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Between Faith and Capital: A Theological Review of the Banking System and Interests in the Abrahamic Religions

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Abstract

This article comparatively analyzes the conception of interest on loans within the three major Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, from a theological, ethical, and financial perspective. In the Jewish tradition, Halakha strictly prohibits charging interest to other Jews, based on passages in the Torah that promote solidarity and mutual support, although it does permit charging interest to foreigners. Islam, through Sharia, condemns all forms of usury (ribā), considering the generation of risk-free profit immoral, and proposes as an alternative the Islamic financial system based on risk-sharing contracts and social justice. For its part, early Christianity, influenced by biblical and patristic thought, also rejected interest, a position that was maintained for centuries but was reinterpreted with the arrival of capitalism and the Protestant Reformation. The study highlights how each religion offers a unique vision of economic justice and the ethics of lending, influenced by its sacred texts, legal traditions, and historical contexts. The study incorporates qualitative data from interviews and surveys that shed light on how contemporary believers and practitioners interpret and apply these principles in their financial decision-making.The contemporary implications of these approaches for modern banking and ethical financial practices are also reflected upon, opening an interfaith dialogue on the morality of the current financial system. This analysis contributes to an understanding of the role of religion in shaping sustainable and socially responsible financial principles.

Keywords: Theological, Banks, Interest, Loans, Religions

Introduction

Throughout history, the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have exerted a profound influence on the moral norms and economic practices of their respective communities. One of the most controversial and persistent issues has been the perception of charging interest on loans, commonly referred to as usury. This concept has been addressed with divergent approaches and theological nuances that reflect not only the fundamental doctrines of each faith, but also their historical, cultural, and economic contexts. In Jewish law (*Halakha*), the prohibition of interest between members of the people of Israel responds to an ethic of communal solidarity. In Christianity, especially in its early centuries and during the Middle Ages, usury was categorically rejected, considering it incompatible with evangelical charity, although this position evolved over time. In Islam, the prohibition of *riba* (interest) is explicitly established in the Quran and constitutes a structural principle of contemporary Islamic finance.

This article seeks to comparatively analyze how each religion theologically and ethically grounds its position on interest, and how these principles have influenced and continue to influence current financial practices. The objective is to understand the implications of these religious perspectives for shaping more just and equitable economic systems from an interfaith perspective.

Despite the extensive literature examining religious conceptions of interest and usury, there remains a significant gap in comparative studies that simultaneously integrate doctrinal perspectives with empirical evidence on how these principles are lived and applied in contemporary practice. Most existing work focuses either on theological–historical analysis or on the description of religious financial instruments, but rarely addresses how present-day believers interpret these norms in their actual financial decision-making. This study helps bridge that gap by combining textual and normative analysis of the three Abrahamic traditions with qualitative data drawn from interviews and surveys, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of the relationship between doctrine, ethics, and financial behavior. In doing so, the research not only broadens the understanding of religious economic morality but also provides insights for designing and reflecting on ethical and sustainable financial practices in pluralistic contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The charging of interest on loans, also known as usury, has been the subject of debate and regulation in both secular and religious contexts. In Abrahamic religions, this issue has historically been associated with ethical, communal, and spiritual principles that transcend simple financial analysis (Chapra, 2000). In Jewish tradition, the Torah explicitly prohibits charging interest to fellow Israelites: "You shall not exact interest from your brother: interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything lent for interest" (Deuteronomy 23:19, NIV). This rule, enshrined in Halakha, promotes internal solidarity and seeks to prevent economic exploitation within the community (Elazar, 2001). However, the Jewish system has developed mechanisms such as *heter iska,* which allow for legitimate financial transactions without violating religious law (Breitowitz, 2005). Christianity, especially in its early centuries and throughout the Middle Ages, strongly condemned usury, considering it incompatible with Christian charity (Noonan, 1957).

Authors such as Saint Thomas Aquinas argued that charging for the use of money—which is sterile in itself—was unnatural and morally illicit (Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 78). Although the official position of the Church softened with the rise of modern capitalism,

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criticism of usury continues to be present in the social teachings of the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004).

Islam establishes one of the most categorical prohibitions on interest, defined in Arabic as *riba.* The Quran states: “God permits trade and prohibits usury” (Quran 2:275). This rule is interpreted as a safeguard against exploitation and the unjust accumulation of wealth (Siddiqi, 1983). Consequently, modern Islamic finance has developed instruments such as *mudarabah* (investment partnership) and *murabaha* (margin selling) to offer ethically consistent alternatives with Sharia (Iqbal & Mirakhor, 2007).

From a comparative perspective, the three faiths agree in their intention to limit or prohibit financial practices that generate imbalances, exploitation, or injustice. These positions reflect not only a spiritual dimension but also an economic ethic of social co-responsibility (Kuran, 2004). In current contexts, these principles have motivated proposals for ethical finance, solidarity economics, and alternative banking that seek to integrate religious values into capital management (Graafland, 2020).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, documentary, and hermeneutical approach aimed at conducting a comparative analysis of religious, ethical, and financial perspectives on the charging of interest in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The objective is to identify, interpret, and contrast the theological and normative foundations related to charging interest on loans, as well as their ethical and socioeconomic implications. The methodological design integrates three main components: (1) a systematic and criteria-based selection of primary and secondary sources; (2) a hermeneutical and comparative analytical framework; and (3) an empirical component consisting of semi-structured interviews and an exploratory survey. This structure enables triangulation between textual analysis and empirical evidence, thereby strengthening the interpretive validity of the study.

Data collection was based on a systematic literature review of sacred texts (Torah, Qur’an, Bible), rabbinic literature, and Islamic legal literature (fiqh). Critical theological hermeneutics was employed as the central interpretive method, complemented by the comparative analysis framework proposed by Esposito and Watson (2000). Interviews were also conducted regarding the application of interest rates in loan contracts. This methodological combination allowed for the comparison of the normative principles of each religion with their historical developments and contemporary applications in modern financial contexts. Additionally, an ethical analysis was carried out based on the principles of justice, equity, and human dignity, following the guidelines of Judeo-Christian and Islamic social ethics.

Source Selection and Documentary Analysis

The documentary corpus was constructed through a systematic and criteria-based review of primary and secondary texts. Sources were selected according to their doctrinal relevance, historical influence, and contemporary significance.

Judaism

The analysis focused on the Torah, complemented by classical rabbinic commentaries (the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud) and by medieval halakhic authorities such as Maimonides and the Shulchan Aruch. Contemporary responsa related to lending ethics and interest were also incorporated.

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Islam
The review included legal texts from the four major Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali), as well as fatwas issued by recognized legal councils concerning the permissibility of financial contracts involving interest and ribā.

Christianity
Primary sources included patristic writings (e.g., Augustine and Ambrose), scholastic theology (especially Thomas Aquinas), canon law, and key contributions from Catholic and Protestant traditions, particularly those emerging during the Reformation. This selection enabled the identification of theological and normative foundations that shape each religion's stance on interest and debt. A critical theological hermeneutic served as the central interpretive method, enabling a contextualized reading of religious normative texts. This approach was complemented by the comparative model developed by Esposito and Watson (2000), which facilitates thematic alignment across religious traditions without sacrificing doctrinal specificity. The analysis focused on identifying the normative principles, ethical logics, and historical developments underlying each religion's position regarding interest and indebtedness.

To complement the textual analysis, empirical evidence was collected through semi-structured interviews and an exploratory survey administered to a total of 70 participants belonging to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in age, educational level, and degree of religious practice. The interviews explored how participants interpret their tradition's doctrinal teachings regarding interest and how these principles influence contemporary financial decision-making. Although the qualitative nature of the study and the moderate sample size do not allow for statistical generalization, the testimonies provide valuable insights into the lived experience of religious norms surrounding lending and debt.

Results

The application of interest on loans was analyzed according to Jewish Law, Islamic Sharia and Western Laws (Christian), below is a comparison of the three Religions and their differences in contracted in the research:

Table.1 Comparative table on loan interest in Abrahamic religions (Authors won)

Principle	Jewish Law (Halacha)	Islamic Banking (Sharia)	Western (Christian) Banking
Prohibition of interest	Charging interest to other Jews is prohibited (Deut. 23:19–20). It is permitted in certain cases with non-Jews. Mechanisms such as *heter iska* allow for adaptations.	Total prohibition of interest (*riba*), considered exploitation. Contracts such as *murabaha* and *mudaraba* replace it.	Interest is legal and essential to the modern financial system. It is applied to loans, credits, and deposits.
Social function of money	Focused on justice, mutual support, redistribution, and ethical responsibility	Money should promote well-being, social justice, and avoid exploitation. Investment should only be	Money is a commodity and a tool for capital accumulation.

	(*tzedakah*). Sabbatical years cancel debts.	made in lawful (*halaal*) activities.	Less emphasis on its inherent social function.
Religious influence	Highly regulated by *Halacha*. Rabbis and religious courts define the economic rules.	Highly regulated by Sharia and fatwas of Islamic scholars.	Separation of Church and State. Regulation based on civil and economic laws, not religious ones.
Loan Ethics	Based on honesty, trust, prohibition of fraud, and avoidance of deceptive practices. Contract with ethical clauses.	Transparency, equity, and risk sharing. Loans must avoid oppression and uncertainty (*gharar*).	Based on principles of profitability and risk. Emphasis on formal contracts rather than moral ethics.
Adaptability	Use of instruments such as *Pruzbul, heter iska.* Jewish law has evolved with commerce without abandoning its theological foundation.	Modern contracts developed to adapt Islamic banking to the current financial context without violating Sharia law.	Highly flexible. Creator of financial derivatives, cryptocurrencies, and fintech.

Fountain: Own elaboration

Jewish Law (Halacha)

The Torah says concerning lending, "If you lend money to the poor among my people, you shall not be to him as a creditor, you shall not charge him interest" (Exodus 22:24). This verse establishes one of the principles of social justice in the Torah. The act of lending money is not only a financial transaction, but a gesture of mercy and communal responsibility. The Torah does not prohibit lending money to another; it considers it a *mitzvah*, but it expressly forbids taking advantage of another's need. By saying "you shall not be to him as a creditor," we are warned against oppressive or demanding attitudes toward the debtor. And the phrase "you shall not charge him interest" (in Hebrew, lo *tishach neshech*) reinforces the idea that lending to the needy should be a selfless act, not a form of business. The sages of the Talmud interpret this commandment as an invitation to live with *chesed* (loving-kindness), reflecting the divine behavior of giving without expecting anything in return.

You shall not charge him interest, and you shall fear Hashem, your God, and your brother shall live with you. You shall not give him your money for a fee, nor give him your food for a profit (Leviticus 25:36,37). Here, the issue of usury is elevated to a deeper spiritual level. It is not just a matter of economic regulation, but a matter of reverence for God. The connection between "you shall not charge interest" and "you shall fear God" indicates that the way we treat the needy reflects our relationship with the Creator. The expression "your brother shall live with you" suggests that a just society is one where no one is excluded from the common good. It is not enough to avoid exploitation; we must help others maintain their dignity. Rashi and other commentators point out that giving "for commission" or "for profit," even indirectly, is prohibited, emphasizing that aid must be pure and without ulterior motives. This passage is a profound ethical teaching: true fear of God is expressed in our actions toward the most vulnerable.

You shall not charge interest on money, food, or any other item from your brother. You may charge interest on a non-Jew, but not on your brother (Deuteronomy 23:20, 21).This passage introduces a legal and ethical distinction: the standards of economic justice are stricter within the people of Israel. “Your brother” represents the covenant member, someone with whom you share a commitment to mutual responsibility. He may not be charged interest in any form, whether money, food, or goods. However, when it comes to a non-Jew (i.e., someone outside the community framework), the Torah permits the charging of interest, since there is no such moral covenant obligation. It is important to note that this does not imply a lack of ethics toward the foreigner, but rather a more demanding internal structure of justice among covenant brothers. In modern times, in order to operate in financial contexts without violating this precept, the rabbis developed the legal mechanism called *heter iska*, which converts loans into investment partnerships, maintaining the spirit of the law.

And this is the theme of the Shemitah: that no creditor shall demand payment from his neighbor and brother, for the Shemitah has been proclaimed before the Lord.
(Deuteronomy 15:2)

This verse introduces a revolutionary institution: the *Shemitah*, or Sabbatical year, which occurs every seven years. During this year, all personal debts among members of the community are canceled. This *mitzvah* has profound social implications: it interrupts the cycle of indebtedness and impoverishment, and reminds us that property, money, and economic power are not absolute—everything belongs to *Hashem*. It is a way to restore equality, to offer a new opportunity to those who have fallen into misery. This precept also educates the human heart, inviting us to let go of control and trust that God will provide. The *Shemitah* teaches that the economic system must have space for compassion and reset, not just for accumulation.

Take heed lest there be an evil thought in your heart, saying, “The seventh year is at hand, the year of release,” and lest your eye be evil against your destitute brother, and you do not give him any, and he cry out to the Lord against you, and you sin against him.
(Deuteronomy 15:9)

This verse goes even further, and legislates not only external action, but also internal intention. The Torah knows that when the *Shemitah* year approaches, some might resist lending money for fear of not getting it back. Therefore, it prohibits even selfish thinking or petty calculation, calling it an "evil thought" (*davar bliyaal*). The expression "your eye is evil" alludes to an attitude of hardheartedness and lack of compassion. The spiritual consequence is serious: if the needy suffers because of your lack of help and cries out to *Hashem*, the sin falls upon you. This underscores that ethics in Judaism include intention, emotion, and conscience. Helping one's neighbor cannot depend on personal interest, but on the principle of divine justice that calls for selfless generosity.

In modern banking, especially in Israel and observant Jewish communities, the enforcement of the Torah's laws on charging interest (*ribit*) is done primarily through the use of the halachic legal contract called *heter iska.*

Banks, operating in economies where interest is an essential part of the financial system, cannot simply lend interest-free. To avoid violating the biblical prohibition, Jewish banks or those operating under rabbinic supervision sign a general *heter iska*, which transforms loans and deposits into investment agreements. Legally, the client is not “receiving a loan with interest,” but rather “participating in a joint venture,” where the interest is presented as part of a shared commercial profit. A clear example is the following: In Israel, banks such as Bank Leumi or Bank Mizrahi-Tefahot publish their *heter iska*, approved by a recognized rabbinic authority, on their websites annually. This document covers all transactions with Jewish clients and ensures that all financial operations comply with halacha.

This allows banks to continue operating normally in a modern environment without violating Jewish law, while preserving the ethical principle of not taking advantage of the needy, especially among members of the same community. When interviewing several Jews about their appreciation of the(*Halacha*), they agree on business practice. To the Orthodox Jew "Halacha is the practical manifestation of God's will". Following it is not an option, but a spiritual obligation that guides every aspect of my daily life. Through *Halacha*, I maintain a living connection with my ancestors and with the Creator. It is not a burden, but a sacred path that gives meaning, order, and purpose to my existence." *Conservative Jew (Masorti) "For me, Halacha is a valuable and evolving tradition. I don't believe all its rules should be applied literally today, but they should be interpreted and adapted responsibly. It's a way of expressing my Jewish identity in dialogue with the modern world, without losing my roots or historical awareness."*

However, it is permissible to lend money or borrow money from non-Jews with interest; the Rabbis do not establish any prohibitions.

Islamic Banking (Sharia)

Within the framework of Islamic financial thought, it became clear that the fundamental difference between Islamic and conventional banking lies in the explicit prohibition of usury (*riba*). This practice, which consists of charging interest on loans, has been rejected both in the Quran and in biblical teachings. Islamic tradition maintains that interest promotes the concentration of wealth in the hands of those with surplus capital, generating economic and social imbalances and perpetuating economic power structures that disadvantage the needy majority.

The Quran takes a clear and firm stance against interest, or riba, considering it an unjust and destructive practice both economically and spiritually. Surah Al-Baqarah 2:275 states that those who profit from interest will be severely punished, comparing their fate to the madness provoked by Satan, and establishes the moral distinction between trade (which is permitted) and interest (which is prohibited). In verse 2:276, it states that Allah destroys interest and blesses almsgiving, promoting generosity instead of unjust enrichment, and condemning sinners who persist in this practice. Verses 2:278-279 warn believers that they must abandon all interest if they truly have faith, and that those who disobey will face a declaration of war from Allah and His Messenger, demonstrating the seriousness of the act. Finally, in Surah Al-Imran 3:130, one is exhorted not to consume interest in its most abusive form—"doubled and multiplied"—associating spiritual and moral success with the fear of God and the rejection of *riba*. In Muslim countries, the Bet Din was authorized by the sultan to punish Jewish offenders. Taken together, these passages reflect a strong Islamic economic ethic based on equity, solidarity, and social justice. Examples include the following banks:

Al Rajhi Bank (Saudi Arabia)
It is one of the largest Islamic banks in the world. Instead of interest-bearing loans, it uses contracts such as murabaha (margin sale) and ijara (financial leasing) to finance its clients.

Dubai Islamic Bank (United Arab Emirates)
Founded in 1975, it was the first fully Islamic bank. It offers interest-free financial products through schemes such as *mudaraba* (investment funds) and *sukuk* (Islamic bonds).

Kuwait Finance House (Kuwait)
This bank applies the principle of sharing risks and benefits with its clients rather than charging interest. It uses contracts such as *wakala* (representation) and *istisna* (manufacturing or construction financing).

Bank Muamalat (Indonesia)
Promotes Islamic banking in Southeast Asia, using Islamic contracts to offer accessible financial services without resorting to *riba*, especially in rural communities.

Meezan Bank (Pakistan)
It is the leading Islamic bank in Pakistan, focusing on Sharia-compliant products such as mudaraba-based savings accounts and business financing through diminishing *musharaka* (decreasing share).

The Islamic model proposes a banking structure where the bank and the client establish a partnership relationship in the investment (*mudaraba* or *musharaka*). Instead of charging fixed interest, the bank shares in the profits—and eventually the losses—of the financed venture. This model aims to ensure distributive equity and moral sustainability, since profits are based on real and shared productive activities, not on financial speculation. It is also noteworthy that Islamic banks have technical teams that evaluate and support financed projects, minimizing the risk of failure and promoting investments with high potential returns. While it is recognized that challenges remain in the practical application of the Islamic banking system, progress points toward greater transparency, financial justice, and alignment with the ethical principles of Islam.

The empirical evidence was collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews and an exploratory survey administered to a total of 70 participants from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities. The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in terms of age, educational level, and degree of religious practice. Although the qualitative nature of the design and the size of the sample do not allow for statistical generalizations, the testimonies gathered provide substantive insights into how doctrinal principles on interest are interpreted and applied in everyday life. By making the selection procedure and the characteristics of the participants explicit, the study strengthens its transparency and validity, while acknowledging that these perspectives represent situated accounts that should be understood as analytical indicators rather than universal patterns.

Some of the responses to the surveys conducted on the treatment of the application of Riba.

> *What do you understand by riba, and how do you think it affects business activities?*
> *Riba is the Islamic principle against usury. It is the prohibition of obtaining excessive profits from commercial activities, for example, bank loans, but it applies to many commercial activities, including delays in the delivery of products or services. In general, I would say that banks in Kuwait operate under two modalities: some in the style of modern Western banks, for example, in Saudi Arabia there are branches of large banks like HSBC. A few others follow general principles of Islamic law. The latter primarily target those who want to maintain and observe*

their religious principles. For expatriates working in Kuwait, it is more common to operate with Western-style banks, and therefore transactions are comparable to those of a regular bank. I think it is important to note that the Kuwaiti population is three to four times smaller than the country's population.

Have you had the opportunity to access riba-free financial services? If so, what was your experience?

Yes. To purchase a car, I obtained a regular bank loan at a rate of 4.5% with monthly payments for three years. Additionally, I maintained a credit card with a 7% interest rate. Overall, it's very similar to Western loans in terms of terms and requirements. The biggest change is that during COVID-19 in 2020-2021, the government ordered the suspension of all loan collections for a period of six months. This was to protect workers who couldn't afford the payments due to decreased income or job loss. This is an atypical response compared to the Western system, and partly due to compliance with Islamic principles, in my opinion.

Do you think the prohibition of interest (riba) in Islam strengthens justice in business? Why?

No, not really. There are many mechanisms applied that are not common in the Western world. For example, in Saudi Arabia I also had the opportunity to purchase a car on credit. On that occasion, ownership of the vehicle remained with the bank until the loan was fully repaid. This caused inconveniences, such as the need to obtain a police permit to move the vehicle outside national borders. Similarly, I understand that, in the case of mortgage loans, it is the bank that acquires ownership, and the borrower only acquires a right of usufruct. That is, the bank retains the payment guarantees intact, as it is the owner of the home. In that sense, it is a distribution; Islamic banking uses different mechanisms to mitigate banking risk. Therefore, I don't believe it necessarily strengthens fairness in business.

Do you think Islamic financial principles can be successfully applied in non-Muslim contexts? Why?

The difficult question to answer in this sense depends on what market it would be aimed at. If we're talking about the application of Islamic principles to non-Muslim clients, I don't think there's much difference. In my opinion, other equivalent options have been implemented to apparently satisfy the same Western instruments, thus only adding an element of distortion to already established banking practices. For example, in the case of a mortgage transaction, a tax penalty (double taxation) is incurred. At the time of purchase of the property, the corresponding taxes must be paid, as well as at the time of transfer upon completion of payment or transfer of the property, in addition to the capital gains upon completion of the loan repayment. This occurs in England, for example, which has forced the government to modify tax rules to avoid the tax burden on loan repayments.

Naturally, for Islamic clients, several banks already operate in some countries that adhere to Islamic principles for the minorities residing in those countries, and which are usually branches or affiliates of banks in Islamic regions.

What benefits or challenges do you see in working under a riba-avoidance trading system?

In the sense of introducing ethical limits on transactions, there are no particular additional benefits. Many existing banking regulations already encourage avoiding usury or the payment of exorbitant interest. Among the challenges is that it introduces moral restrictions on many transactions carried out in the West, for example, payments on OnlyFans. This "power" allows the bank or its board of directors, or governments, to exercise censorship control over the use of money by consumers. Riba not only prohibits exorbitant profits, but also those from activities considered immoral.

The challenges are the normal ones of a competitive market system. The system must be regulated externally (by governments or central banks) and monitored by the authorities. Islamic banks are not exempt from such regulation. In any case, a compliance committee would be equivalent to a committee monitoring Islamic principles (Sharia), but without the religious component.

Western (Christian) Banking

Historically, it is observed that in the West, the legitimization of interest by some religious institutions occurred progressively, in parallel with the loss of doctrinal influence over financial practices. This liberalization resulted in banking systems that, in many cases, promote oppressive debt mechanisms, especially for countries in the Global South, creating unequal economic relations with international financial institutions. Although the Church initially prohibited usury (the practice of charging interest), over time economic doctrines and commercial needs led to a progressive acceptance of interest in finance.

Below are some examples of Western banks and common interest charging practices:

Bank of America (United States)
As one of the world's largest banks, Bank of America offers traditional interest-based financial products such as savings accounts, personal loans, mortgages, and credit cards. Personal and mortgage loans typically have interest rates that vary depending on the borrower's risk and the financial market.

HSBC (United Kingdom)
HSBC is another global bank that follows the traditional interest-based banking model. It offers a wide range of credit products, such as credit cards, auto loans, and mortgage loans, where interest is a key source of income for the bank. Interest rates vary depending on the customer's creditworthiness and the type of financial product.

JPMorgan Chase (United States)
This bank is one of the leading global financial players, providing credit products including mortgages, personal loans, and lines of credit, where interest charges play a key role. Furthermore, the bank charges additional fees for the use of financial products, which increases the financial burden for borrowers.

Wells Fargo (United States)

Wells Fargo is known for its wide range of financial products, including personal and business loans, credit cards, and savings account services, all of which are interest-based. Personal loans often have interest rates that fluctuate based on monetary policy and the borrower's credit rating.

Some of the survey responses on the handling of interest rates in banks:

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church prohibited the charging of interest (called usury) because it was considered a form of exploitation of others and a sin against charity. Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his Summa Theologica, argued that charging for the use of money was unjust, since money, in and of itself, produces nothing.

> *"It is unfair to receive more than what is borrowed, because it is charging for the use of money, which is part of its very essence."*
> *(S. Th. II-II, q. 78)*

However, with the rise of trade, merchant capitalism, and bank lending, the Church moderated its stance. From the 16th century onward, and especially since the 19th century, the charging of moderate interest rates was permitted, provided they were not usurious or abusive. Currently, the Catechism of the Catholic Church does not condemn interest as such, but it does condemn usury, defined as excessive or unjust charging that exploits the needy:

> *"A grave violation of justice is not to pay a just wage, or to practice usury..."*
> *(Catechism, n. 2409)*

Discussion

A comparative analysis of the perspectives on interest charging in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity reveals deep theological and ethical roots that shape financial practices within each tradition. In Judaism, the prohibition against charging interest between members of the same community (Deuteronomy 23:19–20) expresses a communal commitment to justice and mutual aid. As Levenson (2012) points out, this rule not only has economic implications but also reinforces the collective identity and social solidarity of the Jewish people. In Islam, the prohibition of *riba* (usury) is categorical, and it is considered a grave transgression in the Quran (2:275–279). This vision translates into an alternative financial system based on equity, risk-sharing, and moral responsibility (El-Gamal, 2006). According to Chapra (2000), Islamic banking represents a model that seeks to balance economic efficiency with ethical principles derived from divine law. For its part, early Christianity, influenced by texts such as Luke 6:35 and patristic thought, considered charging interest an act contrary to love of neighbor (Noonan, 1957). However, with the evolution of capitalism and modern economic thought, especially after the Protestant Reformation, this position was gradually relaxed (Weber, 2001). This contrast demonstrates that religious norms are not static, but rather interact dynamically with historical, economic, and cultural contexts. While Judaism and Islam maintain more normative and legalistic stances on interest rates, Christianity has shifted toward a pragmatic adaptation that influences acceptance of the Western financial system. This finding suggests that religious ethics can offer valuable criteria for rethinking fairer and more sustainable financial models.

Conclusions

Together, the verses weave a powerful vision of a Jewish society based on solidarity, dignity, compassion, and economic justice. They teach us that money is a tool, not an end; that lending to those in need is a sacred act; and that living with financial ethics is a concrete way of serving God. The Torah seeks not only to regulate transactions, but to form a sensitive, just, and responsible people, where everyone can "live with you." In the Islamic system, Sharia establishes a resounding prohibition of *riba* (interest), as it is considered unfair and exploitative.

Islamic banking seeks to promote fairness in financial transactions, aligning itself with principles such as cooperation, risk-sharing, and social justice. Islamic financial products are based on contracts that avoid charging interest, such as *murabaha* (markup selling) and *ijara* (leasing), where profits are derived from the participation in real assets or services. This approach seeks to avoid speculation and exploitation, promoting a more stable and ethical economy, especially in contexts of economic and social development. And finally, in the Catholic tradition, usury was initially condemned as a sin, but over time, especially since the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Church allowed forms of interest charging under certain conditions.

Although the Church continues to warn against the abuses of interest and promote economic justice, the doctrine on usury has been reinterpreted to adapt to the realities of the commercial world. In this context, Western banking has evolved toward a system based on interest charging, which is central to modern economies but has also contributed to oppressive debt, especially in countries of the Global South.

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