

Christianity and Mithraism



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The influence of paganism in Christianity

1st Christianity and Mithraism

Prof. Franz Cumont of the University of Ghent, was the first scholar who observed the similarity of Christianity with Mithraism. He said that Christianity had borrowed iconographic themes from Mithraism, like the Mithraic images of the Heavens, Earth, Ocean, Sun, Moon, Planets, signs of the Zodiac, Winds, Seasons, and the Elements all are found on Christian sarcophagi, mosaics, and miniatures between the third to the fifth centuries, not before that!

Prof. Franz Cumont, wrote the following "The sectaries of the Persian god, like the Christians', purified themselves by baptism, received by a species of confirmation the power necessary to combat the spirit of evil; and expected from a Lord's supper salvation of body and soul. Like the latter, they also held Sunday sacred, and celebrated the birth of the Sun on the 25th of December.... They both preached a categorical system of ethics, regarded asceticism as meritorious and counted among their principal virtues abstinence and continence, renunciation and self-control. Their conceptions of the world and of the destiny of man were similar. They both admitted the existence of a Heaven inhabited by beatified ones, situated in the upper regions, and of a Hell, peopled by demons, situated in the bowels of the Earth. They both placed a flood at the beginning of history; they both assigned as the source of their condition, a primitive revelation; they both, finally, believed in the immortality of the soul, in a last judgment, and in a resurrection of the dead, consequent upon a final conflagration of the universe" (The Mysteries of Mithras, pp. 190, 191).

Robertson¹ said that Mithraism was a religion of Persian origin. It was the predominant religion in Persia six centuries before Christ. Then it moved to Rome around 70 C.E. and spread in the Roman lands. Thereafter, it moved north till it reached Britain, where some of its monuments were found in the cities of York, Chester, and other British cities.



Relief of Mithras as bull-slayer from Neuenheim near Heidelberg, framed by scenes from Mithras' life.

Ernest Renan said in his book "**The Origins of Christianity**" that if the growth of Christianity had been arrested by some mortal malady, the world would have been Mithraic.

¹ Christianity and Paganism, p. 338.



**Ancient Roman carvings of Mithraism –
Dated between 300-400 CE**

The Roman Catholic writer **Mario Righetti** admits, to facilitate the acceptance of the faith by the pagan masses, the Church of Rome found it convenient to institute the 25th of December as the feast of the birth of Christ to divert them from the pagan feast, celebrated on the same day in honor of the Invincible Sun Mithras, the conqueror of darkness (Manual of Liturgical History, 1955, Vol. 2, p. 67).



Tauroctony in Kunsthistorisches Museum

Reverend **Charles Biggs** stated: "The disciples of Mithra formed an organized church, with a developed hierarchy. They possessed the ideas of Mediation, Atonement, and a Savior, who is human and yet divine, and not only the idea, but a doctrine of the future life. They had a Eucharist, and a Baptism, and other curious analogies might be pointed out between their system and the church of Christ (The Christian Platonists, p. 240).

The Christian Father **Manes**, founder of the heretical sect known as Manicheans, believed that Christ and Mithra were one. His teaching, according to Mosheim, was as follows: "Christ is that glorious intelligence which the Persians called Mithras ... His residence is in the sun" (Ecclesiastical History, 3rd century, Part 2, ch. 5).

"I am a star which goes with thee and shines out of the depths." - **Mithraic saying**

"I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright morning star." - **Jesus, (Rev. 22:16)**

Mithraism stated that:

- Mithra was an intermediary between God and the people.
- Mithra was born in a cave or some secluded spot.
- He was born on December 25.
- He had twelve disciples.
- He died to save humans from their sins.
- He was buried, but came back to life, rising from his grave.
- He ascended to the heavens in front of his disciples, who were praying for him and bowing.
- He was called the Redeemer and the Savior.
- He was described as the calm lamb of God.
- Every year a "Lord's Supper" was set up in his memory.

- One of his rituals was baptism.
- Sunday was a day of worship and considered a holy day.

Let us draw a comparison between Christianity and Mithraism.

Mithraism	Christianity
1. Mithra was an intermediary between God and the people.	Jesus Christ was an intermediary between God and the people: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" ²
2. He was born in a secluded spot.	Jesus was born in a manger: "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger." ³
3. He was born on December 25.	Many countries celebrate Jesus' birthday on December 25.
4. He had twelve disciples.	Jesus had twelve disciples: "And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and heal all kinds of sickness...disease." ⁴
5. He died to save humanity from its sins.	Jesus died to save humanity from its sins. Paul says: "...I delivered to you first of all that which I also re- that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." ⁵
6. He was buried but he came back to life from the dead.	Jesus was buried, but rose again on the third day, according to Paul: "and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." ⁶

² Acts 4:12.

³ Luke 2:7.

⁴ Matthew 10:1.

⁵ I Corinthians 15:3.

⁶ I Corinthians 15:4.

<p>7. He ascended to the heavens in front of his disciples.</p>	<p>Jesus ascended to the heavens while his disciples watched: "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."⁷</p>
<p>8. He was called the Redeemer and the Savior.</p>	<p>Paul called him the Redeemer and Savior: "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."⁸</p>
<p>9. He was described as the lamb of God.</p>	<p>John the Baptist described him as the lamb of God. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"⁹</p>
<p>10. He set up the "Lord's Supper".</p>	<p>Paul came up with the "Lord's Supper". He said, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of Me.'"¹⁰</p>

⁷ Acts 1:3.

⁸ I Corinthians 2:13.

⁹ John 1:29.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 2:23-24.

11. He set up baptism.	Baptism started in a right way, as "...[Peter] commanded them to be baptized in the name of Lord." ¹¹ But it ended up with the Trinity: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." ¹²
12. He sanctified Sun-day.	Sanctified Sunday: "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn." ¹³ This was despite the fact that the fourth commandment made Saturday the holy day. "Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy." ¹⁴

Undoubtedly, Christianity borrowed a lot from the pagan rituals widespread in the Roman and Persian Empires at that time.

All of the above was vintage Persian paganism, i.e., it was all devoted to worshipping Mithra.

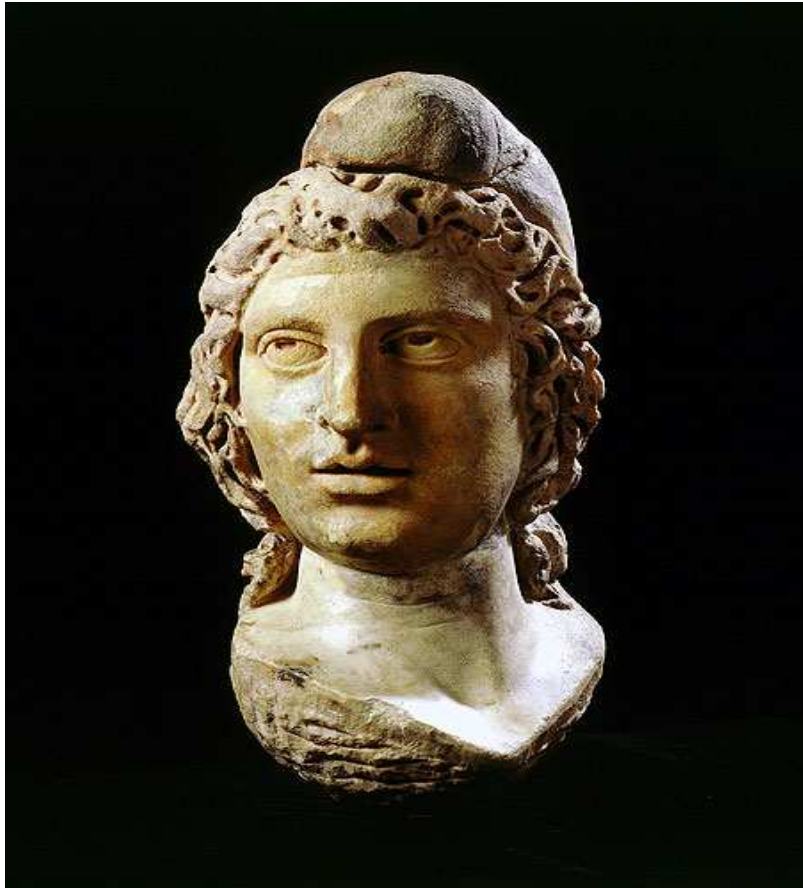
Later, the symbol was changed" from Mithra to Christ.

¹¹ Acts 10:48.

¹² Matthew 28:19.

¹³ Matthew 28:1.

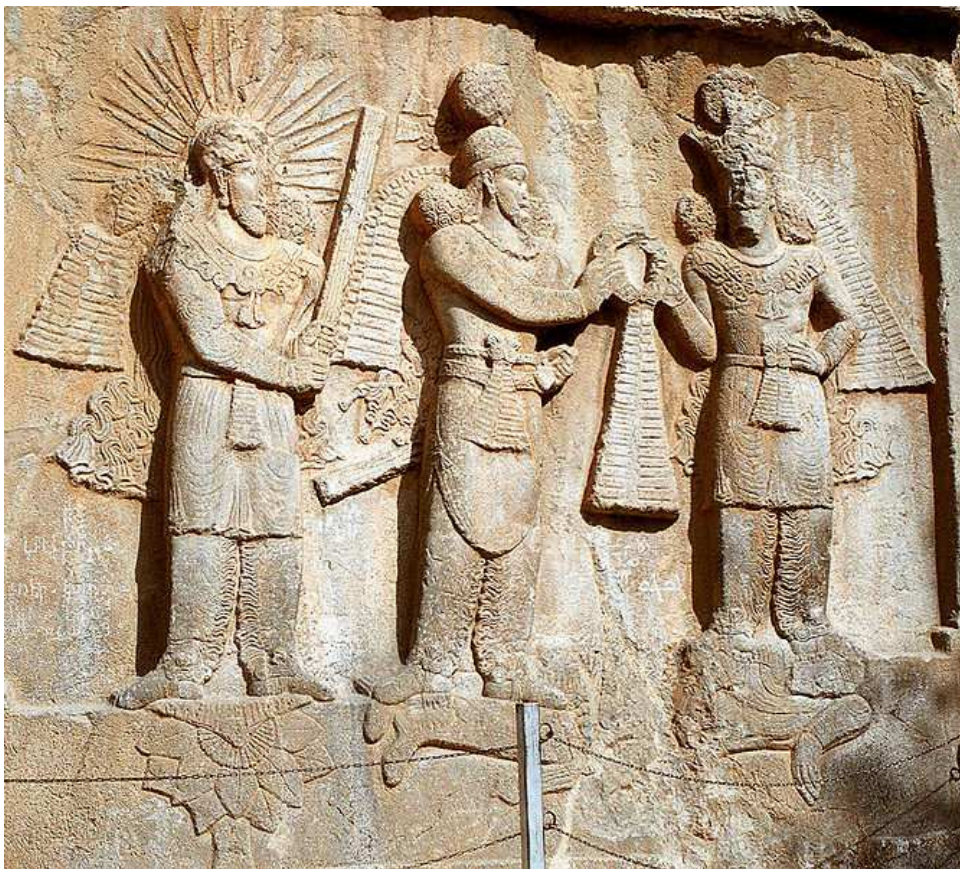
¹⁴ Exodus 20:8-11.



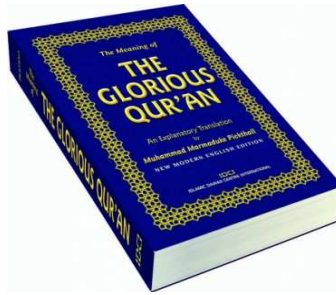
Marble head of Mithras in Phrygian cap. The head probably formed part of a life-size bull-slaying scene that stood in the temple. Mithras's eyes are turned away from the actual deed of slaying the bull.

Why there are so many similarities between the two religions? By a process of diffusion that was practiced without constraint by today's standards, competitive near-eastern religions shared many of the stories and rituals that appealed to worshippers. As the youngest of all these religions, Christianity needed to be especially skillful in adopting for its own purposes those features of other religions that would enlarge its appeal. And of course it enjoyed the substantial advantage that its sacrificial god had been a genuine human being executed by Roman authority, that it offered a more accessible eschatology telling of an afterlife that guaranteed the appropriate punishment and

rewards, that it promised salvation to all who could believe in Christ, not merely one particular sub-population, and that it was able to produce a sacred text that documented the life and sayings of Christ. Mithraism was less flexible, rendered its services to a smaller population (primarily soldiers), and was less popular with the urban population. It accordingly lost its position of leadership among eastern religions practiced in Rome to Christianity by the early fourth century.



Investiture of Sassanid emperor Ardashir I or II (3rd century CE bas-relief at Taq-e Bostan, Iran. On the left stands the *yazata* Mithra with raised *barsom*, sanctifying the investiture.



The Glorious Qur'an addressed these pagan ideas and discussed them extensively. After all, pagan beliefs and customs are generally similar in form and substance.

Accordingly, the Qur'an has branded the Christians with disbelief when they say that Jesus Christ is God, or the Son of God, or a third constituent of the Trinity.

Allah, Most Exalted, says:

They have certainly disbelieved who say that Allah is Christ, the son of Mary. Say, "Then who could prevent Allah at all if He had intended to destroy Christ, the son of Mary, or his mother or everyone on the earth?" And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them. He creates what He wills, and Allah is over all things competent. Qur'an 5:17

These verses underscore the following important points:

1. Jesus Christ was no more than a messenger, like many other messengers who came before him. Likewise, Muhammad was a messenger of Allah. Allah says, "Muhammad is no more than a messenger: many were the messengers who passed away before him." Qur'an 3:114
2. His mother was nothing more than a woman of truth. She was not a prophetess. Allah says, "his mother was a woman of truth." Qur'an 5:75
3. Then Allah says that "...they had both to eat their (daily) food." This is one of the clearest human attributes negating divinity, because the eater is in need of food to satisfy his hunger. He is also in need of getting rid of his wastes and

relieving himself of harmful materials. Needless to say, these characteristics can never apply to God.

While the Qur'an denies the divinity of Jesus Christ, it affirms that he is a servant of Allah. Allah, Most Exalted says:

When (Jesus) son of Mary is held up as an example, behold your people raise a clamor thereat (in ridicule) and they say, "Are our gods best, or he?" This they set forth to you, only by way of disputation: yea, they are a contentious people. He was no more than a servant: We granted Our favor to him, and We made him an example to the Children of Israel. Qur'an 43:57-59

As a matter of fact, Allah, Most Glorified, Most Exalted, reminds us that the first words uttered by Jesus while he was in the cradle were his affirmation that he was a servant of Allah. Allah Most Exalted says:

But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me revelation and made me a prophet. And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live."¹⁵

The final Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said:

Allah Almighty, Most Exalted, says, "The son of Adam tells a lie against Me, though he has no right to do so. He abuses Me, though he has no right to do so. As for his telling a lie against Me, it is his saying that I will not recreate him as I created him the first time.

In fact, the first creation was not any easier for Me than his recreation. As for his abusing Me, it is his saying that Allah has begotten a son, while I am the One, the Self-Sufficient Master, Whom all creatures need. I beget not, nor was I begotten, and there is none like unto Me."¹⁶

When the Qur'an discusses the Christian Trinity, It discusses the issue of Trinity in its various forms and concepts. Likewise, when the Qur'an discusses the Christian concept

¹⁵ Qur'an 19:29-31.

¹⁶ This is an authentic Saying (hadith) of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), narrated by Abu Hurayrah and collected by Al-Bukhari in *The Book of Tafsir*.

of divine sonship, it even discusses the pagan concept of sonship in all its stages and phases of development.

Talking about the Arab pagans and other pagans, the Qur'an says:

Yet they make the jinn equals with Allah, though Allah did create the jinn; and they falsely, having no knowledge, attribute to him sons and daughters. Praise and glory be to Him! (for He is) above what they attribute to Him!¹⁷

Has then your Lord, (O pagans,) preferred for you sons, and taken for Himself daughters among the angels? Truly you utter a most dreadful saying!¹⁸

Now ask them their opinion: Is it that your Lord has (only) daughters, and they have sons? Or that We created the angels female, and they are witnesses (thereto)? Is it not that they say. from their own invention. "Allah has begotten children"? But they are liars! Did He (then) choose daughters rather than sons? What is the matter with you? How judge you? Will you not then receive admonition" Or have you an authority manifest? Then bring your Book (of authority) if you be truthful! And they have invented a blood-relationship between Him and the Jinn: But the Jinn know (quite well) that they have indeed to appear (before His Judgment Seat)! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the things they ascribe (to Him)!¹⁹

People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist: It will be better for you: For Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. Christ disdains not to serve and worship Allah, nor do the angels, those nearest (to Allah).²⁰

¹⁷ Qur'an 6:100.

¹⁸ Qur'an 17:40.

¹⁹ Qur'an 37:149-159.

²⁰ Quran 4:171-172.

The Jews call Ezra a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the Son of God: that is a saying from their mouths; (in this) they but imitate what the Unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them; how they are deluded away from the Truth! They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah and (they take as their Lord) Christ, the son of Mary, yet they were commanded to worship but one God; there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (far is He) from having the partners they associate, (with Him).²¹

The statement: "...they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say," is an inimitable and eloquent expression of the trail of ancient paganism which has lived on through the ages.

Sadly, it is the same pagan legacy that has led to Zionism and the Universal Crusade.

This is just one of the many amazing facts that the Qur'an enlightens us with. It always puts the whole truth at our disposal in the clearest and most complete fashion, without the least ambiguity or complicated arguments.

This is how we find the Glorious Qur'an—inimitable and calm in whatever it says and mandates. It says nothing but what is right. It speaks nothing but the truth.

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²¹ Qur'an 9:30-31.

