narrative and open to interpretation. Beyond that, the symbolic significance of the virgin conception in the overall eschatology of the respective traditions is comparable.

A second area evidence regarding Zoroastrian/Christian connection involves the appearance of the magi in the numerous narratives of Jesus' birth, both canonical and non-canonical. The gospels of Matthew and Luke are the only canonical gospels to give an account of the birth of Jesus. The differences between these texts, which are numerous, have been widely studied and need not be laid out in detail here. It is important, however, to note that Luke's account does not include the story of the magi or the star that led them. Luke only mentions shepherds, no specific number given, who visit the infant Jesus. It seems that Luke does not incorporate the tradition of the magi found in Matthew and other non-canonical infancy narratives. Vincent, however, suggests that the Magian tradition has not completely fallen away from the Lukan account; rather, it comes through more subtly through the imagery of light and angels.[54] There are parallels to the Magian tradition in the general structure of the story in that a group of individuals is directed by a divine entity, in this case an angel of the Lord, to travel to visit the Christ child. Additionally, other non-canonical infancy narratives include the story of the shepherds' visit in addition to the visit by the magi. Therefore, it can be argued that certain Zoroastrian and Magian traditions come through in the Lukan account; however, it is far subtler than its canonical counterpart and other non-canonical accounts.

Besides the infancy narratives found in Matthew and Luke, similar accounts are related in other texts, such as the Protevangelium of James, The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, The Opus Imperfectum, The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary, The Cave of Treasures, The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy, and The Book of the Bee. These accounts much more closely resemble the account in Matthew. In fact, the Protevangelium of James and Matthew agree in every detail except the location of the birth, Matthew taking place in a house and the Protevangelium taking

[53]Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, cont. by Roger Beck, *A History of Zoroastrianism: Zoroastrianism Under Macedonian and Roman Rule, vol. 3* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991) 451.
[54] Vincent, *The Magi,* 28.

place in a cave.[55] For the sake of space, this paper cannot discuss these accounts individually. However, collectively they are remarkably similar, despite variations in specific details and length. For example, of these infancy narratives, only three of them provide names for the magi; one of them describes twelve magi as opposed to three, and some use the term "kings" instead of magi. The discrepancy in number may be a matter of developing Church Doctrine, as it was not until the third century that the Church Father Origen officially decreed the number of magi to be three.[56]

Regardless of the minor discrepancies between these narratives, the general plot remains the same. The narratives describe the magi following a star, traveling to meet the baby Jesus, bringing and presenting gifts, and interacting with Herod. While it may be seen as cherry picking or an allusion to universal religious imagery, celestial elements and events are common in Zoroastrianism.[57] It is clear, however, that there was a widespread infancy tradition involving the magi from the beginning of the first century expanding all the way to the Middle Ages with the *Book of the Bee*. The question is then whether the magi were Persian/Zoroastrian, and, if so, why such symbolism was included in so many of the infancy narratives.

This paper will not attempt to definitively answer the question regarding the identity of the magi, but rather to note the existence of ample scholarship that connects the magi with the Persian, and so the Zoroastrian, tradition. Specifically addressing the history of the magi, Choksy explains that the magi were originally a priestly cast, who continued the tradition of Zoroaster.[58] Ossendrijver further distinguishes the Chaldeans and the magi according to function. The Chaldeans, largely associated with the Babylonian empire, were considered the scholars or the astronomers, while the magi, associated with the Persians or Medians, were responsible for rituals, divination, and dream interpretation. They were also connected with educating princes. It is also important to note confusion involving the term "magus." The term represents both the singular of magi as well as a term meaning "magician" and relates to certain figures such as Simon Magus, the well-known Gnostic heretic. Terminological difficulty continues, as noted by Ossendrijver, in that during the Greco-Roman era, the term magi became a sort of generic term referring to any non-Greek scholar, which may have been the reason for the writer of the Gospel of Matthew to

[55] Ibid., 27-32.
[56] Ibid., 33.
[57] Ibid., 28.
[58] Choksy, "Hagiography and Monotheism," 408.

choose it over the more political Chaldean.[59] Panaino echoes the distinction between the Chaldeans and the magi noting the responsibility of the magi for sacrifices and ceremonies as well as their administrative functions. Panaino suggests the need for the magi to be scholarly in Matthew, although generically so, in order to fulfill Deutero-Isaiah 45:1.

Additionally, the imagery of Iranian magi may have been to give legitimacy to Jesus as "Lord of the World" since the Iranian priests had previously sanctioned Cyrus as "Lord Anointed." Since the magi were "king-makers," Panaino notes that their use could have been because of their recognition as moral figures, which would establish a "manifest universalism" in which priests from different traditions recognized the birth of Christ. Finally, he notes that there may have been a political agenda attached to the use of the magi because it indicates that Harrod's people failed to notice the significance regarding the birth of Christ (237-242).[60] This failure could then be understood as a sign of the rise of Christ and the decline of Harrod.[61] As king-makers, the magi could have been used to establish Christ's birthright.[62] However, Delong does note that much of the interpretation of the magi represents a later, or postcolonial, interpretation of the development of the events in order to establish Jesus as the "king of kings".[63] An interesting interpretation claims that the magi were not Persian, but instead came from a "mythical" land in the Far East near the ocean. [64] By establishing a fictional land from whence they came, the magi become completely disassociated with Persia. Indeed, von Struckrad claims that the entire story is no more

[59] Mathieu Ossendrijver, "The Story of the Magi in the Light of Alexander the Great's Encounters with Chaldeans," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy,* edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 217-230.

[60] Antonio Panaino, "Pre-Islamic Iranian Astral Mythology, Astrology, and the Star of Bethlehem," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy,* edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 237-242.

[61] Jan Willem van Henten, "The World Leader from the Land of the Jews: Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.300-315; Tacitus, *Histories*5-13; and Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4.5" *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy,* edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 363.

[62] Albert de Jong, "Matthew's Magi as Experts on Kingship," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy,* edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 271-285.

[63] Ibid., 279.

[64] Darrell D. Hannah, "The Star of the Magi and the Prophecy of Balaam in Earliest Christianity, with Special Attention to the Lost Books of Balaam," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy,* edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 446.

than a fictional account designed to promote a leader of the world.[65]

According to Boyce and Grenet later Christians set the number of magi to three in order to conform to the number of "princely presents" given by Seleucus II to Apollo in 243 BC, which also consisted of the gold, frankincense and myrrh reported in Matthew 2:11. In addition, the change of the magi to kings may have been a way to preserve the prophecy in Psalms 72:10. They also note that in both the *Opus Imperfectum* and *Chronicle* Seth has clearly taken the place of Zoroaster as instructor of the magi" and that "in another group of Syriac stories 'Zaradust' is named directly as the source of the prediction about the star and the coming savior" (450).[66] Using information from Theodore bar Konia, later bishop of Lashom, Boyce and Grenet relate the narrative in which

> Zaradust, seated by a fountain of water, prophesied to his disciples that a child would be born of a virgin, would be crucified and mourned by all nations, but would return with the armies of light. This child, Zaradust declared, was to be of his own family. 'I am he and he is I; he is in me and I am in him'. His disciples would be the first to know of the child's birth and were to take him offerings, for he would be the king of kings".[67]

Additionally, Boyce and Grenet referenced the *Opus*.

> The magi of Persia had for generations been expecting a star to appear; and how every year, after the threshing festival, twelve of the most learned among them, versed in the celestial mysteries, would ascend a mountain which in their tongue they called 'Victorious Mountain' *(Mons Victorialis)* …At last one year the star appeared descending over that mountain, having within it the form of a tiny boy, and the likeness of a cross above it. Led by it they made their way to Judea. On their return they taught many people; and when after Jesus' death the apostle Thomas went to that region, they attached themselves to him and were Baptized.[68]

Finally, Boyce and Grenet relate the story in the *Chronicle* which has Seth placing both treasures and a book, written by him, into *Mons Victorious.*

> Twelve magi down the generations kept watch every year outside this cave; and at last a brilliant star appeared, as if raised on a pillar. The star descended into the cave, into which a voice summoned the magi. There they saw what its light had concentrated itself into a form of a tiny man, who greeted them and bade them follow the star to Palestine, carrying

[65] Kocku von Stuckrad, "Stars and Powers: Astrological Thinking in Imperial Politics from the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and Modern Astronomy*, edit. Peter Barthel and George van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 397.
[66] Boyce and Grenet, *History of Zoroastrianism,* 450.
[67] Ibid., 451.
[68] Ibid., 448.

> the treasures from the cave as gifts to the new-born savior. —What the gifts were is not specified in this story. [69]

Narratives such as these may be the reason that later interpretations of Zarathustra establish him as magi or as an astronomer to the point of claiming "his name was also interpreted as referring to the stars."[70] Boyce and Grenet admit that no determination as to why the narratives came into existence. Such narratives may have been a means of conversion or a way for converts to keep old traditions. Regardless, what such narratives do is establish a further link to the pre-Christian tradition of Zoroastrianism.[71] For Kidger, arguments for Babylonian, Jewish diaspora, and Persian origins all present reasonable cases, but he admits leaning towards the Persian origin theory regarding the magi.[72] It is also not unreasonable to assume knowledge, particularly among the Syrian communities, of Zoroastrian traditions including the eschatology. It is also not unreasonable to assume a Zoroastrian component being used in the Christ narratives and the eschatology as a means of promoting Jesus as the "kind of kings" and the universal Savior.

COLONIZATION PATTERNS

This paper is not arguing that Zoroastrianism and Christianity are identical, but only that they share too many elements to claim non-relation. The paper asserts that the ignoring of the similarities involving monotheism, ethical dualism, the developing arguments for evil, virgin births, saviors, heaven/hell, resurrections, judgment and the kingdom of God is in itself a form of cherry picking. Heeding Barr's call for caution and contextualization, it is recognized that differences exist between Christianity and Zoroastrianism, such as the Christian emphasis on the suffering and death of the savior while Zoroastrianism has neither a suffering messiah, nor does it focus on Zarathustra's death. Equally, the particulars regarding the virgin births differ, yet they share both a common significance to the respective narratives as well as a creative vagueness. A caution equal to Barr's appears necessary involving the cherry picking of differences as a means of ignoring what appears to be the preponderance of evidence that links the two religions in a relationship similar to the Jewish/Christian relation.

One could claim that the continued denial of connection is no more than coincidence or

[69] Ibid., 450.
[70] Panaino, *Pre-Islamic Iranian*, 238.
[71] Boyce and Grenet, *History of Zoroastrianism,* 451.
[72] Mark Kidger, *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer's View* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press) 178-197.

scholarly choice, but such a denial ignores the systemic pattern of erasure connected with Western patterns of colonization and post-colonization efforts regarding "borrowed" knowledge. Additionally, some may argue that Zoroastrianism is now a relatively small religion and should be placed alongside other small religions in terms of scholarly priority. However, persecution has occurred, and discrimination often continues because Zoroastrianism is discussed as "ancient history" rather than a topic for modern concern. It may also be argued that no intentional omission or oppression of Zoroastrian information is at work in scholarly endeavors, but that scholars choose their areas of interest and few choose Zoroastrianism. These claims belie a hidden curriculum that systematically pushes Zoroastrianism beyond mainstream world religion study and works to keep the scholarship out of classroom cannon. As with colonized religions in general, Zoroastrianism often fails to make the syllabus because of time requirements.

Additionally, textbook treatments of Zoroastrian influences on Christianity remain sequestered within the Zoroastrian chapters. Unlike Judaism, Zoroastrian ancestry fails to make an appearance in Christian chapters. It seems legitimate to examine why the majority of authors make the same choice. Swadener and Mutua argue that there is a need to decolonize Western academia by bringing to light the role that choice of material, language usage, and academic methodology play in supporting oppression. This hidden curriculum acts as a form of cultural genocide by creating false understandings of the past and establishes a historic "forgetting."[73]

An example of the historic forgetting can be seen in the continued debate over the origin and significance of the magi. As long as the magi are framed only in terms of their significance to the infancy narratives and are discussed mainly in reference to the Christian narrative, their larger role in the history of the region remains silenced. The magi then become no more than a footnote to the infancy narratives and the tradition surrounding them is revised to suit the Christian contextual needs. Similarly, by claiming that references to Zarathustra and the magi in the infancy narratives is either for conversion, as with the Thomas narratives, or is the nostalgia of converts ensures that knowledge, tradition, and civilization patterns move from the West to East. In this way, Christianity is seen as influencing Zoroastrianism, which it no doubt did, but the influence

[73]Beth Swadener and Kagendo Mutua, "Decolonizing Performances: deconstructing the global postcolonial" *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* edit. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008) 31-43. Discussions of "enforced forgetting" can be also be found in Robert Bevan's *The Destruction of Memory* second expanded edition (Los Angeles: Reaktion Books, 2016).

of Zoroastrianism on Christianity is denied or forgotten.

A further form of academic erasure can be seen in what is cited as the difficulties surrounding the dating of Zoroastrian texts. Dating difficulties do, indeed, exist regarding Zoroastrian texts. However, scholars have succeeded in giving both evidence and arguments for the general dating to many of the ancient texts in the region, including Zoroastrian texts.

As chronicled by Boyce, the study of the Avesta presents a challenge beginning with the Gathic language and because of the destruction of the Great Avesta, which was referenced as having been created in the Sasanian period. While originally understood to be an oral tradition, during the Sasanian period, a canon of twenty-one books along with a large collection of sacred literature is claimed to have been created. Fragments of the Great Avesta survived along with the Zands, particularly the Pahlavi Zand and were preserved largely in Middle Persian or Pahlavi.[74] The importance to scholarship is then if knowledge of Zoroastrian tradition and the Avesta can be established before the first century BCE and if this tradition contains enough evidence of the early Zoroastrian monotheism, ethical dualism, and eschatology to legitimize its existence in the region prior to Christianity. Zarathustra is understood to have composed the seventeen Gathas and secular records indicate that Zoroastrianism from the east was carried to the west between 550-330 BCE during the Achaemenian period.[75]

Additional scholarship shows the existence of Zoroastrian tradition and eschatology prior to the development of Christianity. This paper will briefly examine two such documents, the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Oracle of Hystaspes.* According to Welburn, while potentially being written later, the information contained in the *Apocalypse* exhibits no evidential connection to post-Christian doctrine.[76] He notes both a Zoroastrian and Judaic influence in the work, but also notes that the *Apocalypse* "does not mention Jesus, and shows no marks of Christian influence."[77] Welburn's claim is that the Older Iranian stories are supported by Zoroastrian concepts of universalism, which indicated that the *Saoshyants*, those who would continue the work of Zarathustra, "would be born in the several regions of the earth as well as at several times in the

[74] Boyce, *Textual Sources,* 3.
[75] Ibid., 1-7.
[76] Welburn, *Iranian Prophetology*, 4755.
[77] Ibid., 4785.

world-cycle."[78] "At any rate, the eschatological star-child was in some circles also the reappearing Zarathustra, and in the Christian version he becomes Jesus."[79] Welburn concludes by noting "…there is no trace of a descending divinity, nor a 'suffering Messiah' there is no 'Savior' either. .The prophets appear in their appropriate cycle, and their multiplication shows that they are 'world-saviors' only in a provisional manner, and must be followed by another manifestation in another time or place."[80] Welburn traces the origin of the *Apocolypse* to the first century BCE but admits it may have originated from earlier oral tradition.[81] If Welburn is correct and this tradition is of Zoroastrian/Judaic origin, then it is reasonable to establish the pre-Christian existence of *Saoshyants*, the "Mountain of God," and the general Zoroastrian eschatology.

Hinnells notes similar absences of Christian components in *Oracle*. While the Oracle may have been popular in Christianity in the 2nd century CE, he traces the elements of the *Oracle* directly to the Avesta and to the "heart of Zoroastrian theology." His contention is that there is evidence that the *Oracle* represents a "direct descendant" from Avesta sources and may be part of the family of the lost Avesta that "embodied" additional apocalyptic material. The dating of the *Oracle* is given as being between the 1st and 2nd century BCE.[82] If his argument of the Zoroastrian origin of the *Oracle* prevails, it supports the claim that Zoroastrian eschatology and theology pre-existed similar Christian concepts (147). Scholarship such as that provided by Welburn and Hinnells then promotes the flow of knowledge, tradition, and civilization moving from East to West.

Finally, Ara contends that the eschatological themes in both Zoroastrianism and Christianity express regional imagery and elements of these may be found in earlier traditions. Ara's claim is that the religions in the region failed to develop in a vacuum and, while one may not want to claim that any given religion developed entirely from another, it is significant to note that certain concepts, including the eschatological imagery and narrative, pre-dated Christian narratives.[83] Given the scholarship of those working with both Near Eastern and Persian texts,

[78] Ibid., 4758.
[79] Ibid., 4789.
[80] Ibid., 4790.
[81] Ibid., 4755.
[82] John R. Hinnells, "The Zoroastrian Doctrine of Salvation in the Roman World," *Man and His Salvation: Studies in Memory of S.G.F. Brandon,* edit. Erick J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973) 125-148.
[83] Ara, *Eschatology, 1-7.*

there seems to be ample evidence to conclude that the Zoroastrian tradition and eschatology was established prior to Christian tradition. This scholarship then refutes the dismissal of Zoroastrian influence based in the "textual dating difficulty" argument.

Another pattern, often used in colonization practices, involves the belittling of the colonized. By labeling the colonized community as being of lesser status intellectually, theologically, or socially, the community can be referred to as "primitive," "unsophisticated," and "uncivilized." Several of the scholars mentioned in this paper denounce the overly simplistic interpretation of the ancient world. Western scholarship has repeatedly dismissed the sophistication of non-Western and ancient civilizations by misapplying Western ontology and epistemology standards to these cultures. Historically, such interpretations have resulted in stereotyping and discrimination. Non-Western civilizations are often interpreted as lacking grand theory, such as that demonstrated in the Western theology. Zoroastrianism has been subjected to just such interpretations. For example, the Zoroastrian construct of Good Thought has been called a mere abstraction used by the ancients to describe the world they could not understand. Such a claim fails to recognize the significance of this construct in the complex and dynamic Zoroastrian theology. Failing to recognize a divergent ontology allows Western systematic theology to deny the equity of the alternate paradigm as they do not meet the required Western standards and definitions required to be either theology or grand theory. There is no logical justification for such assumptions; nonetheless, it has become the status quo position regarding non-Western traditions.

Boyce evidences another technique in what she refers to as the over-statement of the conflict between the Zoroastrians and Christians during the Sasanian era.[84] The interpretation of extreme conflict supports the idea that no cross-influence occurred as the two sides were oppositional. Should the interpretation allow for a lesser opposition or even a communal tolerance, cross-influence becomes more likely and an East to West transference of knowledge becomes relevant. Decolonization studies investigate these interpretations along with the division of the region into "Middle East" and "Mesopotamia." Placing Persian and Zoroastrian studies in the Mesopotamia scholarly camp further ensures silencing of any influence on the Middle East. Recognition of the above colonization patters works to decolonize both scholarship and the academic canon in such a way as to reverse the academic erasure involving the extent of

[84] Boyce and Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism,* 456.

Zoroastrian religious influence. The significance of decolonization is then that, in the words of Boyce and Grenet, scholarship can recognize that Zoroastrianism has "bequeathed to Christianity" concepts involving eschatology, monotheism, and dualism as well as "a number of lesser legacies."[85] The continued academic indoctrination that sophistication, knowledge, and civilization flowed only from West to East beginning with the Indo-European migration reinforces the denial or forgetting that not only did civilization exist in the region prior to migration, but that this civilization exhibited complex epistemologies and advanced ontologies.

CONCLUSION

This paper began by asking if the religions of the region could stand close to each other as they waited for their respective saviors. Specifically, the question was whether Christianity could stand next to Zoroastrianism and recognize its ancestral contributions. There are several potential roadblocks inhibiting the standing next to each other, including the adherence to theological and postcolonial claims of Western and Christian superiority, one of which can be seen in the move from the historical Jesus to the Christ. Involved in this theological move is a concept of universalism that requires the Christ to be unique and to complete or subsume all of the religions of the world. The results of this universalism can be seen in the myth of supersession, which claimed that Christianity fulfilled and supplanted the Jewish religion and allowed for the punishment of the Jews, which escalated into the Holocaust. In the case of Zoroastrianism, the universalization can be seen to have suppressed and silenced Zoroastrian religious contributions both regionally and globally. This myth of Zoroastrian suppression supports the erasure in order to preserve the uniqueness of the Christ narrative and of Christian theology and eschatology. It may be, as Erickson describes, the tendency to subordinate other traditions is a natural one and may be tied to a "deep-seated conviction that some providence has made his tribe or race or caste… even his religion 'naturally' superior to others".[86] However, such a claim only emphasizes the importance of decolonization studies as a means to combat these natural urges. Standing close to one another would require all parties to recognize such urges and work against them to establish an understanding that allows for the potential of multiple paths to God.

Armstrong gives voice to the ability of the religions of the region to, in effect, stand close

[85] Ibid., 446.
[86] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1968) 298.

to one another in an attitude of respect, but notes in *The Battle for God* that fundamentalist religious interpretations hinder such a relationship. She attributes the rise of fundamentalism to, among other aspects, the loss of the significance of both *mythos* and *logos* in religion. Fundamentalism "turned the *mythos* of their religion into *logos,* either by inserting that their dogmas are scientifically true or by transforming their complex mythology into a streamlined ideology."[87] The fear of the other largely drives the reliance on dogma. While not focusing on Zoroastrianism in her book, Armstrong exhibits many of the postcolonial resistance involved in the recognition of Zoroastrian contributions, including the dogma of universalism and uniqueness and the fear of the other.

Smith echoes Armstrong's treatment of fundamentalism as a fear-based reaction that promotes dogma and notes that the dogma exists in both the religious and secular arenas.[88] Smith also notes the significance of myth, which was "restored" by Campbell and emphasized by Niebuhr, as being "*truer* than history because it addresses things that are more deep-lying, more enduring than history."[89] In this interpretation, narrative points to what is beyond it and gives the basis for discussing what cannot be adequately expressed linguistically. The regional religions discussed here can then be thought of as expressing traditions that need not cancel each other out or dominate each other, but rather support a broader dialogue regarding that which is labeled God. When taken in totality, the religions can be seen in a relationship that allows and supports the uniqueness of the other. Using concepts reminiscent of Campbell's religious imagery, Smith describes the three-dimensional cross as a model for religions "standing close to each other." The different religions exist on a horizontal axis, which is positioned on the vertical axis that extends to the Ultimate Unity.[90] While still couched in Western colonial language, the sentiment is one of equity in which the different religions establish rituals that act as doors through which one can seek the Unity and allows for the differences in culture, tradition, history as well as individual orientation. In the end, the question of whether or not Christianity and Zoroastrianism can stand

[87] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: a history of fundamentalism* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2000) 366.
[88] Huston Smith, *The Huston Smith Reader* edit. Jeffery Paine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 96-103).
[89] Ibid., 100.
[90] Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions* (New York; HarperCollins, 1992) 23-33. Imagery based on Rene Guenon's *Symbolism of the Cross* (London: Luzac & Company, 1958).

close to each other as they wait may be dependent on Christianity's ability to define the universalism in the move from historic Jesus to Christ in such a way as to the uniqueness of its narrative and eschatology while at the same time accepting that it is *a truth rather than the truth*. Scholars such as Armstrong and Smith offer suggestions as to how Christianity might make this move and allow for the grafting of the Zoroastrian branch onto the ancestral olive tree. Such a graft would allow for Zoroastrianism to be part of the religious family.

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