

ANIMISM

Overview: Though animism is not a formal religion itself, it is a description of what are often called folk religions or tribal religions. Though they often believe in one Supreme God they believe this God to be too far removed and unknowable for us, therefore we use the personal spirit guides to help us with our immediate circumstances. They would often say that religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism only deal with ultimate issues of life after death but offer no support for the immediate issues of life. The spirits they would worship are ones they are trying to appease so that the spirit would do good things for them. These spiritual beings are limited in their power by geography or certain aspects of nature. They believe in an impersonal spiritual force that infuses all objects.

History:

There is no specific beginning as in other religions but we see many of these beliefs in the cultures that surrounded Israel in the OT. These tribal religions are just about as old as the different tribes of man.

Views of God:

One God beyond the many spirits. This is very much like Hinduism which says Brahman – their term for ultimate reality or God - is without attributes, yet they have 330 million intermediate gods. We also see this tendency to create personal spirit guides in the New age movement, with channeling ~ contacting one's spirit guide. You may even have seen the American Indians version in some shows talking about a visionquest, where they seek to contact their spiritual guide. This guide could be the spirit of an animal, object, or even dead ancestors.

Do we also see this in the tendency for many christianized people to seek their guardian angels, or to pray to and worship angels?

Views of Scripture:

There are no scriptures for these forms of religion. Though they may write down their experiences and this in turn can help others seek their spirit guides. In many ways this is the Burger King of religious beliefs, since you can have it your way.

Concept of Sin

They are not concerned with offending the supreme God, but with offending the local spirits. They believe if they offend the local spirits these spirits may enact some sort of revenge in the form of injury, sickness, failure or personal strife.

Here is an example:

“Migene Gonzales-Wippler, a follower of the animistic religion called Santeria, knew that Elegua- the name of her god- required his followers to perform a simple offering to him every Monday mornig. One Monday, however, Gonzalez-Wippler forgot to perform the ritual offering because she had just returned from a tiring trip and was busy unpacking. As she was walking around her apartment putting things away, she cut her leg on the sharp edge of the handle to the cabinet in which she kept her god. “When I pulled back my leg, the door of the cabinet swung open, and there, looking up at me with aggrieved eyes, was Elegua’s image” Wippler wrote.

Animist live in continual fear of these powers of the spiritual realm.

Contacting the Spirits

Animists contact the spiritual realm through many different types of divination~ the practice of learning information not available through natural means. The methods are numerous and varied some are ; reading tarot cards, palm reading, tea-leaf reading, observing how feathers fall, astrology, omens, rituals, interpreting dreams and visions. They may do this for any important decision or time in life; such as when to build a building, sign a contract, make an investment, or ask for someone to marry them.

Views of Life After Death:

There are no universal and consistent doctrines about this. Though most see the spirit continuing to exist in some form after death, some may graduate to higher levels or some may become ancestral spirits that have the power to protect or plague their family.

Approaching Animists With The Gospel:

Address their fears: They live in continual fear from these spiritual powers. But we can teach them that God is greater than these spirits and he will protect us, Col 2:15, 1Jn 4:1-4.

Show how Jesus had power over the all creation: The Gospel of Mark shows this more than any other gospel. Such as His power over demons (1:24-27; 1:34,39; 3:11-12; 5:1-13; 7:25-30; 9:17-29), and His power over disease (1:30-34,40-42; 5:25-34; 6:56), physical handicaps and deformities (2:1-12; 3:1-5; 7:33-35; 8:22-25; 10:46-52), death (5:35-42), and nature (4:35-41; 6:30-44; 6:48; 8:1-8; 11:13-14,20-21).

Study Paul's sermon to the Areopagus: Acts17:22-31

Works Consulted

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