

# **MITHRAISM IT'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY**

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(Translated from Farsi)

In name of the creator of life and wisdom.

In the early pre-Christ era, Mithraism was the sole savior and guide to the way of life and was considered a serious contender to Christianity. Because of the parallel presence of the two powerful religious establishments December 25, which was Mithra's Birthday, became Christ's Birthday. This is where Mithraism influence on Christianity started.

There are similarities in the stories about Christ and Mitra such as their birth, the shepherds who came to adore the child, the baptism ceremony, celebration of the ascending human-metaphor God, the bread and wine, the day of salvation, and immortality of soul became common among the two religions.

In the beginning, Mithraism was a major part of Christianity. With the passage of time and as Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire; the eastern ideas were filtered out. Even Persian religious songs in Bible, which foretold Christ's birth and baptism, were not legal and sacred anymore. Starting from 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Christian world was engaged in brutal internal fights over biblical rights. At this time because of political reasons, referring to Persian traditions became irreversible. Thus Christianity was left with a combination of Mithraism and Zoroastrianism.

The Romans feared being taken over by the Persians and tried to become independent. The Roman Empire was in constant conflict with the Persian Empire. They regarded Iran, the birthplace of Mithraism, and the land of their enemies. Consequently, they felt the need for an independent governing ideology to counter the Persian influence and eastern ideologies. That is how Christianity celebrates its new birth.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century Iran, under the Sasanian, the links between religion and government strengthened. Ardeshir orders the collection of all religious material. The Avesta alphabet (Din Dabireh) with its 48 letters became a basis for recording Avesta's songs. The script was comprehensive, and the songs were recorded on 12 thousand deerskins.

Zurvanism bloomed during the Sasanian reign and was followed by golden era of astronomy, mathematics, literature, and architecture. Iranian religious life became a global treat especially to the Roman Empire. Who organized their own church and ideology to resist Zoroastrianism. Both religions believed in the God of Sun the undefeatable Mitra. They worshipped father Mitra. This meant a spiritual link between the powerful western and eastern empires and could lead to a common government institution. If it had happened the world could have had a different destiny and history.

Constantine was the first Christian emperor who believed in ideological strength of the empire. He believed that Mithraism could not do it. It was an organized ideology based on a rigid discipline, a hierarchy demanding self-sacrifice and promotion to higher ranks was difficult. Eventually, it would loose followers. From this perspective, Christianity was more popular. Each cardinal could create a new branch and using their own charisma, religious teachings and personal interest of people, gather a crowd without being related to Christ teachings. History of Christianity is full of religious innovations. As Christianity distanced from the eastern ideology it became closer to Sufism.

In Mithraism there was no place for religious innovation and trade. Yet Christianity allowed people with opposing believes and views to gather under Christ's umbrella. These conditions were crucial in the spreading of Christianity. This is how democracy in Christianity and closeness in Mithraism dealt with issues leading to the political defeat of Mithraism.

Mithraism with its Persian roots remained stranger to Romans who viewed it as the official ideology of the Persian Empire. An empire, which deprived them from becoming the world's absolute power. In Sasanian time, Zoroastrianism was the official ideology of Persians. In the meanwhile, Romans, despite their obvious needs for such an ideology, lacked it. Constantine focus on Christianity was to create religious and ideological independence from Persians.

Mithraism had a broad influence on Christianity. However, because of historical, ideological, and political factors it disappeared and was replaced by Christianity. Neither historical facts nor ideological ones could determine the outcome of the battle between the two powers. Naturally, Mithraism could not be the official Roman ideology and could not satisfy Roman political desires in conquering Persians. Yet, many Christian rituals remained influenced by Mithraism and the eastern

ideology penetrated into the European religious institution. Mitra was the Son of God, so was Jesus. Mitra was born from a virgin, so was Jesus.

The story of the birth Jesus is the same as the story of Mitra's birth. Mitra was born in a dark cave and shepherds were the first people who found out about him. They brought him gold and pleasant scents. Is this similar to the bible story? Mitra and Jesus were both the links between the God and people. They are both sent by the Father to prevail wishes of the Father on the earth. The difference is that Jesus is son of Yahweh and Mitra is son of Ahura Mazda. The Jews believed that Yahweh in Bible is the same as Ahura Mazda. Mitra's mission was to fight Ahriman and its followers and to bring about the final conquest of brightness over darkness on the judgment day. So is the mission of Jesus from the Christians' point of view. Return of Mitra to Ahura Mazda following his last missions on the earth is similar to the resurrection of Jesus.

Even Mitra's symbolism impacted Christianity. Mithraist's drew the cross in a circle, which symbolized the sun. For them the four corners of cross-represented the original solar year. Two of the points were day and night and the two other points showed the solar revolution. The Cross inside a circle can be observed in the portrait of Mitra's holy dining. In Christianity cross became a symbol of suffering and resistance although it maintained the sun's symbol.

The Birth of Mitra was on the Holy day of December 25, the longest night of the year, in the darkest cave. Symbolizing birth of the light and hope and renovation of the nature. Christ's holy birth is also on the same night in the solar calendar.

In the ritual of dining with Mitra the bread was divided into four parts. The bread and sweet wine ceremony was among the holy rituals of Mithraists. They symbolized Mitra's giving and supporting attitude. They also symbolized Mitra's joy on the earth and eternity in the kingdom. It has a similar meaning in Christianity other than the bread and wine, which represent Christ's body and blood. Emotionally, the ceremony is a reminder of Christ's last supper with his followers.

Baptism in Mithraism meant washing off the sins. Baptism, confession, and forgiving the sins were all transferred from Mithraism to Christianity. The advanced organization of Christian church is a reminder of the well-organized Mithraist institutions. The labeling of the hierarchy in both institutions is similar: the Father, the Papa, the Pope, the Padre (in

Vatican). Leaders of Mitraist institutions demanded a rigid discipline such as fasting and obstinate behavior from their followers. That is how Mitraism became a manly religion, a fighters' religion, and that is how it became successful all over from North to Averlians, Galians, and Divcaltians.

In the non-martial life, religion was the basis of government and maintaining peace in the society. To this time high-ranking Christian religious figures wear a hat named Metropolis, which is named after Mitra, and is inherited from Persian people. The word "Metropolitan" also means city of Mitra or city of sun and was known to mean the capital city but it does not have such a meaning today. These are a few indicators of the Mitraism within Christianity. Unlike Judaism, Christianity has not purified itself from superstitious ideas of other religions and influence of Mithraism remains there.

Mitra's religion prevailed for some 2000 years among Aryans. In 66 ACE King Tirdad introduced it to Nero and up till 325 ACE it was the official religion of the Roman Empire. In the first century, during Ashkanian reign, Iranian merchants and believers brought Mitraism to Europe and it was mixed with Aristotle's (Aflatoon's) philosophy.

The Mithraist names of the days of the week have been maintained except for changes in the language, this can be observed.

Mahshid God of Moon, Monday in English, Montag in German.

Bahramshid, day of TeeVis, Tuesday in English and Dienstag in German.

Tirshid the Vedin day, Wednesday in English and Mittwoch in German.

Berjisshid day of Tour, Thursday in English and Donnerstag in German.

Nahidshid day of Erie, god of fertility, Friday in English, Fristag in German.

Keyvanshid, day of Saturn, Saturday in English and Samstag in German.

Mehrshid day of Sun, Sunday in English and Sonntag in German.

In 321 ACE, Constantine declared Sunday a weekly holiday.

Mitra had twelve supporters and these became Christ's apostles. When repairing old churches around the world including those in Germany, France and Russia there have been numerous signs of Mithraism. Christianity was influenced by variety of traditions and rituals of Mithraism and became the leader of European civilization.

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