

CHRISTIANITY & ISLAM CONUNDRUM...

OVERVIEW

The apparent adversarial relationship between Christianity and Islam has ancient roots and there are several schools of thought regarding the origin. Some argue that the rift between the two religions began during the eleventh century when the First Crusade was authorized by the papacy to recapture the Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular from Islam, who captured it in the 8th century. Others offer anecdotal evidence of an organic antipathy between the two religions from the early times, and more recently there seems to be a popular sensibility that “they hate us” in the west, because of our freedom, democracy and economic wealth.

Popular historical misperceptions associated with both Islam and Christianity promotes an organic antipathy that has persisted for centuries. Until the 16th century Roman Catholicism and Islam both operated on the ground based on their respective union church and state. Following the advent of the Protestant Reformation, Roman Catholicism bifurcated which split Christianity in the western hemisphere between Catholics and Protestants. Protestant reformers advocated a separation between church and state, and when the Puritans left Europe and established a colony in the New World, to escape religious persecution. Ultimately, “state craft” was formulated by the religious reformers and the separation between church and state which was eloquently articulated in the Constitution of the United States.

Although the United States Constitution advocates the free exercise of religion, the country is touted as Christian, the government is secular, and religion per se, holds no quarter. The US pioneered the modern republican secular form of government, and Western Europe followed by way of the parliamentary form of government. Secular republican governments have proliferated beyond Western Europe popularly called democracies, and currently predominantly Islamic countries are subscribing to secular republican governments that tout religious tolerance. Catholic and Protestant relations in America and Western Europe have a colorful and brutal history that has modulated by and large over the centuries by way of the concept of religious tolerance hence, the antipathy within Christianity has all but disappeared.

Religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims over the centuries has proven to be insufficient and the adversarial relationship seems to be escalating. The nature of state craft in the context of competing economic, political and strategic objectives of governments are without doubt a major factor in past and current regional and global rivalries. Secular governments have military components that some argue have a life of their own, in terms of strategic objectives and geo-political/economic positioning. Whether predominantly Christian or Muslim, secular governments are sovereign but are partial to respective religious ideas, real, imagined and hyperbolic.

The vociferous juxtaposition that is animating respective secular governments and the Christian and Muslim religious faiths have wars raging around the world, and modern civilization seems to

be in free fall. But the antipathy between Christianity and Islam that formulates daily media reports on the front pages, and back stories is paradoxical in view of the shared roots and origin of both religions. Apart from popular perceptions about Christianity and Islam, they both reference the same patriarch, the prophet Abraham. Abraham is acknowledged patriarch of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but as a practical matter the religious nexus is more than an acknowledgement, there is a direct familial relationship with Abraham.

Abraham was blessed with two sons, and heirs to his patriarchal line. By way of a brief paraphrase, Abraham's wife Sarah was able to bare a heir after many years of trial and error, therefore Sarah convinced Abraham to sleep with Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. Hagar bore Abraham a son that he named Ismael. After a time Sarah was blessed with a son, and Abraham named him Isaac. Islam traces its advent to the familial line of Ismael, while the line from Isaac is the foundation of Christianity. Hopefully at some point in the near future Christianity and Islam will transcend the Cain and Able paradigm...