

DID GOD BECOME MAN? (PART 3 OF 5): GOD BECOMES ONE MAN, MEN BECOME GOD, WHY?

Rating: 3.7

Description: Examples of the religions which believe that God became one man, that all humans are a part of God, and a look into the reasoning of all these beliefs previously mentioned.

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God Becomes One Man

Christian belief in God's incarnation has its origins in the beliefs of the ancient Greeks. The very terms used to describe God becoming Man exist in the Gospel of John 1:1 & 14, "*In the beginning there was the Word (logos) and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*" Then the author of John goes on to say, "...*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...*" Although the Greek term *logos* is translated as "word," there is no single English term equivalent to it. Its importance lies in its use as a technical term in Greek metaphysical thought from the sixth century B.C., until the third century C.E., and in its appropriation by both Jewish and Christian thinkers. It first appeared in the expressions of Heraclites (540-480 B.C.) as the motivating principle of the universe, but was, by Aristotle's time, supplanted by the immaterial power *nous* and made the material power. *Logos* reappeared in the system of the Stoics who termed their principle of teleology both *logos* and God. Philo (d. 50 C.E.), a Jewish Alexandrian philosopher, identified the creative word of the Old Testament with the *logos* of the Stoics. The *logos* thus became a transcendent principle, as the means by which God expresses Himself in the world. But *logos* also had a redemptive function; it was the means to a higher spiritual nature. In the Gospel of John, the *logos* are both creative and redemptive; the latter aspect is given greater emphasis than the former.^[1]

This belief required a reason, for which the concept of original sin and divine sacrifice were invented. It was claimed that due to the sin of Adam, which accumulated down the generations until it became so great that no human sacrifice could remove it, a divine sacrifice was needed. Consequently, God had a human son, who was God, Himself, incarnate. God's son later died on a cross as a sacrifice for all humankind to God, Himself. The son, who is God, Himself, was later resurrected and currently sits on the right side of God's throne waiting to judge humankind at the end of this world. So for Christians, also one-fifth of humankind, God became a man at one and only one point in the history of this world, and belief in His incarnation is essential for salvation.

Men Become God

From the perspective of Jesus' humanity, the Christian belief that he is God could be perceived as elevating a single human being to the status of Godhood. There is, however, another body of beliefs among many of the followers of Islam, which, like Hinduism and Buddhism, offer human beings the opportunity to become God.

The origin of their beliefs can be found in mysticism whose roots are in ancient Greek mystery religions. *Mysticism* is defined as an experience of union with God and the belief that man's main goal in life lies in seeking that union. The Greek philosopher Plato proposed this concept in his writings, particularly in his *Symposium*. In it he describes how the human soul can climb the spiritual ladder until it finally becomes one again with God.^[2] The basis of this belief is the teaching that human beings are, in fact, parts of God that have become trapped in this material world. The physical body cloaks the human soul. Consequently, the soul in their view is divine. The trapped part of God in this world must free itself from the material world and reunite with God.

There arose among Muslim people, a sect, which promoted this very same idea. Its followers are traditionally called "*Sufis*" and their system of beliefs is called "*Sufism*". This term is usually translated into English as "mysticism" or "Islamic mysticism." It is based on the same concept as that of the Greek mystics – that the human soul is divine and that the way that it becomes reunited with God is through certain spiritual exercises. Various groups of Sufis evolved into cults called "*Tareeqahs*" (ways or paths). Each cult was named after its actual or supposed founder, and each had its own set of special spiritual exercises which members had to strictly adhere to. Most taught that after the followers performed the prescribed spiritual, emotional and physical exercises, they would become one with God. This oneness was given the Arabic title *fanaa*, meaning "dissolution"^[3] or *wusool*, meaning "arrival." The concept of "unity with God" was rejected by mainstream Muslim scholars but was embraced by the masses. In the tenth century, a *Sufi* devotee, al-Hallaaj (858-922), publicly announced that he was God and wrote poems and a book called *Kitaab at-Tawaseen* to that effect. In it he wrote, "If you do not recognize God, at least recognize his sign; I am the ultimate absolute truth because through the truth I am eternal truth. My friends and teachers are Iblees^[4], and Pharaoh. Iblees was threatened by the Hellfire, yet he did not acknowledge anything between himself and God, and although I am killed and crucified, though my hands and feet are cut off, I do not recant."^[5]

Ibn 'Arabee (d. 1240) took the unity with God belief a step further by claiming that only God exists. He wrote the following in one of his works, "Glory be to He, who made all things appear while being their essence."^[6] And in another he wrote, "He is the essence of whatever appears, and He is the essence of what is hidden while He appears. The one who sees Him is none other than Him and no one is hidden from Him because He appears to Himself while being hidden."^[7] His concept is called *Wahdatul-wujood* (unity of existence) and became popular in the Sufi circles throughout the Muslim world.

Why?

What led ancient people to have the belief that the God became man or that God and man were one and the same? The fundamental reason was their inability to understand or accept the concept of God creating this world from nothingness. They perceived God to be like themselves, creating from what already exists. Humans create things by manipulating existing things into other states, shapes and forms having different functions. For example, a wooden table was once a tree in a forest, and its nails and screws were once iron ore in rocks underneath the earth. Humans cut down the tree and shaped its wood into a tabletop and legs; they dug up the iron ore, melted it and poured it into moulds to produce nails and screws. Then they assembled the pieces to create a table for a variety of uses. Similarly, the plastic chairs people now sit on were once liquid oil, stored deep in the bowels of the earth. One cannot imagine sitting on oil the way people sit on chairs. However, through the human ability to manipulate the chemical components of oil, plastic is produced and chairs are made for humans to sit on. This is the essence of human activity; humans already merely modify and transform what already exists. They do not create the trees or produce the oil. When they discuss oil production, they really mean oil extraction. The oil was created millions of years before by geological processes; then humans extracted it from the earth and refined it. They also did not create the trees. Even if they planted them, they did not create the seeds that they planted.

Consequently, human, in their ignorance of God, often conceive of God as being just like them. For example, in the Old Testament, it is written, "God created man after his own image; in the image of God he created Man." For Hindus, *Purusa* is the creator God, Brahma, in human form, and just as humans create by manipulating the existing world around them, then the creator god must do likewise.

According to Hindu philosophy, *Purusa* is a giant offspring of Brahma, having a thousand heads and a thousand eyes. From him arose *Viraaj*, his feminine counterpart and mate in the creation process. The divine *Purusa* is also the sacrificial offering (vv. 6-10) and from his dismembered body arose the four traditional social castes (*varnas*). [8] *Perusa* Hymn states that *Brahmins* were *Purusa's* mouth; *Ksatriyas* (noblemen), his arms; *Vaishyas*, his thighs; and *Shoodras*, his feet.[9] The Hindus' inability to conceive of God creating this world from nothing, led them to the concept of God creating the world from himself and its people from His body parts.

Human ability to understand ideas and concepts is limited and finite. Human beings cannot grasp and understand the infinite. The belief, which God taught Adam, was that God created this world from nothing. When He wanted something to exist, He merely said, "Be!" and His command brought into existence those things that did not previously exist. This world and its contents were not created from Himself. In fact, the concept of God creating the world from Himself reduces God to the level of His creatures, who merely create something from something else. Those who held and continue to hold this belief are unable to grasp the uniqueness of God. He is Uniquely One and there is nothing like Him. If He had created the world from Himself, he would be like His creatures.

Footnotes:

- [1] Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion, p. 314.
- [2] *Colliers Encyclopedia*, vol. 17, p. 114.
- [3] *Ihya' 'Uloom ad-Deen*, vol. 4, p. 212.
- [4] The proper name of Satan according to Muslim belief.
- [5] *Idea of Personality*, p. 32.
- [6] *Al-Futoohaat al-Makkiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 604.
- [7] *Fusoos al-Hikam*, vol.1, p. 77.
- [8] *Dictionary of World Religions*, p. 587.
- [9] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 20, p. 552.

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