

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.26.2024.310			
Received:	1 Feb. 2024.	Accepted:	15 September 2024
Revised:	18 July 2024	Published:	15 December 2024
Volume:	26 (Dec.)	Pages:	157-168
To cite:			
Tijani Boulaouali. 2024. The historical, theological and spiritual commonality between the monotheistic religions: A comparative approach between the Biblical Abraham and the Quranic Ibrahim. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 26 (Dec.): 157-168.			

The Historical, Theological and Spiritual Commonality between the Monotheistic Religions: A Comparative Approach between the Biblical Abraham and the Quranic Ibrahim

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the Prophet Abraham as a historical, theological and spiritual commonality between the monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Although many centuries have passed from the historical context in which Abraham lived according to both the Quranic and biblical narratives, Abraham is still considered a factor of rapprochement among all followers of monotheism, whether Jews, Christians, and Muslims, in times of prosperity and crises, and moments of peace and wars as well. This article is divided into three chapters. Firstly, the fundamental term "Abraham/Ibrahim" is examined etymologically and semantically. Secondly, the figure of Abraham is discussed theologically both in the biblical and Quranic narratives. Finally, the shared aspects of Abraham between the three monotheistic traditions are analyzed, focusing on its historical, theological, and spiritual commonalities. In this article, we have adopted a comparative approach between the biblical Abraham and the Quranic Ibrahim, based on several biblical texts, especially in the Old Testament and Quranic verses. Finally, the main conclusion of this work is that Abraham, as a historical figure from whom all monotheists descend, is no longer related to the past only. He extends throughout history to the present and then to the future, as a symbol of religious, spiritual, and moral unity.

Keywords: *Abraham, Bible, Christianity, Ibrahim, Islam, Judaism, Quran.*

The figure of Abraham occupies a crucial place in this article as a fundamental commonality between the three sister religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), not only historically, but also contemporarily, and it opens up prospects for the future as well. This means that Abraham is the historical departure point from which all three monotheistic traditions started. Every tradition has taken its line, but these various lines differ from what is in mathematics, where the straight lines do not meet except at one point, and once. On the contrary, Abraham has always been a meeting point throughout history for all adherents of monotheism, both in the war and peace circumstances. Moreover, Abraham cannot only be considered a historical "ecumenism" between Jews, Christians, and Muslims (Küng 2007). He is also regarded as genealogical (the father of

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Ishmael and Isaac), theological (monotheism, Scriptures, eschatology), and spiritual (source of inspiration) commonality.

What is noteworthy in the religious narratives (Bible and Quran) is that Abraham/Ibrahim was the most itinerant prophet. He journeyed from his hometown, Ur in Mesopotamia to the Arabian Peninsula, and from there to the Levant (Canaan), to Egypt, then to Mecca. In this way, the theme 'Exodus' played a crucial role in Abraham's life (Wessels 2011). In a supernatural way, he left his second wife Hagar and her son Ishmael in the desert of Mecca, according to the Quran accounts. But, the secret of this occurrence would be revealed after many centuries, when the Prophet Muhammad appeared in Mecca and re-established Abrahamic monotheism (*hanafiyyah*) again.

This means that Abraham is to a large extent considered the figure agreed upon by the followers of monotheistic religions, whose number today exceeds more than half of the world's population. Who is Abraham? Where was he born and raised? Where did he migrate? How did he live? What was the message he carried for his people, for the communities in which he settled, and then for all of humanity? Why do Jews, Christians and Muslims unite around the personality of Abraham despite their theological and ideological differences? What are the moral and spiritual characteristics that made Abraham an inspiration to the followers of the three monotheistic religions, whether during the conditions of conflict or peace?

These important questions are discussed in this article in depth, based on the two holy Scriptures: the Bible and the Quran, to provide an approximate picture of Abraham's identity and personality, and then about his theological, moral and spiritual importance, whether for Jews, Christians, or Muslims. This article is divided into three chapters. Firstly, the fundamental term "Abraham/Ibrahim" is examined etymologically and semantically. Secondly, the figure of Abraham is approached theologically both in the biblical and Quranic narratives. Finally, the shared aspects of Abraham between the three monotheistic traditions are analyzed, focusing on its historical, theological, and spiritual commonalities.

Etymological and Semantic Definition

According to Ibn Manzur, Ibrahim is a strange term. It is pronounced in different ways: *Ibrahim*, *Ibrahum* and *Ibrahim* (Ibn Manzur 1980:271). The name Abraham is originally not Hebrew but Babylonian. However, this name belongs to the Hebrews and sounded to them quite different to that which its etymological meaning would suggest. In the "popular etymology" of Hebrew, *'abhrām* means "exalted father," which "fits the national and religious significance of the patriarch." (Boyd 1939). From another point of view, the name Abraham has no meaning in Hebrew, and it appears that another form of *Abram* exists, probably because of a misunderstanding of an early spelling. According to several biblical verses, *Abram* means the exalted father and the patriarch (Cheyne 1899), who is Abraham/Ibrahim. (As an example here the verse 16:3 from Genesis: "Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai).

In the Old Testament, the name *'abhrām* is mentioned in the sense of 'patriarch'. It was pronounced *'abraham*. In addition, there are other two persons called *'abhirām*. The identity of this name with *'abhrām* cannot be doubted in light of the difference between *'abhiner* and *'abhner*, *'abhshalom* and *'abhshalom*. Also, the name Abraham appears in the list at Karnak of places conquered by Sheshonk I, with which Spiegelberg proposes to connect the preceding name so that the whole world read "the field of Abram" (Boyd 1939; Binnendijk 2010).

Consequently, Abraham and Ibrahim are etymologically neither an Arabic nor a Hebrew name, but they are Babylonian in origin. In Hebrew, this term means the exalted father or the patriarch. But generally, both in the Bible and in the Quran, this refers to the proper name of "ancestor" Abraham/Ibrahim.

Abraham according to the Bible: Abraham as Forefather of Israel

According to Pierre Lory, Abraham, Ibrahim is in Arabic, one of the main characters of the prophets invoked in the Quran. He is mentioned frequently, in as many as twenty-five Suras. His profile in the Quran is very different from that in the Bible. In the book of Genesis, he is introduced as the “patriarch,” who has placed his faith in God on the promise of an abundant lineage and of possession of a fertile land (Lory 2007: 667-669), “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” (Gen. 13:2). In addition, the biblical account of Abraham is quite long (Gen. 11-25) and some passages of it can be found in the Quran, but the Islamic text lacks the narrative details contained in the biblical traditions of those events (Kaltner & Mirza 2018:10). Despite the difference on this point between the Bible and the Quran, Abraham/ Ibrahim occupies a unique place in both the Quran and the Bible. His role is thus not limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam (Boyd 1939) but is of importance to all people. Hans Küng takes the view that “The fundamental importance of Abraham for the history, piety and theology of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is obvious. It is impressively brought out in the very first book of the Hebrew Bible and in the Gospels, as it is in the Quran.” (Küng 2007:45).

Abraham’s story in the biblical narrative (Genesis 12) starts with God’s command to him to leave his family and his homeland, Ur, and move to an unknown destination. “This God’s call of Abraham marks a significant shift from a story of God’s relationship with humanity at large to his relationship with a specific person who will become the father of a nation, a nation that will in turn become the focus of the rest of TaNaKh/ the Old Testament.” (Bakhos 2014: 52). This relationship would be transformed in a covenant between God, and Abraham and his offspring. “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee” (Gen.17:10).

The Bible distinguishes between three main phases in the life of Abraham (Boyd 1939). First, the period of wandering, when he left Haran with his family and set out for Canaan and thence to Shechem, Bethel, the Negeb, and Egypt. Second, the period of residence in Hebron. During this period, Abraham fathered Ishmael with his Egyptian concubine, the slave girl Hagar. In this regard, Küng wonders: “But in the Hebrew Bible isn’t Abraham’s son Ishmael, son of the wilderness, totally devalued by comparison with Isaac and treated contemptuously in the New Testament, in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, with its Sarah–Hagar allegory?” (Küng 2007:47). Finally, the period of residence in the Negeb. The removal to the Southland does not mean that they stayed in one place, but they moved from one place to another. At that time Isaac was born. Later tensions arose between the two boys and as a result Hagar and Ishmael were sent away. Later still, Abraham died and he was buried in his own ground in Hebron (Boyd 1939; Binnendijk 2010).

Anton Wessels emphasizes the theme of Exodus, emigration, which can be found at most prophets, including Abraham. Abraham was to depart from the city of Ur. God has led Abraham out of Ur, from the land of the Chaldeans or Babylonians, to make him inherit the promised land. Abraham goes in obedience to the place that was destined for him and his heirs. He left without knowing where to go (Wessels 2011:113-114). That means that Abraham was not an indigenous inhabitant from the beginning, but an immigrant: ‘a stranger and sojourner’ (Küng 2007:45; Armstrong 2006).

The above-mentioned question of Hans Küng, concerning the devaluation of Ishmael both in the Old and New Testament, is also confirmed by Carol Bakhos:

“In line with the narrative motif of Genesis, as firstborn Ishmael is pushed aside. He and his descendants are relegated to the margin, a very tenuous position that at best generates ambiguous portrayals and at worst engenders hostile depictions in extrabiblical literature. Genesis 17:15-21 no longer refers to the covenant that includes Ishmael and all those circumcised along with Abraham. Now it is a covenant that excludes all but Abraham’s descendants through Isaac.” (Bakhos 2014:61).

Furthermore, in the Old Testament, Abraham is introduced as the ancestor of the nation of Israel, “the descendant of Abraham,” as that nation is often called (Gen. 16:10; 21:13,18; etc.). The God of Abraham serves as a designation of Yahweh from the time of Isaac to the last period; it is by this title that Moses identifies the God who sent him to the children of Israel. Abraham enjoyed the special place with God. He received special blessings, especially the inheritance of the land of Canaan, and he is considered “God’s friend” (al-Hajjaj 2006:240) [This epithet of Ibrahim “God’s friend” is also found in the prophetic tradition, in which it is reported that the Prophet Muhammad said: “Allah has taken me as *halil*, friend, as He took Abraham as a friend”, see: *Sahih Muslim*]. and servant (Boyd 1939).

Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham

Unlike the Old Testament, Abraham is considered in the New Testament not only as the ancestor of Israel, but also specifically as the ancestor of the Levitical priesthood, of the Messiah, of the unity of believers in Christ and of the Christian believers. The way Abraham responded to this special goodness of God makes him the type of the Christian believer, and the “father” of Christians (Math. 1:1; Luke 8:3). (Boyd 1939). In this way, Christian authors claim that Christianity is an ancient original religion, far from the perverse innovation of Judaism (Reynolds 2010:81).

In other words, if the Jewish metanarrative emphasizes the role of Abraham as the father of the Israelites and by extension the Jewish people, early Jewish literature, in fact even rabbinic literature, acknowledges that Abraham is father of a multitude of nations. “Christianity highlights his role as both father of the Israelites with whom God makes a covenant and father of a multitude of peoples.” (Bakhos 2014:64-65). Moreover, Jesus is considered in the New Testament as the son both of David and Abraham: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Math. 1:1). According to Bakhos, Jesus Christ “is understood here as the fulfillment of the covenantal promise, the seed of Abraham through whom all nations will be blessed.” (Bakhos 2014:65). It is important to refer here to the Letter to the Galatians, in which Paul confirms that “in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, because all are one. When Gentiles belong to Christ, they belong to Abraham, as his heirs. In Paul’s characterization, Abraham is not solely a Jewish ancestor, he is a universal ancestor.” (Neutel 2010:291).

Bakhos concludes that the Christian exegetical tradition takes up the image of Abraham as the man of faith but gradually jettisons his role as forebear of the Jewish people. Sometimes Abraham was associated with the Jews by e.g. Marcion. Sometimes he is Christianized by e.g. Barnabas and Philip. “But over time the most persistent image of Abraham in the Christian tradition is that of a man obedient to God and in whose faith in God all believers partake and are blessed.” (Bakhos 2014:73).

As for Abraham’s journey in the Christian sources e.g. Philo and Origen, it is interpreted allegorically as a spiritual journey, especially from Chaldea to the Promised Land. “Leaving the land is like leaving the body”. That means that “Abraham’s departure from his home is understood allegorically and in similar terms, as a departure from a place of darkness -Chaldea- to a place of understanding, a place of light” (Bakhos 2014:85, 90).

Ibrahim in the Quran:

Imam of the Nations

Boyd (1939) deals with the Quranic Abraham, who was important to Mohammed in various ways. He is regarded as one of the many prophets sent by God, and as the common ancestor of the Arabs and of the Jews. Like the Prophet Muhammad, Abraham played the part of a religious reformer toward his idolatrous relatives (21:51-71). He built the first temple dedicated to God in Mecca to worship Him (3:96). In addition, Abraham is referred to in the Quran as the “*Imam* of the Nations” (2:124). The word ‘*Imam*’ here stands for ‘the spiritual leader.’

In this way, Abraham/Ibrahim occupies a special place in the Quran and Islam. “In the Quran Abraham (Ibrahim) is the most frequently mentioned biblical figure after Moses. Around 245 verses in 25 surahs refer to him. There are striking parallels not only to biblical depictions of

Abraham but also to rabbinic depictions outside the Bible.” (Küng 2007:45; see also: Firestone 2001). The story of Abraham in the Quran takes place in three locations. The first was in Mesopotamia, the land of two streams, the two in the Euphrates and the Tigris, the land of Abraham’s birth; the second near Jerusalem, Salem; and the third in Mecca. The reason for all those trips was “to worship the One God and to practice religion, to act as it should.” (Wessels 2011:115-117).

This required a long and fierce battle against the idolatry of his people and of his father Azar (6:74), or Terah (Jos. 24:2) as he is called in the Old Testament. Terah was the guardian over the treasure of King Nimrod’s gods and he was known as Azar, as in the Quran. “Because in Quran 9:14 Azar appears as an enemy of God, some Islamic exegetes create greater distance between him and Abraham and claim that he is Abraham’s uncle and is referred to as his father because he is a close relation. That is to say, while some exegetes conflate Azar and Terah, others maintain that they are not one and the same person.” (Bakhos 2014:96).

In his struggle against polytheism, Ibrahim appealed to the argument and discovery of the existence of God through natural signs. Thus, Ibrahim appears in the Quran as a rational monotheist (Reynolds 2010:71). The Exodus of Ibrahim was to be completed with the building of the Ka’ba as “the ultimate outcome and purpose of his life of tribulation. Mecca is mentioned as the first House of God, which was established for the people.” (Wessels 2011:117-118).

As previously noted, Abraham is very important to the monotheistic faith. Additionally, Ibrahim in Islam is also important in ritual and legal terms. Pierre Lory assumes that his stories in the Quran relate to a number of fundamental rituals. The prayer is originally a call for blessings on Abraham and his family. The pilgrimage to Mecca was instituted by Abraham according to the Quran (22:26-27). The animal sacrifice of the tenth day of the month *Du al-Hijjah* has to do with the sacrifice of the ram to replace the son of Abraham (Lory 2007:13).

Isaac and Ishmael

According to Küng, “The firm biblical preference for Isaac over Ishmael in the Jewish-Christian tradition is a fact, but we should not fail to note that the Hebrew Bible makes not only ‘biographically’ interesting statements about Ishmael but also theologically relevant ones. Karl-Josef Kuschel is right in his book on Abraham when he works out precisely the positive statements about Ishmael in the interest of an Abrahamic ecumene.” (Küng 2007:47). Küng lists Kuschel’s statements as follows:

1. Ishmael, not Isaac, was the firstborn son of Abraham (at the wish of his wife Sarah). Ishmael-‘God (hears)’.
2. Even before Isaac, Ishmael receives the sign of God’s covenant: circumcision.
3. Both Isaac’s survival and Ishmael’s survival are under God’s special protection.
4. God’s promise of fertility and numerous descendants applies to both Isaac and Ishmael.
5. Not only Isaac but also Ishmael is present at Abraham’s burial. (Küng 2007:47-48).

This means that both the Bible and the Quran refer to the sacrificial story where Abraham/Ibrahim was about to sacrifice his son, but in both cases, it turns out to be a trial from God and the son is spared (Q. 37:99 -113; Gen. 22:1-19). (Kaltner & Mirza 2018:12, 69-72).

The point of contention is over which of the sons of Abraham/Ibrahim was designated as the “sacrificial son”: Ishaq or Isma’il. The Bible speaks of Isaac, while Islam refers to Isma’il. “Even though God announces to Abraham that he will be a father of many nations, the covenant God makes with him and his seed is through Isaac, not through Ishmael or the sons he has with Keturah (Gen. 25:1- 2).” (Bakhos 2014:53). In addition, God also promises Abraham that Ishmael shall be a great nation: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year” (Gen. 17:20-21). Consequently, “Like Isaac, through whom twelve tribes

are established, Ishmael will father twelve chieftains, but the covenant will be maintained only through Isaac, not Ishmael.” (Bakhos 2014:60).

This account is different introduced in the Quran than the Bible. Both Ishaq and Isma'il are considered as prophets in the Quran. Say ye: “We believe in God and the revelation given to us and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes and that given to Moses and Jesus and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord we make no difference between one and another of them and we bow to God (in Islam)” (2:136). Nevertheless, Quranic and Islamic narratives link Isma'il to two crucial occurrences in the history of the Islamic religion. The first is God's command to Abraham to slaughter his son Isma'il, according to the consensus of Muslim interpreters of the Quran (37:101-107). This occurrence would develop in Islam into the ritual of *Eid al-Adha*, the Feast of Sacrifice.

The second is Isma'il's assistance of his father Ibrahim in building the Ka'ba and then inviting people to visit it, and worship the One God. “And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways” (22:27). This event would also evolve into the ritual pilgrimage that is performed annually by Muslims to the Ka'ba and its surroundings.

Ibrahim as Hanif

We cannot outline the identity and personality of Ibrahim without considering the concept of *hanif* related to Abrahamic monotheism in the Quran. This term is mentioned ten times in the Quran in the singular *hanif*, and twice in the plural *hanafa'*. (See Quran verses: 2:135; 3:67; 3:95; 4:125; 6:79; 6:161; 16:120; 16:123;30:30). Ibrahim is the only person to be referred to by name in this way (Kaltner & Mirza 2018:10-11). Linguistically, the original meaning of the word *hanif* stands for deviating from the way, just as Abraham deviated from the previous faith of his people (Ben Achour 1984:1/737). In addition, *hanif* refers to various connotations including sincere, devoted, adherent, and the one who believes in all the prophets (Ibn Manzur 1980:1025-1026; Rubin 2002:402).

In Islamic theology, *al-hanafiyah*, or “Hanafism,” means witnessing that there is no god but Allah, avoiding idolatry and affirming the monotheistic belief (Ibn Kathir 1999:1/448). In this way, Islam is equated with the *hanafiyah*, and every Muslim is called a *hanif* (Ibn Manzur 1980:1026), in the sense of one who submits to Allah alone. Anyone who takes this road can be characterized as a ‘God-seeker’ or as a ‘devoted to God’ (Küng 2007:47-49). The word *hanif* is often left untranslated, and refers in English to many connotations including “upright,” “firmly and truly,” “true believer,” and “true monotheist.” On contrary, in Semitic languages (the Syriac *hanpa* and the Hebrew *hanef*) the term takes on a meaning opposite to the Islamic “true monotheist,” instead conveying the sense of “heathen” or “pagan.” (Bakhos 2014:74-75).

In other words, as the Quranic verse 3:67 reflects, Islam in the sense of submitting to God's will was launched by Abraham long ago before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. That is why it is stated repeatedly in the Quran that Muhammad follows the “religion of Ibrahim”. His job was not to establish a new faith, but to call people back to the way God intended for mankind from the beginning (Kaltner & Mirza 2018:11). How is the Quranic verse 3:67 interpreted by Muslim exegetes? What were *asbab an-nuzul*, the reasons of the revelation of these verses? How do the three monotheistic religions relate to Abrahamic monotheism?

“Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian but he was true in faith and bowed his will to God's (which is Islam) and he joined not gods with God” (3:67).

According to this Quranic verse from Sura *Al 'Imran*, the family of Imran, Ibrahim rejected polytheism and envisaged the (monotheistic) belief. There is another similar verse in the previous Sura (2:135). (Ibn Kathir 1999:1/448; 2/58). This means that Ibrahim did not follow Judaism, or Christianity. He turned from all religions to sincere faith. In other words, he was a Muslim (in the sense of submitting to the One God), not a polytheist (al-Sabuni 1981:1/209).

The revelation came here as a response to some Jews and Christians who had asked Prophet Muhammad to follow their faith. The Prophet wanted neither Judaism nor Christianity, but he pursued the monotheism of Ibrahim. The word *hanif* has several meanings including sincere, adherent, worshiper and the one who believes in all the prophets. Qatadah adds that *al-hanafiyah* is meant “the witnessing that there is no god but Allah.” (Ibn Kathir 1999:1/448; 2/58). According to Al-Qurtubi, *hanif* means to be monotheist, to make pilgrimage, to make sacrifices, to be circumcised and to focus on the *Qibla*, in the direction of Ka’ba (al-Qurtubi 2008:5/166).

Ben Achour assumes that, unlike the Bible, the Quran emphasizes the fact that Moses and Jesus followed in the footsteps of Abraham and followed his monotheism. The Quran itself indicates that there is no difference between the prophets. All were Muslims in the sense of submitting to the One God. Ibrahim was not only *hanif* but also a Muslim. However, the disbelievers realized the significance of Hanafism, yet they denied Islam. Therefore, they are not considered real *hanif* as they claimed, because they were polytheists and idolaters. In this way, the Quran made clear that Ibrahim’s Hanafism was Islamic in nature. This means that Islam is equated with Hanafism (Ben Achour 1984:3/274-276).

Ibrahim as Halim

In both the Bible and the Quran, the personality of Abraham is characterized by many positive values including friendship: “God’s friend” (4:125; Isaiah 41:8), righteousness (Q. 37:112; James 2:23), and obedience (6:79; Gen. 22:22). In this section, the focus will be on a specific value that Quran attributes to Ibrahim, namely *halim* as in verse 9:114: “For Abraham was most tender-hearted (*’awwah*), forbearing (*halim*).”

The adjective *halim* (noun *hilm*) means in Arabic terminology to control and to calm oneself down especially with anger (al-’Iṣfahani 2009:253; al-Jurjani 2004:82). Anger requires patience and prudence. Therefore, the mind is considered a synonym of *hilm* by some philologists (Ibn Manzur 1980:980). Al-’Iṣfahani disagrees with this because the *hilm* does not literally mean “the intellect.” It has so been stated, but actually, *hilm* is one of the causes of the intellect (al-’Iṣfahani 2009:253). This shows that the *hilm* is a moral value, with which the inner qualities of self-control, patience and meekness are associated. The Hebrew *’arek* is probably considered to be the meaning related word to the Arabic *hilm*. According to the Hebrew dictionaries, *’arek* means patient, long-suffering, and slow to become angry (Strong 2012:67; Benner 2005:261).

Dutch, for example, does not contain an exact equivalent of *halim*. Most translators of the Quran into Dutch have used the adjective *’zachtmoedig* as the translation equivalent of the Arabic adjective *halim*. *Zachtmoedig* means “gentle of heart, not inclined to fierceness, easily yielding, syn. kind, gentle.” (Van Dale 2005:III/4202). This means that the *hilm* is a purely Arabic/ Quranic concept that is not found in the Bible. In this Quranic concept, two different values are combined: self-control and meekness. In Dutch, these two values are expressed separately. This is due to the absence of an exact equivalent of the Arabic word *hilm* in Dutch.

In the above-mentioned Quran verse 9:114, two values are attributed to Ibrahim, namely: *’awwah* and *halim*. The word *’awwah* refers to a range of excellent and special qualities of pious believers, including supplicant, merciful, praising and God-fearing. The most appropriate meaning in the context of this Quranic verse is the one who begs a lot and if he is mistreated, forgives. That applies to Ibrahim, because he begged for his father, even though he caused him much pain (Ibn Kathir 1999:4/225-227). Al-Qurtubi has listed fifteen different meanings of the adjective *’awwah* including merciful, convinced, believing, (strongly) supplicating and praising. The adjective *halim* describes the one who is very meek, forgiving, and patient. That applies to Ibrahim (al-Qurtubi 2008:10/401-404).

Ibrahim was known for his compassion out of mercy and gentleness. In addition, he had the patience to endure the pain that afflicted him, as evidenced by his forbearance toward his father (al-Sabuni 1981:1/566). Therefore, Ibrahim is appreciated in this Quranic verse 9:114 from Sura *at-Tawbah*, the Repentance by the two excellent qualities: *’awwah* and *halim*. These two concepts stand for mercy, for the self as well as for the people. For self by turning to God and asking His forgiveness, and for others by compassion and supplication. Moreover, *halim*

represents a moral quality that involves several values, including wisdom, decency and tolerance (Ben Achour 1984: 10:46).

Historical, Theological and Spiritual Commonalities

Abraham as a Historical Common

It is striking that, compared to other prophetic figures, Abraham is present in all three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) throughout history, in almost an equal way. This presence is characterized by two important features. On the one hand, Abraham forms a meeting point of all monotheists as Hans Küng concludes: "A fundamental and at the same time anticipatory conclusion is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are linked by great common features associated with the name of Abraham: a kind of Abrahamic ecumene rooted in a long history, which hostility and wars could not obliterate." (Küng 2007:54). On the other hand, Abraham is considered to be one of the prophets about whom there is not much difference between the Bible and the Quran compared to, for instance, Jesus Christ. The only significant theological difference had to do with, which of his sons he wanted to sacrifice: Isaac or Ishmael. In the biblical narratives, it primarily concerns Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19), while Muslim exegetes of the Quran unanimously agree upon Isma'il (Q. 37:101-107).

Nowadays, the concept of Abraham has come back strongly to the reality as an "ecumene" in the sense of Küng, and as "a common denominator", especially in a contemporary world where conflicts and wars prevail. This means that there is an urgent need for Abrahamic values e.g. friendship, righteousness, obedience, and *hilm*. Therefore, different intellectual (e.g. The Abrahamic Family House, and The Tent of Abraham) and political (e.g. The Abraham Accords Declaration) initiatives have been taken and organized, in which Abraham is presented as an ethical and spiritual role model. According to Bakhos, "Over the past several years, the term "Abrahamic religions" has gained purchase in scholarly and ecumenical circles to refer to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Its purchase in these arenas has seeped into common parlance and secured its widespread usage, especially by those who seek to foster peaceful interactions among believers in the three religions." (Bakhos 2014:1).

In this way, Abraham is considered as a historical frame of work, because he is genealogically the father of many nations; "the father of nations". "As for me, behold, my covenant [is] with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee" (Gen. 17:4-6). On this basis, "Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian but he was true in faith and bowed his will to God's and he joined not gods with God" (3:67). This means that any person who submits to the One God may be associated with Abraham, or maybe Abrahamic. That can indeed form a solid ground for the interfaith encounter and rapprochement against dissension, antagonism and violence.

Historically, Abraham's story, as already mentioned above, started with a divine command to Abraham to emigrate. "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1). But Abraham is no longer a historical face related to the past only. He extends throughout history to the present and then to the future, as a symbol of religious, spiritual, and moral unity. The Promised Land is no longer related only to certain regions in the Levant, as in the biblical narratives, but has expanded into the whole universe, where today more than half of the world's population are adherents of the Abrahamic monotheism (Levenson 2012:173).

To sum up, Abraham did not only make a horizontal journey in the past from one country to another, as in the biblical and Quranic narratives. We can also talk about a vertical journey extending from the past to the present. Despite the sharp historical, political, and theological conflicts between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Abraham remains the unifying element for the followers of these three sister religions. Everyone invokes Abraham, whether during peace encounters as a spiritual inspirer or in the midst of wars as a moral savior.

Abrahamic Belief and Morality

Abrahamic belief stands for monotheism or Hanafism as believing in the only One God. Abraham is considered the first monotheist in history. Also, Abraham is labeled as a rational monotheist (Reynolds 2010:71), because he discovered the existence of God through reasoning as in Sura *al-An'am*, the Cattle. During his search for the truth, Abraham began to think about stars, planets and the universe. At the beginning, when the night covered him over he saw a star, and thought that it was his Lord. But when it set, he realized that it is not, because God does not disappear. The same thing is repeated when he saw the moon and the sun. At the end of his reasoning, he affirmed: "For me I have set my face firmly and truly toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to God" (6:76-79).

According to Bakhos, to avoid misguided assumptions that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are the only three monotheisms, that are practiced in the West, scholars have proposed alternative nomenclature. Martin Jaffee discusses 'metaphysical' monotheism as opposed to 'elective' monotheism. While the first emphasizes the relationship between the eternal and the ephemeral world of beings, the second deals with a specific creator, God, who desires a relationship with a specific community that is commanded to love and serve Him (Bakhos 2014:3). But, can this methodological distinction not cause a realistic problem? Crucially, whereas the so-called elective monotheism takes Abraham as its historical and theological reference, the metaphysical monotheism relies on other, very different references.

This means that all three Abrahamitic religions invite human being to the same message of monotheism, which is essentially based on the unity of God, the prophecy and the afterlife. All monotheists believe in the same deity, even if its definitions are different between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This deity finds its roots in Abraham as its real founder, but not separated from the general historical and theological framework of monotheism. All previous prophets and messengers e.g. Adam, Enoch and Noah were monotheists, or "Muslims" in the sense of submitting to the One God (2:133). This also applies to the following prophets who fall under Abrahamic monotheism. In this way, Abraham is prominently present in different laws, rituals, and narratives of the prophets who came after him, especially Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. As he was a unifying factor in the past, Abraham will also continue to be a common denominator among all monotheists both in the present and in the future. In this way Abraham's story "is a story of pluralism that is sorely needed in this time of religious hatred." (Armstrong 2006: IX).

The Abrahamic morality and values cannot be understood and acquired separated from the monotheistic divinity. Abraham's obedience is focused on the One God instead of idolatry. Abraham's gratitude is directed at God instead of the tyrant Nimrod. Abraham's righteousness is manifested in his worship and prayer for God. Abraham's *hilm* is also a value of the highest standard because it combines two positive morals of self-control and meekness (9:114). Abraham was always *halim*, especially in dealing with very difficult situations including the dispute with his father Azar, leaving his homeland, and God's command to slaughter his son.

Abraham as a Spiritual Common

When a Jew, Christian or Muslim is asked about Abraham, they would answer that they are descended from Abraham or one of his sons: Isaac or Ishmael. That depends not only on the genealogical origin, but the theological and spiritual aspects are often emphasized as well. "By smashing idols and speaking of a God Who was both invisible and indivisible, Abraham opened a new area of spiritual reality for humankind to investigate: monotheism." (Worthington 2011:131). Generally speaking, spirituality is defined as "the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things", or "being connected with religion" as in another definition (Brown 1993). That applies to all God's prophets and messengers among whom is Abraham, who is often described as a spiritual ancestor.

Abraham's belief, exodus and accounts are broadly spiritual in nature. He was constantly busy with spirituality, both in his faith and in his behavior. He linked his monotheistic belief to reality in the form of moral values that have a spiritual character and goes beyond what is material

and physical to what is moral and divine. Therefore, we believe that the Abrahamic theological, moral and spiritual model continues in history, and is accepted by all; academics, politicians, and educators. In addition, all followers of monotheism (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) agree on it without any problem. Perhaps this can be explained by the ethical and spiritual possibilities this model offers to all as ground for establishing coexistence, tolerance, and peace. For this reason, Abraham acquired a universal dimension from the beginning. The Bible considers him as “a father of many nations” (Gen. 25:2), while the Quran describes him as the “*Imam* of the Nations” (2:124).

In *The Heart of Islam*, Hossein Seyyed Nasr emphasizes that “Islam is an inalienable and inseparable part of the Abrahamic family of religions and considers itself to be closely linked with the two monotheistic religions that preceded it. Islam envisages itself the complement of those religions and the final expression of Abrahamic monotheism, confirming the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, but rejecting any form of exclusivism.” (Nasr 2002:42). This significant commonality of the three monotheistic traditions does not mean that they are united with each other, and does not mean at the same time exclusivism in the sense of the systematic exclusion of others outside one’s circle. This commonality is open to theological, ritual and cultural plurality, which arose as a result of geographical, historical and interpretive diversity. But the essence that reconciles all monotheists remains one despite the different religious traditions. It is the One God, the Creator. “The Quran asserts that God is the Lord of both the East and the West and also that the Blessed Olive Tree, which symbolizes the spiritual axis of the world, is of neither the East nor the West. It is more necessary today than at any other time in history to realize the universal nature of the truth, which belongs to both the East and the West and yet is confined to neither.” (Nasr 2002:309).

To conclude, this article takes a comparative approach to describe and analyze the concept of Abraham/ Ibrahim both in the Bible and the Quran. Within these two different corpora, the figure of Abraham is discussed focusing on the common aspects between the biblical Abraham and the Quranic Ibrahim.

First, the term Abraham/ Ibrahim is studied etymologically and semantically. Here we conclude that Abraham and Ibrahim are etymologically neither an Arabic nor a Hebrew name, but they are Babylonian in origin. In Hebrew, this term means the exalted father or the patriarch. But generally, both in the Bible and in the Quran, this refers to the proper name of “the common ancestor” Abraham.

In addition, the concept of Abraham is examined theologically both from the perspective of the Bible and the Quran. Here we find that there are more similarities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam concerning Abraham than there are contrasts. In all these sister traditions, Abraham is regarded as the first monotheist, as God’s friend, as an emigrant, as the husband, especially of Sarah and Hagar, and as the father, chiefly of Ishmael and Isaac. Therefore, he deserves to be the ancestor of all monotheists. The only theological difference is about who was the offered son: Isaac or Ismail?

In the end, a thematic comparison is made of three main common elements that bring biblical Abraham and Quranic Ibrahim closer to each other. Firstly, Abraham is a historical figure from which all monotheists descend, but he is no longer related to the past only. He extends throughout history to the present and then to the future, as a symbol of religious, spiritual, and moral unity. Secondly, faith and morality go hand in hand in Abrahamic monotheism. Abraham’s morality and values cannot be understood and acquired separated from the monotheistic divinity. For instance, Abraham’s obedience is focused on the One God instead of idolatry. Finally, the spiritual element forms an important common denominator that brings together all adherents of monotheism regardless of religious tradition. In this respect, Abraham is considered a spiritual inspirer whether during peace encounters or in the midst of conflicts.

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