

Religion



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Religion. The general consensus among theists is the acceptance of God as an all-pervasive, formless, invisible entity. However, most religions, from ancient Hinduism to modern Christianity, sanction the expression of this invisible God in myriad visible forms: in stone idols, simple wooden crosses, exquisite icons, or statues. This penchant for giving the formless God a visible manifestation can be justified in terms of man's limited capacity to actually comprehend the essence of the Divine. The ultimate realization of God as a force, or essence, imbued with all the man-given attributes such as goodness, compassion, power and righteousness, is not easily assimilated by all men. The idealized, spiritualized essence of God can be comprehended only by refined minds, bent on spiritualism, and only after sustained effort. To the vast majority of mankind, the visible manifestation of God goes a long way towards focusing the inner mind and thoughts on Divinity. This initial, primitive belief that God is only present in that particular picture, or only in that particular form, can, with spiritual growth, metamorphose into the realization that God is an all-pervading, formless entity. Visible forms can be justified as symbolic, spiritual aids to the realization of God.

One of the basic tenets of Christianity is the belief that God sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to earth, as the Redeemer to deliver sinful humanity from eternal damnation. Jesus took upon himself the collective sins of humanity and accepted his martyrdom on the cross as the expiation of these sins. This belief probably arises from the primitive belief that the deities must be placated through sacrifice, and the shedding of blood is a prerequisite for absolution. This sacrificial offering, be it the ox of the ancient Romans, or the lamb of the Jews, must be the purest and most perfect to serve the purpose. In this context, the pure, sinless Jesus constitutes the perfect sacrifice in the

eyes of God. This ‘substitution theory,’ according to which Jesus’ vicarious punishment redeemed humanity, has a major flaw. If one concedes that Jesus’ punishment has indeed absolved humanity from sin, does it follow that man is now free to sin without having to face the consequences of his actions? If Jesus has obtained a prior, blanket absolution for all sinners, this is something in the light of a ‘license to sin’ with impunity. This poses a problem to the acceptance of the substitution theory.

The word ‘Christ’ means the ‘Anointed One,’ or the ‘Messiah’ and has no connotations of kingship. According to accepted historical accounts, Jesus was a healer and teacher who was crucified as a punishment for alleged sedition against Rome. While the testaments may trace Jesus’ lineage to King David, the origin of the appellation ‘King of the Jews’ is attributed to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor who tried Jesus for sedition. The crowds which met Jesus on his entry into Jerusalem for the Passover, hailed him with the cry “Blessed is the King of Israel” (John 12: 13. King James Bible). Jesus does not explicitly deny Pilate’s accusation that he considers himself to be the King of the Jews. Therefore, Pilate orders the epithet ‘Jesus Nazarene, King of the Jews’ to be affixed to Jesus’ cross at his crucifixion. This mocking title may be the origin of Jesus’ standing as a king. The more common viewpoint considers Jesus to be the King of a spiritual realm, the Kingdom of God which is to come after the Apocalypse. Jesus himself asserts “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18: 36. King James Bible). Christians, if they regard Jesus as a king, do so as the king of a spiritual, as opposed to a temporal, realm.