

Comparing and Contrasting Indigenous Religious Traditions with Christianity

God

For the indigenous religions, the high god or creator spirit, if there is one, is remote and remains mysterious and unknown. This being is not intimately involved with the created world. Christians understand God as one who chooses to reveal himself to human beings in a variety of ways, desiring to be known by and relate to people. For Christians, God takes the initiative, revealing himself and the divine plan through creation, events, persons, Scripture, Tradition (for Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians), and, most fully, Jesus Christ.

Ultimate Reality

One of the most distinctive comparisons between these two religious traditions is in their experience of ultimate reality, or the absolute nature of everything. For most followers of indigenous traditions, ultimate reality is experienced in many different ways. It is spread throughout the natural world and experienced as well through interaction with a host of beings such as gods, divine and semi-divine spirits, and ancestors. For Christians, on the other hand, ultimate reality is the one God, even though most Christians experience the one God in the triune form of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

History

Indigenous religion is what historian of religion Mircea Eliade called “cosmic religion.” Cosmic religion does not rely on a sense of historical or linear time. History is not nearly as important as what happened during the time of creation, which is fully recreated in the present through myths and rituals. Christians, along with practitioners of other monotheistic religions, regard history as vitally important. Life within history, the progress of history, and the meaning of history are significant because history is the stage upon which God’s purposes for creation, particularly for human beings, unfolds in the world.

