

PROMISE AND PROVIDENCE

As Christians prepare for the celebration of the arrival of the Christ child, Jews are at the moment involved with Hanukkah- an eight day festival of lights, commemorating the rededication of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem while the Moslem is in continuing ritual of the so-called Pillars of Islam. It would be providential if there were respect for each by the other.

I visualize the 'three wise men' of today could be imaginary figures (Moses, Jesus and Mohammed) reflecting on the trials and tribulations now and wondering why each profess to a monolithic God whose example could persuade and pacify, yet fraught with ambiguities anger and conflicting definitions of their religions. An impasse seems without recompense.

Angels appeared at the beginnings: spiritual beings acting as an attendant or messenger of God, represented as being of human form with wings. To Isaiah who spoke of seeing the Lord sitting on a throne, angels (seraphims) higher and one cried to another, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', signifying a sacred place (Isa 6:3); and Gabriel, an angelic prince sent from heaven directing arrangements for the Son of God's arrival (Lk 1:19/26), naming Jesus (Joshua) as 'God's only begotten son' (Ma 1:21); Too, according to Mohammed's revelation, during Ramadan Gabriel came to him selecting him as prophet to his people, Koran (Qu'ran). It was said God revealed to Moses his message for the Old Testament on Mount Sinai, as described in the Torah (Jewish religious doctrine), while Mohammed received his message over a 23-year period.

Yahweh (Hebrew word for God/salvation) was believed to have inspired Abraham and that he would be the leader of a great nation, and Moses believed that Yahweh was the liberating rationale for their trek from the tyranny of Egypt. Historically, from the beginning the Jew sought a Messiah, the anointed one, who would prevail and lead the nation of Abraham. Often in time of stress, moral decadence, and frequent attacks from outside nations, the Jew left the aura of God belief reverting to idolatry and sin, inspired by the lineage of prophets who kept the faith and provided the example of God's relationship with the Jewish people. Biblical scripture reminds of the coming of Jesus, presumed to be the awaited Messiah yet the promise would be compromised by the conflict over Mosaic law and the divine message of Jesus.

Even though Mohammed had listened to Jewish and Christian prophets and became acquainted with the early writings of both along with the selection of

Jerusalem as the focus of Islamic credibility-saying he received early Qu'ranic messages- while there, he soon because of conflicts between the three religions turned to Mecca near to where he received the revelation from Gabriel. A dichotomy became pronounced as Islam became more militant employing a Jihad, or holy war versus the others. Too, the divinity of Jesus seemed to be in conflict with the believers in God as prophets for their following.

Providence-the protective care of God or of nature as a spiritual power-seemed caught in the labyrinth of the respective paths of the three religions rather than an amalgamation of beliefs into a synthesis. Or at least an understanding and attempt to reconcile the divergent ideologies.

The imaginative voices of the wise men above may be too little, too late with the waters under the bridge of history finite and irreconcilable. Promise (hope and travail) and Providence (God in conflict among many) may trump accommodations and trust. To some, a 'real war of civilizations' is brewing or already here. Anathema at Christmas time.