The Concept of the 'Elected' People in the Abrahamic Religions

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ABSTRACT: The Divine election is certainly one of the more profound and controversial doctrines of religions, in every Holy Scripture and beyond. It certainly helped many wandering people, ranging from a place to another, in slavery, poverty or ousted by other. Also, it helped maintain loyalty to traditions; it brings hope for poor and meek, it implies divine protection and helps overcome the most severe social handicaps. The conception of chosen*ness* has at the same time negative appointment regarding the others, non-chosen, and so it leads to moral and eschatological debates and paradoxes. How the most known religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—relate to this concept, and what is their interpretation of this profound concept, we will try to build on the relationship of pilgrim people, expelled and ousted. For the biblical interpretation of the concept, we will see it as a separation among others but also with a special call in relation with them. The Christian side of it aimed at the beginning against the ultra nationalistic view of chosen*ness* as in Judaism, then it gained the same facet as Israel, within the concept of predestination. For the Islamic part, the concept borrowed some issues from both previous religions, but also set its vision and application of it. What are the differences and mostly the circumstances that led to such conceptions—we will see during this paper.
KEY WORDS: jealousy, chosenness, elected people, hope, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, religious leaders, covenant, ousted, sovereignty, predestination, theopolitical nation.

What Makes a Religious Leader (RL) be Authentic?

Is *there any element to distinguish a religious leader*[1] *from a mundane leadership?* From our foray in leadership, it stands out the fact that an RL *ensures* his flock of things impossible to obtain or even prove but nevertheless believed in. Using this prerogative of 'being elected' by God to enact a people of divine interest and pass on this attribute of the election, the RL has the power to help his flock overcome any difficulty a person can encounter in life. Due to that method he gives psychological/spiritual comfort, he encourages his flock to move on in hard times, to stand still when everybody is staggering, to keep on doing things that no one else ('sane') would probably do instead. All these outcomes and many others only an *religious leader* can influence his flock to undergo, are the results of what only a real RL gives to his people. This is not the correct pattern he appoints [since I do not believe that there is no such thing as 'wrong religious pattern' as opposed to a 'correct' one], the exhaustive explanations about the lifestyle he can give, or the unstained conduct he might display. In fact, all these features are preceded by the only gift that really matters, *giving hope*. Any religion aims for people's salvation; what is this *salvation* and how it comes to be seen in different religious movements we will see shortly after. However, for the actual purpose, the role a religious leader has in conserving the identity of errant people, as the most valuable and efficient tool for doing this is *to encourage and feed them with the conception of 'chosen people'*. It helped many wandering people, ranging from a place to another, in slavery, poverty, or ousted by other. As religion usually helps people in need, it grew with the concept of chosen*ness* for those expelled and ousted.

Nothing else counts as much as *hope* for people; humans can bargain anything, from food to dignity, for the real price, but when it comes to religious belief, man cannot accept any compromise. There are situations in which man fights for wealth, for treasures, for food, water or less, for social/moral/political values or more, but for a proper price he can *be made* to fight or leave the fight over any of these motifs. The psychological trigger that can change

a fighter into an obedient or vice versa, from a peaceful one into a rampant militant, is *giving him hope*. How is it possible to achieve 'hope' in such manner that it transforms definitely and unchangeable a person, a group, or an entire community? The answer lies not with the expectation of achieving a higher material state or some goods 'in this life', as other mundane leaders might promise for their electorate. It lies in the case of religious pledges, the only valuable one that can literally 'move mountains' is that of *divine election*. Building a study case of this concept, we have to know that all religious promoters used it, and with high success, I might add.

Religiousness and the need of considering divine chosen

It is normal for a leadership group to establish the rules in which obedient people have to govern their lives. It is also understandable that the religious leaders—as for example 'the Church'—have the role to manage and succor the relation between people and God, for there are not many who are entitled to be leaders in a community, and religious leaders even less. To put people on a religious track, with moral conduct and humanitarian behavior, obvious it is needed for some who can facilitate genuine knowledge in this regard—based on several motifs, like *learned knowledge, life self-experience, supernatural bygones, atypical gifts, etc*. Starting from reasons like these, human society came to entrust 'special people' with religious leadership based on odd and different particularities. This characteristic was always took in the human society as a *sign*—either from G–d, or from Devil—and people who bore the mark of this particularity—differentness—were invested with special powers and therefore endowed with man's religiousness in every age. As an example, we find a man with severe handicap regarded as devil's work in certain societies (Lv 21:16–23) or ordained as a priest in another.

What it is particular to underline here, is that those "elected people," a.k.a. *religious leaders*, have to have monopoly over religiousness of individuals, that them and ONLY they have the power to conduct people's religious life as if they could not do anything without or beyond their power. It is not wrong to ask someone what G–d might want us to do in specific cases but is blatantly wrong to

make this someone's statement the final and indisputable G–d's will. When asking for G–d's will and getting a whole scale of answers in the same regard, it is hard to anyone to look upon all of them as trustful, unmistakable, unequivocal statements, because there is no possibility for G–d to create subjective, different and opposed declarations of will. That is why I cannot conceive a monopoly in any regard from human's behalf, even if it comes to 'the Church' matter of authority. It is more than possible for G–d to reveal Himself to man, but in the same time—and I say this as a scholar so fond and deepened in research on revelation—He leaves man to carry the burden of interpretation and social manifestation of it in man's subjective hands. *Why is that?*, or rather, *why don't I trust that there is a command or a controlled dictation in the relationship between G–d and 'elected men'?*

In the context of my book the answer should be a truism, for there is no religiousness on behalf of man [as a self-directed behavior to recognize G–d's merits, powerness, and authority] unless G–d, the revealer, won't give man space to behave in return, as a feedback, an adequate answer to G–d's activity over creation. Otherwise, all He would receive in return is a mechanical, unproductive, without pleasure behavior, one that was written in the creation code and for that matter, it would be redundant to give a command/dictation through revelation, once He already gave a controlled prescription of living, a predestination of behaviour. The bottom line is that no one—religious: leaders, institutions, society—should be given with a monopoly on the people's manner to behave and give religious responses to G–d, for there is no way you can control the internal feeling you want to express in behavior. You can offer some general lines, already–proved–as–working patterns, but you cannot expect all the followers to act in kind and without no exceptional, different, self-expressing conduct.

H.R. Niebuhr explains this religious–psychological phenomenon as an egoistic faith and vision, for "we imagine ourselves as the center of things. We portray the self as protagonist and our community as chosen. . . . I construe all things in terms of their relation to my self, my group, and their cherished projects."[2]

The Concept of *Election* in Different Religions

Obvious, the exemplar of this model is the biblical Israel, in which Anthony Smith finds the quintessential formulation of divine election and covenant. The people "consented to be chosen, and to submit themselves to the law of goodness and justice."[3] This strong feeling and motivation to do great things has inspired and empowered other peoples who felt they had been given divine favor, and it has provided the stimulus and reasoning for moral renewal among those who see themselves as chosen.[4] It brings hope to people in sorrow, in need or slavery and it helps them going on with their lives even when nothing from surroundings encourages them to do it. That is the primary reason for I said that religion is a tool made for slaves to overcome their situation; it is mostly, popularly known as the fact that *people turn to God only when they have problems and encounter hostile situations*.

The first embodiment of the concept in peoples' religiousness is the presence of a *covenant*, one that *God strongly look forward to make between Him and the chosen ones*. 'Coming [as initiative] from God' it has multiple purposes; first it ensures to the chosen ones the fact that they are protected by God and everything they do is under oath, so it is sacred and also taboo, without question considered accepted by God—so, they are allowed to take whatever measures they want to fulfill their promises. Then it ensures to God a people to take care of His work/will in the world; all other reasons and purposes are secondary to these. "Covenant, according to Bader–Saye, is the 'correlate of election that, through Torah and the land, determines the material and political shape of Israel's free and holy life in mutual relation to God.'"[5] The covenant always came with same sacrifices of any type, vegetal, animal or human; it is also an insurance that no party will redraw from the covenant. Psychologically, it stands like this: *I* [man] *am willing to make the sacrifices you* [God] *demanded, but in return you have to keep your word, otherwise you are not a divine person, one who is not able to lie*. It is a sort of policy under whose umbrella many great things

were done in human history, some in a good sense, and other in the worst possible.

The second major sacred foundation of *chosen*ness is that of territory and the notion of the 'homeland'. It goes closely with the *theopolitics* of Israel as the nation that would be a visible sign of God's reign, and thus of God's salvation. This closes the triangle of chosen–covenant–reign, making out of the elected people a purposefully engaged one, targeting all its energy "to restore the singular people to its election–and–covenant identity."[6] On top of everything, "being chosen, therefore, would appear to be a special and positive status that places the chosen over and above the non-chosen."[7] Therefore, by a 'normal' utterance, it is implied that being elected is a good thing, while non-elected one is definitely considered outside the perimeter of sacredness, having less rights and lower position in the hierarchy of salvation or God's reign. "Whether called chosen*ness* or election, the special nature of that divinely authorized status—its presumed superiority—has been glorified by religious civilizations when in positions of imperial power,"[8] creating a hierarchy more and more specialized in the imminence of God's kingdom's advent: from all nations a chosen one, within this chosen people a descent, a blood kindred elected to lead the people, and above all few special called persons to rule them all 'as God commands'.

Judaic Understanding of Election

The concept of election starts with the biblical tell of *Abraham encountering Jehova* and receiving His blessing, "I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing . . . and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gn 12:2, 3). Of course, there was a great debate of whether *Abraham was elected by Jehova because he entrusts his life to God or on the contrary he gave his life to God because he was chosen.*[9] The balance inclined to the first scenario of Sodom, where Abraham has faced another test, another moral dilemma: obey Jehova's will of condemning transgressors or stand for their living right. "In the words of psychologist and Torah teacher Naomi Rosenblatt, this story is about "the power of the man of integrity to be the conscience of the world." Abraham's conscience does not allow him to keep silent. His tone is respectful,

but his questioning is unrelenting. God choose to disclose His own intentions to Abraham to see how Abraham responds. In this regard, Abraham wins because he came to the defense of the innocent even as he loses the fight to save the cities. Abraham passes the character test by standing his moral ground while maintaining his relationship with his creator."[10]

The Jewish mistical tradition puts this election on a Mosaic base and it starts with Shavout, described in Torah as an agricultural festival during which the first fruits were brought to the Temple in thanksgiving. "Shavuot is the time when God and Israel are wed. But no Jewish wedding is complete without a marriage contract, known as a ketubah. The mystics explain that the contract binding God and Israel is the Torah. It records the duties of Israel to God—to follow God's law by being a holy people—and the duties of God to Israel—to maintain Israel as a Chosen People."[11] This alienation from the Abrahamic promise grow bigger with Mosaic regulations, for example Shabbat,[12] the ultimate Jewish holiday. This command (Ex 20:9) it is not just a day off for the chosen few, but the new sign of election as it was the circumcision in the time of Abraham. "Shabbat is one of Judaism's great gifts to humankind. The concept that there is a day when you stop your labors, when you turn inward instead of out, is a Jewish innovation."[13] That is why the Sinaitic covenant is the form of Israel's fulfillment of election. "This covenant proceeds directly from Yahweh's sovereignty as Yahweh founds a society to embody His reign in the world."[14]

Bottom line, Jews as descendents from ancient Israelits, considere themselves as the 'chosen people', i.e. chosen to be in a covenant with God.[15] The concept stresses on the fact that God was the first to incline the balance in their favor, so there is no one to blame for that election except God, whose plans are unknown to man and thus must be taken as it is by everyone (every nation). Simply, gents have to obey this regulation because He was the one who pronounce "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy people." (Ex 19:6) Besides the concept of 'holiness'—mostly overlaid with taboo in the antiquity, i.e. forbiden, intangible and sacred, a strong prohibitions relating to any action this 'holy people' might be doing, otherwise misapprehend by others—they have also receive

the position of 'priesthood' among nations. So, from the original point of view over Jewish chosen*ness*, election was related to a the role of Abraham and Moses among their surrounding people, the former in relation with all tribes and the later within Jews; "in this view, Jews are charged with living a holy life as God's priest–people."[16]

But unlike the real and full promise of Jehova, "in you will all the families and kindred of the earth be blessed . . . and in thy seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gn 12:2; 26:4), Judaism grew within the concept of *elected people* as *against all others*. It was clear from the previous episode that Abraham already was posed in protector and spokesman of others in front of the Creator and did not care to his kin only. But after the period of Egyptian slavery, the ofsprings of Abraham reinterpreted the conception of election; they took it as elected *from* others, rather than chosen *among* others. So, instead of considering the historical episode of Joseph and his brothers as the model of what elected/chosen mean in the eyes of Jehova—one that would have to take care of the others, even in their roving or wandering. The story goes with Joseph chosen by God *among* his brothers and then elected by Pharaon, in the beginning to be band and then to rise as the guvernor of Egypt, but he didn't considered this twist as a payoff situation against his brothers and revenge their betrayal because he would consider himself as elected from them. "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent [שלח, Shalach = sent forth, soweth, cast] me before you to preserve life." (Gn 44:5) Same pattern was putted by Jesus with Peter (Chefa) when saying "I have prayed especially for you [Peter], that your [own] faith may not fail; and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:32).

Most Jews hold that being the "Chosen People" means that they have been placed on earth to fulfill a *certain purpose*, while all others are lost and unworthy of God's attention since they are not chosen. Traditional proof for Jewish 'chosen*ness*' is found in the Torah, the Jewish bible, in the Book of Deuteronomy (chapter 14) where it says: "For you are a holy people to Hashem your God, and God has chosen you to be his treasured people from all the nations that are on the face of the earth." In the Book of Genesis (chapter 17.7) it also written: "And I [G–d] will establish My covenant between Me and

you [Abraham] and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." But not even in these texts the anti-gentiles attitude is not present or implied at all. In fact, every mentioning on gentiles made in Old Testament show that they will receive God's mercy, attention, and even blessing through Abraham's offspring (Gn 22:18 "*In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*, because you have obeyed My voice", cf. Ps 22:27; 86:9; Is 9:2; 60:3; Dn 7:14; Mal 1:11, et. all). Nevertheless, Judaic people are elected among all other nations, but not in spite of them, on the contrary, to bring them closer to Jehovah's blessing through a work of centuries of serving others. "He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make *You a light of the nations* So that *My salvation may reach to the end of the earth*.'" (Is 49:6). There is no negative appointment in all the mentioning about gentiles except in the beginning of Mosaism, through the 'voice' of Moses and some of the following judges that have viewed the gentiles within Canaan as their enemies, for standing between Jews and their promised land. Other than that, all the prophets put the concept of 'chosen*ness*' as among other nations and related to them, for "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

The concept of 'bachar' (בר Hebrew – compare Aramaic בר, Syriac בחן, ܒܚܪ Assyrian bêru) is the divine choice *with a special call or duty:* Abraham to bring forth out of Ur (Neh 9:7), Aaron to serve Moses in his position within Jews and perfume miracles (Ps 105:26, 27) Israel to prove idols wrong and bring monotheism into nations sight (Ez 20:3–7), Judah to be a leader (1 Chr 28:4), David to bring balance into the people's faith (1 Sm 10:24; 16:8–10) and to build a house for God's name, and Jerusalem to make His name mighty (2 Chr 6:5,6,7). But the voice of prophets were never fully accepted, especially when it was about the 'others'; growing as a feeling of *jealousy* (Dt 32:21), the concept of 'chosen*ness*' stood between Jewish people and all others (cf. Lk 15:11–32). Instead it was ever stressed on words that emphasize the position in relation to others, 'above all people' (Dt 7:6; 14:2), and not the interest and

the relation they should bring forth for them, moreover since it was God's single merit for this election and none from the Jews (Dt 7:8).

From this ground election came with a job to be done by the elected people, as it was with Joseph, and through sorrow, suffering and wandering they should have brought the name of real God to all people on the face of the Earth (Jer 16:19; Zec 8:22; Ps 67:2: "That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.") "Because of the Jews' small numbers, any success they would have in making God known to the world would presumably reflect upon the power of the idea of God."[17]

This conception was recurrence over centuries and in times of persecution, the 'chosen*ness*' doctrine was a source of great strength for the Jewish people. Similarly the talmudic explanation for chosenness—that the willingness of Israel to accept and obey the Torah was the reason for their election—helped maintain loyalty to tradition and to halakhah in periods of stress and forced conversion to other religions. It grew stronger with Zionism whose goal was to strengthen the separation of the Jewish people from their surroundings and return them to a Jewish state. Also, the goal of Reform Judaism was to integrate into the society around them while preserving Jewish identity."[18] In some ways the Zionist dream that gave birth to Israel has not succeeded. Fewer than half the world's population of Jews have chosen to live in Israel; the ingathering of all Jews, the dream of its founders, has not been achieved."[19]

The Concept in Christianity

For the Christian part, the concept of the election was not so stressed on for a very long time. "Within Christian doctrine, Smith notes, chosen*ness* is transferred from a particular ethnic community to the universal Church of believers."[20] Of course, it was also implied from the beginning, mostly as a response to the Judaic version of this concept. And to see that it was so, we have to listen St. Apostle Paul saying over and over again that "in Christ there is no distinction, no Jew nor Greek; there is no bondman nor freeman; there is no male and female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:22; 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). I know that the last thing I should assert in writing like this would be that I know *what God would have thought* because

this assertion is usually waved around by everyone about so many and different things that made no one clearly understands any longer what is that God really wants. Still, considering the revelation of God—written mostly in the sacred books of each religion—it is clear that God does not consider himself as belonging to a man or another, to a people or another, chosen or not; "is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also" (Rom 3:29–30). So, in the light of the new revelation that came through Jesus, apostles somehow banned the conception of election, at least as it was understood by Jews, as a people *from* all and *instead* of all others, and have repositioned Him in the center of all humankind, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for *the same Lord is Lord of all*, abounding in riches for all who call on Him" (Rom 10:12).

This perspective was only apparently new in the biblical history; in fact, it was only the original plan[21] from which Jews, mixing it with their ultra-nationalism and the desire of overcoming all exiles and castaways they have been through, have transformed it into the hope that God would only serve their own interests and purposes. This original plan was revealed from time to time by prophets, but no one was ever listening, for their eyes were closed to the big picture and their ears shut to God's real will; "The LORD is near to all who call upon Him. . . . I will also make You a light of the nations, so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Ps 145:18; Is 49:6). This truth was obvious from the beginning and the apostles made it the case of Christianity, so as to its own election was only *to do Christ's work and spread His words among gentiles*, and not *to emphasize the chosen*ness *and perk up with it* (cf. Rom 1:1). It is even more disappointing for a people that has been confusing its tradition of 'chosen*ness*', thought in antagonism from non-Jews, when God spikes and denies their 'rightful' title of 'chosen people' saying "And the LORD said, 'Name him *Lo–ammi*, for *you are not My people and I am not your God.*' . . . And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'" (Hos 1:9–10; 2:23; Rom 9:25–26).

For apostles and for Christians later on in general *election* was understood only as *among* all other people, each and every one being chosen to do God's work, according to His call and gift, and serving

two purposes, *praising the Lord* and *helping others* (1 Cor 7:17–24; Eph 4:4). Indistinctive and non-selective, this concept of 'chosen*ness*' was mostly substitute with that of 'calling', whose *specialness* was also considered exclusively about *holiness* (1 Pt 1:15; 2 Tm 1:9). The concept of election was special for Christians from the beginning, partially for the reason I already told above, and also because of its relation to the divine calling. "Many are called but few chosen" (Mt 22:14) expresses the role of man's *free will* and his cooperation with God's grace: while God [through His Son] calls everyone to inherit His Kingdom, still few are elected to actually have it. In the beginning this equation was solved only by considering following God's commandments, and so the emphasis was no longer on the chosen*ness*, but on the calling, that was universal and reachable to everyone. After the failure of the nation of Israel (Jer 31) of serving as the chosen among others to bring them all to one God, and arriving "to a point of no return in its rebellion against Yahweh and Torah,"[22] a new covenant was needed to build new grounds in the relationship of man with God. *To be chosen* was not an issue any longer because it has separated people from within; now, the chosen*ness* should be left apart for "all your descendants will be called and counted through the line of Isaac" (Rom 9:7). Since it was the belief of Christians that all people belong to God and have received the calling, *to be chosen among others* leave Judaic tradition and start building another one. Who received the calling to serve others and bring unto God's salvation was considered special, elected to do Christ's work. But this election was not granted with a higher position, a superior rank, for "he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Mt 23:11; Mk 10:43–44; Phil 2:5–8). Considering the same attitude of Christ as an example in humility "everyone should be concerned for not [merely] his own interests, but also each for the interests of others" (Phil 2:4–5). But who receives the special calling and how can we distinguish them from others?

However, the rejection of chosen*ness* from the Christian part was not meant to last and so, consumed by the same feeling of grandeur and elevation, it was easily corrupted to re-embrace the same specialness of election while being persecuted, in the form of *predestination (Latin præ, destinare)*. "What predestination means,

in its most elementary form, is that our final destination, heaven or hell, is decided by God not only before we get there, but before we are even born."[23] Its strong character, build upon "two essential elements: *God's infallible foreknowledge* (præscientia), and *His immutable decree* (decretum) of eternal happiness,"[24] had the same consideration as when Jewish people has turned *chosen among* with *elected instead of*, while being persecuted. It has started with the heresy of Pelagius (fifth century AD), who would have wanted to get even with his persecutors and set a curse upon them in return, this ascetic monk call by St. Augustine a "saintly man," *vir sanctus*, has used for his personal defense the double coined predestination: eternal salvation for the elected ones (positive election) as well as the eternal damnation of the reprobate (negative election). St. Augustine (354–430) developed his teaching explaining Romans 5:12 and Romans 9 in "Ad Simplicianum," "so that the purpose of God does not stand according to election, but election is the result of the purpose of God." (I, 2, 6) Later on, Luther (1483–1546) and Calvin (1509–1564) have also used this teaching while being persecuted by the Roman–Catholic Church for trying to reform its mistakes and wrong behaviors, emphasizing that "some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation." (*Institutio Christianae Religionis* 3.21.5). As any other explanation of chosen*ness*, predestination was supposed to underline a perfect expression of God's love and mercy. "It was certainly loving of God to predestine the salvation of his people, those the Bible calls his "elect" or "chosen ones." It is the non-elect that are the problem."[25] Because, if only some people are elected for God's Kingdom, what happens with all the others? Also, if God defends and protects only the chosen ones (aka clergyman) against any threat coming from disobedient individuals who must be punished for their impudence, is God loving after all? Other than the endless issues on moral, ethics, eschatology, etc. arising from this inclusive concept, it stick to the same problem as the Judaic chosen*ness*—only few are in God's favor and no one can determine the reasons of this divine call. In fact, if we measure the percentage of those in favor in comparison with those awaken of 'side without even knowing why, we will see that God's partiality is mostly against humankind and not for it.

Bottom line, this Christian fundamental teaching is not far from the Judaic misconception of inequality between nations in the eyes of Yahweh. The strength of Christian chosen ones to impose their own voice as God's has the same ground as Jewish's—the sovereignty of God. Its justification was also borrowed from different biblical texts (Eccl 9:2), but the reason why those theologians came up with it stood on the same ground, the eager to be divine avenged. "The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet" (Ps 110:1). The concept was obviously built as a shield against any threat from 'others' to those 'elected'; if anyone touches a chosen man, he should be damn by God as an enemy of His children, regardless of what good that enemy might have done. This was the concept of hunted Israel and its behavior grew stronger against all others with each exile he took, ending in hatred against everybody, even its kin (Samaritans), and the same theory was born inside Christianity in two distinct ways. One was of that heresy of *Predestinarianism*, and other in the response of sacramental hierarchy who, by the power invested in them, express "unavoidable and invincible" the damnation of God over whoever do not obey their regulations. In this regard, the ecclesiastical practice of canonization was the expression of this invested power of elected: who obeys the mother Church can receive the eternal salvation (by indulgence of Church) and who stand against a clergyman will be cursed to eternal damnation—of course, regardless of whatever good he might have done already. To justify this abnormal 'divine justice' appointed through the Church's judgment, the mainline Christianity distinguishes between good things made by a non-elected and good things made by those who obey Church's regulations; the former never count for salvation. The concept of *predestination*, confessed openly or asquint by Christian denominations, is the keynote of what the idea of chosen*ness* means for Christianity, as *covenant–theopolitical–nation* was for Israel.

There is also another detail that should be important in the understanding of the concept regarding the comparison of it in these two religions. While in Judaism the concept of election has started with a group/tribe and has surrounded the entire nation of Israel encompassing every individual regardless of what they might

think/believe/feel about it, for Christianity the same concept had an opposite development. We have seen that the offspring of Abraham, the Israel nation, was entirely entitled with the special attention from Yahweh as His 'elected people'; there was no one and nothing left aside from this chosen*ness* among the sons of Israel "you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey, any of your livestock, or the foreigner who lives within your gates, so that your male and female slaves. . . . The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Dt 5:14; Lv 19:34). The whole people living within the edges of the 'chosen people of God' receive his blessing equally, "'There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.'" (Lv 24:22) On the other hand, the Christian concept of 'chosen*ness*' has started with individuals, apostles elected one by one, handily picked by God to spreads His call among nations. The election worked the other way around for the Christian part, first the selection of few persons who spread the word as seeds and from all these seed other few people had to be chosen by God to be entrusted with His kingdom. Thus, the 'chosen people of God', a.k.a. the Church, had to be grown with individuals, not groups, nations, tribes or any other social gathering "you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). The difference within Christian denomination is the way they understand the binding agent that hold together all the parts of this *body* that is spread worldwide in the entire history of humanity; "the whole body, which is nourished and held together by its joints and ligaments, grows as God enables it" (Col 2:19). However, it doesn't matter if this 'body of Christ' is seen as worldly (Orthodoxy), institutional (Roman–Catholic), or spiritual (Protestant), since, in our case, the significance is all the same: "even as the body is one and yet has many members, and *all the members of the body*, though they are many, *are one body*, so also is Christ" (1 Cor 12:12).

In conclusion, while for the Judaic conception of chosen*ness* the entire nation starts like a body and all who are inside it has to be considered elected no matter what, for the Christian understanding *the body* is built with each person converted to Christ and thus understood as the sum of those who believe.

The Concept in Islam

Because Islam followed the same emerging pattern as Christianity, the sociology of creating the 'chosen people' followed also the same type: starting with a man—which was *elected* by God, namely Muhammad—than he has chosen his disciples, who eventually were spreading his teachings in the purpose of giving to God a people of servants and believers (Muslim, Arabic: مسلم = "one who submits [to God])."[26] The process of building Allah's 'chosen people' is somehow similar only with the initial Christian preaching method: telling everyone about the revelation Muhammad had from God (Arabic: الله Allāh), God of Abraham, the One divine entity revealed as against idolatry and polytheism. However, if we consider the whole Christianity, things are no longer the same, because the protestant side of it professes that the preaching of Gospel does not *make* literally chosen persons from non-believers, instead it only *activates* those who were *already chosen* by God from eternity and places them inside the body of Christ. In other words, from the Protestant perspective of Christianity the 'chosen people' do not *become* so by conversion, but they *become aware* of this eternal calling by hearing the Christian Gospel; "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Protestants cannot accept the free–will acceptance of the divine calling on behalf of man, because, in that case, it wouldn't be a divine choice, but a man's one. On the other side of Christianity, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, it is considered that anyone can answer to the universal call of Christ and by doing that they *become* chosen by God (to continue the work of Christ and so to receive the divine chosen*ness*' laurel wreath); it is no body in particular that has the status of chosen*ness*, it is rather opened for everybody and only activated by man's free answer. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. . . . Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever doesn't believe will be condemned" (Mk 4:9; 16:16).

Considering this, now we can appoint the differences Islam belief has over the chosen*ness* concept with previous religions. "In the first place, Mohamet the Prophet preached to his little world of polytheistic Arabs the doctrine of One God—all–wise and

all–powerful—a conception not exceeded in beauty by any other revelation. From the first, however, Islam was not so much idealistic and spiritual; it was rather a social and political code, built around the essential doctrine of monotheism. Jewish influence, especially that of the Old Testament, had much to do with shaping the later development of Islam; but it does not appear that the Prophet knew the Jewish scriptures."[27]

Therefore, Islam started with a religious promoter that has experienced God's uniqueness in his life and has wanted to inform his kin about this *revelation*. Muhammad was another religious promoter, enlightened with a personal experience and willing to share his vision of God with others. The religion that was developed by his followers took, in time, diverse forms and traditions that supplemented its original vision, sometimes way apart from it. Of the establishment religious communities Arabs were converted to, "the polytheists were the greatest obstacle to the emergence of Islam, and the Qur'an directs its resentment and anger mostly toward the indigenous religion of the Arabs and those who practiced it."[28] That way has started the fight against all those who associates other polytheistic powers with true God (mushrik) or did not follow Muhammad and accept the validity of the Qur'an (kafir); these *infidels* or *unbelievers* were the real enemies of spreading the true image/teaching of Allah. The traditional Arabian polytheists (mushriks) or Jews and Christians (kafir), the Qur'an refers to them as unbelievers and notes that "unbelievers tried actively to destroy the new religious movement,"[29] and again this new emerging religion was confronted with the same struggle as the Christianity in its beginning when confronted by Judaism. "… you fear that those who disbelieve may disrupt [or attack] you. Indeed, the disbelievers are ever to you a clear *enemy*" (Surah 4:101). This is due to the moment and place Muhammad start receiving his revelation, his hometown of Mecca, a major polytheistic religious center in his day, and there is no evidence that there were Jewish or Christian communities living in Mecca in the seventh century. Moreover, "when Muhammad began to attract followers to monotheism who then shunned the traditional religious practices in favor of simple prayer to the One Great God, he attracted the ire of the religious establishment."[30] That

was the situation with the Jewish community in Yathrib (622), future Medina (a shortened form of *Madinat al–Nabi*, *City of the Prophet*), that saw in him a competing religious movement and so a threat to their religious path.

Now, in comparison with Judaic community and believe on 'chosen people' which was a closed group, an elite of mankind entrusted with God's words and commandments, Muhammad has considered that the 'chosen people' is not at all a closed group, but rather consists of everyone who embrace Allah's call, and his mission was to awake them from the moral sleep and regain them for the secret, true Kingdom of God. Unless they are awakened, they cannot receive Allah's privileges or enter His unlimited 'chosen people'. That is why the *awakening* has to be done with everyone, regardless of how it was done, violently or not, because, while being still asleep, they are unaware of what they do, say or believe.[31] "Say (unto them, O Muhammad): I exhort you unto one thing only: that ye awake, for Allah's sake, by twos and singly, and then reflect: There is no madness in your comrade. He is naught else than a warner unto you in face of a terrific doom. . . . Thou wouldst have deemed them awake, whilst they were asleep" (34:46; 18:18). The threat lies not in any worldly sin or temptation—as it is for Jews or Christians which consider that they can actually lose their elected position only by taking a wrong step in life and make a certain sin against God's commandments—because Muslims do not consider any specific sins as a barrier between them and their promised election for Aljana (heaven). "Other than the Infallible ones (whom Allah has vowed to keep away from sins), no human being is perfect and all of us make many mistakes."[32] Instead, if they do not enkindle someone to Allah's real existence and believe, they are not entrusted with their promises. Thus it is a *must* to awake someone, violently or not, to the Islamic faith. Therefore, while Christians try to repent—more or less, from Orthodox, to Catholics or Protestants—for their sins in order to be forgiven and not band from their unstable status of chosen*ness*, for Muslims the status is very clear and stable, but the call has to be fulfil regardless of the sins you inherently do. Moreover, the inheritance of Aljana is regardless of the wrong and sins Muslims might have done in life like Protestants Christians since they have to

cross over the bridge over Hell (as–Siraat) prior to entering Heaven, so that they are "purified by means of their settling any wrongs that existed between any of them in this world."[33]

Accordingly, there is a strong logical correlation between the emergence of each religion and its conception of chosen*ness*. Starting mostly like Judaic tribes, Muhammad and his followers had to consider themselves as elected by God to spread and also defend the real and genuine understanding of Allah. Therefore, the 'chosen people' couldn't be considered others than those who submit entirely to God and his call—first Muhammad, then his first 'baptized',[34] Abu Bakr as–Siddiq, and thereafter all those who accepted their invitation to Islam. "And who has a better religion than he who submits himself entirely to Allah?" (4:125) because "whoever submits His whole self to Allah and is a doer of good, He will get his reward with his Lord." (2:112) For the same reason, they also obey the covenant contractor, circumcision, as the seeing sign of chosen*ness*, a sign that protect those who bear it and enables Allah blessings upon him and his family. It is thus an extensive understanding of chosen*ness*, not entirely individual (as in Christianity), but not also related to a nation (as for Judaism).

Conclusion

Beyond those already appointed differences between the three main religions on the growing concept of chosen*ness*, we should face as a conclusion the fact that while for the Christian and Muslim side of the concept it needs to be growth with new people and thus the method of proselytizing is a keynote of their completing community of believers/chosen people, for the Judaic side there is no such thing since the original covenant was between Yahweh and Abraham's offspring. That means that it is a huge difference in the attitude of relating with others from each these three religions and it all start from the way they perceive the 'chosen people'. Namely, Jews will see everybody else as beyond the edges of Promised Land and chosen*ness*, but not specially a threat because there is no one who

compete over God's covenant with them except those who stand between them and their rightful worldly Kingdom, Palestine.

For Muslim things are more assertive since their special call is to convince everyone about Allah's existence and to impose His moral laws in order to achieve the special place in the heavenly Kingdom of the chosen people. As for Christians they see in anyone an opportunity to practice their special call—good deeds—and also as an opportunity to convert (for the Orthodox/Catholic side) or to activate (Protestants) to the elected people of God, that is why they are opened to conversation to everyone and willing to serve and demonstrate that they are the true messengers of Christ while serving/preaching; a threat is ultimately considered only by those who do not understand the universality of the divine calling over mankind and they start fighting over nothing, because the status of elected people is not possible to be lost in theological contradictions, but through fight and violence might be so.

As we have seen at the end of the concept in Islam, when talking about sins and how it is affecting the chosen*ness* vision, the 'sin concept' is also crucial for whom each religious community acts within or outside itself. Because the 'chosen*ness*' is related to the covenant Yahweh did with Israel, it stays in contact with fulfilling the covenant part and Jews will mostly try to accomplish their rituals and divine commandments as a minimum level of implication (Mt 23:23). For Christians there is a major threat to achieving chosen*ness* status in God's kingdom, and that is the sin; some (Orthodox and Catholics) live under the reign of fear that they might lose this status by making a certain, unimportant sin, and this is why they live mostly in repent and even away from sinners (as hermits), while others (Protestants) know that the only sins that can jeopardize the chosen*ness* are not to serve others and evangelize them. At the same time, Islam greatest sin is not to convince others about the Prophet's message and Allah awakening call, and that is why proselytizing is a key pillar of Muslims' deeds. So, regarding violence and hatefulness, there is no religion encouraging or promoting them. Instead each is dealing these sentiments differently, and that is why some are more eager to display them, while others' violent reactions are only culturally inhibited; some are eager to help people in need because they are

aware of their calling, while others only have to do it as a minimum duty or lesser, by tradition. One thing that all these religions share about chosen*ness* and deeds/sins is that doing good in practice is the proof of having the right belief in the heart or, as Protestants say, good things are a proof of salvation, of course with some shades, but in practice, it is pretty much the same. The tint is that while some are doing it because they have to, others because now they really want to. "That association among some monotheists of chosen*ness* with arrogance and self-importance would sometimes result in terrible abuse of others who were not considered part of God's chosen community."[35]

In conclusion, there is no problem in using this kind of religious hope for those that need it to overcome life difficulties, like for wandering people, ranging from a place to another, but it also doesn't suppose to be used as against others, *non-chosen* people.

NOTES

[1] Abbreviation for this will be RL.

[2] Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2006), XVII.

[3] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57.

[4] Braden P. Anderson, *Chosen Nation: Scripture, Theopolitics, and the Project of National Identity*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 52.

[5] Anderson, Ibid., 93.

[6] Ibid., 125.

[7] Reuven Firestone, *Who Are the Real Chosen People? The Meaning of Chosenness in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2008), 9.

[8] Ibid., 10.

[9] Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz, *Judaism's Great Debates. Timeless Controversies from Abraham to Herzl*. (Jewish Publication Society/Behrman House), 2012.

[10] Ibid., 7.

[11] Ibid., 184.

[12] It is the *Sabbath*, known in Modern Hebrew as *Shabbat*.

[13] Ibid., 199.

[14] Anderson, 93.

[15] "Jews as the Chosen People" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jews_as_the_chosen_people (Last accessed March 15, 2016.)

[16] Ibid.

[17] "Judaism: The 'Chosen People,'" in *Jewish Virtual Library*, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/chosen_people.html (Last accessed on July 5, 2016.)

[18] Schwartz, 88.

[19] Ari L. Goldman, *Being Jewish. The Spiritual and Cultural Practice of Judaism Today*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 181.

[20] Anderson, 52.

21 Cosmin Tudor Ciocan, "The Failure of the 'Mosaism' Project: What Happens When Politics and Self–Centrism Mixed With Religion," in Titus Corlăţean, Ioan–Gheorghe Rotaru, Eds. *The Future of Knowledge: Proceedings of Harvard Square Symposium* (Cambridge, MA: The Scientific Press, 2016), 291.

[22] Anderson, 129.

[23] R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 21.

[24] "Predestination", in *New Advent online Encyclopedia* http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12378a.htm (Last accessed on July 6, 2016.)

[25] Sproul, 31.

[26] "Muslim" At: www.etymonline.com (Last accessed on July 6, 2016.)

[27] Archibald R. Colquhoun, "Pan–Islam," in *The North American Review*, Vol. 182, No. 595 (Jun., 1906): 906–918. Published by: University of Northern Iowa, 906. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/25105584 (Last accessed on July 6, 2016.)

[28] Firestone, 125.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid, 127.

[31] The influence of neo–platonism that was strongly seen in the Arab writings of Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq Al–Kindi (ca. 800–870 CE), Al–Farabi (c. 872 – c. 950), or Abu al–Walid Muhammad (Averroes) (1126—1198), make them say that Allah always says the truth (by His prophets), but man cannot understand it and continues to get it wrong because he is asleep. See more in "Islamic Platonists and Neoplatonists" http://www.john-uebersax.com/plato/ip.htm Last accessed on July 7, 2016.)

[32] "The Duties of Men," in *Principles Of Marriage & Family Ethics. Part 2*. "Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project." https://www.al-islam.org/ (Last accessed on July 7, 2016.)

[33] "Paradise People," in *Islamic-Islamic*, http://www.islamicislamic.com/paradise_people.htm (Last accessed June 9, 2016.)

[34] "Abu Bakr the First Among Men to Enter Islam," *SunnahOnline.com*. retrieved at http://sunnahonline.com/library/history-of-islam/305-abu-bakr-as-siddiq (Last accessed June 9, 2016.)

[35] Firestone, 63.