Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Collaboration and Conflict in the Age of Diaspora

Edited by Sander L. Gilman

Contents

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Introduction

The Abrahamic Religions in an Age of Diaspora

Sander L. Gilman

In his 1922 explanation of what constitutes "ethnicity," the German sociologist Max Weber claimed that "the belief in group affinity, regardless of whether it has any objective foundation, can have important consequences especially for the formation of a political community" (Weber 1922, 56). Today we understand that the key word here for Weber is "belief." If you believe that you are part of a community, there is an affective aspect to your identification that then defines the group itself. Neither history, nor biology, nor national boundaries is primary; belief is central. One can add to this statement that this is equally true in constituting the religious communities of others. Non-Jews have regularly constituted the image and nature of the "Jew" as seen from their perspectives and needs (as Jean-Paul Sartre admirably illustrated in his *Anti-Semite and Jew* [1995]). The image of the Christian, seen from the perspective of secular society, which is itself grounded on Christian presuppositions, is as compromised as that of the Jew: Are Christians perpetrators or victims passive or active? Are they Protestant or Catholic or otherwise defined? After 9/11 the very image of the Muslim and of Islam is also fractured: not only do the older fissures of theological differences within Islam, such as Shia, Sunni, Alawite, Druse, etc., take on new meaning, but they also are read along newer national and political lines, as well as along reformist and neo-conservative ones. From the standpoint of non-Muslims in the West the schism seems between "terrorists" and benign Muslims (if such a dichotomy is even permitted to exist). Never mind the complexity when we begin to tease out how each of the fragmented views of Jew, Christian, and Muslim are understood from the multiple perspectives of the various segments of the other religious communities. And indeed can we even claim that individual identities as Jew, Christian, or Muslim are only the concretization of the more generalized if complex image of the religious community? Can you be a Jew, Christian, or Muslim outside of or beyond a religious practice?

Sigmund Freud argued, shortly after World War I, that all such community images were constituted out of antithesis. He wrote in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921) that:

> Every time two families become connected by a marriage, each of them thinks itself superior to or of better birth than the other. Of two neighbouring towns each is the other's most jealous rival; every little canton looks down upon the others with contempt. Closely related races keep one another at arm's length; the South German cannot endure the North German, the Englishman casts every kind of aspersion upon the Scot, the Spaniard despises the Portuguese. We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and the white races for the coloured. (Freud 1921, SE 18:100)

This idea of conflict becomes commonplace in the 1920s, echoed by thinkers such as Carl Schmitt in his dichotomy of "friend and foe" in his *The Concept of the Political* (1927), in which, like Freud's view, the potential of conflict did not foreclose the potential of collaboration (Beattie 2010).

It should be of little surprise that the Abrahamic religions today—with multiple national, cultural, linguistic, class, gender identities—desire to imagine that what constitutes their own religious identity is seemingly independent of such a world of complex images. Yet it is very clear that today, at least within diasporic culture, those images are often framed by the debates about multiculturalism within the context of the Abrahamic religions and are defined by multiple potentials of conflict but also by collaboration. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam constitute their own, multifaceted self-images as well as images of the other "related" religions as forms of ritual practice, historical antecedents, or ethnic or national identities. Today such images shape both conflicts among as well as collaboration between the Abrahamic religions, often in odd forms. Thus, the positive representation of Jews in evangelical Christianity is as those who will trigger the second coming, while Islam has assumed, at least according to preachers such as the American Evangelical preacher Franklin Graham, the negative image long associated with Jewish conspiracies against Christians. Graham stated that the "persecution or elimination of non-Muslims has been a cornerstone of Islamic conquests and rule for centuries" and referred to Islam as "a very evil and wicked religion" (Niebuhr 2001). These images come to be free-floating signifiers moving from one Abrahamic religion to another based on the dynamics of the inter-relationship among them.

Theodor Adorno claimed in *Minima Moralia* that "dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible. The traditional residences we grew up in have grown intolerable . . . the house is past . . . it is part of morality not to be home in one's home" (Adorno 1951, 87). And yet the claims of a new Abrahamic multiculturalism beginning with the twenty-first century are that this rupture has been healed. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are equally "at home" in national cultures as well as "global citizens." In his insightful study *Cosmopolitanism*, the Princeton philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah points out that the new globalization is both constrained and furthered by

the new nationalism (Appiah 2007). He quotes what is perhaps the ultimate colonial, cosmopolitan text, the Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton's 1880 "translation" of the Sufi *Kasidah of Haji Abdu El-Yezi*:

> All Faith is false, all faith is true:
> Truth is the shattered mirror strown
> In Myriad bits: while each believes
> His little bit the whole to own. (Appiah 2007, 296)

Burton's version of G. E. Lessing's (Christian) Enlightenment promise of the Abrahamic religions as identical in their revelation mirrored in the "Parable of the Three Rings" in his drama *Nathan the Wise* still holds out the fantasy that even if the other two rings are perfect copies, there is an original, true ring among the three. But are the cultures in which the Abrahamic religions are to be found neutral about this new sense of globalized religious identity? Are they today more tolerant of seeing their bit of the mirror as one part of a whole or do they continue to compete, so that conflict rather than collaboration defines the Abrahamic religions in the twenty-first century?

The Abrahamic religious cultures existing in the Western world and beyond during the last two centuries have been and continue to be read as hyphenated phenomena within a specific national context, such as German-Jewish or American-Muslim culture. Even where the new nationalism reflects the creation of a state defined by one of the Abrahamic religions the answer is never simple. The creation of the State of Israel as a Jewish State has led to classifications within Israeli society (from the ultra orthodox to the secular, from the "Arab" [Mizrachi] to the "European" [Ashkenazi]) to the radical secular *but* nevertheless Jewish Israeli. In addition the status of Christians and Muslims is often defined by their political rather than their religious identity. Added to this, the extensive Israeli Diaspora ("Israeli-Americans") and the complexity of Jewish identity in the twentieth century have become more rather than less contested. States founded to make Sharia law the defining moment of the national state, such as Iran after the "Islamic Revolution" in 1979, make clear differences between modes of religious belief that would globally be called "Muslim." The differences between Shia and Sunni define Iranian political acceptability while offshoots of Islam, such as the members of the Baha'i faith, are simply labeled heretics by law and fall completely beyond the boundaries of traditional (if in Iran marginal) toleration for Jews and Christians as fellow members of the Abrahamic tradition. But twenty-first-century Christianity, too, has its own complex relationship to national states that have become more and more secular. In Great Britain, where the monarch remains the head of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury complained in 2013 of the anti-Christian views of her majesty's government (supported

by political parties on the right and the left) on issues such as gay marriage, and the British population has shown a marked collapse in the belief that being "British" has anything at all to do with being "Christian," even in historical or ethical contexts.

Even historically, such constructs are undermined by the histories of Abrahamic expulsion and migration, which were accompanied by the migration of languages and cultural-religious expressions that were written out of the cultural paradigms of particular nation states and the dominant religious communities within. The Enlightenment's demand that all human beings be understood as equal was paralleled by the nation-states' understanding of the need for such universality to be defined in terms of national identity. Immanuel Kant's claim that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all underpinned by a rational religious belief differing only in the nature of their claims about revelation as the source of the internal coherence is typical (Kleingeld 2011, 120). This conflict, which in the West subsumed religious identity with personal or national identity shaped religious identity of all forms in modernity. It is, of course, specious, as Kant's idea of rationality is Christian in its underpinnings. Christian thinkers since at least the Renaissance have imagined Jewish thought, specifically that of the "pilpul," the mode of Talmudic argument, as inherently irrational because it violates the premises of Western logic, specifically the syllogism.

Yet to what extent do such nationalized constructs of Abrahamic culture and identity still dominate religious self-expressions, as well as the discourses about them, in the rapidly globalizing world of the twenty-first century? In a world in which diaspora societies have begun to reshape themselves as part of a super-or non-national identity, the virtual Ummah of contemporary Islam, for example, what has happened to religious identity? How are the Abrahamic religions now understood as transcending the old boundaries and ideologies of nation states or their continental reconfigurations, such as Europe or North America, but also as crossing the fragmentation of internal distinctions, as well as the confines of national states, such as Israel and Iran, and the diasporic communities that result from them? In a cosmopolitan world where the newest and most substantial diaspora communities are defined by a mix of religious, political, and ethnic identities in a new globalized culture, is "being religious" suddenly something that can reach beyond the older models of diasporic integration or nationalism? Which new paradigms of Abrahamic self-location within the evolving and conflicting global discourses about the nation, race, history, anti-religious feeling, colonialism and post-colonialism, gender and sexual identity does the globalization of the Abrahamic cultures open up, and to what extent might transnational notions of religious identity create new discursive margins and centers?

The terms themselves are constituent of the compromise formations necessary to comprehend "religious" culture in a self-consciously multicultural world. Let me use one example: The term "Arab" (and "Persian") Jews has its own history. "Jewish

Arabian" tribes were defeated by Islam in the 620s and early 630s and their medieval relics were the Jews of Khaibar or refugees such as those from the city of Darʻa in Transjordan and perhaps the city of Hit in Mesopotamia. To modern Iraqi Jews, the terms "Hitis" and "Jews of Khaibar" refer to the Karaites, which perhaps confirms Samuel Goitein's general hypothesis about proto-Karaism among Arabian Jews. Iraqi Jews fiercely dislike Hiti Jews, or more exactly, the Karaite community that lived in Hit until 1950. "Hiti" is considered synonymous, to modern Iraqi Jews, with the despised "Yehud Khebar," i.e., the "Yahud Khaibar" of northern Arabia who are identified as those who went to Hit. Yet medieval Jews from the Khaibar region had resorted to the Gaonate. When Yassir Arafat's brother held a Kuwaiti-funded chair in the United Kingdom, he focused his research on the Jewish tribes defeated in Arabia, as this provided a history of "Arab"–"Jewish" conflict as though it was perennial. The "Bachutzim" communities of Tunisia were "Arabs," as perceived by the other Tunisian Jews, i.e., the regular Twansa, and the Gorna (the latter being of Leghorn extraction). "Arab Jews" are one of the two self-perceived subdivisions of Jews in Hilla, Iraq, in modern times. A brief experimentation with "Arab Jewish" identity in the 1920s and 1930s was undertaken to accommodate Arab sovereign states. Yet to both Jews and Muslims, it was artificial. Jews felt Iraqi, or Egyptian, and so forth, but not Arab, and Arabs in turn used to be bound to what in Europe was an either premodern or a far-right notion, by which nations are defined by religion, and vice versa (e.g., Arabs and Turks are Muslims, and to this very day, in secularist but nationalist Turkey, informal prejudice blocking promotion is based on that belief, whereas in Ottoman Constantinople Jews could attain high ranks from the 1870s, e.g. as medical officers in the army). Today if you find yourself in Los Angeles, you might find within an American Conservative religious congregation, such as Sinai Temple, 107 years old, now with a large "Persian" Jewish community, a split between the older immigrants from Iran and their newly Americanized children over the issue of gay marriage, a question inconceivable in today's Iran (Nagourney 2013). Who are the "Arab" Jews and how do they relate to the other Abrahamic religions and cultures? The answer is historically dynamic and culturally fraught.

We are focusing in this volume on Abrahamic cultures and identities as minoritized ethnic and cultural groups in a diaspora that may be majority Muslim, Christian, Jewish or self-consciously secular. It is clear that if one of the major foci of any project on globalized religion is the interface of the "Abrahamic" religions, then this arena demands further and more comprehensive study. It is the seeming closeness of "Abrahamic" religions and their joint histories that draws attention to their real or imagined differences in relation to the majority religion and its new form: secular society. Even our key term is complicated. "The 'Abrahamic' religions" is the newest politically correct phrase: the "Judeo-Christian tradition" was the catchphrase for common aspects shared between Judaism and Christianity after the Holocaust

made this an acceptable notion; "the Abrahamic religions" is the new buzzword, which has become current only after 9/11, that incorporates Islam into the Judeo-Christian fold. Both phases attempt to defuse the clearly Christian aspects of modern Western secular society by expanding it, but, of course, in doing so only re-emphasize it. Here Jonathan Sacks's notion of difference is helpful: in creating categories that elide difference, that stress superficial similarities one believes that one is bridging "differences" (Sacks 2002, 53). Actually one is submerging them.

The historic acknowledgment, for good or for ill, of the closeness of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam results in what Sigmund Freud called the "narcissism of minor differences." Those differences are heightened in a secular society, which is rooted in the mindset and often the attitudes, beliefs, social mores, and civic practices of the majority religious community, which in Western Europe is Christianity. Thus, in Western Europe there was a radical secularization of religious institutions throughout the course of the nineteenth century. The new minority was promised a wide range of civil rights (relabeled by the twentieth century as "human" or "natural" rights)—including those of freedom of religion—if only they adhered to the standards of civilized behavior as defined by the secular society. This is rooted in the desire to make sure that that society with its masked religious assumptions redefines a minorities' religious practice or "secularizes" a religious minority into an "ethnic" one. The standards of "civilized behavior" are, for the most part, secularized versions of the claims of Christianity (either in its Catholic or Protestant forms) for appropriate behavior. Here, the claims are little different from those of the colonial belief in a civilizing mission. Secularization may be opposed to "religion," but when this opposition is examined, we find that it is usually cast in terms of the warfare between "theology" and "science" (also the title of a major book of 1896 by the former American Ambassador in Berlin, Andrew Dickson White). "Theology" is a specific religious claim or structure rather than a religious belief itself. Thus Jewish and Islamic claims as well as those from certain directions of Christian belief (Catholic or Puritan from the perspective of the liberal Andrew Dickson White) are seen as in need of modification. What that modification is and how it is to be accomplished is at the core of our question.

Can we now look at the experiences within the various strands of Jewish religious (and therefore social) ritual practice from the late eighteenth century (which marked the beginning of the civil emancipation of the Jews and the claim of a "human right" to one's own religious belief and practice) that parallel those now confronting diaspora Islam in "secular" (read "Christian") Western Europe. Here the trope of "foe and friend" needs to be sharpened based on the potential for collaboration around common interests in states that see their secular identity as separate from their own Christian history. The similarities between Western European attitudes toward Islamic practice and Jewish ritual in the twenty-first century are striking:

a religious minority enters into a self-described secular (or secularizing) society which is Christian in its rhetoric and presuppositions and which perceives a "special relationship" with this minority. The co-territorial society sees this entry as an act of aggression. The minority speaks a different secular language and also has a different religious language. This may be seen as odd in countries that have a national language and (in some) a religious language but not a secular language spoken by a religious minority. Religious schools that teach in the languages associated with the religious group are seen as sources of corruption and illness. Religious rites are practiced that seem an abomination to the majority "host" culture: unlike the secular majority these religious communities practice the mutilation of children's bodies (infant male circumcision and, for some Muslims, infant female genital cutting); the suppression of the rights of women (lack of women's traditional education; a secondary role in religious practice; arranged marriages; honor killings); barbaric torture of animals (the cutting of the throats of unstunned animals allowing them to bleed to death); disrespect for the dead through too rapid burial; ritual excess (drunkenness at Purim in the case of the Jews; feasting during Ramadan in the case of the Muslims); ostentatious clothing that signals religious affiliation and has ritual significance (from women's hair covering such as the Muslim hijab or Jewish sheitels to men's hats such as the Eastern European Jewish shtremil or the Arab kafiyya); and, centrally relating all of these practices: a belief in the divine "chosen-ness" of the group in contrast to all others. The demonization of aspects of religious practice has its roots in what civil society will tolerate and what it will not, what it considers to be decorous and what is unacceptable as a social practice. Why it will not tolerate something is, of course, central to the story. Thus, Alan Dundes argued almost twenty-five years ago that the anxiety about meanings associated with the consumption of the body and blood of Christ in the Christian Mass shaped the fantasy of the Jews as slaughtering Christian children for their blood (Dundes 1991, 336–345). This image lies at the core of both Jewish and Muslim fantasies about Christians, fantasies that both shaped and were shaped by community responses to Christian religious practices. But it is equally present in the anger in secular Europe today still directed at Jewish and Islamic ritual practices such as ritual slaughter with its obligatory bloodletting.

One of the most striking similarities of the process of integration into Western secular society is the gradual elision of the national differences among the various groups. Muslims in Western Europe represent multiple national traditions (South Asian in the UK, North African in France and Spain, Moroccan and "Moluccan" (Indonesian) in the Netherlands, Turkish in Germany). But so did the Jews in Western Europe who came out of ghettos in France and the Rhineland, from the rural reaches of Bavaria and Hungary, who moved from those parts of "Eastern Europe"—Poland, the eastern Marches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—which became part of the West, and from the fringes of Empire to the center. To this diverse population one can

add the Sephardi Jews from the Iberian Peninsula who settled in areas from Britain (introducing fish and chips) to the fringes of the Austrian Empire. The standard image of the Jews in eighteenth-century British caricature was the Maltese Jew in his oriental turban. By the nineteenth century, it was that of Lord Rothschild in formal wear receiving the Prince of Wales at his daughter's wedding in a London synagogue (Nissan 2008, 129–190). Religious identity (as the Jew or the Muslim) replaced national identity—by then few (except the anti-Semites) remembered that the Rothschilds were a Frankfurt family that escaped the Yiddish-speaking ghetto. The Jews are seen to be everywhere and all alike; Muslims are seen to be everywhere and are becoming all alike. Even ritual differences and theological antagonism become diminished in the Diaspora where the notion of a Muslim *Ummah* (or community) seems to be realized. It is the ideal state, to quote Talal Asad, of "being able to live as autonomous individuals in a collective life that exists beyond national borders" (2003, 180). But this too has its pitfalls, as the Jewish template shows.

Now for Jews in those lands that will become Germany, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in France, and in those lands that will become Great Britain, the stories will all be different as they encounter different forms of Christianity and different expectations as to the meaning of citizenship. Never mind if we now factor in the colonial world and its postcolonial manifestation. Different notions of secularization all present slightly different variations on the theme of what one must give up to become a true citizen. Do you merely have to give up your secular language (Western and Eastern Yiddish, Ladino, Turkish, Urdu, colloquial Arabic)? Today there has been a strong suggestion in Germany and the United Kingdom that preaching in the mosques be done only in English—for security reasons. Do you have to abandon the most evident and egregious practices or, as the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) states (echoing debates about Jewish emancipation during the French revolution), do you have to "cut off their Jewish heads and replace them with German ones"? And that was not meant as a metaphor, but as a statement of the impossibility of Jewish transformation into Germans.

All of these changes deal in general with question of Jewish "identity" but in a complex and often contradictory manner. For the history of the Jews in the European Diaspora the late eighteenth century called forth three great "reformers" who took on different reforms in the light of the diaspora status of the Jews: Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment in Germany (and their predecessors in Holland) who confronted a secularizing world. Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilnius—the Vilna Gaon (1720–1797)—in the Baltic who desired to reform Orthodox tradition to make it more able to function in a self-contained Jewish world. The first modern Jewish mystics, the Hasidim, typified by Rabbi Yisrael—the Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760) (the Master of the Good Name)—who fought, like their contemporaries in Berlin and Vilnius, against what they saw as the stultifying practices and

worldview of contemporary Judaism. All lived roughly simultaneously. In their wake came radical changes in what it meant to be a Jew in belief and practice. For contemporary Islam, all can serve as answers to the pressures found throughout the Diaspora. All offer parallels to the dilemmas faced by Islam in the West today. Thus the list of "abominations" that secular Europe saw in Jewish ritual practices became the earmark for the question of what Jews were willing to change in order to better fit the various national assumptions about citizenship.

Now we know that there are also vast differences between Jews in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Muslims today. There are many more Muslims today in Western Europe than there were Jews in the earlier period. The Jews historically never formed more than 1 percent of the population of any Western European nation. Muslim populations form a considerable minority today. While there is no Western European city with a Muslim majority, many recent news stories predict that Marseilles or Rotterdam will become the first European city to have one. In France today there are 600,000 Jews while there are between 5 and 6 million Muslims, who make up about 10 percent of the population. In Germany, with a tiny Jewish population of slightly over 100,000 almost 4 percent of the population is Muslim (more than 3 million people). In Britain about 2.5 percent of the total population (1.48 million people) is Muslim. Demographics (and birthrate) aside, there are salient differences in the experiences of the Jews and Muslims in the past and today. Indeed in all of these nations the so-called Christian majority is also collapsing: not because of the increase of Muslims or Jews but because of the gradual dissolution of state Christianity into ever more irreligious (not secular) forms. The Roman Catholic Church as well as the various state Protestant Churches have become aware of this problem, perhaps best indicated by the radical decline in the number of individuals entering into religious life as priests, nuns, or ministers.

Unlike Muslims today and their Christian compatriots, the Jews had no national "homeland"—and, indeed, were so defined as nomads or a pariah people (pace Max Weber and Hannah Arendt). They lived only in the *goles* (or *galut*, exile)—for even traditional Jews living in the Holy Land considered themselves to be in an exilic condition—within the Diaspora and seemed thus inherently different from any other people in Western Europe (except perhaps the Roma). Most Muslims in the West come out of a national tradition often formed by colonialism in which their homelands had long histories disturbed but not destroyed by colonial rule. And last but not least the Israel-Palestinian conflict over the past century (well before the creation of the state of Israel), the Holocaust, and the establishment of a Jewish homeland seem to place the two groups—at least in the consciousness of the West—into two antagonistic camps.

Religion for the Jews of pre-Enlightenment Christian Europe and for many of the adherents of the various forms of contemporary Islam, which has its immediate roots

in majority Islamic states, became for many a "heritage" rather than a living experience in the Western, secular diaspora. What had been lived experience in *milieux de memoire*—environments of memory—to use Pierre Nora's often-cited phrase from 1994 become *lieux de memoire*— places of memory—that refigure meaning constantly within the Diaspora (Nora 1993). What is it that such memory of ritual and practice can or must abandon? What must it preserve to maintain its coherence for the group? The answer depends on time and place, and yet the experience of Jews in the Western European Diaspora seems to offer a model case clearly because of the "narcissism of minor differences" among the three Abrahamic religions. The Jews maintain, in different modalities, their religious identity, even if the nature of their options created ruptures that produced new problems and over time partial resolutions and yet further conflicts and resolutions.

The essays in this volume on *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Collaboration and Conflict in the Age of Diaspora* illustrate the problems of conflict and collaboration among the various versions of the Abrahamic religions. They are case studies for the complexity of these problems and potentials. The idea of core meanings attributed to the interrelationships between the Abrahamic religions in specific historical contexts is framed by two Israeli sociolinguists, Benjamin Hary, teaching in the United States, and Martin Wein, in Israel, looking at what they call "religiolinguistics" across the Abrahamic religions. This idea of difference and conflict is explored by the Muslim-American scholar Mehnaz Afridi, in her work on the image of the Shoah as a space for interreligious reflection between Jews and Muslims. My essay on the politics of circumcision in the contemporary Western Diaspora of Jews and Muslims frames the debates about religious practice and ideas of health and illness and reflects historical conflicts about religious practices in the Abrahamic religions. The world of interreligious relationships is also the theme of the Australian political theorist Wayne Cristaudo's examination of the Christian thinker (and convert from Judaism) Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and his intimate correspondent the Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig with the author's focus on their relationship to Islam. That the fragmentation of the Abrahamic religions can be explored through the contrasts between them but also by examining the relationships within them is shown by the British historian Zhou Xun looking at the meanings of "Jewishness" in secular and multicultural Hong Kong under and after British rule. Katja Garloff's literary approach provides yet another case study for the meanings associated with collaboration, here understood in terms of intimacy between Jews and non-Jews in contemporary German film and literature. Yulia Egorova looks at South Asia, a very different space than Post-Shoah Germany and the potentials for Jewish-Muslim relations in that world. David Feldman's reading of the "blood libel" attacks on European Jewry provides a new and startling manner of seeing the relationship between Jews and Christians in Victorian England. Jane Garnett and Michael Keith explore the East

End of London as a place for the conflict and collaboration among the Abrahamic faiths from the nineteenth century into the present. My short conclusion, on the fluid relationship between symbol and identity in the Abrahamic religions, reflects on a recurrent theme in this book: the complexity of religious meanings in our age of diasporic pluralism and the anxieties that such fluidity creates.

It is this flux in the conflicts between and the collaborations among the Abrahamic religions on the new global stage that is the core of this volume. It grew out of a most successful conference on this topic held at the University of Hong Kong under the aegis of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures and its head Professor Kendall Johnson during my tenure as Research Professor from 2010 to 2013. I am grateful to Daniel Chua (Professor of Music and Head of the School of Humanities) for his support for this undertaking and the School of Modern Languages and Cultures for its support of this publication.

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Index