**Monotheistic**

*(Islam belief in one God, Christianity belief in one Trinitarian God)*

Christianity and Islam are both monotheistic religions (believe in one God) that find their origins from Abraham. For Muslims the only source of knowledge of God is God himself. Christianity however is unique in this respect. In the Qur’an Muslims attribute ninety-nine names to God or Allah, but by far the most important is his given name of God. The creed is also one aspect both religions have in common it is also where Muslims and Christians declare the monotheistic faiths. ‘*There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet’* (First line of the Qur’an). The Islamic theology of God can be summarized by one word: '*tawhid'*, which means "*absolute unity*." Muslims insist that there is no distinction within the Godhead. God is sublimely one. It is this belief in one God that connects but also separates Islam from Christianity.

Although Christianity is a monotheistic religion it has one distinctive feature, its Trinitarian beliefs. This remarkable portrait of God as a communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one that is revealed to us by Jesus, the Son of God in the New Testament. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ this communion of tri-personal love is revealed to us. In the early Christian writings there are many attempts to disclose the mystery of the Trinity. Yet it was the study and exploration of Augustine of Hippo that revealed to us the mystery of the Trinity in more detail. He perused the possibility of understanding the mystery in terms of love; the Father as the One who loves, the Son as the One who is loved and the Holy Spirit as love itself. Now, love can 'never' be exercised in isolation. You cannot be all loving and be alone. Love is manifested 'in relationship', and for that reason the God who is LOVE must exist within a "community within himself," that is, within a community of three Persons, among whom their mutual love is so perfect that they, though three, become perfectly One! This is the fundamental truth underlying the doctrine of the Trinity. It is here where people who follow the Islamic faith believe that those who follow the Christian doctrine ‘*misbelieve*’ the Qur’an states: ‘they misbelieve who say, “Verily God is the third of the three” (Sura 5:77). Both Islam and Christianity say that God is totally other and beyond human comprehension, completely beyond the ability of humans to grasp, yet Christians add something completely different: that God sanctified the world by deigning to become part of it, by loving us so much that he was willing "to come down from his throne" to became part of this mess which we call the world.

**Prophets**

*(Muhammad and Jesus)*

Another similarity both religions have is their belief in prophets. God communicates his message through the prophets. It is important to note one similarity between Islam and Christianity is the lack of female prophets mentioned in both the Qur’an and the Bible. The task given to prophets is to instruct people how to live and worship in accordance with God’s command. The Qur’an refers to 25 prominent prophets and the Bible mentions 48 however both Christianity and Islam have two main prophets, Jesus and Muhammad. Jesus however, is present in both Islam and Christianity. In Islamic tradition and within the Qur’an Jesus is singled out again and again as a prophet of very special significance. Rather uniquely he is described as a miracle of God. He is the word and spirit of God. He is the prophet of peace par excellence; and, finally it is he who predicts the coming of Muhammad *(pbuh*) and thus, one might say, is the harbinger of Islam. Yet it is Muhammad who holds most significance to the Muslims. He was the last and greatest messenger of God. Unlike, how Christians view Jesus and Divine and human Muslims regard Muhammad as human and not divine. He was born in Mecca in Saudi Arabia in 570. Unlike Jesus he did marry and it was his wife who encouraged him to be a spokesperson for God. His story takes us back to a cave near Mecca where he was meditating where an angel appears to him and calls him to be a ‘messenger of God’ *(rasul Alla).* He then embarked on a mission focusing on God’s word of judgement against idolatry and polytheism. Believing that God had chosen him as his messenger Muhammad began to preach what God had revealed to him. He preached the simple and clear-cut message of Islam, that there is no [God](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/beliefs.shtml) but Allah, and that life should be lived in complete submission to the will of Allah was attractive to many people, and they flocked to hear it.

In Christianity Jesus is the most significant prophet. When reading the New Testament the first thing that will strike the reader is the names that are used to describe Jesus, the most common name being *Kyrios* or ‘Lord’. But what does the Bible have to say about Jesus Christ as a prophet? The role of the prophet in the Old Testament was to foretell the future and the truths about God. Jesus, of course, did both of these things. He foretold the future when He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem. (Luke 21:20-22). Like prophets before him he began to speak about the truths of God when He spoke to the disciples and the crowds is His well-known Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:1-2). Yet unlike other prophets Jesus had power over sickness, death and the elements of nature. When the storm raged while Jesus was with His disciples in the boat, He spoke to the sea. "He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm" (Mark 4:39). No mere prophet possessed all of these supernatural powers. Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah, God come to earth in human form. Also, unlike Mohammad and the Islamic beliefs surrounding Jesus to Christian Jesus was the Son of God. Such a statement would be blasphemous to Muslims. They believed God was far above having a son. On the contrary, Christians see the son ship of Jesus not as a blasphemy but as a testimony to the divine love, which is so intense (again, beyond all human understanding) that God was not content only to bless his creation from outside of it. No, actually humbled himself to the point of becoming a part of his creation through the Incarnation of his Son Jesus Christ! By becoming part of the created order, by taking on a full and a complete human nature, God sanctified humanity "from within," so to speak. Both Islam and Christianity say that God is totally other and beyond human comprehension, completely beyond the ability of humans to grasp, yet Christians add something completely different: that God sanctified the world by deigning to become part of it, by loving us so much that he was willing "to come down from his throne" to became part of this mess which we call the world.

**The Understanding of Sin and Salvation**

Sin and salvation are central categories in Christian theology and spirituality. Christianity teaches that the effects of original sin have corrupted the world and the human beings who exist in it. In Islam, however, there is no such a thing as original sin. The Qur'an does indeed state that Adam and Eve sinned, but according to Islamic belief, they repented and were fully forgiven so that their sin had no repercussions for the rest of human race.

**Prayer and Worship**

When discussing differences between Christian and Muslim worship, we should also note that Muslims are very attentive not just to the interior aspects of worship but to the external aspects as well. In this Muslims have much more in common with Eastern

Christianity than with Western Christianity, especially Protestantism. Like Eastern Christians, Muslims use their whole body in prayer. Both groups, for instance, make prostrations before God in their worship. This seems strange to many Protestants, whose worship consists of sitting (or maybe standing from time to time) in a comfortable setting (on cushioned pews, in air conditioned churches, etc.) What one does with the body in most Western Christian worship seems almost unimportant. Not so in Islam. The submission of the spirit is symbolized by the submissive gestures of the body, made according to a ritualized pattern. Muslims have a much easier time, therefore, understanding the spirit behind the highly developed liturgical worship of the

Eastern Christian than they does understanding what they consider to by the overly informal, unregulated worship of the Evangelical Christian. This, to me, is an interesting topic in Christian- Muslim relations that needs to be explored more fully in scholarship and inter-faith dialogue: Christians and Muslims need to examine more fully -- and more objectively -- the similarities and differences between their experiences of prayer and worship.