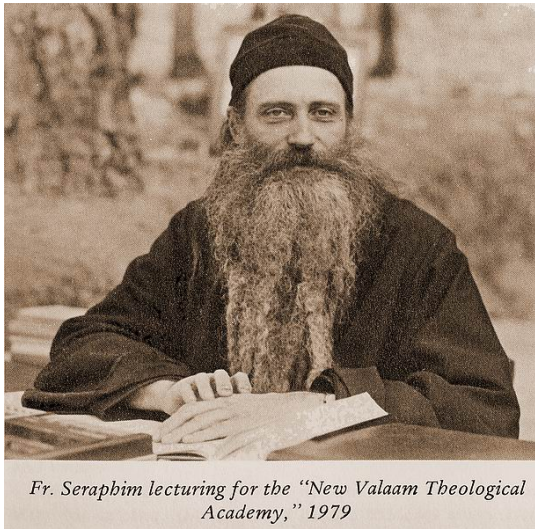


The Monotheistic Religions; Do We Have the Same God That Non-Christians Have?

by Father Basile Sakkas



Fr. Seraphim lecturing for the "New Valaam Theological Academy," 1979

"THE HEBREW AND ISLAMIC PEOPLES, AND CHRISTIANS... these three expressions of an identical monotheism, speak with the most authentic and ancient, and even the boldest and most confident voices. Why should it not be possible that the name of the same God, instead of engendering irreconcilable opposition, should lead rather to mutual respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence? Should the reference to the same God, the same Father, without prejudice to theological discussion, not lead us rather one day to discover what is so evident, yet so difficult — that we are all sons of the same Father, and that, therefore, we are all brothers?"

Pope Paul VI, La Croix, Aug. 11, 1970

On Thursday, April 2, 1970, a great religious manifestation took place in Geneva. Within the framework of the Second Conference of the "Association of United Religions," the representatives of target religions were invited to gather in the Cathedral of Saint Peter. This "common prayer" was based on the following motivation: "The faithful of all these religions were invited to coexist in the cult of the same God"! Let us then see if this assertion is valid in the light of the Holy Scriptures. [Next...](#)

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In order better to explain the matter, we shall limit ourselves to the three religions that have historically followed each other in this order: Judaism, Christianity, Islam. These three religions lay claim, in fact, to a common origin: as worshippers of the God of Abraham. Thus it is a very widespread opinion that since we all lay claim to the posterity of Abraham (the Jews and Moslems according to the flesh and Christians spiritually), we all have as God the God of Abraham and all three of us worship (each in his own way, naturally) the same God! And, this same God constitutes in some fashion our point of unity and of "mutual understanding," and this invites us to a "fraternal relation," as the Grand Rabbi Dr. Safran emphasized, paraphrasing the Psalm: "Oh, how good it is to see brethren seated together..."

In this perspective it is evident that Jesus Christ, God and Man, the Son Co-eternal with the Father without beginning, His Incarnation, His Cross His Glorious Resurrection and His Second and Terrible Coming — become secondary details which cannot prevent us from "fraternizing" with those who consider Him as "a simple prophet" (according to the Koran) or as "the son of a prostitute" (according to certain Talmudic traditions)! Thus we would place Jesus of Nazareth and Mohammed on the same level. I do not know what Christian worthy of the name could admit this in his conscience.

One might say that in these three religions, passing over the past, one could agree that Jesus Christ is an extraordinary and exceptional being and that He was sent by God. But for us Christians, if Jesus Christ is not God, we cannot consider Him either as a "prophet" or as one sent by God, "but only as a great imposter without compare, having proclaimed Himself "Son of God," making Himself thus equal to God!" (St. Mark 14:61-62). According to this ecumenical solution on the supra-confessional level, the Trinitarian God of Christians would be the same thing as the monotheism of Judaism, of Islam, of the ancient heretic Sabellius, of the modern anti-Trinitarians, and of certain Illuminist sects. There would not be Three Persons in a Single Divinity, but a single Person, unchanging for some, or successively changing "masks" (Father-Son-Spirit) for others! And nonetheless one would pretend that this was the "same God"

Here some might naively propose: "Yet for the three religions there is a common point: all three confess God the Father! "But according to the Holy Orthodox Faith, this is an absurdity. We confess always: Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-giving and Indivisible Trinity." How could we separate the Father from the Son when Jesus Christ affirms I and the Father are One (St. John 10:30); and St. John the Apostle, Evangelist, and Theologian, the Apostle of Love, clearly affirms: Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father (St. John 2:23).

But even if all three of us call God Father: of whom is He really the Father? For the Jews and the Moslems He is the Father of men in the plane of creation; while of us Christians He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ by adoption (Eph. 1:4-5) in the plane of redemption. What resemblance is there, then, between the Divine Paternity in Christianity and in the other religions?

Others might say: "But all the same, Abraham worshipped the true God; and the Jews through

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Isaac and the Moslems through Hagar are the descendants of this true worshipper of God." Here one will have to make several things clear: Abraham worshipped God not at all in the form of the unipersonal monotheism of the others, but in the form of the Holy Trinity. We read in the Holy Scripture: And the Lord appeared unto him at the Oaks of Mamre... and he bowed himself toward the ground (Gen. 18:1-2). Under what form did Abraham worship God? Under the unipersonal form, or under the form of the Divine Tri-unity? We Orthodox Christians venerate this Old Testament manifestation of the Holy Trinity on the Day of Pentecost, when we adorn our churches with boughs representing the ancient oaks, and when we venerate in their midst the icon of the Three Angels, just as our father Abraham venerated it! Carnal descent from Abraham can be of no use to us if we are not regenerated by the waters of Baptism in the Faith of Abraham. And the Faith of Abraham was the Faith in Jesus Christ, as the Lord Himself has said: Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it and was glad (St. John 8:56). Such also was the Faith of the Prophet-King David, who heard the heavenly Father speaking to His Consubstantial Son: The Lord said unto my Lord (Ps. 109:1; Acts 2:34). Such was the Faith of the Three Youths in the fiery furnace when they were saved by the Son of God (Dan. 3:25); and of the holy Prophet Daniel, who had the Vision of the two natures of Jesus Christ in the Mystery of the Incarnation when the Son of Man came to the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13). This is why the Lord, addressing the (biologically incontestable) posterity of Abraham, said: "If ye were the children of Abraham, ye would do the works of Abraham" (St. John 8:39), and these "works" are to believe on Him Whom God hath sent (St. John 6:29).

Who then are the posterity of Abraham? The sons of Isaac according to the flesh, or the sons of Hagar the Egyptian? Is Isaac or Ishmael the posterity of Abraham? What does the Holy Scripture teach by the mouth of the divine Apostle? Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed: which is Christ (Gal. 3:16). And if ye be Christ Is, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). It is then in Jesus Christ that Abraham became a father of many nations (Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:17). After such promises and such certainties, what meaning does carnal descent from Abraham have? According to Holy Scripture, Isaac is considered as the seed or posterity, but only as the image of Jesus Christ. As opposed to Ishmael (the son of Hagar; Gen. 16:1ff), Isaac was born in the miraculous "freedom" of a sterile mother, in old age and against the laws of nature, similar to our Saviour, Who was miraculously born of a Virgin. He climbed the hill of Moriah just as Jesus climbed Calvary, bearing on his shoulders the wood of sacrifice. An angel delivered Isaac from death, just as an angel rolled away the stone to show us that the tomb was empty, that the Risen One was no longer there. At the hour of prayer, Isaac met Rebecca in the plain and led her into the tent of his mother Sarah, just as Jesus shall meet His Church on the clouds in order to bring Her into the heavenly mansions, the New Jerusalem, the much-desired homeland.

No! We do not in the least have the same God that non-Christians have! The sine qua non for knowing the Father, is the Son: He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me (St. John 14:6,9). Our God is a God Incarnate, Whom we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have touched (1 John 1:1). The immaterial became material for our salvation, as St. John Damascene says, and He has revealed Himself in us. But when did He reveal Himself among the present-day Jews and Moslems, so that we might suppose that they know God? If they have a knowledge of God outside of Jesus Christ, then Christ was

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incarnate, died, and rose in vain!

No, they do not know the Father. They have conceptions about the Father; but every conception about God is an idol, because a conception is the product of our imagination, a creation of a god in our own image and likeness. For us Christians God is inconceivable, incomprehensible, indescribable, and immaterial, as St. Basil the Great says. For our salvation He became (to the extent that we are united to Him) conceived, described and material, by revelation in the Mystery of the Incarnation of His Son. To Him be the glory unto the ages of ages. Amen. And this is why St. Cyprian of Carthage affirms that he who does not have the Church for Mother, does not have God for Father!

May God preserve us from the Apostasy and from the coming of Antichrist, the preliminary signs of which are multiplying from day to day. May He preserve us from the great affliction which even the elect would not be able to bear without the Grace of Him Who will cut short these days. And may He preserve us in the "small flock," the "remainder according to the election of Grace," so that we like Abraham might rejoice at the Light of His Face, by the prayers of the Most Holy Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, of all the heavenly hosts, the cloud of witnesses, prophets, martyrs, hierarchs, evangelists, and confessors who have been faithful unto death, who have shed their blood for Christ, who have begotten us by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the waters of Baptism. We are their sons — weak, sinful, and unworthy, to be sure; but we will not stretch forth our hands toward a strange god! Amen.

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by Seraphim Rose