**Religious Imagery**

**SUMMARY** RELIGIOUS IMAGERY

The religious imagery and references in “A Hunger Artist” make the story an allegory for the modern world’s rejection of faith. An allegory is a story with a literal, surface meaning that corresponds to a secondary, symbolic meaning. In “A Hunger Artist,” the hunger artist’s life is parallel to Jesus Christ’s, and the hunger artist’s tragic end suggests that Kafka had a pessimistic outlook on the world’s spiritual crisis. The hunger artist’s simple black attire is priestly, marking him as a holy man, as Christ was. Like Christ, he travels from town to town and performs miracles in front of spectators. Both the hunger artist and Christ live ascetically, renouncing the material and physical worlds that they believe stand in the way of spiritual enlightenment. The hunger artist and Christ are most similar in that after expending themselves in so-called service to others, they undergo a public display of death.

The twist in Kafka’s religious allegory is that the hunger artist’s spectators are indifferent to his suffering. This indifference suggests that faith and spirituality have no place in the modern world. Kafka seems to suggest that the hunger artist’s popularity, and, by extension, Christ’s, is just a trend. Indeed, the hunger artist’s popularity disappears in his own lifetime. Even when the hunger artist is famous and revered, the townspeople suspect trickery—no one has faith. His forty-day fasts, which mirror Christ’s forty-day period in the desert during which he subjects himself to Satan’s temptations, are greeted with cynicism and apathy. The spectators’ apathy culminates in the hunger artist’s final performance in the circus—no one pays him any attention. The fact that no one bothers to keep track of the days during the hunger artist’s last and greatest effort underlines Kafka’s message that the hunger artist, and thus Christ, do not truly die for others’ sins. Ultimately, their martyrdom is false because the principles to which they devote themselves are quickly forgotten by the people left behind.