

**RELIGIONS BEFORE
CHRISTIANITY; A
MANUAL FOR SUNDAY
SCHOOLS**

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Religions Before Christianity; A Manual for Sunday schools by C. C. Everett

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A MANUAL FOR SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

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PREFACE.

IN THE extremely limited space offered by this manual, it has been thought best to attempt to give general principles rather than details of fact. Those religions have been chosen for presentation which adapt themselves most readily to this treatment, or the names of which are most familiar. The Hebrew religion is not included, as it has already been presented in this series of manuals. Mohammedanism is excluded by the plan and title of the work. Teachers can add much to the interest of the study by presenting such details in regard to each religion as they may judge expedient.

It will be observed that there are two kinds of questions. Those that are printed in the longer lines and in the larger type have always answers in the paragraphs to which they refer. The others are more general in their nature. To these, no answer is given, though one is sometimes suggested. The object of these is to lead the pupil to regard the religion as a real thing, and thus to prevent the study from being a mere affair of memory. Of course, they are not to be used mechanically. They

are designed to suggest conversation between teacher and pupils.

A few references are added to such English books as it is thought might either be most helpful or most available. I have to thank the Rev. H. G. Spaulding, Secretary of the Sunday School Society, for valuable help in preparing this list.

C. C. E.

CAMBRIDGE, May, 1883.

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RELIGIONS BEFORE CHRISTIANITY.

I.

THE EARLIEST RELIGION.

1. *The earliest form of religion cannot be known.* The earliest peoples kept no record. The earliest remains of human workmanship that are found represent a period already comparatively late in the history of man; and even these do not convey the precise information which we require.

2. *The religions of savage races* now existing may perhaps teach us something in regard to the earliest form of religion. Many of these races, however, have evidently fallen from a somewhat higher condition, and in regard to none of them can we know through what changes it has passed. While we gain what information we can from the study of the religion of savages, we must remember how very imperfect are the results thus obtained, so far as our knowledge of the earliest religion is concerned.

3. *No people absolutely without religion* has probably yet been found; although in some degraded tribes the religion is often hardly worthy of the name.

4. *Four elements* enter into the religion of the savage, viz.: fetichism, nature-worship, and the worship of the spirits of the dead. There is also a more or less distinct recognition of spiritual beings that cannot be identified by us with the objects of any one of the forms of worship just named.

5. *Fetichism and nature-worship* grow out of the fact that the savage believes in general that the objects about him are something like himself; that is, he believes that they have

thought and feeling, only they often possess much greater power than he has.

6. *In fetichism*, some object is selected by accident or caprice. The worshiper sometimes distinguishes it by artificial marks. He thinks that this object is a divinity that will bring him good fortune. If he succeeds in his enterprise, he honors it. If he fails, he punishes it, or throws it away. Some savages have great numbers of these fetiches.

7. *In nature-worship*, the object is selected for more special reasons than the fetich. It is something that is imposing by size or strength or usefulness, or even by its destructive power. It may be something merely that has been associated with good or evil fortune. Thus, it may be a mountain or a river, or an insect or a wild beast.

8. *The worship of the spirits of the dead* holds an important place in the religion of most savages. This worship is often nothing more than an attempt to propitiate the spirits that are feared.

9. *The existence of the soul* is firmly believed by the savage. He thinks that the soul, even in this life, may be sometimes independent of the body. He believes that the soul may leave the body in sleep. When he has dreamed of a distant place, he believes that his soul has really been there. When he has dreamed of a person, living or dead, he thinks that the soul of this person has actually visited him. This soul, he sometimes identifies with his shadow, or with the reflection of himself in a mirror, or with any representation of himself. For this reason, the savage is generally unwilling to have his picture taken. Whoever has his picture, he believes has some power over himself.

10. *In the worship of spirits in general*, those that work evil often receive more attention than those that are more kindly disposed. The former need to be propitiated; the latter do not.

11. *The chief and most common methods of worship* are prayers for what is wanted, and offerings. The latter include what the spirits are supposed to value the most. To the dead