

**Children of the Same God:
Unitarianism in Kinship with Judaism and Islam
Minns Lectures, 2009
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Lecture One:

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The Early Unitarian Theology of Relationship to Judaism and Islam

The divorce between Christianity and Judaism took almost four centuries to be finalized. The Council of Nicea in the year 325 represented the first serious separation. Hopes of reconciliation were dashed at the Council of Constantinople in 381, which made a new doctrine of the Trinity creedal. The early church had supported multiple understanding regarding the nature of Jesus; after Nicea, only the belief that Jesus and God shared in the same divine substance was officially sanctioned. At the Council of Constantinople, for the first time in the history of Christendom, God, Jesus and now the Holy Spirit were defined as sharing equally and fully in the same divinity. Christianity was changed forever, and alienated in a new degree from its closest relatives in the past and present (Judaism and paganism) and in the future (Islam). As Richard Rubenstein has written in *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity in the Last Days of Rome*, “The real thrust of (this newly defined)... doctrine (of the Trinity) was to differentiate the Christian “Godhead” which now incorporated Jesus and the Holy Spirit from the monolithic God worshipped by the Jews, radical Arians, and later on, by Muslims, Unitarians, Bahais and others....As a result, Christians who accepted this triune God...no longer shared Jehovah (sic) with their Jewish forebears or the Supreme Being with their pagan neighbors, nor could Jews or pagans claim to believe in the same God as that worshipped by the Christians.”ⁱ

Many refused and resented this enforced separation, namely Jews, and later, Muslims, and always, a small minority of liberal Christians that it will be our special interest to follow.

While the relationship between Judaism and Christianity was hardly untroubled throughout the years of the earliest church, Jews writing in the period of the 4th

century church councils were concerned that the theological shift to a more fully Trinitarian Christianity would put them in new jeopardy. They had good reason to be alarmed. The new theology did accompany a new and violent age of anti-Semitism.

Islam would not develop until centuries after the Christian Jewish divorce, and yet, it too found itself in the middle of a family argument. Early Muslims, especially the prophet Muhammad himself, were so convinced of the natural kinship between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, that it was confounding for them when history did not play itself out accordingly. Insistence on the unity and sameness of a God of many traditions lay at the very heart of the Prophet Muhammad's revelation on Mount Hira in the year 610. Some Arabs practicing their indigenous religious already believed that "the God" or "al-Lah" that they worshipped was the same God as that of the Jews and Christians, but Muhammad's experience transformed this hunch into certain revelation.

Not surprisingly, then, Muhammad assumed that most Christians felt as strongly as he did about the close relationship of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, but this was largely because he underestimated the role of the Trinity in the Christianity of the time. Muhammad did not think that many Christians *really* believed that God had a son, a belief, which from his point of view, would have been pagan and incompatible with any monotheism. ⁱⁱ

The early Muslim community had more direct dealings with Jews than Christians. In an attempt to reach out to the Jewish Community Muhammad, as early as the year 621, directed the Muslim community to fast on the Jewish high holy day of Yom Kippur, naming this fast day *Asura* as a reference to the tenth day of the month of the Jewish calendar, *Tishri*. Mohammed's mystical night journey revealed to the prophet the importance of Jerusalem as a holy city common among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. When the community moved to Medina, fleeing the persecutions they were encountering in Mecca, Mohammed formed this first Islamic state on the explicit notion that the many Jewish tribes, as well as pagan ones, would be "one community with the believers." ⁱⁱⁱ

This Constitution of Medina (actually a collection of various documents) brought peace between previously warring tribes, meaning that unlike western ideas of theoretical tolerance, this Islamic state was “founded on the reality of actual agreement among real people of diverse ethnic and religious groups.”^{iv} Sadly, the peace did not last. In 624, the city of Medina found itself at war with Mohammed’s own tribe, the Quraysh. This accelerated the conflicts between different Muslim and Jewish tribes, and led to the expulsion of two Jewish tribes from Medina. Yet, for all the disappointment and even bloodshed, there was never any doubt on either side but what Jews and Muslims were disagreeing about the wishes of the same God.

There have been times and places when and where Jews, Muslims, and Christian have managed to transform their shared conviction in the unity of God into a life of peaceable companionship with each other. The late medieval (750-1492) Muslim-ruled state of al-Andalus (Arabic for Andalusia, the Iberian peninsula of present day Spain), whose rich multi-cultural setting historian Maria Rosa Menocal drew attention to as “The Ornament of the World,” is often invoked as one such time and place. Charmingly, the phrase “Ornament of the World” was itself the coinage of a German nun who never traveled to the Iberian peninsula, but who was in awe of the cultural wonders of the place as described by the Archbishop of Al-Andalus. In Al-Andalus, scholars from all traditions were frequently fluent in all of the religious languages--Latin, Arabic and Hebrew, and it was common for people to read each other’s holy books with respect and interest. Gradually, some of the aesthetics of worship within each of the traditions took on multi-cultural aspects. Learned and courteous debates were held. Literature, science and the arts blossomed in this place that we so wrongly describe as medieval, which after all means “middle,” as in “between” meaningful historical developments.

It is a clear mistake to over-romanticize Andalusia, which did have its own outbreaks of hatred and violence, including the horrible anti-Semitic riots that broke out in Grenada in 1066. But I like that even that old curmudgeon-scholar Harold Bloom has had to admit that even if those who praise the tolerance of Al-Andalus have over-idealized it, that idealization is itself helpful, and a useful beacon for our own hopes.^v

Of course, then, as now, not everyone celebrated cosmopolitan open-mindedness as an ideal. Consider the most bizarre episode of intolerance to break out in Al-Andalus, instigated by the unfortunately named monk Perfectus. Perfectus had been marketing in the thriving capital city of Cordova when he was confronted by a group of Muslims who asked him if Jesus or Mohammed was the greater prophet. The question itself was most likely a trick. While tolerance was the rule of the day, to directly insult the prophet was nonetheless a crime punishable by death. Even so, Perfectus' response to the dilemma was bizarre. Instead of finding a way around the question, he accused Mohammed of being a sexual pervert and the Anti-Christ, all the while using the most terrifically obscene language.

The reasonable Muslim judge who heard Perfectus' case was eager to dismiss it, given that the incident had been provoked by Muslims. But just as he was about to be set free, Perfectus, apparently unable to stop himself, issued another impossibly vulgar outburst directed at the prophet. He was sentenced to death, upon which he became a martyr to a small fanatic band of Christians, some of whom showed up at court the very day in order to repeat the act. The judge was so shocked at the first repeat incident that he slapped the man, thinking the only possible explanation was that he was insanely drunk.^{vi}

While this incident was odd and singular, one has only to Google "do Christians believe in the same God as the Jews and the Muslims" to reveal scores of absolutely hateful websites throwing the same vulgarities at Muhammed as Perfectus and his group, and for what feels to be the same purpose of denying the kinship between Islam and Christianity. There were only a handful of people who followed Perfectus, but it is not by accident that Karen Armstrong, in her account of the history of Islamaphobia, starts by describing this very incident.

So how characteristic is it of Christianity to accept or deny its family relationship with Islam and Judaism? Liberal religious people who welcome such ties might recall an odd ally in President George W. Bush, who earned the ridicule of his evangelical supporters when, on a state visit to England, he remarked that he believes that Muslims and Christians are the children of the same god. Learned commentators were called in, who, to my bemused amazement, said in the same breath and with no explanation of the contradiction, that Bush's belief was both

representative of mainstream American Christianity and completely incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.^{vii}

There are multitudes of ways to argue for interfaith relationship from within a Trinitarian theology. However, it is my intention in these lectures to demonstrate that European Unitarianism was formed in large part through a particular desire to honor Christianity's close kinship with Judaism and Islam, and that in our history, this desire for multi-religious tolerance is inextricably bound up with our anti-Trinitarianism. Convinced that Christians, Muslims, and Jews were a part of the same religious family, Unitarians emerged as those Christians who purposefully resisted theologies of God that would not travel well across different traditions.

The first connections between tolerance and anti-Trinitarianism were forged at the Council of Nicea in 325, where the historical forces at work were powerful enough to forever wed that Council's rejection of Judaism with that council's affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. When later anti-Trinitarian individuals take up the cause of multi-religious kinship (the very most obvious example being Michael Servetus) it was now necessarily coupled with the intention of rejecting a doctrine that alienates Muslims and Jews. And by the time Unitarian congregations gather in community around these beliefs in the 16th century, the more radical theologians are expressing specific theologies of family relations between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, in which Unitarianism is understood to have a uniquely conciliatory role. And while the most radical theologies of kinship were not always explicitly articulated across all of European Unitarianism, it nonetheless characterizes the identity and behavior of the movement.

And so our story begins with the Council of Nicea. Ah, the Council of Nicea!

I attended a non-progressive seminary where the highlight of the Church History class was the annual and painful spring re-enactment of the Council of Nicea. We set about these reenactments even though we had learned only the most cartoonish version of the history. The little that we knew was that in 325, the ambitious assistant to the Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, led the most encompassing assembly of church leaders ever in the righteous condemnation of bishop Arius' shocking insistence that Jesus and God were not one and the same. We were told

that the Nicene Creed emerged from this meeting, cementing agreement on the divinity of Jesus for all time to come. As so it was that during our reenactment of the council, bands of students representing Athanasius and his followers roamed around campus for an entire day carrying picket signs reading “Victory to Athanasius” and “Christianity Saved” while loudly screaming “Kill the Heretic Arians Part of the celebration included carnival games where people were invited to throw darts at inflated balloons with the names of Arius’ followers written on them.

The quality of the history here could not have been worse. For one, I was a little disappointed that my classmates didn’t use Athanasius’ own slur for the followers of Arius, “Ariomaniacs,” which actually sounds rather hip. But more importantly, no indication was made in our re-enactment of the fact that the complicated issue of the trinity could scarcely be said to have been resolved at Nicea. For years, different councils would go back and forth on the issue, and Arius himself was alternatively banished and reinstated in his relationship to the church many times. Arius was to be included again in communion right before he died—suddenly, after withdrawing from debate to the toilet, where he died of an intestinal bleed. Athanasius concluded that this fate was an intervention from God that awaits all Arians and their friends. Others have noted it is less the common fate of those sharing a theology as it is the common fate of those who have been poisoned.

In any case,, the political setting of the Council of Nicea was never considered in our reenactment. Nicea was located in what is now Turkey, and the council itself was summoned by Emperor Constantine, and held on his property. Contemporary accounts describe bishops thrilled to bask in the grandeur of the imperial palace, even though they felt little immediacy for the topic. For left to its own devices, the church itself might never have called this or any other similar conference. The Christians themselves were not at first very alarmed by a difference of opinion between Arius and the Bishop of Alexandria over the nature of Jesus. As the famous account has it, at the time, wherever you went in public you could hear persons of all social positions debating the nature of Jesus. This was the way the world was, not a cause for any special anxiety. Concern about the variances of practice and belief within Christianity emerged as Emperor Constantine’s issue,

who wanted a better homogenized and consolidated religion that could be used as both a vehicle and expression of empire.

Also missing from the seminary's account of Nicea was an appropriately nuanced portrait of Arius himself. Arius was a distinguished theologian and a much loved priest. Unlike most of his fellow bishops, during the Roman imperial persecution of Christians he refused a luxurious exile in order to stay and minister to his people. Those people, especially the most oppressed among them, loved him deeply. He was especially popular among women, sailors, and dockworkers, and he would teach them his theological ideas by attaching them to popular ballads, which would then travel with the speed of song through the taverns and across the Mediterranean.

For all its failings, what did seem very real about my school's Church history reenactment of the Council of Nicea was the ugly sentiment. The very few of us who were Unitarian Universalist students were not accidentally given the job of playing Arius and his followers. For obvious reasons, unlike the Anathasians, we not did throw ourselves into the role, and we did not dress in togas decorated with the name of our leader. But really, there was no confusion, not about whom was whom, and not about what was being communicating to us.

To be fair, the triumphalism on the part of the students was, if less than lovely, based on something like fact. While Arianism lingered longer than often acknowledged the council of Constantinople in 381 did authorize the radical anti-Arian persecution that ensured the death of the movement. After the council, Arian theology lingered on in the safe obscurity of remote Germanic areas of the Empire, but even these trace influences were absolutely gone at by the 7th century at the latest. There has been some speculation that the endurance of anti-Arian sympathies led to the later rapid spread of Islam in this area. This is of course, impossible to prove, and might just be a mistaken impression cause by comments such as those of the Byzantine Emperor, who upon hearing of Muhammad for the first time, assumed he must be a kind of Arian. For all practical purposes, by the late 4th century Arianism was gone.

And so it is that there is no actual, lived connection between 4th century Arian Christians and the Unitarians who emerged in the Reformation eleven centuries later, although often, we claim Arius as an ancestor in spirit. It is true that in each period of our history, including the American, it was first the enemies of Unitarianism who called us “Arians,” and it was only later that we embraced the name for ourselves. Yet it makes great sense that we accepted the name out of our nostalgia for connection the pre-Nicean church: as a part of the radical wing of the Reformation, our ancestors hoped to recapture the spirit of a church not yet spoiled by its own complicities with power and empire. But what specifically was it about the Ariomaniacs that inspired and connected them to later Unitarians?

In our histories on this matter, it has been customary to follow the lead of the great Earl Morse Wilbur, who so generously gifted our contemporary North American movement with its first serious appreciation of European Unitarian history. Wilbur assumed that the exact nature of Arius’ ideas about the doctrine of the Trinity were not specifically important to the development of Unitarianism. Indeed, Arius’ belief that Jesus was begotten (in the sense that there was a time when he was not, as opposed to the eternal existence of God) and that he shared in divinity but not substance with God, is an obscure and uninteresting theological subtlety for most contemporary Unitarian Universalists.

In Wilbur’s reading of our history, what Arius did that was important for future centuries was rail against the notion that any one complex theology could be elevated as unquestionable creed. Wilbur saw this sort of rebelliousness as the first key step in the progressive development of what he called “complete spiritual freedom” within Unitarianism. To quote directly from Wilbur, “First came the revolt against the bondage to the traditional dogmas as expressed in the historic Creeds, and the substitution of new statements of Christian faith drawn directly from the Scriptures. Next in logical development, the realization of a conflict, actual, or possible, between Scripture and reason led to the recognition of the fact that, if the soul were to be wholly free, reason must be accepted as the supreme authority. Nearly co-incident with this second step historically, though subsequent to it logically, came the further recognition of the equal authority of other men’s reason, for them which, when put in practical effect, issued in the principle of full mutual tolerance of differing opinions.”^{viii}

It is not difficult to rehearse the arguments against this approach, and indeed I have uncomfortably done so for Starr King seminary students while sitting directly under Wilbur's large, broodingly alive portrait. He does cast a very large and abstract net of "freedom, reason and tolerance" over the whole of European history in order to catch and label as "Unitarian" whatever fish he may. Having reeled in the most interesting specimens, he does then tie their stories together in such a way as to make the triumphal emergence of American Unitarianism circa 1930 seem more inevitable than it was. He is weak on Unitarian developments when they are very slow, when they are initially based in convictions about polity rather than theology, and when they involve entire movements of people rather than remarkable individuals (this would include just about the whole of our British history, and a good portion of the American). And, it is true there are only two women mentioned in his massive two volume history—one being Queen Elizabeth (I always forget the other).

But perhaps enough critique has already been made of poor Wilbur, without whom after all, we American Unitarian Universalists would have precious to little inkling at all of our historic relations in Europe. Single handedly, the man learned the necessary languages, plodded to the correct places, uncovered the right documents and wrote thousands of pages, all the while coping with financial instability, wars, and separation from his family. We falsely imagine that we have stepped all that far away from him.

For we still tend to assume that the Unitarian commitment to tolerance emerged sequentially after the arguments over the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than looking how to issues of tolerance were an intrinsic part of those debates. It is my argument that the Anti-trinitarian debate was always about multi-religious tolerance, and that we should have forgotten so suggests much about American Unitarian racial and class alliances, which I will discuss in Lecture Four of this series.

Sadly, the Council of Nicea did exclude Jews from the Christian family, and at that time and place, Arians were those who refused to go along with the expulsion. The business at Nicea also included an uncoupling of the date for the celebration of

Easter from the Passover calendar. Constantine himself explained in a letter he sent to clergy unable to attend him at Nicea: “We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews...and...we desire, dearest breather, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of Jews.”^{xix}

The theology for the anti-Semitic moves at Nicea had been carefully laid out by Anathasius, who contrasted the “flesh” of the Jews to the “spirit” of the new creedal Christianity.^x Jews were “flesh” in so far as he saw their embodied particularity—their very difference, here as a racial identity—as a threat to the “Spirit” of a church newly homogenized along universal, (catholic) lines. Not only did this theology come to inform the anti-Semitism of Nicea and later councils, but it also made it possible to employ anti-Semitic bias against anyone resisting the imperial homogenization of the church. It does not take long at all before Arians are also denounced as “flesh” in the way of “spirit.” As the Arians were not distinguished by racial identity, this move was accomplished by criticizing Arian biblical scholarship, which by taking seriously biblical language and biblical specificity, was said to honor the particular over the universal. The Arians thus associated with harmful particular difference, it became possible plot Arians onto existing anti-Semitic stereotypes. Even widely celebrated hymns of the time deployed this tactic. A diverse Christendom was replaced by a monolithic Christianity and it Others, the Others now comprising both Arians and Jews.^{xi}

For their part, fourth century Jews appreciated that the Arians were on their side, and they saw a real connection between Arian tolerance and their anti-Trinitarianism. Jewish communities had experienced tolerance while living under the rule of the Arian Goths, Franks, and Lombards, and when the leaders in those areas took up armed conflict against the empire in the 5th-6th centuries, the Jews took up arms alongside of them. This is from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*:

In contrast with the domination of the orthodox church, the Arian was distinguished by a wise tolerance and a mild treatment of the population of other faiths, conduct mainly attributable to the unsophisticated sense of justice characterizing the children of nature, but also traceable in some degree to certain points of agreement between the Arian doctrine and Judaism, points totally absent in the orthodox confession.^{xii}

As we already know, the resistances, armed and not, made to empire did not last long, with Arianism being completely eradicated by the end of the 7th century. But when anti-Trinitarianism becomes articulated once again in early sixteenth century Europe, most famously by Michael Servetus, this history ensures that the discussion will be part and parcel of the negotiation of Jewish-Christian kinship.

We turn now to this part of the story, where anti-Trinitarianism breaks out again after its long slumber.

By August of 1492, the European anti-Semitism that had been alarmingly growing for some three centuries culminated in the expulsion the large Jewish community from Spain which as we have described, was previously the model of more tolerant multiculturalism. Earlier that year, the last Islamic ruler of Al-Andalus, Muhammad XI, was forced to hand over the Iberian peninsula to Queen Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain in surreal ceremony for which the Catholic nobility donned Islamic costume.^{xiii} It was only a few months later that Isabella and Ferdinand issued the order expel the Jews. Approximately one half of a million Spanish Jews left for the safety of the Islamic-ruled Middle East. An equal number declared their conversion to Christianity and remained in their native land.

These so called “New Christians” included all kinds of people—some of whom came to be called by the derogatory term “marranos”. Marranos secretly practiced Judaism while outwardly adopting Christian observance, and they became the first target of the Inquisition. Other New Christians tried negotiate for themselves an authentic religious practice by accepting Christianity but while not engaging in the more divisive and doctrinal side of the faith. This last category included New Christians, “conversos” such as Juan de Valdes helped to define Catholic humanism, with its inspiration focus on everyday spirituality, self examination, and love. Other New Christians wrestled more overtly with the doctrines that were the most offensive from a Jewish point of view, the chief of which proved to be, not surprisingly, the doctrine of the Trinity. Pedro Gonzalez, tried by the Inquisition in 1525, made it clear what the big stumbling block to Christian conversion was for him: “The old and new law are very similar, for if the Jews believed in the Trinity, the creeds would be the same.”^{xiv}

The most famous anti-Trinitarian of the day was of course Michael Servetus, who served as the chief inspiration for the founders of Unitarianism. Servetus was not technically a New Christian, but, in the very least, Servetus so deeply understood that point of view that one of his biographers wonders if “Servetus was not in reality presenting some Christian understanding of Judaism based on a complete course in Jewish converso politics.”^{xv} He was familiar with the Jewish commentators from both the time of the early church and of his own time, and their arguments against the Trinity. He was also well read in the radical attacks on the Trinity coming from the exiled Jews living under the protection of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, if Servetus wasn’t literally a New Christian, he was well enculturated as one. Historian Richard Popkin has even argued, not without controversy, that the connection between Jewish influence and anti-Trinitarianism is so strong that the category of “marrano” might justly be extended to not just those who maintained their Jewish faith in secret, all those who refused to fully embrace the Doctrine of the Trinity, regardless of background.^{xvi}

Part of Servetus’ motivation in taking on the Trinity was his concern that the doctrine unnecessarily separates Christianity from Judaism and Islam. In *The Errors of the Trinity* Servetus praises Islam’s acceptance of Jesus as a prophet, while indicating that it was unfortunate that Christianity did not return the favor with a more serious acknowledgement of Muhammad. He expresses his concerns that the doctrine of the Trinity, especially in some of the extreme articulations of the time, made a laughing stock of Christianity. He also writes of the criticisms the medieval Biblical commentator Rabbi Kimhi made of the Trinity and how he weeps to think they never received an appropriate or full response from Christian theologians.^{xvii}

While jokes of the time suggest that huge numbers of Spainards shared Servetus’ point of view, the expanding focus of the Inquisition soon forced vocal dissenters from the country. Servetus’ post-exile career comprises the most fabulous story among the many fabulous stories that emerge as so many brilliant and independent thinkers were forced to leapfrog across Europe in search of toleration. Servetus worked under an assumed name as an editor, then, as a physician in France (with the local archbishop chief among major supporters and patients!). He could not

however stop himself from theologizing, publishing his work, and even sending it on to John Calvin. So it was that Servetus was famously martyred by John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland in 1553.

The next generation of anti-Trinitarians, most notably Niccolo Paruta, Jacob Paleologus, Szymon Budny, and Georgi Biandrata, would seal the connection between Servetus' theology and the purposeful establishment of Unitarian churches. For these men had the deliberate intention of gathering religious communities around anti-Trinitarian ideas, specifically in Poland, Transylvania, and Lithuania.^{xviii} While Budny and Paleologus in particular sometimes stand out as being more radical in their theology than some of those that they inspired, their thinking nonetheless lie at the foundation of European Unitarianism.

The most comprehensive early articulation within Unitarianism of theology on a natural religious kinship between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam comes from Jacob Paleologus (c. 1520-85). Paleologus, his name most likely assumed to imply a connection to the Byzantine imperial family, was a Dominican monk born in Greece. He took refuge in Prague in 1559 when a theological paper he wrote on revelation attracted the interest of the Inquisition. There he lived as a scholar of the Middle East and of the Qu'ran, and there, too he began identifying as a Unitarian, entering into a correspondence with Francis David, the leader of what would become the Transylvanian Unitarian church. Eventually, he accepted David's invitation to serve as rector of the Unitarian school in Kolosovar. He is primarily remembered in Unitarian history for his dialog with the church in Poland, where he urged them to abandon their pacifist conviction, concerned that if people of faith refused to take arms, enemies of justice might easily take power. Unfortunately, his definition of the role that Unitarianism might play in unifying Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as a single religious family is less discussed.

One of Paleologus' more extraordinary works is his *Disputatio Scholastica*, written in 1570. At the heart of the work is an imaginary church council, which includes not only representatives of the different Christian confessions, but also Jews and Muslims. In a fantasy that must have given Paleologus great satisfaction, Pope Pius (who was Grand Inquisitor during Paleogus' own persecution) is

summoned from the very deepest level of hell, and made to admit that he exercised his authority ruthlessly, unfairly, and that he seriously misunderstood scripture.

But at the heart of the council is a debate between Trinitarians and Anti-Trinitarians. Heavenly elders, including Jesus himself, have asked God to intervene to prevent what they are finding to be the excessive and even cruel attempts to establish Jesus' divinity. Defending the anti-Trinitarian point of view are Nicolo Paruta (famed Italian anti-Trinitarian) and Johann Sommer (son in law of Unitarian church founder Francis David). Representing the Trinitarian argument are Theodore Beza (John Calvin's successor) and other popes summoned from hell for the purpose: Gregory VII and Boniface VIII. Somewhat unfairly, the debate is presided over by the Transylvanian Unitarian King John Sigismund Zapolya. Not surprisingly, the anti-Trinitarians win the argument.

The piece is notable for its curious yet rich literary style. Paleogus seems to have special fun discussing the lavish setting, half heavenly Jerusalem, half parody of a papal or imperial residence. But the significance of this piece for scholars of the 16th century has been how it has prompted a reconsideration of the motivations behind early anti-Trinitarianism. Peter Schaeffer writes, "...other early dissenters had not so much rejected a belief in the Trinity as the codification of this belief in abstract unscriptural terminology such as substance, essence, hypostasis and relation, and its ruthless imposition by persecution and terror, yet here the Trinity is rejected as the emblem of tyrant and intolerance, whether seated in Rome, Wittenberg, Geneva, or anywhere else." ^{xix}

In condemning intolerance, was Paleogus condemning only the lack of acceptance of theological diversity within Christianity, or was he condemning something larger? In the same set of papers as the *Disputatio*, included is also *De Tribus Gentibus*, which suggested a radical basis for understanding Jews, Muslims, and Christians as members of the same, actually Jewish family tree.

The heart of Paleogus' vision is simple. Jews, Christians, and Moslems are all a part of the same Semitic family tree, and all share a similar basis for salvation in understanding Jesus' teachings as prophetic. The details are rather confusing, and demonstrate that he was hardly free from misunderstandings of the traditions he

was so anxious to join together (the case of Jews who accept Jesus as a teacher but not Messiah gets him into some especially murky and troublesome water). He even argues at one point that Muslims are not just theological but genetic Christians, his reasoning being that as Islam is prevalent in formerly Christian it can be assumed there must have been a mixing of races. But if he works too hard to establish a genetic family history, it is because his vision of true kinship is so strong, and, most importantly, based on actual experience.

For in 1573 Paleogoeus had taken a journey to Constantinople, where he had been directly impressed by the possibilities of religious toleration as both an ideal but also as something he experienced. His own account of his travels is possibly inaccurate and certainly grandiose; he was very concerned to list all of the impressive contacts he claimed to have made with officials of the Ottoman Empire. And yet his story opens up an exciting chapter in early Unitarian history, where sometimes the theologies of multi-religious toleration yield to creative cultural exchanges with contemporary Jewish and Islamic communities, and where sometimes, the multi-religious multi-cultural life experiences within diverse communities gives rise to accepting theologies.

For the world's religions and cultures have been more greatly enmeshed in patterns of creative conflict, mutual attraction, and circular patterns of influence than scholarship has fully imagined. There are of course, many pieces of many portraits yet to be assembled, but when we assemble them, let us do so with an eye not towards telling an ethnically and religiously distinct cultural histories, but with an eye to the many ways in which the borders between cultures and cultures have been crossed, renegotiated, and re-crossed, in the case of early European Unitarians, by those who deliberately chose this as the larger path.

In my next lecture I will explore this by examining how the basis for the Edict of Torda granting religious toleration was established not only in Francis David's mind, not only in European humanist influence, not even through the direct political and legal influence of the Ottoman Empire, but in the everyday lives of actual persons, who were already living in multi-religious and multi-cultural ways.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 1999): 260.
- ⁱⁱ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992): 159.
- ⁱⁱⁱ R. B. Serjeant, "The Sunnah Jami'ah, pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the Tahrim of Yathrib: Analysis and translation of the documents comprised in the so-called "Constitution of Medina," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41:1 (1978): 4.
- ^{iv} Ali Khan, "The Constitution of Medina," *Understanding Islamic Law*, Social Science Research Network at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=945458>.
- ^v Harold Bloom, "Introduction" to Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002).
- ^{vi} Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992): 15.
- ^{vii} See, for example, the remarks of Jack Miles, author of *God: A Biography* in "The God of Abraham, Jesus and Muhammed," a special article for beliefnet.com at <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2003/12/The-God-Of-Abraham-Jesus-And-Muhammed.aspx?p=1>, accessed Feb. 18, 2009.
- ^{viii} Earl Morse Wilbur, "The Meaning and Lesson of Unitarian History," *Unitarian Historical Society Transactions*, 3:4 (1923/1926): 350-360: 350.
- ^{ix} *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark) Vol XIV p. 54.
- ^x David Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9:4 (Winter 2001): 453-481.
- ^{xi} Christine Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed: Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jew in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith," *Hugoye: Journal of Syrian Studies* (electronic) 5:1 (January 2002): <http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol5No1/HV5N1Shepardson.html>.
- ^{xii} "Arianism," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1757&letter=A>, accessed Feb. 25, 2009.
- ^{xiii} Described in Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002): 49.

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- ^{xiv} Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd edition, vol. XIII (New York, 1969) 132.
- ^{xv} Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva Librarie Droz S.A., 1978): 129.
- ^{xvi} Richard H. Popkin, "Marranos, New Christians, and The Beginnings of Modern Anti-Trinitarianism," *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan, eds. (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999): 143-160.
- ^{xvii} *De Trinitatis Errobus*, 42b-43a; 56b. As cited in Roland H. Bainton, *Haunted Heretic: the Life and Death of Michael Servetus 1511-1553* (Providence: Blackstone Editions through the Beacon Press, 2005): 8.
- ^{xviii} The conscious efforts of these men to establish Unitarianism is discussed by Massimo Firpo in *Antitrinitari nell'Europa orientale de '500: Nouvi testi di Szymon Budny, Niccolo Paruta e jacop Paleologo*, summarized by Anne Jacobson Schutte in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33:2 (Summer, 1980): 242-244.
- ^{xix} Peter Schaeffer reviewing *Disputatio Scholastica* by Jacob Paleologous, Edited by Juliusz Domanski and Lech Szczucki (Utrecht: Bibliotheca Unitariorum, 1994) in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27:2 (Summer, 1996) pp 493-494.