

What Religion is God

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Sunday, April 09, 2006

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The question has been asked before, What religion is God?

Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a once in a life time requirement of every able-bodied Muslim. The pilgrimage must take place during the second week of the Islamic month, Dhul Hijjah. During the Hajj, there are many rituals to be observed in a short period of time. One is the Stoning of the Devil, a reenactment of the Devil tempting Abraham three times as he prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

I do not believe there is an equivalent in Christianity to the Hajj. To the Muslims it is a trip made for God. In order to undertake the pilgrimage you must be debt free. How many Americans could undertake such a pilgrimage? Many Christians believe that without the Rite of Baptism, entry into Heaven is not possible. What if the Christian holy book required baptism in the same body of water as Christ's baptism, and then limited that time to one week of the year. The crowd's behavior would be unimaginable.

Unfortunately, this year, like some other recent years, disaster struck. During the Stoning of the Devil ritual, something happened and several hundred pilgrims were crushed to death. I heard a Muslim commenter on the radio speaking to this. As Islam has grown, as the world's population has grown, this pilgrimage has grown from thousands to millions annually. The commenter felt the Devil was at work here in one holiest of Islamic places during one of the holiest of times. How else could one explain the overzealousness that lead to this disaster? I'm not going to argue with this explanation.

I was riding with a couple folks. Somehow the conversation turned to the deaths of the hundreds of Muslims during the Stoning of the Devil ritual. More was said by the tone of voice than actual comment. There was definitely derision in there as they talked about Muslims running around throwing rocks at the devil. There was not a whole lot of sympathy expressed for the hundreds that died and the families they left behind. There are now children without a father or a mother, families that have lost a son or daughter. It can only be considered a tragedy.

One never knows whether to confront such attitudes or not. Generally, I find that opinions are not changed, that only animosity is created. But to not confront such attitudes is to allow such attitudes to persist. Regrettably, I just sat there and stared out the window.

Later, we stopped to get a bite to eat at a fast food restaurant. Before my two companions enjoyed their meal, one looked at the other and asked, Are you going to do it? The other nodded yes, and proceeded to pray aloud over their hamburgers and fries.

I'm reminded of a quote I recently read attributed to King Ashoka, who reigned around 268 b.c.e in India. He said, "Whoever due to excessive devotion praises one's own religion and condemns others only harms one's own religion." My two companions and the dead pilgrims in Mecca were seeking the

same destination. Does it really matter which road they travel?



Muslims throwing seven stones at the devil

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