

## Created for Relationship

The first chapter of the Bible states: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Man, the pinnacle of creation, was created by God as an eternal being who would live in a close personal relationship with Him. We see this in the garden paradise that God planted especially for Adam and Eve. They were to work and take care of the garden as a place where God would walk and talk with them.

In our modern era we are seeing an increasing number of interfaith discussions on how to deal with world problems like terrorism and climate change. How does the Christian belief that man was created in the image of God compare with the views of God and man held by the major world religions?

## The Judaic Unfulfilled Image of God

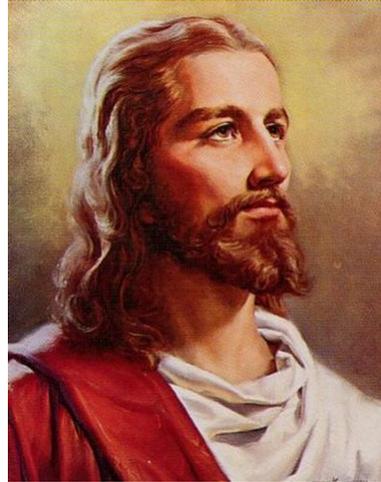
The Jewish Torah, which corresponds to the Christian Old Testament, fully acknowledges that man was created in the image of God. In great detail the Law (or Five Books of Moses) outlines how man is to relate to the Creator. It details the system of sacrifice with the elaborate furnishings and rich imagery found in the tabernacle or Temple.

But the writer of the book of Hebrews states that the Jewish priesthood “serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (Hebrews 8:5). Since the temple was destroyed in AD 70, as prophesied by Jesus, the temple has not been rebuilt and system of sacrifice therefore not in use. The Jewish people are still waiting for their Messiah as spoken of by the prophets.

## The Christian Fulfilled Image of God

The image of God was perfectly revealed to man when Jesus Christ “the image of the invisible God”

(Colossians 1:15) became flesh and lived amongst us. Jesus said “do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matthew 5:17). (underscore added)



The image of God is being restored in those who have been saved by the grace of God. At Adam and Eve’s fall into sin the image of God in man became marred and tarnished. But those who have faith in Christ are being transformed

into His likeness with ever increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The image of God will be fully restored in believers when they see Jesus face to face in heaven. (see Leaflet 1, ‘Jesus – The Image of God’ for a fuller explanation)

## The Islamic Absence of Images

Islam, which incorporates distorted truths of Judaism and Christianity, regards man as a created being with some of the attributes of Allah, the absolute god in Islam and the source of good and evil. But Allah is so far above man in every way that he is not personally knowable. Man relates to Allah through obedience and good works with no assurance of salvation. Jesus is regarded as one of the six great prophets of which Muhammad is the last and greatest.

The Quran, the Islamic holy book, condemns idolatry. Muhammad, in rejecting the pagan idols all around him, also opposed images of humans and

animals. Subsequently, only geometrical ornamentation and calligraphy are allowed as artforms in most mosques.

## The Hindu Images of Many Gods

Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon, which can be worshipped at home or in the temple. These are images of a great multiplicity of gods, some resembling human beings with animal heads and body parts. There is also a serpent goddess regarded as a primal energy in human beings.

Hindus view man as a manifestation of Hinduism’s supreme being, the undefinable, impersonal Brahman. The belief in reincarnation means that the Hindu can be caught in an endless cycle of deaths and rebirths as human beings or animals.

## The Buddhist Image of a Man

Buddhism, a reaction to Hinduism, has no God in the Hindu, Islamic or Christian sense. It has Buddha its founder, the Enlightened One, who denied the existence of a personal god and considered himself only a man. According to Buddhist belief, man is selfless and soulless, having only temporary existence and destined to an unexplainable state called Nirvana.

The image of Buddha in Buddhist temples and shrines comes in many forms. Often it is a gigantic Buddha sitting cross-legged with elongated earlobes and wearing a cap of snails. Many Buddhists have deified him and venerate his image even though this is against the basic teachings of Buddha himself.

Because God “has set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11) man has an in-built longing to relate to God the Creator who exists in eternity. Sadly, because sin entered into the world, man spiralled downwards, “exchanged the truth of God

for a lie” (Romans 1:25) and “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:22). Out of the five major world religions only Christians still relate to their Creator as a personal, knowable and benevolent God.

Dear Heavenly Father, You are the immortal, invisible and all-wise God who created the heavens and the earth. Your Word declares that Your invisible qualities – Your eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that mankind is without excuse. Even so, man has been deceived by the evil one and exchanged the truth of who You are for gods of their own making. But thank You that You sent Your Son Jesus to earth. He is the image of the invisible God. He showed us the Father. He provided a way for the marred and tarnished image of God in every man, woman and child, to be restored. All because He loved them! As we face the problems of the world today give us wisdom in dealing with those of other world religions who see God and man very differently. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

### About ‘Image of God’ Leaflets

In the Bible we read that God “*created man in His own image*” (Genesis 1:27). Many maintain that all human history revolves around this truth. The Judeo-Christian belief in the unique dignity of human beings is at the very foundation of Western civilisation.

The 2010 Canberra Declaration therefore states:

*“We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life’s natural end.”*

‘Image of God’ leaflets relate the doctrine of man as created in the image of God to various issues we face in Australia today.

The 21 leaflets in SERIES ONE are dedicated to Sophie Scholl who was martyred at the age of 21 in World War II for writing and distributing leaflets.

You can download other ‘Image of God’ leaflets at The Canberra Declaration website.

Please:

**READ & SIGN**

**The Canberra Declaration  
to Protect**

- ***Religious Freedom***
- ***Marriage and Family and***
- ***Human Life***  
**in Australia**

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SERIES ONE

## Leaflet 17

# Major World Religions



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# Image of God