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Later Christianity and its Parallels in the Wider World

*When it is said to them: “Follow what Allaah has revealed” they say:
“No, rather we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.” Even
though their fathers understood nothing nor were they guided, they were
void of wisdom*

{*al-Baqarah: 170*}

James H. Baxter, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at *St. Andrews University* says in *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*: **“If Paganism had been destroyed, it was less through annihilation than through absorption. Almost all that was pagan was carried over to survive under a Christian name...local pagan statues were labelled with**

Jesus' name, transferring him to the cult and mythology associated with the pagan deity.”

Arthur Findlay in *Rock of Truth* made the point that: **“It was not until the year 527 C.E. that it was decided when Jesus was born, and various monks equipped with astrological learning were called in to decide this important point. Ultimately, the Emperor decided that the 25th of December, the date of birth for the pagan Roman god, *Mithra*, be accepted as the date of birth for Jesus. Up to 680 C.E. no thought had been given to the symbol of Jesus crucified on the cross and prior to that date veneration was accorded to the Mithraic symbol of the lamb. From this time onwards it was ordained that in place of the lamb the figure of a man attached to the cross should be substituted.”**

Sir James G. Frazier in his famous work *The Golden Bough* noted: **“In respect both of doctrines and of rites, the cult of *Mithra* appears to have presented many points of resemblance to Christianity. Taken all together, the**

coincidences of the Christian with the Heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental. They mark the compromise which the church in its “hour of triumph” was compelled to make with its vanquished and yet still dangerous rivals.”

In Robertson’s *Pagan Christs* we read that *Mithra* was believed to be a great mediator between man and God. His birth took place in a cave on December 25th. He was born of a virgin and he travelled far and wide and had twelve disciples (that represent the twelve zodiacal signs). He died in the service of humanity, he was buried but rose again from his tomb and his resurrection was celebrated with great rejoicing. His great festivals were the *Winter Solstice* and the *Equinox* (Christmas and Easter?). He was called the saviour and sometimes figured as a lamb and people initiated themselves into this cult through baptism and sacramental feasts were held in his remembrance.¹ Mithraism was a religion of “salvation.”²

¹ Robertson, *Pagan Christs*, p.338

² Chambers Compact Reference, *Mythology* (1991), p.132

It is worth noting that in the English language all of the days of the week are actually named after Pagan deities from Northern European cults. For example, *Monday*, is from 'Moon' as some of the northern European Pagans used to worship the Moon on this day. Thursday is from the Nordic god *Thor*; Friday is from the Nordic god *Freyr*; Saturday is derived from the Roman god *Saturn* and possibly *Saturnalia* which was another Roman "celebration" which involved debauchery and inebriation. But the most important pagan naming for a week day is with *Sunday* derived from the Roman sun god *Solis Invictus*, not from "son of god." This is why later Christians, accommodating Romans and their culture, hence 'Roman Catholicism,' worship on 'Sunday,' s-u-n, not s-o-n. The 25th of December was also the birthday of *Sol* and was known as *Natalis Solis Invicti* which was a time of rejoicing, games, public frolics and inducement in slaves. Remember, these same Romans would later preside over the *Council of Nicea*, headed by the Pagan Roman Emperor, Constantine, who was himself considered to be an incarnation and embodiment of the sun god!! *The Council of Nicea* and other "councils" lead to the "official" and "orthodox" doctrines of

which books should be placed into the Bible, the trinity and Jesus' date of birth being fixed to the 25th of December.

Edward Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* says: **“The Roman Christians ignorant of his (Jesus’) birthday, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the *Brunalia* or *Winter Solstice*, when Pagans annually celebrated the birthday of *Sol*.”**³

Groliers Encyclopedia notes: **“Christmas is the feast of the birth of Christ, celebrated on December 25. Despite the beliefs about Christ that the birth stories expressed, the church did not observe a festival for the celebration of the event until the 4th century. Up to this time Rome had celebrated the feats of the *Invincible Sun* on December 25, and even from 274 C.E. under the Emperor Aurelian the feast was still celebrated.”**

³ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; Volume 2*, p.383

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Sons of God?

In ancient societies there were many people who were referred to as son of god, sons of god, son of the gods and so on. James Dunn, a Trinitarian theologian, summarises the various positions and their contexts:

“Those familiar with the wider circles of Hellenistic culture would know that:

(1) Some of the legendary *heroes* of Greek (and Roman) myth were called sons of God – in particular, Dionysus and Heracles were sons of Zeus by mortal mothers.

(2) *Oriental rulers*, especially Egyptian, were called sons of god. In particular, the Ptolemies in Egypt laid the claim to the title ‘sons of Helios’ from the fourth century BC onwards, and at the time of Jesus, ‘son of god’ was already widely used in reference to Augustus.

(3) *Famous philosophers* also, like Pythagora and Plato, were sometimes spoken of as having been begotten by a god (Apollo).

(4) and in Stoic philosophy Zeus, the supreme being, was though of as father of all men.

Even those whose cultural horizons were more limited to the literature and traditions of Judaism would be aware that ‘son of god’ could be used in several ways: (5) *angels or heavenly beings*

(6) Regularly of *Israel or Israelites*

(7) *The king*, so called only a handful of times in the Old Testament.

In intertestamental Judaism these uses of “son of God” were developed.

(8) In 1 Enoch, angels are called “sons of heaven” and “sons of the God of heaven”

(9) Philo in his unique blend of Stoic and Jewish thought calls God “the Supreme Father of Gods and men” and frequently talks of God as Father in relation to the creation, referring to the cosmos as “God’s son” and the *Logos* as “God’s first born.”

(10) Individual Israelites, specifically the righteous man, the Maccabean martyrs or those who do what is good and pleasing to nature.

(11) In particular, attention has recently been drawn to two Jewish charismatics remembered in Rabbinic literature – one Honi, the “circle drawer” (first century C.E.), who according to tradition prayed to God “like a son of the house” and had the reputation of enjoying a relationship of intimate sonship with God which ensured the success of his petitions...the other Hanina ben Dosa, from the generation following Jesus, who a heavenly voice was said to have addressed as “my son.”

(12) Finally, the *Dead Sea Scrolls* have thrown up three interesting fragments: one speaks of the time “when (God?) will have begotten the Messiah among them.” In the second, the hoped for Davidic Messiah is described specifically in the language of divine sonship using II Sam 7.11-14...and possibly associating it with Ps. 2.7...the other says of one who apparently is to be a mighty king (Messiah?) – “He shall

be hailed as the son of God, and they shall call him Son of the most High...⁴

The degree of similarity between the use of “son of God” with Jewish writings and its use in the wider Hellenistic world is noticeable. In particular, it was obviously a widespread belief or convention that the king was a son of god either as descended from God or as representing God to his people. This is known as *Divine Kingship* and is seen in the tribal cultures of the world. So to both inside and outside Judaism human beings could be called “sons of God” either as somehow sharing the divine mind or as being specially favoured by God or pleasing to God.”⁵

Dunn goes on to note:

“The language of divine sonship and divinity was in widespread and varied use in the ancient world and

⁴ About this occurrence, Geza Vermes writes: “4Q246 with its intriguing phrases, “son of God” and “son of the Most High,” recalling Luke 1, 32, 35, has been the centre of learned and popular speculation for the last twenty years. Four competing theories were proposed before the photograph of the document reached the public.” (Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 1995)

⁵ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p.14-16

would have been familiar to the contemporaries of Jesus, Paul and John in a wide range of applications.”⁶

Isis – Mother of God?

The ‘Black Madonnas’ of Europe, which can be seen in 7th century C.E. French art, Eastern Europe, Russia, Switzerland and Montserrat, have enormous similarities with Isis.

Isis was an African goddess of Nile Valley civilisations, whose worship eventually diffused to most of the ancient western world. The infant Horus was the begotten son of the resurrected god Osiris and the goddess Isis. The legend of Isis became an ancient international phenomena, Jocelyn Rhys states **“statues of the goddess Isis with the child Horus in her arms were common in Egypt and were exported to all neighbouring and to many remote countries, where they are still to be found with new**

⁶ ibid. p.17

names attached to them – Christian in Europe, Buddhist in Turkestan, Taoist in China and Japan. Figures of the virgin Isis do duty as representations of Mary, of Hariri, of Juan-Yin, of Kwannon and of other virgin mothers of gods.”⁷

Another interesting fact is that in the pre-Islamic times, the Arabs in Makkah used to worship a goddess called *al-Uzza*, who was a black woman and her idol was destroyed by the companion of the Prophet Muhammad (*sallallaahu alayhi wassallam*), Khaalid bin Waleed (*radi Allaahu anhu*). The pagan Arabs worshiped other goddesses such as *al-Lat* and *al-Manaat*.

In the aspect of ‘mother with child,’ Isis was pictured as a woman with dark brown skin and this image was dispersed throughout Europe. By the late 3rd century C.E. the cult of Isis worship was the biggest, even over the Roman and Greek goddess cults.⁸

⁷Jocelyn Rhys, *Shaken Creeds – The Virgin Birth Doctrine* (1922), pp.115-116 (Chapter 3)

⁸R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1971) p.81

Isis was known as the “*Great Mother*,” the “*Immaculate Virgin*,” “*Our Lady*” and the “*Mother of God*.”

During the 4th century C.E. there was discussion in the European Christian Churches concerning the doctrinal status of the Virgin Mary.

In 428 C.E., Nestorius patriarch of Constantinople, put forward the belief that the Virgin Mary was a mother to the divine Jesus, differing from the ruling Church faction which insisted that the Virgin Mary was *the* “Mother of God.”

In 430 C.E. Cyril of Alexandria, called a synod which included the major Christian leaders of Europe. The 431 C.E. official declaration of the Virgin Mary as the “Mother of God” was the result of this synod, known as the ‘*Council of Ephesus*.’

Cyril’s faction of the Christian Church formed the European Orthodox Churches, which eventually separated into the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The absent Nestorius was ousted from Constantinople and his writings were burned as a result of the *Council of Ephesus*. The attributes and titles which catapulted the Virgin Mary into the realm of goddesshood were borrowed from Isis.⁹

Despite the official suppression of the worship of Isis in Europe, it survived in the veneration of the European Black Madonnas, which are the Orthodox Christian images of Mary.

Steven C. Cappannari and Leonard W. Moss state that “the Black Madonnas are powerful images, miracle workers...implored for intercession in the various problems of fertility. Pilgrimages covering hundreds of kilometres are made to shrines of the Black Madonnas...pilgrims journeying to the shrine at Mount Vergine would climb the steps of the Church on their knees, licking each step with their tongues. **The attitude of the pilgrim approaches not reverence but worship.**”¹⁰

⁹ Danita Redd, “*Black Madonnas of Europe – Diffusion of the African Isis*” in Ivan Van Sertima (ed.), *African Presence in Early Europe* (Transaction Publishers, 1996) p.117

¹⁰ Cappannari and Moss, “*Mother Worship – In Quest of the Black Virgin, She is Black Because She is Black*” in James J. Preston (ed.), *Mother Worship – Theme and Variation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) pp.53-74

The worship of the European Black Madonnas clearly demonstrate the diffusion of the cult of Isis worship into Europe. This diffusion can be investigated through the early development of Byzantine Christian iconography and the adoption by the European Orthodox Christians of various Black goddesses to represent the Virgin Mary.¹¹

The Black Madonnas of Europe have a tradition which goes back hundreds of years, before the advent of established Christianity. Isis was the prototype for the black Madonnas of Europe, and was absorbed into the Orthodox Christian Churches of Europe.

Furthermore, Cappannari and Moss state that during the French revolution, engineers destroyed several images of the Virgin Mary. These images and relics were examined and found to be black basalt statues of Isis and Horus. Thus, it is evident that the idols of Europe were converted into statues of Mary.¹²

¹¹ Danita Redd

¹² Stephen C. Cappannari and Leonard W. Moss, “*The Black Madonna: An Example of Cultural Borrowing*” in *Scientific Monthly*, (Vol. 73, 1953) pp.319-24.

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Similarities with Buddha?

T.W. Doane in his book *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions* went as far as dedicating an entire chapter on assessing the comparison between Buddha and later Christian concepts of Jesus as God, God incarnate and “Son of God” etc.

Doane has included a forty-eight point side-by-side narration and detailed analysis from their births until the end of their lives on earth *as recorded in the Bible* and in Buddhist scriptures.

Their conception, birth, missions, miracles, temptation, preaching, worship, prophecies, death, ascension, divine-ness, judgment of mankind and many other matters recorded in their orthodox scriptures are almost word for word exact carbon copies of one another.

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Dr. Muhammad Ansari records the following words from an eminent Christian scholar, S.M. Melamed: “Yet the fact remains, the Buddhist canons were already known to the Western world before the coming of Jesus. Today hardly any Indologist of note denies the organic connection between the two redemptive religions. So close is the connection between them that even the details of the miracles recorded in the “orthodox” scriptures of both religions are the same. It is said that Buddha fed five hundred people with one loaf of bread, that he cured lepers and caused the blind to see.”¹³

In 1884 C.E. a German historian of religion by the name of Rudolph Seydel published a very detailed study demonstrating that **all of the tales, miracles, their astounding similarities with the much more ancient Buddhist scriptures and accounts.**

T.W. Doane observes that even though today Buddha has been elevated to the position of a god, **“there is no reason**

¹³ *Islam and Christianity in the Modern World*

to believe that Buddha ever claimed to be a higher authority than that of a teacher of religion, but, as in modern factions, there were followers of Buddha after his death who carried out his teachings further than Buddha did himself. These people, not content with praising him during his lifetime, exalted him to the level of a god, and thus within a quarter of a century after his death, Buddha found a place amongst the other deities.”¹⁴

The Word of God

In the Qur’aan, Jesus (*peace be upon him*) is referred to as ‘*the word,*’ as he came into being by the word of Allaah, “Be” (Soorah Alee Imraan: 59).

¹⁴ Due to the popularity and fashionable trend of people in the West entering into Buddhism, as an alternative to the modern consumer industrial complex and its spiritual void, we realise the need to cite some realities of the “*Buddha path.*” Even though Buddha never asked people to worship him and never claimed to be the One True God worthy of worship, most Buddhists all over the world worship him and make colossal temples, aesthetic shrines and gigantic statues of “Buddha.” Many of the rites of worship involved at such sites include bowing, prostrating and praying, in an attempt to seek help from “*the Buddha.*” Meanwhile, most Buddhists will say that they do not worship Buddha and that their way is the “way of true inner peace and spirituality.” Even though many young people and Western university students are now getting into Buddhism, with films highlighting the craze such as *Seven Years in Tibet*, Buddhist realities are not really know. For example in the 20th century the Tibetan Buddhists even outlawed the bicycle!?! Totally against any kind of progress!

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In Christianity however, the adoption of the pre-Christian concept of *'the word'* in the gospel according to John, has been to signify his divinity. The Greek term used in the gospel (John 1:1, 1:14) for *'word'* is *'logos,'* also meaning *'reason'* or *'plan.'* Thus, Jesus is identified in the gospel with the pagan *logos* of Greek philosophy who was the divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning. In the sixth century C.E. the philosopher Heracletius proposed that there was a *logos* in the cosmic process equivalent to the reasoning power of man.

Philosophers following the teachings of Zeno of Citicum in the third and fourth centuries C.E. known as Stoics, later defined the *logos* as an active, rational and spiritual principle that permeated all reality.

Judaeus Philo of Alexandria, a Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher (d. 45 C.E.) taught that the *logos* was the intermediary between God and the cosmos, being both the agent between God and the cosmos, and both the agent of

creation and the agent through which the human mind can comprehend God.¹⁵

¹⁵ Dr Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *The True Message of Jesus Christ* (Dar al-Fatah, 1996) pp.60-61.