NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS173

COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

COURSE GUIDE

CRS173
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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Introduction

CRS173: Introduction to the Study of Religion is a one semester, two credit foundation level course. It will be available to all students to take towards the core module of a certificate in Christian Theology. This course is suitable for any foundation level student in the School of Arts and Social Sciences.

The course which consists of fourteen study units, examines etymology of religion, theories of religions, definitions of religion, concepts and elements of religion, structure, features and problems associated with the study of religion. The course will identify and discuss the different approaches to the study of religion. It will also examine religion with the cultural and social contexts. It will discuss important different scholars who are associated with the academic study of religion. This course will examine the purposes of religion in the lives of individuals and the society vis-à-vis the social, psychological, political and soteriological functions. It will identify and discuss various religious groups and agencies in the major religions in the Nigerian community. The material has been developed for the African and Nigerian context.

The course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignments is found in the separate file, which will be sent to you later. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

Course Aims

The course aims at giving you an understanding of the basic concepts in the academic study of religion, the approaches to the study of religion and the purposes of religion in the lives of individuals and human community. Such understanding will enable you to treat and analyse the faiths of all humankind objectively, and to deal with religious issues and persons with openness, empathy, sympathy, reverence and objectivity.
This kind of treatment and analysis should help you to tolerate others and live in harmony with the people of other faiths and denominations, to create a conducive and enabling human environment which will foster peaceful coexistence. These aims will be achieved by:

Introducing you to basic issues and concepts in religion within the cultural and social contexts.
Examining the etymology of religion, various theories of religion, definitions of religion from the perspectives of history, theology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary and philosophy.

Identifying the nature and general characteristics of religion through their history, beliefs and practices.
Exposing you to the different approaches of investigating religious phenomena.
Identifying the specific and general functions of religion in the life of an individual and the community.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set above, there are set overall objectives. In addition, each unit also has specific objectives. The unit objects are always included at the beginning of a unit; you should read them before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check on your progress. You should always look at the unit objectives after completing a unit. In this way, definitely, you can be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit.

The wider objectives of this course are stated below. By meeting these objectives, you should definitely know that you have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

Explain the etymology of religion;

Identify the problems associated with the study of religion and mention specific solutions;

Analyse the different definitions of religion;

Mention the names of the scholars associated with the study of religion and their schools of thought;

Explain the reasons why religion is studied;

Identify the subject matter studied in religion;

List and define the different approaches to the study of religion;

Explain the theories of the origin of religion;

Define the contents of the discipline of religious studies;

Discuss the disciplines that assist the study of religious studies;

List the characteristics/features/common elements of religions;

Identify different religious traditions in the world and their basic beliefs, creeds, tenets, ethics, social dimensions, sacred texts, symbols and religious specialists;

Identify religious specialists that are common to religious traditions;

Identify religious groups and agencies;

Define religion in its cultural and social contexts;

List the purposes and functions of religion in the lives of individuals and the community; and

Highlight the dynamics in the study of religion in the contemporary world.

Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit contains some self-assessment exercises, and at points in the course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. There is a final examination at the end of this course. The components of the course and what you have to do are stated below.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation

Study Units

There are three modules and fourteen study units in this course as follows:

Module 1

1. Etymology of Religion
2. Defining Religion: What is Religion?
3. Common Characteristics/Features of Religion
4. Approaches to the Study of Religion

Module 2

1. Religious Studies as an Academic Discipline
2. Requirements for the Study of Religion
3. Problems in the Study of Religion
4. Theories of the Origin of Religion
5. Religious Pluralism

Module 3

1. World Religious Tradition I
2. World Religious Tradition II
3. Structure of Religion
4. Religious agencies and specialists
5. Religion and Other Institutions
6. Functions of Religion

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the materials you have just covered or require you to apply it in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor-marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

References / Further Readings

Boyer, Pascal, 2001. *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. New York: Basic Books

Boyer, Pascal, 2001, *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts That Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*. London: Heinemann.

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Ellwood, Robert S. 1993. *Introducing Religion From Inside and Outside* Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey,

Goring, Rosemary (ed.) 1992. *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* Wordsworth Reference, Ware, Herefordshire.

Hopfe, Lewis M. 1994. *Religions of the World* (6th Edition), Macmillan College Publishing Company, New York/Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Toronto.

Matthews, Warren. 1998. *World Religions.* West Publishing Company, New York, Los Angeles & San Francisco.

Monk, R. C., W. C. Hofheinz, K.T. Lawrence, J.D. Stamey, B. Affleck and T. Yamamori 1998. *Exploring Religious Meaning* Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Nigosian, S.A. 1994. *World Faiths*. (2nd Edition), St. Martin's Press, New York

Waardenburg, Jacques. 1999. *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research.* Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York

Assignment File

The Assignment file will be posted to you in due course. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain for these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignment will be found in the Assignment File, itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assignment. There are more than thirty Assignments for this course. Each unit is loaded with a minimum of two Assignments. In any way, there are many Assignments for this course and they cover every unit.

Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, there is a written examination. In tackling these assignments, you are expected to apply information, knowledge and experience gathered during the course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark. At the end of the course; you will need to sit for a final written examination of two hours' duration. This examination will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs)

There are fourteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You will need to submit all the assignments. The best three (i.e. the highest three

of the fifteen marks) will be counted. Each assignment counts 10 marks but on the average when the three assignments are put together then each assignment will be 30% of your total course mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You will be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set books, reading and study units. However, it is desirable in all degree level-education to demonstrate that you have read and researched more widely than the required minimum. Using other references will give you a broader viewpoint and may provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When each assignment is completed, send it, together with a TMA (Tutor-Marked Assignment) form, to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given in the Assignment File. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is due to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions will not be granted after the due date unless these are exceptional circumstances.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for CRS173 will be of two hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the practice exercises and tutor-marked problems you have previously encountered. All areas of the course will be assessed. Use the time between studying the last unit, and sitting for the final examination to revise the entire course. You might find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and comment on them before the examination. The final examination will cover every aspect of the course.

Course Marking Scheme

The following table lays out how the actual course marking is broken down:

Table 1: Course marking scheme

Assessment	***Marks***
Assignments 1-15	15 assignments, best three marks of fifteen counts @ 10% each (on the averages) = 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	**100% of course marks**

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Table 2: Course Organiser

UNIT	***TOPIC***	***WEEKS ACTIVITY***	***ASSESSMENT (END OF UNIT)***
	Course Guide	1	
1.	Etymology and the Study of Religion	2	Assignment 1
2.	Defining Religion (What is Religion?)	3	Assignment 2
3.	Common Characteristics/Features of Religion	4	Assignment 3
4.	Approaches to the Study of Religion	5	Assignment 4
5.	Religious Studies as an Academic Discipline	6	Assignment 5
6.	Requirements for the Study of Religion	7	Assignment 6
7.	Problems in the Study of Religion	8	Assignment 7
8.	Theories of the Origins of Religion	9	Assignment 8
9.	World Religious Traditions I	10	Assignment 9
10.	World Religious Traditions II	11	Assignment 10
11.	Structure of Religion	12	Assignment 11
12.	Religious Agencies and Specialists	13	Assignment 12
13.	Religion and other Institutions	14	Assignment 13

14.	Functions of Religion	15	Assignment 14
	Revision	16	
	Final Examination	17	
	Total		

How to get the most from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your text materials or set books. You are provided exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a Reading Section.

The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor or post the question on the web's discussing board. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly.

2. Organise a Study Schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Important information, e.g. details of your tutorials, and the date of the first day of the Semester are available at your Study centre. You need to store all this information in your diary or a wall calendar.

Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for each unit.

3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to adhere to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.

4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the introduction and the objects for the unit.

5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.

6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read from your set books.

7. Well before the relevant due dates (about 4 weeks before due dates), access the Assignment File on the Web and download your next required Assignment. Keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examinations. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.

8. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.

9. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.

10. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

11. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit's objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide).

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or through the Study centre if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings.

you have difficulty within the exercises

you have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have faced to face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussion actively.

Summary

This course seeks to give you an understanding of the basic concepts in the academic study of religion, the approaches to the study of religion and the purposes of religion in the lives of individuals and human community. By the end of the course you should be able to analyse the

faiths of all humankind objectively, and to deal with religious issues and persons with openness, empathy, sympathy, reverence and objectivity. Such analysis should help you to tolerate others and live in harmony with the people of other faiths and denominations, to create a conducive and enabling human environment which will foster peaceful coexistence.

I wish you success in the course and hope you find it interesting and useful.

MAIN COURSE

COURSE CODE CRS173

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MODULE 1

UNIT 1 ETYMOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

More than any other time, there is an increasing global awareness of the importance and crucial role of religion in human life and society. Contacts between and among cultures and societies have made it possible for traditional and modern, developing and developed societies to become globally aware of different kinds of religions. This awareness has developed a great appreciation for other people's religions and religious values.

This great awareness has resulted from such factors as development of extensive trade, tourism, economic interdependence, efficient transportation, rapid means of communication and technological advancement. For instance, instead of the old-fashioned way of sending messages, you can now use the Internet services to send mails electronically. You can now browse on the Internet to search for information on subjects of interest. People of different faiths who want to advertise or give information about their religious traditions post them on the Internet. Millions of these could be downloaded from the Internet. Fast and efficient search engines are available for use as will. A few examples of such search engines are google.com, mamma.com, ask.com, etc. There is also available a constant stream of journals and books, documentaries and films. It is important to note that apart from hard copies of these materials, most of them are made available online.

It is also noteworthy that this century has been witnessing crises, wars,

and disasters from politics, economy, ethical and social issues including

family, marital and sexuality issues, terminal diseases and sexuality-related diseases including HIV/AIDS. Most of these issues, on one hand, are linked to religions. On the other hand, most people particularly in traditional societies seek for religious explanations to certain issues that defy commonsense or medical explanations. In contemporary times, modern western societies have begun to realise the imposing influence of religion on human social life. Hence, pertinent questions of religious and spiritual concerns have been posed as solutions to human wellbeing, peaceful coexistence, interpersonal relationships, international politics and relations. In so many cases, answers to such questions focus on religious ideas and ideals. It is these concerns that make the academic study of religion to be of much significance within the local and global contexts (Hopfe, pp. 1-2, Monk, p. 1).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Explain the etymology of religion;

Give reasons for problems in defining religion with precision; and

Identify the two perspectives in the definition of religion.

3.1 Etymology of the Word "Religion"

When you come in contact with a word or phenomenon or concept that engages the attention of a person or group of persons, and the word is used in diverse ways, or the word is applied to so many situations, it is natural for an inquisitive mind to ask for its origin. Such questions that are asked are: "what is the source of this phenomenon or concept?" That is, how did it begin? Who was the first person who used the word or phenomenon? Where was the word or phenomenon first used? How did the word gain its prominence and what transformations had occurred to the word or phenomenon that have given it the current usage and application?

The question of the source calls into mind the time of origin. Philologists, that is, specialists dealing with the origin of human language would provide helpful hints by going into the root or roots that explain the word. It needs to be stated however that confusions may arise from such inquiry or searching into the roots of words. H.F. Hall, in his *The Hearts of Men* identified two difficulties in searching for the roots of words: (1) People often use words in different senses; and (2)

they may not have clear idea themselves of what they mean by the

words. This would not stop us from attempting the find out the etymology of religion.

A.C. Bouquet argued in his book, *Comparative Religion* that the word 'religion' is of European origin and that it acquired a lot of meanings in Europe. He however observed that scholars in the ancient world did not agree on the etymological connotation of the word. Some scholars connected *religio* with other Latin terms *relegere* which means to re-read; *relinquere* which is to relinquish; or *religare* which means to relegate, to unite, to bind together. Bouquet examined the two of the various views: The Roman Cicero, and Roman writer Servius Cicero took the word from *relegere*, to gather things together, or to pass over the same ground repeatedly. Another possible meaning, according to Cicero, was 'to count or observe.' Cicero focused on the term 'observe' to be appropriate in understanding the term 'religion'. Using the word 'observe' would have religion interpreted as "to observe the signs of divine communication." For Servius and most others, religion was to be associated with the Latin *religare*, to bind things together. The possibility of accepting this root origin is obvious in that this notion expresses the most important feature of religion. That is, "religion binds people together in common practices and beliefs, drawing them together in a common enterprise of life" (Bowker 1997: xvi). This notion shows *religio* as pointing to relationship. Bouquet strongly felt that both roots could be combined to give the sense of the meaning of religion: "a communion between the human and the superhuman. Thus, he interpreted religion to mean "a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the Sacred, the Supernatural, the Self-existent, the Absolute, or simply 'God'. *Religio* therefore implies a relationship between human beings and some spiritual beings. As we shall see in our study of religion, religion involves relationships both in essence and functions.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1

Explain the etymology of the word "religion"

3.2 Problems in the Study of Religion

Everyone, both those who are engaged in the study of religion and those who are not, think they understand the nature of religion, and hence its study. Thus, each explains or describes religion using his or her own bias whether positive or negative. More than all other endeavours, people seem so much familiar with religion that they do not feel they need to learn or be tutored in a formal, structured and academic way. To some, the word appears to be self-explanatory since everybody seems to

belongs to one religious tradition or the other, or that he or she daily

encounters people who belong to some religious traditions. The situation could be captured using the famous Indian legend *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. The version of this Hindu parable by John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) runs thus:

Six Blind Men & the Elephant

It was six men of Hindustan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfys his mind.
The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"
The Second, feeling of the tusk
Cried, "Ho! what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"
The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,

Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"
The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
'"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"
The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"
The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,

Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope.
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"
And so these men of Hindustan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!
So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I won,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen.

This parable reveals the different perceptions of the incapable individuals in having a full grasp of the whole phenomenon of religion. In fact, the last verse which shows the moral in the parable exposes the whole idea in the parable. That is, that people dispute endlessly in ignorance of the elephant which exists but the sense of which each has not been able to decipher though explained in different ways. Their ways of explaining the different parts felt show that each is informed of an idea about something each is familiar with.

Our societies have so much tenacity to religious ideas and ideals. The person who explains religion as a concept bases his or her idea mostly on personal religious feeling, experience or practice of the people who are involved in some religions.

We need to emphasise that religion is not as easy to understand as subjects like economics, political science, sociology, philosophy, science, etc. It defies precise definition because it carries different meanings for different people within different social or cultural contexts and at different times. The following are some of the problems that make it possible for understanding the phenomenon of religion.

The nature of religion

Religion belongs to two worlds: the profane and the sacred. It will be necessary for us to combine the senses of the two worlds to be able to understand religion. There are many elements across different human cultures that constitute the subject matter of religion. These are so wide and diverse. Not all of these elements are observable. For instance, most religious traditions recognise the existence of spirits or gods and

spiritual beings. There are religious experiences which are inexpressible in human language. Examples of such experiences are meditation, mysticism, *glossolalia*, dreams, visions, etc. Such practices as healing and miracles have no systematic descriptions. Thus, most descriptions or explanations that are given in current books express ambiguity, insufficiency, inadequacy or bias. In attempting to understand religion, therefore, all important elements such as mentioned, and countless others, have to be included and made intelligible and accurate.

Theoretical Explanations and Descriptions

Most scholars who attempted the descriptions and explanations of religion did not focus on actual participation and experience of religion but from mere academic deductions of people who have neither been emotionally or spiritually involved. Each provided different explanations and descriptions from personal biases, most of which are negative and one-sided. They drew upon a few cases to generalise, making explanations and descriptions more dangerous than revealing of the phenomenon of religion. Most of them were not scholars in the discipline of religion, but economists and social scientists and political analysts like Max Weber, Karl Marx, etc., and psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Justav Jung. There were yet others who did arm-chair researching.

Human Social Locations and Time-Space Contexts

It is important to state that religion is a dynamic discipline. It is as dynamic as human culture and society. Religious ideas, ideals and elements change with time. For instance, if you read about a particular indigenous community, say of the 18th century, and you have to observe the same community in the contemporary time, you would perhaps feel that what you are reading of that 18th century community did not exist. The fact is that the community has undergone and will still undergo changes. This also affects one's understanding of religion. Furthermore, let us imagine an indigenous community and a western society, and examine their religious ideas and ideals, we will see how different our perceptions of those two communities will be. All these necessarily influence what we understand as to be religious, and religion.

Ideological Problems

Some scholars who offered some descriptions and explanations of religion do so from their personal ideological standpoint. For instance, explanations from an atheist, an agnostic, or a theist would reflect such ideological positions. We can note a good example from the definition of Karl Marx. Unfortunately, their readers would not take time in

reading through their political contexts and ideological stances. It is noted that because of their imposing influences, many uninformed readers of their materials get easily carried away and use their explanations as the truth.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

1. Identify and discuss the problems associated with understanding of religion.
2. What lessons can we learn from the Hindu parable of the blind men and the elephant?

3.3 Perspectives in the Study of Religion

We shall list some perspectives from the scholars who have attempted to explain and study religion. We shall discuss these fully in another unit. The following are some of the perspectives that we have noted in the explanation and study of religion:

(a) **Anthropological Perspectives** focus on religion as the bedrock of the relationship of the human beings to their cultural environments.

(b) **Sociological Perspectives** examine the impact of religion and social institutions. They focus on religious groups.

(c) **Psychological Perspectives** centre on the role of emotions and feeling in the practice of religion.

(d) **Historical Perspectives** deal with the development of religions in time and space.

(e) **Theological Perspectives** focus on the different levels of relationship of God to human beings, which emphasise among others the attitudes, faith, and assumptions of human beings about God.

(f) **Ethical Perspectives** emphasise human being's interpersonal relationships.

(g) **Philosophical Perspectives** focus on rational explanation of religious behaviours and ideas. It asks questions about the universe and the place of human beings in it. It seeks intellectual explanations to human religiousness and religiosity and thus allows no role for faith or revelation.

(h) **Phenomenology Perspectives** describe religious ideas as one observes them, and as they appear to the practitioners.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3:3

Mention and discuss the different perspectives which scholars have used in analysing religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Religion is a universal phenomenon. It is as old as the existence of humankind in the world. Religion is as diverse as human cultures, historic and prehistoric, western and traditional or non-western. It is wide and thus difficult to define with precision. However, there are certain basic facts which we have to bear in mind if we attempt to give precise definition. It is essential to human life as it has several functions it performs for individuals and societies. Different scholars from different disciplines and ideological positions have contributed to the definitions of religion which we can begin to examine and assess.

Moreover, we observe that the word religion has its etymology from the Latin *religio* and is thus of European origin. Whether or not the etymology fully expresses the concept of religion, religion has assumed such meanings that are universal and comprehensible to inquiring mind. It emphasises relationships between the human being and the divine, and between the human being and his or her environment, the several forms notwithstanding. Oseovo Onibere points out that the continued use of the word 'religion' is "in order, more so as it refers to the outward form of faith, the practical expression being no hidden fact" (Onibere 1981: 67).

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have explained the etymology of religion; we have examined the perspectives in the definitions of religion and major classifications of the definitions of religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. From the Hindu parable of the blind men and the parable, what can we learn from the problem of understanding of the phenomenon called 'religion'?
2. Identify and discuss the different perspectives in the study of religion.

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UNIT 2 DEFINING RELIGION: WHAT IS RELIGION?

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A good way to begin a study is to start with definition. Definition is important because it sets boundaries that could help us to focus on important and salient features of the study. It is only through definition that we can differentiate a concept from other concepts, a phenomenon from other phenomena, and a study from other studies. For instance, a definition of religion allows us to differentiate religion from art, morality, philosophy, history and music among others.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to: Give

different definitions of religion;

Mention the names of scholars who gave some definitions of religion; and

Classify the different definitions to the different perspectives in which religion has been defined.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Nature of Man

Man is naturally Religious but not Necessarily Religious[1]

Are human beings naturally religious? Should we take religion to be in some way an innate, instinctive, or otherwise inevitable aspect of human life? Or is religion a historically contingent, nonessential aspect of basic human being?

These are not questions of merely academic curiosity. The answers have big implications for how human personal and social life should be properly ordered. They often imply positions about the truth value of religious and secular claims about reality. Answers and arguments about them are also bound up with massive historical projects that seek to shape social orders. These include the neo-Enlightenment project to create a rational, secular modernity and various religious projects to create a modernity that socially accommodates religious worldviews if not place them at the center. The futures of world civilizations around the globe are today being contested by movements that are affected by different answers to the questions posed above. The stakes of the answers are therefore high for implications in public policy, institutional practices, and deep cultural formation over time.

The religious issue pertains to human beings *by nature* universally since beginning of humanity in all other cultures. The question of whether religiosity is a necessity in human nature is quite dicey. But it is evident that religion is natural to human beings.

The empirical evidence gives us four facts that do not consistently answer the question. First, very many people in the world are not religious, and some entire cultures appear to be quite secular, without apparent damage to their happiness and functionality. This suggests that religion is not natural to human being but an accidental or inessential practice only some human beings experience.

Second, religion generally is not fading away in the modern world as a whole. Even the most determined attempts by powerful states to repress and extinguish religion (in Russia, China, Revolutionary France, Albania, and North Korea, for example) have failed. Religion thus also seems to be incredibly resilient, perhaps incapable of being destroyed and terminated. This suggests that religion is somehow irrepressibly natural to human being.

Third, even when traditionally religious forms of human life seem to fade in some contexts, new and alternative forms of life often appear in their place that engage the sacred, spiritual, transcendent, and liturgical needs of human beings. New Age ideas and claims to be "spiritual but not religious" are obvious instances. Organizations, movements, and practices as different as "secular" environmentalism, academic economics, and sports spectacles have religious dimensions. Many of today's most popular films, fiction, and television shows deal with superhuman powers, supernatural realities, and spiritual themes.

Even those in traditional religious groups who seem religiously disengaged exhibit

[1] The arguments here are culled from Christian Smith.

arguably religious practices, including what sociologists call "vicarious religion," "believing without belonging," and "everyday religion." Some, like St. Augustine, have argued that many apparently antireligious activities—including drunkenness, carousing, promiscuous sex, harsh athletic training, committed political activism, incessant material consumption, and drug addiction—actually represent deeply driven human religious longings and searching, which happen to be misdirected quests for the true religious good. The presence of these religious alternatives adds credence to the view that religion is irrepressibly natural to human being.

The fourth fact points back to the view that religion isn't an essential part of who we are. The role of religion in the lives of individuals and societies depends greatly upon personal and historical experiences and developments. They are, as sociologists say, "path dependent." Different people and groups can and do head in quite different directions when it comes to religion. No one narrative or trajectory tells the whole story, and in fact there simply may not be a dominant story. At best, scholars can note and interpret broad patterns and associations. This suggests that religion is not natural, if by *natural* we mean consistently expressed.

What should we make of these four facts, which seem to speak both for and against the idea that humanity is naturally religious? I believe there is a way to make sense of all of the evidence. What is necessary is to understand what it means to say that something is "natural" for human beings.

People often cannot understand the question of human nature because their way of understanding it is framed (whether they know it or not) by the ideas of positivist empiricism. Positivism tries to read human nature off the surface of human behavior. It tells us to look for regular associations between observable empirical events and defines "explanation" as identifying the strongest, most significant associations between them. Once positivists find these explanations, they apply them as "covering laws" to all relevant cases and situations. Applied to the question at hand, the debate thus proceeds on the unquestioned assumption that either human beings definitely are naturally religious, and so religion will always persist in human societies, or they are not naturally religious, and so modernity will inevitably secularize people and society as we shed the accidents of our cultural past.

But this is not an adequate view of what *nature* means. We need instead to take a realist approach, which observes that everything that exists in reality possesses distinctive characteristics and capacities by virtue of its particular ontological makeup. The "nature" of anything refers to the stably characteristic properties, capacities, and tendencies it possesses at a "deep" level by virtue of what it is. By nature, as I have argued in my book *What Is a Person?*, human beings have specific features, capacities, powers, limits, and tendencies, and human nature is defined by these as expressed by human beings taken as a whole. The tendencies normally direct the use of our capacities in particular directions and not others. People have the capacity to exercise their muscles but tend to do so in certain ways—for example, to walk upright because that is easier and more efficient than crab-walking.

The causal capacities and tendencies of real things are *neither* determined or determining *nor* random or chaotic. They are therefore neither absolutely predictable nor incomprehensible. Human beings are in their nature-guided actions neither determined nor fully autonomous. Nevertheless, because the tendencies normally direct the capacities in certain directions, when we speak about human nature we are pointing to a certain grain in the expressed features, abilities, tendencies, and operations of persons. When we say that a social activity, arrangement, or pattern is in accord with or contrary to human nature, we are saying that it works either with or against that grain of nature.

To understand these matters well, we also have to distinguish potentiality from actuality, mere possibility from full realization. Different environments activate, or don't activate, different combinations of capacities and powers. A child's aptitude for math or music or baseball, for example, is realized or fulfilled (or not) depending upon environmental conditions that do or don't activate and nurture it in various ways. Natural potentials may go unrealized. But that does not make them unreal or not part of the nature of things. It simply means that they are currently dormant and unrealized.

Social reality develops through complex processes of interaction and emergence that in different contexts will produce quite different events and outcomes. But variability in social reality does not mean that nothing has a nature but that real nature can and will be expressed in various ways.

Thus, the highly variable characteristics of both individual human beings and particular human societies flow from rather than contradict the idea that we human beings have a stable nature. Our natural capacities and tendencies must actually be realized or expressed, and a culture-making animal like the human being realizes and expresses them in all kinds of different ways. Another way of putting the point is to say that certain natural powers and potentials exist at a deep level and are triggered and activated only under certain conditions and when activated are realized in certain ways and not others.

Thus, when we consider whether or not human beings are naturally religious, we need to reject the empiricist notion that we can read human nature off the surface of human behavior. Instead, as realists, we have to use all available empirical evidence to understand what we can't always see, including the innate capacities and aptitudes we observe in their highly complex expressions when they are realized but cannot see when they are not. Our task is not (as it is for positivism) to discover the covering laws that explain and predict observable associations of conditions and events, but to use all available empirical evidence and powers of reason to develop conceptual models that as accurately as possible describe the real capacities and causal processes operating at the deeper, unobservable level of reality. This is what scientists do with subatomic particles, for instance. It is what all human knowledge requires.

How does this help us understand the question about whether human beings are

naturally religious? I begin by stating my position negatively. First, human beings are *not* by nature religious if by that we mean "by nature" in the positivist-empiricist sense of being compelled by some natural and irrepressible need, drive, instinct, or desire to be religious. Plain observation shows that some people are religious and some are not, often quite happily and functionally so.

Second, and closely related, human beings are *not* by nature religious if by that we mean that every human culture has a functional need or intractable impulse to make religion one of its centrally defining features. Like particular people, societies vary in how important a role religion plays in their lives. Some are highly religious. Others are quite secular, with religion operating on the margins. At the level of observation the most we can say is that complete secularity appears to be impossible for societies. But that is a long way from saying that human beings are naturally religious.

Nonetheless, human beings *are* naturally religious when by that we mean that they possess, by virtue of their given ontological being, a complex set of innate features, capacities, powers, limitations, and tendencies that give them the capacity to think, perceive, feel, imagine, desire, and act religiously and that under the right conditions tend to predispose and direct them toward religion. The natural religiousness of humanity is not discerned in the (nonexistent) uniformity of empirical religious beliefs or practice in individuals or societies. It is instead located in natural features latent within our humanity and subject, as all innate capacities are, to the complexities of interactions and stimulations that do (and don't) bring these features to the surface.

This not only helps to explain religion's primordial, irrepressible, widespread, and seemingly inextinguishable character in the human experience, it also suggests that the skeptical Enlightenment, secular humanist, and New Atheist visions for a totally secular human world are simply not realistic—they are cutting against a very strong grain in the nature of reality's structure and so will fail to achieve their purpose. But that is not the whole story. Taking the concept of "being religious by nature" in a properly critical sense also helps us interpret the data that tells us that human beings and societies often are not religious. This view tells us that nonreligious people possess the natural capacities and tendencies toward religion but that those capacities and tendencies have not been activated by environmental, experiential triggers or else have been activated but then neutralized or deactivated by some other social forces.
But what exactly are the natural tendencies toward religion grounded in human personhood? They are the interconnected set of orientations toward life and the world in which human beings continually seem to find themselves. We are speaking here about important aspects of the human condition.

The first of these natural human tendencies toward religion springs from our universal human condition in relation to what we affirm as true. As I have argued in my book *Moral, Believing Animals*, all human beings are believers, not knowers who know with certitude. Everything we know is grounded on presupposed beliefs that

cannot be verified with more fundamental proof or certainty that provides us assurance that they are true. That is just as true for atheists as for religious adherents. The quest for foundationalist certainty, with which we are all familiar, is a distinctly modern project, one launched as a response to the instabilities and uncertainties of early-modern Europe. But that modern project has failed. There is no universal, rational foundation upon which indubitably certain knowledge can be built. All human knowing is built on believing. That is the human condition.

That means that religious commitment is not fundamentally different from any human belief commitment. It involves the same innate human need to believe more than one can "prove." Otherwise we would live in a cognitive desert, unable to furnish our minds with enough perceptions and ideas to begin thinking. Religious believing thus shares the larger epistemic situation of all human believing.

The second natural tendency toward religion springs from the human capacity to recognize problems and our desire to solve them. By one way of thinking in sociology, which is surely right as far as it goes, religion has its deepest roots in the human desire to avert, forestall, or resolve real and perceived problems. And as human beings we are particularly capable of recognizing problems, and we want to overcome them. Of course, we encounter problems we have limited or no power to solve. Death provides the most obvious example, illness another. Yet precisely because we can throw our problems into cognitive form and want to solve them, we cannot ignore even the most intractable and seemingly unsolvable problems. We often want to solve problems we cannot solve. When the prospect of a helpful superhuman power is present to human minds, through culture, socialization, revelation, or some other means, it is quite natural for us to appeal to this power to help avert or resolve our problems.

Third, our existential condition also lends itself to the tendency toward religion. Human beings have both incredible capacities and severe limits. We know we will die but not what comes after death, for example. We often seek truth, goodness, and beauty but find so little of it in this world and oftentimes in ourselves. Many people naturally ask and wrestle with answers to the Big Questions: What should I live for and why? What should I believe, and why should I believe it? What is morality, and where does it come from? What kind of person should I be? What is the meaning of life, and what should I do in order to lead a fulfilling life? We are meaning-making and significance-seeking animals, yet we have difficulty creating satisfying meanings solely from within the horizons of the immanent world we occupy.

Religion has been the primary way that human cultures have answered these life questions. Still, religion is not the only way for human beings to answer them and live functional, happy lives. The human existential condition does not *require* that people be religious or feel the need to address and answer such questions—many people appear happy to focus on the present, live as well as they can, and not be bothered by the Big Questions. At the same time, however, the capacity to respond to the human existential condition in terms that are not religious does not mean that this existential condition does not exist or that its tendency to lead to religion is not

powerful. It does and is.

Finally, the human need to make what Charles Taylor calls "strong evaluations" works as another tendency toward religion. We unavoidably operate in relation to moral beliefs that are taken to arise not from our personal preferences and desires but from sources transcending them. It is simply *un*natural for human beings to think that morality is nothing but a charade, that all moral claims are nothing but relative human constructions.

Friedrich Nietzsche attempted some version of this but could not himself finally escape from arguing that some things were in fact true, that some positions were actually right—which is why he wrote his works to convince readers of his views. His "transvaluation of all values" still ended up committing him to certain values, truth claims, and beliefs about good and bad. "Slave morality" was for him bad, for instance, while the morality of the pagan noble warrior was good.

This innate tendency to make strong evaluations leaves us needing to account for where morality comes from, what makes it real. Some people are able to submerge such questions beneath their consciousness, but the moral questions recurrently return in cultures and social groups, if not in the lives of distinct persons. Again, religion is not the only source of answers, but historically it has been a foundational and central one. Even though few ordinary people are moral philosophers who care about intellectual consistency (not that most moral philosophers necessarily prove to be all that consistent either), the questions themselves never disappear from human life. This too, under the right conditions, triggers the human capacity for religion.

In short, the human condition entails genuinely natural capacities for religion, which these four tendencies often direct toward the actualized practice of religion. No human person or culture has to respond to these conditions religiously. Any such tendency, weak or strong, is merely a tendency—not a determination, necessity, or historical destiny. There are other, functional, nonreligious ways to deal with the human condition.

Still, we can justifiably say that human beings are naturally religious—as a matter of real, natural potentiality, capacity, and tendency—while at the same time acknowledging that very many human beings and even some cultures are not particularly religious at all. This view accounts for the seemingly contradictory evidence with which we began. Religiosity is widespread, yet not universal, and though not inevitable, impossible to extinguish.

What then does this tell us about matters in our own present age and likely into the future? That we are naturally religious does not mean that tomorrow will necessarily see a great revival, or that all secularists are secretly unhappy, "anonymous believers," or somehow subhuman because they are living in some sense against the grain of their natures. But it strongly suggests that we should not expect human societies to become thoroughly secularized. Because we human beings are indeed

religious by nature, secularization will be limited in effect, contingent in direction on various factors, and susceptible to long-term reversals.

3.2 Defining Religion

The illustration of the Hindu parable of *The Blind Men and the Elephant* as we identified in Unit 1 could also be used to state the problem in defining religion. We have noted in Unit 1, the problems that are associated with understanding the phenomenon of religion. To restate the points, the first and most important problem is the ambiguity of the term. The ambiguity reflects the dynamic and inexpressible qualities of religious experiences which are the core of religion. Such experiences are personal and intense, mysterious and indefinable. The problems also include the nature of religion itself and the elements, concepts and phenomena that count as religion, the theoretical and ideological influences of the scholars who provide some of the definitions, and time-space conditionings of the scholars. Furthermore, we discovered that several perspectives affect the meanings of religion. These perspectives involve anthropological, sociological, psychological, phenomenological, philosophical, theological, ethical, historical, etc. As we discovered two important dimensions of religion, we provided a framework for considering a meaningful definition of religion.

We shall note the efforts of scholars who have attempted to give meaningful definitions of religion. Emmanuel Bolaji Idowu, an eminent scholar of African Traditional Religion, noted the efforts of H. Fielding Hall and Professor Leuba. Idowu wrote that Hall listed twenty definitions of religion while J. B. Pratt recorded the effort of Professor Leuba thus:

> Professor Leuba enumerates forty-eight definitions of religion from as many great men (and elsewhere ads two of his own, apparently to fill out the even half-hundred). But the striking thing about these definitions is that, persuasive as many of them are, each learned doctor seems quite unpersuaded by any but his own. And when doctors disagree what are the rest of us going to do? (See E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, p. 69).

It is necessary to point out again that if we analyse all the fifty definitions, there would still be some areas where those definitions show some deficiencies. One of the reasons is that more than ever before the dynamism of religion is growing in a sporadic manner, particularly in this age of modernity and globalisation. Religion is developing many faces. There is a lot of intra- and inter-religious contact as so many cultures and societies continue to interact. New ideologies are developing. Most importantly, western societies are

recognising the imposing power and influence of religion, particularly in the face of religious evangelism, revivalism and fundamentalism leading to conflicts, crises and terrorism.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1

Identify the problems that are associated with the definition of religion and mention the attempts by scholars in providing a meaningful definition of religion.

3.2 Types of Definition

Scholars of religion have identified two types of definition of religion: the functional and the substantive. Some thinkers of the enlightenment studied religion only as remnant of a past age or symptom of alienation. However, both the thinkers of enlightenment and modern sociologists have taken religion seriously. The 'founders' of modern sociology, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim attached theoretical importance to the academic study of religion. In fact, religion has been central to their theory of society. To Weber who focused on social change, religion is an important factor of social change. Religion it is that transforms the society. For Emile Durkheim, the question that engaged his mind was on the role of religion in keeping together a society. To him, religion plays the role as social elements of producing cohesion and solidarity. It is the essential factor of identity and integration.

It is important to note that though Weber studied religion impressively as important to every society, he did not offer a definition. However, many sociologists drew their definitions of religion from his extensive studies. Thus, in different disciplines such as economy, politics and philosophy, one would note the importance of the works of Max Weber. Also, we should note that Weber did not concern himself with the claims to private religious experiences. He regarded a claim to religious experience as the revival of old gods which Christianity had laid to rest. It was only the function of religion, the social impact on the society that at centre of the discussions of Max Weber. The attitude of Max Weber may be viewed from his own religious bias, for he was an agnostic.

Emile Durkheim studied both the primitive and modern society, and realized that religion provides the symbols of world interpretation for the society. To him, religion was essentially social. Particularly, he noted that the beliefs and practices regarding the sacred usually and functionally united people as a single community with one heart and soul. We should note that in his early academic inquiry, Durkheim hypothesized that religion was a system of collective self-interpretation only in traditional communities but had no place in modern, enlightened societies. His thinking was that the complex division of labour in industrial society produced interdependence and solidarity. He later changed his mind having realized that religion possessed something eternal. Thus, to him, religion was useful even in the age of science and technology since religion possessed both the power that kept the

society together and the power that summoned it to greater fidelity to the ideal of the society.

In giving a meaningful definition of religion, the definition must include both the substantive and functional aspects of religion. Substantive aspect deals with the essence of religion. The essence of religion expresses the intrinsic quality of religion. The functional tells of the roles of religion in the live of the individual and/or society.

Let us use water as an illustration of the substantive and functional aspects of religion. The chemical contents of water are hydrogen and oxygen which when subjected to test in the chemistry laboratory reveals those qualities. The components are the essence of 'being' of what is called water. Without one of the components, we do not have water. The functions of water are immense. Somebody may not understand the chemical components of water; yet he or she knows how water functions in human life, that is, the use of water for human beings: life sustenance, domestic use, agricultural use, chemical products, manufacturing of liquid products, etc.

The issue of the substance or essence and the function or role of religion are important in giving a precise definition. Most of the scholars who have attempted the definitions of religion have been found to emphasise one of the two aspects. We shall identify and discuss some of these scholars with their different perspectives in a later unit.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

Explain and differentiate between the two types of definition of religion.

3.3 Characteristic Emphases in the Definition of Religion

It is important to mention that each person who defines religion focuses on some particular aspects of human life and experience, or on what religion does, positive or negative. We shall now examine the characteristic emphases in their various definitions. It is necessary that as you go through the various definitions, look at each of them critically. In your analysis, try to suggest whether the definition represents the real and accurate, the substantive and functional aspects of the definition of religion. Radoslav A. Tsanoff, in his *Religious Crossroads*, classifies the definitions of religion into the following ways: (1) theistic and other beliefs, (2) practices, (3) mystical feelings, (4) worship of the holy, and (5) conviction of the conservation of values. For our own, we shall identify the definitions of religion and consider them under the following categories.

Feeling

Friedrich Schleiermacher, an important 19th century German theologian and philosopher, has defined religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence, of pure and entire passiveness" and that "true religion is sense and taste for the Infinite." He asserts that religion should include emotions. Schleiermacher bases his definition on human's feeling and intuition. It anchors on dependence on one Infinite, or the Eternal, which in some religions may be termed God. The definition does not reflect human participation in religious scheme as in knowing or doing something in the name of religion.

Ritual Activity

This definition emphasises the performance of specific acts that are established by the religious community. Anthony Wallace, an anthropologist defines religion as "a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in humans or nature." The definition holds that religion is only situated within the realm of humanity and society. There is no reference to the divine as some religion may hold.

Belief

It is very common to both young and old when asked about the definition of religion to define it as belief in God or the supernatural. Most theo-centric religions like Christianity and Islam will define religion in terms of 'belief', particularly belief in a supernatural power or entity.

Monotheism

Monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam emphasizes that religion is a relationship with one omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient divine being who manifests in and superintends on the affairs of humanity and the whole universe. The essential relationship is differently captured in definite terms in different religions. An example in Judaism is the *Shema* in Judaism as contained in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4-6); in Christianity as revealed in the belief in Jesus Christ who is regarded as the *Way, the Truth, and the Life* (John 14:6); and in Islam as contained in the *Shahadah*, the Testimony to the oneness of Allah (Qur'an 112).

The Solitary Individual

Alfred North Whitehead, a prominent English-American philosopher, defines religion as "what the individual does with his own solitariness; and if you were never solitary, you were never religious." This emphasises the involvement of the individual in an intimate personal dialogue with himself or herself. It makes no reference to either the

supernatural or a group or the society in which a person lives.

Social Valuation

William Lessa and Evon Vogt, (two anthropologists) define religion as "a system of beliefs and practices directed toward the 'ultimate concern' of a society." To them, religion is human-centred. Here, society provides the centre for religious valuation. Religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes are directed toward the expression of what a society of people holds to be of central importance.

Illusion

Karl Marx, a 19th century social philosopher, and the father of communism, defines religion this way: "Religion is the heart of the heartless, sigh of the oppressed creature … It is the opium of the people." Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around humans as long as he does not revolve around himself. Marx sees religion as something that misinterprets reality. This portrays human being's response to the universe as essentially immature and distorted.

Ultimate Reality and Value

John B. Magee says that "Religion is the realm of the ultimately real and ultimately valuable." Religion is seen as the true and ultimate measure of people's existence, the final test of life's meaning.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3

Identify and explain the characteristic emphases in the definition of religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Although religion is difficult to define, different scholars have attempted to define it. When we examine a particular definition, we need to understand from which perspective the definition fits and the emphasis of such a definition. This will help us as scholars of religion to approach the study of religion from a scientific standpoint.

5.0 SUMMARY

Religion is difficult to define. The difficulties that beset the definition of religion are many and varied. The difficulties arise out of the nature of the concept. A few of the difficulties are the ambiguity of the term; several life experiences – which are capable of change because of individual differences, social and political location,

time and change – those experiences that lack adequate human expressions such as dreams, ecstasy, death and cultural issues. Yet scholars have attempted to define the phenomenon. Their definitions are classifiable into two types: the substantive and functional. The substantive focuses on the essential quality or essence of religion while the functional addresses the roles or impact of religion on the social. These roles or impacts could be positive or negative. It is also noteworthy that the definitions contain some of the characteristics such feeling, ritual activity, belief, monotheism, solitary individual, social valuation, illusion, notion of ultimate reality and value. One point that needs to be made is that we need to provide a definition to be able to have a focus and direction. Definition provides a compass and a direction. It is important that you read academic books on religion and note the definitions that are given of religion. No definition is the correct definition. A definition can only give you some idea of religion. As a student of religion, you will do well in getting equipped through reading all these definitions. Try also to analyse any definitions you come across, and classify them in terms of the type and perspective.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Explain the characteristic emphases in the definition of religion.
2. Discuss in detail the two types of definitions of religion.

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UNIT 3 COMMON CHARACTERISTICS/FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

When we talk about religion, there are certain basic elements and characteristics or features that we cannot avoid to mention. These are what we refer to as the common characteristics of religion. These are present in all religions regardless of whether they are primitive or modern, monotheistic or polytheistic. In this unit we will be concerning ourselves with these elements of religion that can be said to be common denominators of religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss what is meant by belief in the supernatural;

Define myth;

Explain the role of myths in religion; Discuss

the place of ritual in religion; and Evaluate the

concept of life after life (eternity).

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Belief in the Supernatural

One basic and central feature of religion is the fact that they all hold to the existence of a supernatural being or beings as the case may be. This truth can be seen in the example of many religions in the world be they ancient or modern.

The Babylonian Pantheon

The Babylonians believed in a pantheon consisting of beings; human in form but superhuman in power and immortal; each of whom, although invisible to the human eye, ruled a particular component of the cosmos, however small, and controlled it in accordance with well-laid plans and duly prescribed laws. Each was in charge of one of the great realms of heaven, earth, sea, and air; or of one of the major astral bodies—the sun, moon, and planets; or, in the realm of the Earth, of such natural entities as river, mountain, and plain, and of such social entities as city and state. Even tools and implements, such as the pickaxe, brick mould, and plough, were under the charge of specially appointed deities. Finally, each Babylonian had a personal god, a kind of good angel, to whom prayers were addressed and through whom salvation could be found.

Judaism/Islam/Christianity

Even in Judaism, Islam and Christianity which are the three major strictly monotheistic religions of the world, there is the belief in the existence of the only one God that created the heavens and the earth.

Hinduism and Buddhism

In Hinduism and Buddhism which are the examples of Oriental religion there is also the belief in the supernatural as seen in the concept of the many manifestations of Vishnu.

The African Traditional Religion

In most of the religions of Africa there is the belief in the Supreme Being who created the heavens and the earth even though he is believed to have been assisted by other countless divine beings referred to as divinities. These are also more powerful than humans; hence they are part of the supernatural.

From the few above examples, you can conclude that belief in the supernatural is so central to religion because it helps humans to look

outside themselves for the solution to the problems facing them. Without a supernatural being, there can be no religion.

3.2 The Sacred and the Profane

The belief in the supernatural naturally leads to the concept of the sacred and the profane.

3.3 Myth

Myth is a narrative that describes and portrays in symbolic language the origin of the basic elements and assumptions of a culture and in most times it is embedded in a religion. Mythic narrative relates, for example, how the world began, how humans and animals were created, and how certain customs, gestures, or forms of human activities originated. Almost all cultures possess or at one time possessed and lived in terms of myths.

Though myths look like tales, they differ from fairy tales in that they refer to a time that is different from ordinary time. The time sequence of a myth is extraordinary—an "other" time—the time before the conventional world came into being. Because myths refer to an extraordinary time and place and to gods and other supernatural beings and processes, they have usually been seen as aspects of religion. Because of the all-encompassing nature of myth, however, it can illuminate many aspects of individual and cultural life. Myths may be classified according to the dominant theme they portray. The following are the types of myths that exist.

Cosmogonic Myths

Cosmogonic myths are usually the most important myth in a culture or religion and are the ones that become the exemplary models for all other myths. It relates how the entire world came into being. In some narratives, as in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the creation of the world proceeds from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Egyptian, Australian, Greek, and Mayan myths also speak of creation from nothing. In most cases the deity in these myths is all-powerful. The deity may remain at the forefront and become the centre of religious life, as with the Hebrews, or may withdraw and become a distant or peripheral deity, as in the myths of the Australian Aborigines, Greeks, and Mayans.

Other cosmogonic myths describe creation as an emergence from the lower worlds. Among the Navajo and Hopi, for example, creation is the result of a progression upwards from lower worlds, and the emergence from the last world is the final progression into the world of humanity.

A Polynesian myth places the various layers of emergence in a coconut shell. Similar in form to such myths are myths of the world egg, known in Africa, China, India, the South Pacific, Greece, and Japan. In these myths, creation is symbolized as breaking forth from the fertile egg. The egg is the potential for all life, and sometimes, as in the myth of the Dogon people of West Africa, it is referred to as the "placenta of the world".

Eschatological Myths

Eschatological myths are closely related to cosmogonic myths. However, they exist at the other extreme, because they are myths describing the end of the world or the coming of death into the world. Myths of the end of the world are usually products of urban traditions. They presuppose the creation of the world by a moral divine being that in the end destroys the world. At this time human beings are judged and prepared for a paradisiacal existence or one of eternal torments. Such myths are present among Hebrews, Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians.

A universal conflagration and a final battle of the gods are part of Indo-European mythology and are most fully described in Germanic branches of this mythology. In Aztec mythology, several worlds are created and destroyed by the gods before the creation of the human world.

Myths of the origin of death describe how death entered the world. In these myths death is not present in the world for a long period of time, but enters it through an accident or because someone simply forgets the message of the gods concerning human life. For example, in Genesis, death enters when human beings overstep the proper limits of their knowledge.

Culture Heroes Myth

These are the myths that describe the actions and character of beings who are responsible for the discovery of a particular cultural artifact or technological process. These are the myths of the culture hero. In Greek mythology Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods, is a prototype of this kind of figure. In the Dogon culture, the blacksmith who steals seeds for the human community from the granary of the gods is similar to Prometheus. In Seram, in Indonesia, Hainuwele is also such a figure; from the orifices of her body she provides the community with a host of necessary and luxury goods. In Yorubaland of Nigeria there are myths concerning Sango, the third king of the kingdom and who doubles as the god of thunder.

3.4 Ritual Practices

Rituals are particular types of formal performance in which the participants carry out a series of relatively stereotyped actions and make a series of relatively standardized statements largely prescribed by custom and sanctioned by precedent. Historical evidence suggests that rituals tend to be much more stable and invariable than most human customary activity. The capacity of the participants to modify the form and content of ritual activities is usually much less than would be the case if the activities were primarily focused on political, economic, or recreational concerns.

Types of Rituals

Rituals of initiation

These are the rituals used to mark transition from childhood through adolescence into adulthood. In these rituals the initiates are first dramatically separated from their mothers, from the households in which they have been brought up, and symbolically from their childhood. They enter a luminal or threshold phase of the ritual in which their joint equality, their separation from normal society, and their lack of status are stressed. They are subject to various tests of endurance, often including circumcision or other painful operations, which may stress in a most dramatic way their subjection to those organizing the ritual, who represent the force of politically organized society. At the same time such ordeals give opportunities to the initiates to stress their bravery and their ability to take on the responsibilities of adult life. It is not accidental that the ordeals at initiation often involve the genitals, as initiation is commonly specified as a qualification for marriage, and locally defined responsible sexuality. In the final phase of the ritual the initiated are formally welcomed back into society and reincorporated into normal productive activities as adults. At initiation, initiates are also commonly inducted into shared new knowledge, labeled as a privilege of adulthood, marked as important by the pain of the associated ordeals and "sacralized" by association with invisible beings or powers.

Political Rituals

These are rituals that seem to carry political connotations. Such rituals tend to act to maintain the status quo, to perpetuate social differentiation, to invest the powers that be with sanctified legitimacy. Examples of political rituals are coronations and other installation rituals which in the real sense sanctify, define, and legitimize transfers of power and authority.

Life-Cycle Rituals

Apart from initiation rituals, these are rituals that are used to mark out the life-cycle period in the religious community. A major example is

marriage and other life-cycle rituals that are designed to bless, mark out, or sanction significant transitions in the lives of individuals.

Calendar Rituals

Calendar rituals are the rituals that are used to provide an established, ordered, and meaningful pattern for the changing seasons, and the productive and other activities associated with them. An example of this is the yam festival in most African societies which is mainly used to celebrate the harvest and to declare farming closed for some time.

We have to note however that in the face of increasingly secularized societies of the modern urbanized and industrialized world, elaborate rituals now seem strange to many people. However, this is a relatively recent phenomenon, which has gathered pace in the last generation or two. Until then almost everybody in the world, from members of non-literate nomadic hunter-gatherer societies to highly literate members of societies with access to complex technologies, participated from time to time in elaborate ritual activities that were in general regarded as meaningful and important. Such activities are among the most universal of all human social activities. They remain extraordinarily widespread and remarkably persistent.

3.5 Doctrines/Ethical Principles/Moral Codes

Doctrine is a belief system that forms a part of every religion. Although the word *doctrine* is sometimes used for such a system as a whole as in the term "Christian doctrine"; it is more commonly used for particular items of belief as in the terms "the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of creation" and "the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation". The particular beliefs constitute a more or less coherent whole, however, and it is in the context of the whole that each doctrine should be understood and evaluated. The Latin word *doctrina* means "teaching" and religious beliefs are often first specifically formulated in the process of instructing initiates. Although religious doctrines have sometimes been regarded as unchanging truths, today it is generally recognized that even if a doctrine contains some permanent core of truth, its expression will always reflect the relativities of a particular age and culture, so that new expressions are constantly needed if doctrines are to remain intelligible and persuasive. Although in some religions, doctrines have not been precisely formulated, in many others they have been the subject of sharp controversy, even to the point of disrupting the community of believers. Most of the world religions do, in fact, exhibit doctrinal divisions. When a religious authority proposes one expression of a doctrine to the exclusion of other possible ones, it becomes known as a dogma.

3.6 Life-After-Life

Most, if not all religions of the world has the concept of life after life. The belief in most religions is that after the death of human beings, they live the physical realm and continue to live in the spiritual realm where they will live forever. Most of the doctrines of life after life also teach that at this time there will be eternal judgement, and the good ones will go to paradise which is called by many names in the many religions. The wicked, on the other hand, would be destroyed in the end.

3.7 Propagation

One feature of religion that is becoming sharper by the day is propagation. Even the traditional religion and the Oriental religion that hitherto have been passive when it comes to the issue of propagation are now becoming volatile. Propagation is the means by which every religion tries to gain adherents from the unbelievers or from the people of other religions in other to continue to exist as a religion.

3.8 Religious Experience/Expression

Devotees of all religions pass through what is called a religious experience. This varies from religion to religion but there are certain experiences that cut across all religions. Examples of these are trances, visions and dreams. On the other hand, religious expressions are such expressions that have to do with the verbalization of religious experiences. In Christianity, speaking in tongues is an example of such religious expression.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have studied about the characteristic features of all religions in the world whether they are the primitive ancient polytheistic religions or the more modern refined monotheistic religions. These features are: Belief in the Supernatural, The Sacred and the Profane, Myths, Ritual Practices, Doctrines/Ethical Principles/Moral Codes, Life- After-Life, Propagation and Religious Experience/Expression.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have studied in this unit:

Belief in the supernatural is the core feature of any religion.

Places and materials consecrated to the divine are regarded as sacred.

Myths are narratives in symbolic language that describes the origin of the basic elements.

There are three major types of myths, namely: cosmogonic myths, eschatological myths and culture heroes' myths.

There are four types of rituals: initiation ritual, political ritual, life-cycle ritual and calendar ritual.

Doctrines are belief systems that form a part of every religion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss five features of religion in a paragraph each.

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UNIT 4 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, you studied about the features and the characteristics of religion. You learnt that these features are the aspects that describe the religion. In this unit, you will be introduced to the various approaches to the study of religion. You will remember we have said earlier that the definition of religion depends on the approach from which the one defining religion takes. In this unit you will study more about these approaches. By approaches we mean the methods employed in the study of religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Enumerate the various approaches to the study of religion

Discuss the various approaches to the study of religion

Compare and contrast the various approaches

Explain the role of data in the approaches to the study of religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Historical Approach

The historical approach helps us to understand and know the origin, which is: the beginning, the development and the spread of the various religions of the world. In addition, this approach affords us the opportunity of knowing the contributions of great religious figures in the different religions like Jesus, Buddha and Confucius among others.

3.2 Literary Approach

This approach to the study of religion helps us to examine the thoughts and the words of the key figures of the religion on paper. It is this approach that has led people to the sacred scriptures of the various religions. Through this method, humans have been furnished with the authentic facts of the origin, development, doctrine spread of the religion, worship mode of the religion and the expectations of the particular religion. This method has contributed to the authenticity and the credibility given to the religions which has written scriptures.

3.3 Comparative Approach

This approach makes use of comparative analysis through which an objective, honest and dispassionate analysis of religion is obtained. It reveals that in spite of the differences present in the different religions, there are similarities running across them. If used conscientiously, this method can bring about a better understanding among the followers of the different religions thereby fostering religious harmony.

3.4 Psychological Approach

This approach recognizes the fact that religion itself arose out of the psychological needs of humans. The theories of the origin attest to this fact, on the basis that religion arose out of people's desire to satisfy their inner complexities; and this to a very large extent is psychological.

3.5 Philosophical Approach

This is one approach that scholars dread and are hesitant to use it in the evaluation of the study of religion. This is because while religion thrives on faith and belief, philosophy is more interested in using reason and logic to decipher its object of study. Having noted this however, we must emphasize that since humans are bound not only to reason about their faith, but also to embark on the quest from knowledge about the Supreme Being, and who is the object of their religion, then the philosophical approach cannot be neglected in the study of religions.

3.6 Sociological Approach

This approach is very significant because religion cannot be practiced in a vacuum or in isolation of humans. Human beings, according to the sociologist are social animals. It is this sociological approach that demonstrates how religion can be studied as one of human's social activities and the consequent role religion can play in fostering social order in the society.

3.7 Data and the Study of Religions

The objects of investigation, which actually refers to what and what are being studied are commonly referred to as data. Loosely speaking, data includes elements such as ideas, ideals, individual feelings, man-made objects, natural and social phenomena. In the study of religion there are no fixed data so far it can be classified as religious by implication.

Care must however be taken in determine what will constitute data for the study of religions. This is because simple fiat cannot be used to determine what will constitute religious data. For example, it has been discovered in the past that a datum when viewed from a religious angle may be religious while the same datum may loose its religious quality when used in a non-religious way. An example that readily comes to mind in is that of the Christian cross. The cross is a religious datum as a crucifix. However, it can be used to represent cross-roads for a driver and ceases to be a datum. There are other data that may also become religious data by definition but when considered ordinarily, they may have nothing to do with religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Though approaches to the study of religion can be said to be varied, a better understanding of religion can only be obtained if all these approaches are blended together for a holistic approach to the study of religion. In other words, all the various approaches are relevant and indispensable to a good understand of religion. Data is also one vital element that is used in the study of religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

Data are the objects of study.

Religious data cannot be classified by any hard and fast rule.

There are six approaches to the study of religion, namely: the historical, literary, comparative, psychological, philosophical and sociological.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Mention and discuss the different approaches to the study of religion.

2. Which of these approaches in your opinion is the most suitable for the study of

religion?

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MODULE 2

UNIT 1 RELIGIOUS STUDIES AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Before going further in this course, there is one area that has to be clarified and this is the study of religion as an academic discipline. In this unit, you will be concerned with the reasons why religion has to be studied and you will also learn the various fields of study that are available in religious studies.

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Discuss why religion should be studied;

Enumerate the various fields of study available in Christian Religious Studies; and

Determine your area of interest.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Why study religion?

"Why we study religion" should be our first basic question in undertaking the study of religion. Some students know exactly why they wish to undertake the study while others have no clear sense of their intention. We have discovered, however, that students who found themselves in the study of religion soon found out several reasons why

they were pursuing the right course, and why others needed to also engage in pursuing it. We have also noted that others who encountered religious issues in life situations and other careers as in politics, history, ecology, international relations, medicine, etc have seen the need to study religion in a formal and structured system.

Studying religion is the path to emancipation from ignorance. Contrary to the prevalent belief, the ignorant individual is the one who does not acknowledge that there is God. This is why the one of the wise sayings of Israel states that "the fool says in his heart that there is no God". The fool in the context of that saying does not refer to a moron but rather, to the ignorant.

As in every field of learning, the study of religion leads to the acquisition of information and skills. Consequently, those who study religion become experts in the field they have chosen to study.

The study of religion also leads to an increased appreciation of God and fellow human beings. It leads to an increased appreciation of God in that God seems to be the object of all religions. It leads to the appreciation of fellow human beings in that you would be able to see how humans of different ages and from different places have been able to grasp the concept of the divine and have attempted to relate with the divine.

3.2 What to study in religion: The Scope and Areas of the Discipline

Religion today has become a specialized course as there are so many areas that one could specialize in. Looking at Christianity as an example, the following are the areas that one could specialize:

Biblical Studies

This is the area of religious study that deals exclusively with the study of the sacred text of Christianity – the Bible. Scholars in this field have two broad areas – the Old Testament and the New Testament. It has to be noted however that the study of textual criticism (that aspect of biblical studies that deals with the transmission of the correct text of the Bible) is however currently a field of study in its own right but subsumed within biblical studies.

Theological Studies

Theological studies is that aspect of Christian religious studies that deals with the understanding of the doctrines and the dogmas of the church. Theological studies have always been approached from two basic angles: the historical angle and the contemporary angle. Apart from

systematic theology that is the systematic studies of theology, the following are the branches of theology that one could specialize in: Systematic theology, Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology, Catholic Theology, Protestant Theology, Evangelical Theology, African Christian Theology and Islamic Theology.

Comparative Studies of Religion

In comparative studies, the scholars intend to study other religions from an apologetic point of view. This means that though they are studying other religions, they are only doing it with the purpose of being able to preach the gospel to the adherents of that faith and to be able to explain their faith to others. The following are the major divisions within comparative studies of religion:

African Traditional Religion: this is the field of study that examines the traditional religions of the Africans. It attempts to systematize their beliefs and theology as well as practices.

New Religious Movements: this is field of study that is dedicated to the study of Oriental religions that have suddenly gained popularity in the world. The religions studied under this umbrella include: Buddhism, Hinduism and the Hare Krishna movement.

Islamic Religious Studies: Islamic religion is often studied on its own because of its global importance to the culture, politics and economy of the globe. It has to be noted too that the study of Islam is of particular interest to the Nigerians because of the large presence of Muslims in the country.

Historical Studies

This is the aspect of religious studies that focus on the history of the church both as a corporate organization and as local parishes. The major field here is Church History.

Ethics, Morality and Social Issues

This is the major area of Christian religious studies that has to do with the relationship between the demands of the faith and the society. It examines what is known as the ethics of the religion vis-à-vis the ethics of the society. It also looks at morality issues. Under this umbrella, the following can be studied: Ethics and Morality, Social issues and Society and Culture and cultural issues.

There are other specialized fields in religious studies that have grown beyond the confines of Christian religious studies and have become specialized fields on their own and are so pursued. These are, Sociology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion, Psychology of Religion and Ecology/Geography of Religion. These courses can be studied on their own and so no comment would be made here on them.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit you have been given three major reasons why religion is being studied and you have been exposed to the various fields of study that exist within Christian Theology, which is your field. Most of these fields have been explained briefly only to arouse your curiosity so that you can learn about them more.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have been exposed to in this unit:

Reasons for the study of religion includes: emancipation from ignorance, acquisition of information and skills and an increased appreciation of God and human beings.

The followings are the various fields of study available: biblical studies, theological studies, comparative studies, historical studies and Ethics, morality and societal studies.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss in full, why we need to study religion.

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UNIT 2 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit you have studied about the approaches of education. In this unit you will be focusing on the requirements for the study of religion. This unit is very important because of the nature of religion and humans' disposition to religion. These requirements would be discussed under two broad sub-topics: personal human requirements and material requirements.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

List the necessary material items that are needed for the study of religion;

List the necessary human requirements; and

Discuss the importance of the items needed for the study of religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Personal Human Requirements

In order to satisfy the reason for this unit, we have to say that since it is human beings that conduct the study of religion, there are certain characteristics that are required for the person that would engage in a meaningful study of religion. The following are the major

characteristics:

Openness

There is the need for you to be open- minded. This is because in the course of your study of religion you will come across many facts that seem to render your previous opinions and knowledge useless or out of date. The tendency for us as human beings at this point is to close our minds to such truths. But for you to engage in a fruitful study of religion, such things must engage your attention.

Objectivity

Very close to open mindedness is the issue of objectivity. Objectivity is very important because as a researcher would hold, subjectivity is no good in the course of academic study. This belief is much truer in the quest for the study of religion. This is because most people who go into the study of religion usually go in with a bias. For example, as a Christian if you begin to study Islamic religion, the tendency is that you will begin to evaluate Islamic religion from a Christian viewpoint. This will constitute a barrier between you and an objective study of the religion, and your findings will consequently be inaccurate. Even if an atheist comes into the study of religion he/she is likely to come out as a false critic because from the onset there is a stated belief that there is no God. To be able to understand any religion you must be objective in your approach.

It was bias and subjectivity that made the early Europeans study the African Traditional Religion, and to conclude that that the African has no concept of God. However, there have been several developments in the field since then that have corrected some erroneous ideas.

Caution

It is also important that when you come to the study of religion to be very cautious. This is because when studying religion you must be very careful not offend the sensibilities of the adherents of the religion. Once they are offended, you will never be able to get the truth of what you are studying again because as human beings they will be on the defensive.

Carefulness

Finally, you must be very careful to obey and observe the dictates of the religion you are studying especially if your research involves observation. For example, there are some religions that will forbid you to put on shoes within the precincts of the shrine or the temple or even the church. There are some religions in which some colours are forbidden.

3.2 Basic Material Requirements

Apart from the human requirements needed in the study of religion, it is very important to know that the following materials are necessary:

Writing materials

In the course of your research, you will need to jot down what you observe in the behaviour of the adherents of the religion. For this, writing materials like pen, pencil and jotter come in handy. Never go for a research without these items.

Tape Recorder

You will also need a tape recorder during this period because you will need to conduct interviews with the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the religion as well as with the lay people. Such interviews are important because they help you to obtain first hand information from the practitioners of the religion. When conducting interviews however, it is important to have them recorded because you can always get back to the recorded interview to cross check your facts. Note that there is no way you can record an interview session with only writing materials. If you do, you are bound to lose vital information.

Video Recorder

A video recorder is useful for the purpose of research. This is because religious expressions are most of the time kinetic in nature; that is they belong to the realm of body language. These include the dances, the postures taken in prayer and worship, the expressions during rituals of all kinds and the dramatic presentations of these expressions. All these cannot be captured by writing materials or by the tape recorder. Yet, they are of tremendous importance in the interpretation of the religion from the point of view of the adherents.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have studied about the requirements needed for the study of religion. They have been divided into two broad classes: the human and the material. The human requirements border more on the needed character for a fruitful research, the materials that are necessary for the recording of observations and the rituals of the religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have studied in this unit:

Openness in needed in the study of religion

Objectivity is of paramount importance in the study of religion

Caution must always be taken while studying a religion

The one studying the religion must always be careful

It is important to have a record of all the activities of religion by using writing materials, tape recorders and video-recorders.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss the importance of the human requirements in the study of religion.

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UNIT 3 PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

The study of religion as an academic discipline has some basic problems. This unit is dedicated to the examination of the multi-faceted problems that face the study of religion. This unit marks the end of the section that deals with the study of religion as an academic discipline.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

Discuss the problems facing the study of religion due to the nature of religion itself;

Highlight the obstacles that personal biases pose to the study of religion;

Identify the social issues involved in the study of religion;

Discuss the political angle to the study of religion; and

Examine the problem the economy poses to the study of religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Nature of Religion

One of the major problems facing the study of religion has to do with the nature of religion itself. Religion by its very nature is an attempt to

study and understand the supernatural. This is the most ironic of all the problems of the study of religion. This is because in reality, it is highly impossible for the natural to study the supernatural. In addition, the fact remains that religion is highly subjective. It has to do with the issues of what people believe, and what their values are. Consequently, most of the data to be collected in the study of religion are mot scientifically verifiable as is the case of other fields of study. For example, in the realm of the sciences, it is possible to observe for example, how many times per second the heart beats and state it categorically; or to identify the various reactions that the mixture of certain chemicals will give. In the realm of the social sciences too, it is possible to do statistical analysis to measure certain things to a certain degree. For example, you cam measure the reaction of a certain group of people to certain events and arrive at a postulation. However, in the study of religion, it is impossible to measure whether someone believes what he/she says he/she believes. The realm of religion is thus viewed in the light of subjectivity, and this is what makes the study of religion from an academic perspective very problematic.

3.2 Personal Biases

Another great obstacle to the study of religion is the subjectivity of the researcher which intervenes with the study of religion more often than not. It has always been very difficult for most scholars of religion to separate their personal faith from the study of religion as an academic discipline. In fact, the veracity of this point can be seen in the fact that even if an atheist studies religion, he/she would be doing so from an atheistic point of view. Let us cite some practical examples: if a Christian is studying the Islamic religion, most of the time he/she evaluates the teachings, doctrines and practices of the Islamic faith from the perspective of his/her own Christian faith and vice versa. For example, Christians may criticise Muslims for denying the divinity of Jesus Christ, while Muslims on the other hand may criticise Christians for serving three gods. To obtain objective results in the study of religion however, all forms of personal biases must be removed.

3.3 Social Problems

The social issues involved in the study of religion are due to the fact that because religion has a sociological dimension and it usually overlaps with religion to the extent that distinctions between the two become blurred. This is because most of the time, especially in hyper-religious communities, most societal laws are coded in religious forms thus giving them a quasi-divine legitimacy.

3.4 Political Problems

As it had been pointed out in other courses, there has always been a very close relationship between religion and politics, and the two have

always been used to exploit each other. For example, in Nigeria, there have been many religious riots that have been politically motivated. On the surface, it may appear as if it is the religion in itself that is problematic, but the problem lies in those that are using religion to advance certain political goals.

3.5 Economic Problems

The greatest problem that economy poses to the study of religion lies in the fact that it costs a lot of money to conduct a good research. Consequently, since most people do not have enough to attend to those things considered important, the tendency is to neglect to pay attention to the issue of religion, let alone budget money for its study. The researchers into religion then have no choice but to use only that which is available for the study of religion.

4.0 Conclusion

It can be safely concluded that there are various problems facing the academic study of religion ranging from the nature of religion itself to other socio-economic problems as well as political factors.

5.0 Summary

The following are the major points learnt in this unit:

The nature of religion makes objectivity in the study of religion difficult to attain;

Personal biases affect the study of religion;

The relationship between politics and religion makes it difficult to study religion as it should be studied; and

The relationship between the society and religion makes it difficult to study religion as it should be studied.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Discuss the factors that pose problems to the study of religion.

7.0 References/Further Readings

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UNIT 4 THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Religion is a phenomenon that resides wherever people are found. We have noted that it is difficult to have a precise definition for religion. But religion is found both in great metropolitan capitals as well as in rural villages. It manifests in western and traditional societies. In most human communities around the world, there are temples, shrines, churches, mosques, pyramids, monuments, etc. Most of these express human religion in a great intensity. Even in most industrialised cities, some natural phenomena have been reconstructed to tourist centres, and indeed old burial sites and caves point to the religious nature of some particular people who once lived in some particular communities. Images and symbols of community significance are erected, reflecting religious founders and leaders which are now treated with utmost reverence and sacredness.

However, we need to inquire into the evolution of religion. The very basic question into our evolutionary inquiry is: "where do religions come from?" The question may be further put in the following ways:

(a) What is the source of religion? How did religion evolve? How did religion begin? Who began religion?

(b) What is the earliest form in which religion began? That is, when or what time did religion begin?

(c) What is responsible for the religious nature of humans?

Our answers to these questions will be given by examining different theories that have been offered by different minds on the origins of religion. Basically, we shall discuss such theories along the categories of anthropology, sociology, psychology and revelation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Mention the different theories of the origin of religion;

Explain the different theories; and

Critically assess each theory as it explains the origin of religion.

3.1 Classifying the Theories of the Origin of Religions

We can classify the theories of the origin of religion into different categories. The categories focus on two concepts in understanding religion: experience and expression. The two concepts are valuable in understanding from which source scholars developed their theories of the origin of religion. Religion operates within these two dimensions.

Religious experience can be explained as those moments of great realization, awakening, and emotional power attributed to direct encounter with the divine or transcendent reality. It is intense in character and in some cases it is personal; an encounter which transforms the person or a group into a new being or group. Religious experience is used as the basis for determining the truth in religion. It gives shapes and forms to religious expressions.

Religious expression could be expressed in three forms: the theoretical, the practical and the sociological. The theoretical is the expression of religion in words and ideas, as in religious doctrines, philosophies, myths and lore. The practical is the expression of religion in practices such as in worship, rite, prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, and costume. The sociological is the expression of religion in groups, institutions, social relations, as between spiritual leader and follower; and relation of the religion to the larger social order.

The theories can be classified broadly:

(a) Historical theories
(b) Revelatory theories
(c) Anthropological theories
(d) Sociological theories
(e) Psychological theories
(f) Monotheistic theories
(g) Philosophical theories.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1

Mention the different classifications of the theories of origin of religion.

3.2 Historical Theories

Darwinism

Charles Darwin's theory is fundamental in evolutionary theory. He postulated that everything in the world has its origin in rudimentary beginning. To him, there is the process of evolution through which all things in the world pass in order to arrive at the present form. This could be applied to religion as religion is like any other phenomenon, developing from a very lowly, not quite well structured beginning. The development will be affected by changing historical conditions. Darwin's theory is in direct contest with creationism, a theory that expresses the view that the universe and all things in it were created directly by God.

One effect of Darwin's evolutionary theory is that it stimulates researchers to examine and study the history of the 'indigenous' peoples of the world. It is believed that it is in indigenous societies that the past religious life of the people could be uncovered.

A reflection on Darwin's evolutionary theory is necessary. The theory provides us with information that all things in the world including religion have beginnings. However, although Darwin's theory seems to show a rationalistic approach to explaining religion, his theory has often been criticized as not capable of revealing the fact that human beings could have revelatory encounter with a divine being. It also does not explain that human beings have the capacity of creating some symbols and rituals around which a society may construct their reality as we encounter in the cases of the sociologists and psychologists. The theory fails to account for the progression of the various religious traditions; it also does not explain the development of monotheism which is fundamental to such religious traditions as Islam and Christianity.

Euhemerism

Euhemerism is a theory that was attributed to Euhemerism. He argued that the concept of gods developed out of elaborate legends concerned originally with historical people. To him, gods are nothing but mortals who were raised to the rank of gods because of their merits. He came about this generalisation during his voyages on the island of Panchaia which he visited. He saw a golden pillar bearing a golden engraving. From there, he read about the biography of Zeus, who was the king of the island at a time. This king travelled throughout the world and established the worship of gods everywhere. Zeus built a temple for himself and was adored by a cult as Zeus Triphylios.

Euhemerism seemed to have shared in the skepticism of his contemporaries such as Hecataeus who also held the view that the gods of Egypt were just deified benefactors of humankind. According to him, it would be idle to seek for the origin of religion elsewhere than in the deification of benefactors and heroes after their death. Such heroes gained recognition and they were accorded divine statuses as divine beings even before their death.

It is important to note that Euhemerism fails to really deal with the origin of religion. In most world religious traditions, there are distinctions between deified beings and gods or spirits. The theory does not explain the structural development of polytheism and monotheism neither does it provide explanation for the experiential knowledge which people of religious traditions claim to have.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3:2

Discuss Darwinism and Euhemerism as evolutionary theories.

3.3 Revelatory Theories

Revelation is a religious concept and has a strong theological connotation. Revelation means self-disclosure of the divine. That is, God revealing himself to human beings. Revelatory theory, therefore, implies divine communication of the sacred to human being. We shall examine three scholars who are noted for their contributions in the area of revelatory theories. These are Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade and Emil Brunner.

Rudolf Otto

Rudolf Otto was a philosophical theologian and professor of systematic theology at the University of Marburg. His work synthesised the philosophical, phenomenological and theological concerns in explaining the experience of human beings with the divine. His popular book *The Idea of the Holy* explains his revelatory theory. He describes the divine as the numinous or *numen praesens* (divine presence). In his book, *The Idea of the Holy*, he explained that human being encounters the numinous with fear and trembling. He describes this encounter with the Latin expression *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that is, a mystery that is terrifying and at the same time fascinating. The two-sided effect of this encounter could be explained thus. First, when human being encounters the numinous, he or she feels a sense of self-abasement, a sense of inadequacy and a feeling of awesomeness. Second, human beings are attracted and magnetised by the numinous. They wish and try to escape but they cannot escape; theywant the numinous.

Otto's theory can be explained using the Old Testament biblical story of Moses who encountered the divine in the wilderness. It was in the wilderness where he saw a bush that was burning, but did not burn. It was a mystery to him, an exciting one, but at the same time frightening. At the site, he heard a voice that told him to remove his shoes because where he was approaching was a holy ground. Another notable example was the experience of Isaiah the prophet. He saw God with his glory in a temple. The sight of God was so imposing that he gave such a wonderful description of God's majesty. This wonder was at the same time frightening as he saw himself incapable of beholding the Lord. This made him to proclaim woe on himself. The divine had to do some spiritual operation on him when an angel took a coal of fire from the altar of God and used it to touch the lips of Isaiah. It was a perfect purification for Isaiah.

This theory is highly revealing of the essence of religion as manifested in human being's experiential capacity of the divine. It also shows the intrinsic qualities of the experience of the sacred. However, it fails to provide explanations to the real origin of religion as illustrations given explain a transition from a religious state to a more deeply religious state. Secondly, Otto turns the divine into a fearful and unapproachable Supreme Being who you have to go to though some intermediaries.

Mircea Eliade

Mircea Eliade is famous for his attempt to discern elemental, timeless, patterns of religious life. He took a comparative approach which combines history and phenomenology to present a model of the human as *homo religiosus*. To him, human beings are usually motivated by the way the divine manifested itself in nature. Drawing his materials from archaic cultures, Eliade discovered that traditional humanity finds meaning and value of its existence in basic archetypes.

According to Eliade, the world of human beings presents the supernatural valence. That is, the world reveals a modality of the sacred. As human beings encounter the sacred or the divine in his or her own world, the divine shows itself to be of different standing from natural realities. This attitude creates in human beings to differentiate between the sacred and the profane, the divine and the material. This manifestation of the sacred is called *hierophany*. In his book *The Sacred and the Profane,* he noted certain basic phenomenon through which the sacred and the profane like space, time and nature are differentiated.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3:3

(a) What is the meaning of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*? (b) What is hierophany?

3.4 Anthropological Theories

In its broad sense, anthropologists engage in the study of human culture. They look at aspects of the culture and how human beings interact with them over time.

Animism and E.B. Tylor

Animism is derived from the Latin word, *anima*, which means "breath" or "soul". Technically in religion, it means belief in spiritual beings. As a philosophical theory, animism, usually called panpsychism, is the doctrine that all objects in the world have an inner or psychological being. The 18th-century German doctor and chemist Georg Ernst Stahl coined the word *animism* to describe his theory that the soul is the vital principle responsible for organic development. Since the late 19th century, however, the term has been mainly associated with anthropology and the British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, who described the origin of religion and primitive beliefs in terms of animism.

In *Primitive Culture* (1871) Tylor defined animism as the general belief in spiritual beings and considered it "a minimum definition of religion". He asserted that all religions, from the simplest to the most complex, involve some form of animism. According to Tylor, primitive peoples, defined as those without written traditions, believe that spirits or souls are the cause of life in human beings; they picture souls as phantoms, resembling vapours or shadows, which can transmigrate from person to person, from the dead to the living, and from and into plants, animals, and lifeless objects. In deriving his theory, Tylor assumed that an animistic philosophy developed in an attempt to explain the causes of sleep, dreams, trances, and death; the difference between a living body and a dead one; and the nature of the images that one sees in dreams and trances.

Tylor's theories were criticized by the British anthropologist Robert R. Marett, who claimed that primitives could not have been so intellectual and that religion must have had a more emotional, intuitional origin. He rejected Tylor's theory that *all* objects were regarded as being alive. Marett opined that primitive peoples must have recognized some lifeless objects and probably regarded only those objects that had unusual qualities or that behaved in some seemingly unpredictable or mysterious way as being alive. He held, moreover, that the ancient concept of vitality was not sophisticated enough to include the notion of a soul or spirit residing in the object. Primitive peoples treated the objects they considered animate as if these things had life, feeling, and a will of their own, but did not make a distinction between the body of an object and a soul that could enter or leave it. Marett called this view "animatism" or "preanimism", and he claimed that animism had to arise out of animatism, which may even continue to exist alongside more highly developed animistic beliefs.

Totemism and Emile Durkheim

Totemism can be defined as a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a *totem.* The totem may be a particular species of bird, animal, or plant; or it may be a natural phenomenon or feature of the landscape with which a group believes itself linked in some way. The term *totem* is derived from the language of the Ojibwa, a Native North American people.

The totemic relationship is widespread and has been observed in, for example, Malaysia, Africa, and Guinea. It is especially strong among some Native Americans and the Australian Aborigines. In these societies, the totem is often regarded as a companion and helper with supernatural powers, and, as such, is respected and occasionally venerated. The individuals of a totemic group see themselves as partially identified with or assimilated to the totem, which may be referred to by special names or symbols. Descent may be traced to an original totemic ancestor, which becomes the symbol of the group. With the exception of some totemic rituals, killing, eating, or touching the totem is prohibited. Individual shamans have been known to cultivate a personal friendship with a particular totemic animal or plant.

The basis of totemism seems to lie in the world-view of some societies that assume a specific relationship between human beings and the powers of nature, a relationship that serves as the foundation for a classificatory scheme. Totemism may thus be interpreted as a conceptual device for sorting out social groups by means of natural emblems. Furthermore, some scholars point out that when different social groups within the same society draw their names and identities from plants or animals, these totems serve as symbolic devices showing that society, although divided into many groups, still remains a whole. Totems identify and symbolize a group that shares common interests—particularly an interest in the protection of kin members—in societies that have no other agency or mechanism for performing this function. Recently, some anthropologists have argued that Australian totemism, because of its taboos against killing and eating one's totem, has acted as a device for conservation, helping people adapt to their natural environment. Totemism would, in this interpretation, have an ecological significance and would thus have played an important role in the development and survival of those societies in which it flourished.

Emile Durhkeim's teachings on totemism can be seen in his work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. In this book, he used examples from totemic religions among Australian and American Aborigines to show how the most fundamental "collective representations" (concepts, symbols, and beliefs) reflect past and present social organization. Certain "sacred" collective representations, such as

the totem, serve the function of giving members of society a common identity and excite allegiance.

Magic and G.J. Frazer

Magic, in the concept of religion is the art of influencing the course of events or gaining knowledge by supernatural means. Magic is linked to alchemy, occultism, spiritualism, superstition, and witchcraft. The term is derived from the ancient Persian magi, whose priestly occupations included dealing with the occult. The ancient Greeks and Romans also practised magic. According to anthropologists, magical beliefs and practices exist in all cultures. In western cultures, we can see these beliefs in practices such as fortune-telling, communication with the dead, astrology, and belief in lucky numbers and charms.

Magic in simple societies utilizes nearly all knowledge, including scientific and medical knowledge and practices. The modern sciences trace their origins from practices and beliefs that were originally magical. Thus, medieval alchemy led to the development of modern chemistry and physics, and astrology led to modern astronomy.

Magic is divided into two main categories: white (or good) magic and black (or evil) magic. White magic is used to heal and to counteract the effects of black magic; the latter is invoked to kill or to injure, or for selfish gain. During the Middle Ages, black magic consisted of witchcraft, sorcery, and the invocation of demons; white magic consisted of the tolerated forms, such as astrology, hypnosis, and herbalism.

Magical practices may be grouped under four headings. The first, called sympathetic magic, is based on symbolism and wish fulfillment. Desired effects are accomplished by imitation or by making use of associated objects. Thus, it is thought, one may injure enemies by sticking pins into images of them, by mentioning their names in a spell, or by burning hair or nail parings from their bodies. Similarly, the strength, fleetness, or skill of an animal may be acquired by eating its flesh or by using tools made from its skin, horns, or bones. A second major magical practice is divination, the acquisition of secret knowledge by sortilege (casting lots), augury (interpreting omens or portents), astrology (interpreting the positions and conjunctions of the stars and planets), and tongues (inspired utterances by people in a state of trance, by oracular priests, or by mediums). The third form of magic is thaumaturgy, or wonder- working, which includes alchemy, witchcraft, and sorcery. The fourth form of magic is incantation, or the chanting of spells, verses, or formulas that contain the names of supernatural beings or of people who are to be helped or injured. Magic rituals are generally a combination of these forms.

Frazer's work covered a wide area of anthropological research, but he was especially interested in the study of myth and religion. He is best known for his book *The Golden Bough* (1890), a study of ancient cults, rites, and myths, and their parallels with early Christianity. This book,

which established Frazer's reputation as a distinguished scholar, was expanded to 13 volumes in 1915.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have been exposed to the theories of the origin of religion. These theories are classified under seven broad headings. In this unit, only three of these categories have been studied. These three categories are: historical, revelatory and anthropological theories. Under historical theories, you have studied Darwinism and Euhemerism, while revelatory theories are studied as exposed by Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. Under anthropological theories, animism, totemism and magic are studied as developed by E. B. Tylor, Emile Durkheim and G. J. Frazer respectively.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points learnt in this unit:

There are seven categories of the theories of the origin of religion.

Darwinism and Euhemerism are example of the historical theory.

Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade are exponents of revelatory theory.

Animism, totemism and magic are sub-categories of the anthropological theory.

Tylor defined animism as the general belief in spiritual beings and considered it "a minimum definition of religion". He asserted that all religions, from the simplest to the most complex, involve some form of animism.

Totemism can be defined as a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on an assumed relationship between an individual or a social group and a natural object known as a *totem.*

Magic in the concept of religion is the art of influencing the course of events or gaining knowledge by supernatural means.

7.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Would you agree that Darwinism is a good theory for the explanation of the origin of religion?

Discuss animism as a theory of the development of religion.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Connolly, Peter (ed.) 1999. *Approaches to the Study of Religion* Cassell, London and New York.

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Unit 5 Religious Pluralism

1.0 Introduction

Religious pluralism is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettoes with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies. Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly. Third, pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another. Fourth, pluralism is based on dialogue. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one's commitments.

2.0 Objectives

The objectives of this topic are to help the student to:
Understand the critical issues that are involved in the study of religion
Interact more meaningfully on issues of interfaith dialogue

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Religious Pluralism, Diversity and Tolerance

Religious pluralism, to paraphrase the title of a recent academic work, goes beyond mere toleration. Beneke, in *Beyond Toleration: The Religious Origins of American Pluralism*, explains the difference between religious tolerance and religious pluralism by pointing to the situation in the late 18th century United States. By the 1730s, in most colonies religious minorities had obtained what contemporaries called religious toleration: "The policy of toleration relieved religious minorities of some physical punishments and some financial burdens, but it did not make them free from the indignities of prejudice and exclusion. Nor did it make them equal. Those 'tolerated' could still be barred from civil offices, military positions, and university posts." This has happened in many countries around the world. In short, religious toleration is only the absence of religious persecution, and does not necessarily preclude religious discrimination. Religious pluralism can be defined as "respecting the otherness of others" and accepting the given uniqueness endowed to each one of us.

Religious intolerance, defined as the practice of keeping others from acting in accordance with their religious beliefs, is not new. However, there is concern world-wide over the increasing amount, and increasingly violent nature, of such behavior. Accordingly, there is understandably a renewed interest in fostering religiously tolerant environments in which individuals with differing religious perspectives can practice their faiths unencumbered.

A number of philosophers have recently turned their attention to the relationship between religious diversity and religious tolerance, with the main focus on whether acknowledgement of, and subsequent reflection on, religious diversity might lead to greater religious tolerance. The main argument supporting the claim that acknowledged diversity can foster tolerance was proposed by the late Philip Quinn (Quinn, 2001, 57–80; 2002, 533–537; 2005a, 136–139).[2] He maintained that (1) serious reflection on the undeniable reality of religious diversity will necessarily weaken an individual's justification for believing that her religious perspective is superior to the perspectives of others and that (2) this weakened justification can, and hopefully will for some, lead to greater religious tolerance — for example, will lead to a more accepting, less confrontational attitude toward others.

Both of Quinn's contentions have been challenged. The claim that reflection of the acknowledged reality of religious diversity reduces an individual's justified confidence in the superiority of her position has been subject to at least two types of criticism. As noted earlier in our discussion of religious diversity and epistemic obligation (section 3), some philosophers agree with Alvin Plantinga that the proponent of a given religious perspective need not grant that his competitors are

[2] These notes are largely culled from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy First published Tue May 25, 2004; substantive revision Mon Oct 4, 2010, cited on Aug. 20, 13 at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religious-pluralism/*

actually on equal epistemic footing and is thus justified in continuing to maintain that his perspective is superior without further reflection (Plantinga 1997, 296).

Other philosophers do not deny that proponents of differing religious perspectives are on equal epistemic footing or that reflection on these diversity perspectives might in some cases actually cause an individual to become less certain that her perspective is superior. But they deny that there is any necessary epistemic connection between acknowledged diversity and a weakening of justified personal commitment. That is, they argue that a proponent of a given religious perspective can acknowledge both that those holding perspectives differ from hers are epistemic peers and that she is not in a position to demonstrate objectively that her position is superior and yet justifiably continue to maintain that her perspective is in fact superior (Hasker, 2007; Basinger, 2007).
Quinn's second contention — that weakened justification in the superiority of one's perspective has the promising potential for fostering religious tolerance — has also been challenged. For instance, William Lane Craig, Robert McKim, and Keith Yandell have all argued recently that the weakening of a person's conviction that the specific teachings of her religion, including the relevant moral teachings that prohibit intolerance, are correct might in turn actually make it more likely that this person will engage in intolerant behavior as it may well deflate the very confidence in the relevant beliefs needed for inspiring tolerance (Craig, 2007; McKim 2007; Yandell, 2007).

Others, such as William Hasker, have questioned whether Quinn's challenge to those who hold firmly to the superiority of their religious perspectives — that the reality of religious diversity requires that they hold their perspectives less firmly — will have the effect Quinn intended. It was his hope that those challenged in this fashion would "soften" their exclusivistic convictions and thus be less likely to engage in intolerant behavior. But might not just the opposite occur? Might not those told that the reality of religious diversity reduces their justified confidence in their beliefs feel threatened and thus, in an attempt to "stand up for the truth," become even more intolerant of those with other perspectives (Hasker, 2007)?

Those sympathetic to Quinn's position do not deny that some finding the justification for their religious beliefs challenged will respond defensively or that some coming to hold their religious beliefs less confidently might for that reason find themselves with a weaker basis for refraining from intolerant behavior. But those sympathetic to Quinn's "pathway from diversity to tolerance" maintain that acknowledged religious diversity can, and often does, foster in a person (1) a greater respect for her epistemic competitors and their positions and (2) a more flexible, inclusive understanding of her own position, and that those who respect their competitors and have a more inclusive understanding of their own perspectives are less likely to engage in inappropriate intolerant religious behavior (Basinger, 2007).

Interfaith Dialogue

Religious pluralism is sometimes used as a synonym for interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue refers to dialogue between members of different religions for the goal of reducing conflicts between their religions and to achieve agreed upon mutually desirable goals. Inter-religious dialogue is difficult if the partners adopt a position of particularism, i.e. if they only care about the concerns of their own group, but is favored by the opposite attitude of universalism, where care is taken for the concerns of others. Interfaith dialogue is easier if a religion's adherents have some form of inclusivism, the belief that people in other religions may also have a way to salvation, even though the fullness of salvation can be achieved only in one's own religion. Conversely, believers with an exclusivist mindset will rather tend to proselytize followers of other religions, than seek an open-ended dialogue with them.

Conditions for the existence of religious pluralism

Religious Tolerance

Freedom of religion encompasses all religions acting within the law in a particular region, whether or not an individual religion accepts that other religions are legitimate or that freedom of religious choice and religious plurality in general are good things. Exclusivist religions teach that theirs is the only way to salvation and to religious truth, and some of them would even argue that it is necessary to suppress the falsehoods taught by other religions. Some Protestant sects argue fiercely against Roman Catholicism, and fundamentalist Christians of all kinds teach that religious practices like those of paganism and witchcraft are pernicious.

Many religious believers believe that religious pluralism should entail not competition but cooperation, and argue that societal and theological change is necessary to overcome religious differences between different religions, and denominational conflicts within the same religion. For most religious traditions, this attitude is essentially based on a non-literal view of one's religious traditions, hence allowing for respect to be engendered between different traditions on fundamental principles rather than more marginal issues. It is perhaps summarized as an attitude which rejects focus on immaterial differences, and instead gives respect to those beliefs held in common.

Relativism, the belief that all religions are equal in their value and that none of the religions gives access to absolute truth, is an extreme form of inclusivism. Likewise, syncretism, the attempt to take over creeds of practices from other religions or even to blend practices or creeds from different religions into one new faith is an extreme form of inter-religious dialogue. Syncretism must not be confused with ecumenism, the attempt to bring closer and eventually reunite different denominations of one religion that have a common origin but were separated by a schism.

The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. But what is pluralism? Here are four points to begin our thinking: First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettoes with little traffic

between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

Third, pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

Fourth, pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table -- with one's commitments.

With respect to many, if not most issues, there exist significant differences of opinion among individuals who seem to be equally knowledgeable and sincere. Individuals who apparently have access to the same information and are equally interested in the truth affirm incompatible perspectives on, for instance, significant social, political, and economic issues. Such diversity of opinion, though, is nowhere more evident than in the area of religious thought. On almost every religious issue, honest, knowledgeable people hold significantly diverse, often incompatible beliefs.

Religious diversity of this sort can fruitfully be explored in many ways — for instance, from psychological, anthropological, or historical perspectives. The current discussion, however, will concern itself primarily with those key issues surrounding religious diversity with which philosophers, especially analytic philosophers of religion, are most concerned at present. Specifically, our discussion will focus primarily on the following questions: How pervasive is religious diversity? Does the reality of this diversity require a response? Can a person who acknowledges religious diversity remain justified in claiming just one perspective to be correct? If so, is it morally justifiable to attempt to convert others to a different perspective? Can it justifiably be claimed that only one religion offers a path into the eternal presence of God? The answers to such questions are not simply academic. They increasingly have great impact on how we treat others, both personally and corporately.

3.2 The Pervasiveness of Religious Diversity

Religious diversity exists most noticeably at the level of basic theistic systems. For instance, while within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam it is believed that God is a personal deity, within Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhism God's existence is denied and within Hinduism the concept of a personal deity is, in an important sense, illusory. Within many forms of Christianity and Islam, the ultimate goal is subjective immortality in God's presence, while within Hinayana Buddhism the ultimate goal is the extinction of the self as a discrete, conscious entity. However, significant, widespread diversity also exists within basic theistic systems. For example, within Christianity, believers differ significantly on the nature of God. Some see God as all-controlling, others as self-limiting, and still others as incapable in principle of unilaterally controlling any aspect of reality. Some believe God to have infallible knowledge only of all that has occurred or is occurring, others claim God also has knowledge of all that will actually occur, while those who believe God possesses middle knowledge add that God knows all that would actually occur in any possible context. Some believe the moral principles stipulated by God for correct human behavior flow from God's nature and thus that such principles determine God's behavior, while others believe that God acts in accordance with a different set of moral rules, that for God what is right is simply whatever God does. Some believe that only those who have consciously "given their lives to Christ" will spend eternity in God's presence. Others believe that many who have never even heard the name of Jesus will enter God's presence, while others yet do not even believe subjective immortality (a conscious afterlife) to be a reality. Muslims also differ significantly among themselves on these same divine attributes. Or consider the wide variety of Muslim perspectives on such issues as the autonomy of the individual when interpreting the Qur'an, how best to apply core Islamic values to modern life, and the status of women.

While it is still somewhat popular in philosophical circles today to focus on diversity among basic theistic systems, there is a growing awareness that the same basic questions (and responses) that apply to inter-system diversity (for example, to differing perspectives on the most accurate basic theistic conception of God) apply just as clearly, and in exactly the same sense, to intra-system diversity (for example, to differing perspectives within Christianity over the extent of God's knowledge). And there is increasing awareness that the practical import of intra-theistic diversity is just as significant as is that of inter-theistic diversity. For most Christians, for instance, the practical significance of retaining or modifying beliefs about God's power or knowledge is just as great as retaining or modifying the belief that Christianity is a better theistic explanatory hypothesis than is Islam (Basinger 2002, 2–3).

Possible Responses to Religious Diversity

One obvious response to religious diversity is to maintain that since there exists no divine reality — since the referent in all religious truth claims related to the divine is nonexistent — all such claims are false. Another possible response, put forth by religious relativists, is that there is no one truth when considering mutually incompatible religious claims about reality; more than one of the conflicting sets of specific truth-claims can be correct (Runzo 1988, 351–357). However, most current discussions of religious diversity presuppose a realist theory of truth — that there is a truth to the matter.

When the topic is approached in this way, philosophers normally center discussions of religious truth claims on three basic categories: religious exclusivism, religious nonexclusivism, and religious pluralism. For the purpose of our discussion, someone is a religious exclusivist with respect to a given issue when she believes the religious perspective of only one basic theistic system (for instance, only one of the major world religions) or only one of the variants within a basic theistic system (for instance, within Christianity) to be the truth or at least closer to the truth than any other religious perspective on this issue. Someone is a religious non-exclusivist with respect to a given issue when she denies that the religious perspective of any basic theistic system or variant thereof is superior to all other religious perspectives on this issue. And someone is a religious pluralist with respect to a given issue when she claims not only (as a non-exclusivist) that no specific religious perspective is superior but also makes the positive claim that the religious perspectives of more than one basic theistic system or variant thereof are equally close to the truth.

3.3 Religious Diversity and Justified Belief

What if we assume, as do most philosophers today, that belief assessment in the face of religious diversity will not normally resolve debate over conflicting religious perspectives in an objective manner? That is, what if we assume that while the consideration of criteria such as self-consistency and comprehensiveness can rule out certain options, there exists no set of criteria that will allow us to resolve most religious epistemic disputes (either between or within religious perspectives) in a neutral, non-question-begging fashion (Peterson et al. 2173, 40–53)? In what epistemic position does this then place the exclusivist? Or to use the phrasing preferred in the current "epistemology of disagreement" debates, to what extent, if any, is it reasonable for an exclusivist to retain her exclusivistic beliefs when it is acknowledged that epistemic peers disagree?

The answer, as some see it, is that the exclusivist can no longer justifiably maintain that her exclusivistic beliefs are true. J.C. Schellenberg, for example, argues that because no more than one among a set of incompatible truth claims can be true, a disputant in a debate over such claims is justified in continuing to maintain that her claim is true only if she possesses non-question-begging justification for believing the incompatible claim of any competitor to be false. However, since no disputant in religious conflicts possesses such justification, no disputant can be justified "in holding her own claim to be true." Or, as Schellenberg states this conclusion in another context, we must conclude that in the absence of objective, non-question-

begging justification, none of the disputants in religious conflicts "has justification for supposing the others' claims false" (Schellenberg 2000, 213). David Silver comes to a similar conclusion: "[Exclusivists] should provide independent evidence for the claim that they have a special source of religious knowledge … or they should relinquish their exclusivist religious beliefs" (Silver 2001, 11). The proper response for the exclusivist, most in this camp argue, is to suspend judgment — is for the person who was an exclusivist to abandon her exclusivistic position and give equal weight to all the self-consistent, comprehensive perspectives in play (Christiansen, 2009; Feldman, 2007).

Others have not gone this far, arguing rather that while the exclusivist need not abandon religious belief in the face of unresolved conflict, she must or at least will hold her exclusive religious beliefs more tentatively (with less confidence). Philip Quinn argues, for instance, that acknowledged epistemic parity necessarily has a negative (epistemically humbling) impact on the level of justification for any religious belief system. Such parity does not necessarily minimize justification below a level sufficient for rational acceptability. But for those proponents of a religion who are "sufficiently aware of religious diversity, the justification that the [religion] receives from its sources is a good deal less than would be the case were there no such diversity" (Quinn, 2005a, 137). James Kraft agrees. When a person acknowledges that those with whom she disagrees are equivalently informed and capable and have made no obvious mistakes in reasoning, this person's confidence in her perspective, we are told, is rightly reduced (Kraft, 2007).

The tentativeness this reduction in confidence produces, McKim tell us, does not entail never-ending inquiry. What it means, rather, is that in the face of unresolved religious diversity, one should be open to the possibility "that one or more of the [alternatives] may be correct … that the position one had thought to be correct may be wrong [while] one of the other positions may be right" (McKim 2001, 154–55). Joseph Runzo and Gary Gutting agree. According to Runzo, "all faith commitments must be held with the humbling recognition that they can be misguided, for our knowledge is never sure" (Runzo 1993, 236). Gutting argues that only interim, not decisive assent is justified in the face of unresolved diversity and that "those who give merely interim assent must recognize the equal value, as an essential element in the continuing discussion, of beliefs contrary to theirs" (Gutting 1982, 108). Moreover, argues McKim, such tentativeness in the face of diversity has an important payoff. It can lead to deep tolerance: the allowance "that those with whom you disagree are people whom it is worthwhile to approach with rational arguments" (McKim 2001, 178) And personal tolerance of this sort, we are told, may well lead to a more tolerant and open society that will permit and even encourage a diversity of opinion on all issues, including opinions on religious matters.

William Alston represents an even more charitable response to exclusivism. His perspective is based on what he sees as a crucial distinction between two types of epistemic disputes: those in which "it is clear what would constitute non-circular grounds for supposing one of the contestants to be superior to the others" and those in which it is not. In the former case — in those cases in which there is a commonly

accepted “procedure for settling disputes” — it isn't clear, he acknowledges, that it is rational for a person to continue to maintain that her position is superior (Alston 1988, 442–443).

However, as Alston sees it, there exists no such common ground for settling basic epistemic disputes over religious truth claims, and this, he contends, alters the situation drastically. It still remains true, he grants, that the reality of religious diversity diminishes justification. But the fact that “we are at a loss to specify [common ground]” means, he argues, that with respect to those religious perspectives that are self-consistent, it is not “irrational for one to remain an exclusivist” — not irrational for the proponent of any religious perspective to continue to hold that her perspective is true. That is, as Alston sees it, given the absence of common ground for resolving disputes, the proponent of any self-consistent religious perspective can justifiably continue to believe this perspective to be true “despite not being able to show that it is epistemically superior to the competition” (Alston 1988, 443–446).

In fact, at one point he goes even further. Because there exists at present no neutral ground for adjudicating religious epistemic conflicts, it is not only the case, Alston argues, that an exclusivist is justified (rational) in continuing to consider her own perspective superior. Since we do not even know in most cases what a non-circular reason for demonstrating superiority would look like, the “only rational course” for an exclusivist “is to sit tight” with the beliefs “which [have] served so well in guiding [her] activity in the world.” Or, to generalize this point, Alston speaks for those who maintain that, given the absence of common ground for adjudicating disputes concerning self-consistent religious perspectives, it is not rational for an exclusivist to stop maintaining that her system is superior (Alston 1988, 444).

Philip Quinn represents yet another, increasingly popular approach. While he agrees with Alston that in the face of diversity an exclusivist may well be justified in continuing to “sit tight” — in continuing to maintain that her religious perspective is true — he denies that this is the only rational course of action available (Quinn 2000, 235–246). The basis for this position is his distinction between a pre-Kantian and a Kantian understanding of religious belief. To have a pre-Kantian understanding of religious belief is to assume that we have (or at least can have) access to the truth as it really is. It is to believe, for instance, that we do (or at least can in principle) know what God is really like. To have a Kantian understanding of religious belief is to assume that although there is a literal noumenal reality, our understanding of this reality (and thus our truth claims about this reality) will of necessity be relative to the cultural/social/psychological grids through which our conceptualization of this noumenal reality is processed. It is to believe, for instance, that although there is a divine reality about which we can make truth claims, our understanding of (and thus our truth claims about) this divine reality will necessarily to some extent be conditioned by the ways in which our environment (our culture in the broadest sense) has shaped our categories of thought (Quinn 2000, 241–242).

Alston, Quinn contends, is essentially working off of a pre-Kantian model of religious belief when he encourages religious exclusivists to sit tight in the face of peer conflict since, in the absence of any objective basis for determining which perspective is right, the exclusivist has no sufficient reason not to do so. Quinn does not deny that this pre-Kantian approach is justifiable and thus does not deny that someone who follows Alston's advice to sit tight is rational in doing so. However, Quinn believes that "it should not be taken for granted that any of the [contending perspectives] in its present form is correct." Hence, he believes it is equally justifiable for an exclusivist to adopt a Kantian approach to religious belief. Specifically, he believes it is equally justifiable for an exclusivist to assume that whatever any of us can know about the truth of the matter will never be a description of religious reality that is free of significant "cultural" conditioning. Accordingly, it is also rational, he maintains, for exclusivists encountering diverse truth claims to "seek a more inclusivist or pluralistic understanding of their own faith" by modifying their beliefs to bring them "into line with such an understanding" (Quinn 2000, 242).

In short, as Quinn sees it, those who hold a position such as Alston's have left us, at least implicitly, with a false dilemma: either we find common ground on which we can objectively determine which religious perspective is the truth or we sit tight with what we have. However, Quinn holds that, once we realize it is perfectly reasonable for a person to assume that the proponent of no religious perspective has (or even could have) an accurate understanding of divine reality as it really is, another rational alternative appears. We then see that it is also perfectly rational for a person to begin to revise her own phenomenological perspective on the truth in a way that will allow for greater overlap with the phenomenological perspectives of others.

The approach to conflicting religious perspectives Quinn outlines has in fact become increasingly popular in exclusivistic circles. Consider, for example, the ongoing debate among Christians over how God brought the rest of reality into existence. Some still claim the Bible clearly teaches that God created the "heavens and the earth" in six twenty-four hour periods about ten thousand years ago. Others still maintain that the fact that "a day is to the Lord as a thousand years" means that while God is directly responsible for what the Bible says was created each "day," it is most reasonable to believe that the time frame for each instance of creative activity could well have been millions, or even billions, of years. And then there are those who still hold that God's direct creative activity consisted primarily of orchestrating the "Big Bang." However, more recently, many Christians have taken a more Kantian approach. Based on their assumption that we may well not have access, even through Scripture, to exactly how God was involved in the creative process, they have modified what is to be considered essential to Christianity on this issue. Rather than affirming any of the specific explanations of how God created all else, they affirm a more general contention compatible with each of these specific explanations: that God is in some manner directly responsible for the existence of all else. They have, in Quinn's terms, thinned their core theologies in a way that reconciles the divergent perspectives.

Everyone realizes, though, that moving toward a thinner theology and thicker phenomenology can resolve the epistemic tension produced by religious diversity only to a certain extent. Even if we assume that it is perfectly reasonable, and possibly even preferable, for exclusivists to thin their theologies (and thus thicken their phenomenologies) in an attempt to minimize that core of truths that must be accepted to remain proponents of the specific theological perspectives in question, to be an exclusivist — even a strongly Kantian exclusivist — is still to believe that one's religious perspective is superior in the sense that it is in some important way closer to the truth than are the competing perspectives of others. Accordingly, while thinning her theology may be a rational choice that can minimize conflict, no one is arguing that it can be the sole response for an exclusivist. At some point, a person must either cease to be the exclusivist she was or choose one of the other options: acknowledge that the belief in question isn't true, hold it more tentatively, or sit tight with what she has.

Finally, we find at the far end of the spectrum those who deny that acknowledged peer conflict does in fact require the exclusivist to abandon her exclusivism or even reduce confidence in her exclusivistic perspectives. The key to this position is a distinction between personal (private) evidence and public evidence (evidence available to all persons involved in the dispute). It is granted that an individual will often find herself in epistemic disputes with persons who are epistemic peers in the sense that they are (1) equally intelligent, thoughtful, and free from obvious bias and (2) equally familiar with all the relevant public evidence. But the final judgments made by each participant in such disputes are not made solely on this public evidence, it is held. Such judgments are based also on personal beliefs to which only each participant has access. Jennifer Lackey notes, for instance, that each person in an epistemic dispute has greater access to the reliability of her own belief-forming faculties than do her epistemic competitors (Lackey, 2010). Ernest Sosa talks of "the gulf between the private and public domain" (Sosa 2008, Other Internet Resources). Peter van Inwagen speaks of "incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits, lack" (van Inwagen, 1996). And the weight of this private evidence, it is argued, can make it reasonable for an individual to retain her beliefs (including exclusivistic religious beliefs) with the same level of confidence, even in the face of acknowledged peer disagreement in the public sense.

Some critics, of course, will maintain that this is primarily a verbal victory. The question, remember, is whether an exclusivist who acknowledges that epistemic peers hold incompatible perspectives can continue to justifiably maintain with full confidence that her perspective is superior. And it will seem to some that to claim that participants in epistemic disputes have access to relevant personal evidence not available to their epistemic competitors is in fact simply to acknowledge that the dispute is really not among true epistemic peers in the sense originally intended — that is, in the sense that all parties are assessing the same body of evidence.

3.4 Religious Diversity in Public Education

Public education in Western culture has always been to some extent a "melting pot." But the increasing number of students with non-Western cultural values and religious traditions is causing public school educators to grapple in new and sometimes uncomfortable ways with the challenges such diversity poses. Some of these challenges are practical — e.g., should Muslim girls be allowed to wear burkas, should schools designate only Christian religious holy days as school holidays? The focus of this section, however, will be a pedagogical question of increasing interest in the philosophy of education: How ought the increasing religious diversity to which students are exposed affect public school curricula? (Basinger, 2010).

Most public school educators agree that increasing student understanding of diverse religious perspectives is important as this will have positive social outcomes. It is often argued, for instance, that helping students better understand the increasing diversity, including religious diversity, they face will better prepare them to live in a peaceful, productive manner with those with differing cultural and/or religious values (Kunzman, 2006).

Many educators, however, want to go further. It is also important, they maintain, for students to clarify *their feelings* about other religions and their followers. Specifically, they want to foster a more empathetic understanding of other religious perspectives, an understanding that encourages students to *appreciate* the other religions from the perspective of an adherent of that religion (Kunzman, 2006). While few challenge this as a valid goal, there is, though, continuing controversy over one common *method* by which educators attempt to engender this type of empathy in students. As some see it, while having students *think about* diverse religions is an important step past the mere dissemination of factual information toward empathetic understanding, having students *directly experience* these religions in some way — for instance, having students visit a local mosque or having a representative from a Buddhist Center share with students in a class — is also necessary (or at least very desirable). However, while no one denies that these forms of direct experience might broaden a student's empathetic understanding of a religion, concerns have been raised.

First, some believe that having students experience a religion, even as "observers," can test the limits of the separation of church and state. While the intent of having students attend a mosque or having a Buddhist talk with students is seldom to "promote" a religion, the line between "exposure" and intended or unintended promotion (and even proselytization), they maintain, is a fine one, especially given the widely varying communication skills and deeply embedded values and preconceptions of the teacher and/or the representatives of a given religion to whom students might be exposed. Second, there is growing ethical concern that to experience a religion as an observer might in some cases trivialize or demean the religion in question. Some Native Americans, for instance, are becoming increasingly concerned with the growing desire of "outsiders" to seek understanding of their religion(s) by watching or experiencing sacred ceremonies since such observation, they believe, can trivialize these ceremonies (Kasprisin, 2173: 422).

Is it justifiable for the public school educator to go even further than the dissemination of accurate information and the attempted engendering of empathetic understanding? Specifically, ought an educator attempt to bring it about that all students affirm a core set of "appropriate" beliefs about other religions and their adherents? It is clearly the case that almost all public school educators currently do attempt to bring it about that students hold certain beliefs related to pervasive human characteristics, such as race, gender, and disabling conditions. Students are encouraged, for instance, to continue to believe, or come to believe, that engaging in intolerant or discriminatory behavior is wrong and that they should affirm, or come to affirm, the inherent worth and rights of the disabled, those of other racial/ethnic backgrounds, etc. So if the desire is simply to also encourage students to believe it wrong to treat those of other religions in intolerant or discriminatory ways and to believe it right to accept those of other religions as persons with equal inherent value, few will object.

But need teachers stop there? Might there not be other beliefs about religions and their adherents that public school educators can justifiably attempt to bring it about that all students accept? We can extrapolate from some recent work on religious diversity by Robert Wuthnow to introduce two beliefs that some might propose fit into this category. As Wuthnow sees it, the most appropriate response to the increasing religious diversity we face in this country is what he labels "reflective pluralism" (Wuthnow, 2005: 286-307). To engage is this sort of reflection, he tells us, is not simply to become better informed, or to strive to "live peacefully with those with whom one disagrees" (be tolerant), or even to attempt to develop an empathetic understanding of diverse religions. It is to engage intentionally and purposefully with "people and groups whose religious practices are fundamentally different from one's own" (Wuthnow, 2005: 289). And such engagement, as he understands it, includes both (1) the recognition that since all of our beliefs, including our religious beliefs, depend on a point of view "shaped by the culture in which we live," we should not regard our "own position[s] as inherently superior" and (2) "a principled willingness to compromise" in the sense that we must be willing to move out of our social and emotional comfort levels "in order to arrive at a workable relationship with another person" (Wuthnow, 2005: 292).

The benefit of this form of engagement, we are told, is not only that it can minimize the likelihood of the sorts of "religious tensions, conflicts, and violence [that] have been so much a part of human history" (Wuthnow, 2005: 293). Such reflective engagement also allows us to focus on "the shared concerns for basic human dignity" found in the teachings of many of the world's religions, which can furnish a basis for inter-religious cooperation to combat social ills and meet basic social needs (Wuthnow, 2005: 294).

It is important to note that Wuthnow does not explicitly claim or deny that encouraging students in a public school setting to become reflective pluralists would be appropriate. But not only does he highlight two increasingly popular pluralistic claims about religions — (1) that the beliefs of many religions are equally valid

expressions of faith, expressions that adherents of these religions should be allowed or even encouraged to maintain and (2) that religious believers of all faiths should identify and focus on what these religions have in common — he highlights what such pluralists often note as the main benefits of widespread affirmation of these beliefs: a reduction in violent religious conflicts and an increase in socially beneficial inter-religious cooperation. And these outcomes are clearly quite compatible with what we have seen to be a key reason why public school educators want to increase student understanding of other religions — namely, their desire to better prepare students to live in a peaceful, productive manner in social contexts that will increasingly be characterized by religious diversity.

Accordingly, since it seems reasonable to believe that widespread acceptance of the validity of diverse religious perspectives and increased focus on the commonalities in diverse religions might well result in more peaceful, mutually beneficial interaction among followers of diverse religions, the question of whether public school teachers can justifiably attempt to bring it about that students affirm the beliefs in question appears worthy of exploration.

Let's first consider the contention that many religions contain equally valid expressions of faith. Even if we make the debatable assumption that this is true, it won't be clear to many that a public school teacher could justifiably attempt to bring it about that her or his students believed this to be so. The problem is that various religions affirm conflicting doctrinal beliefs on significant issues. For example, while conservative Christians maintain that one must affirm certain beliefs about the saving power of Christ to spend eternity in God's presence, conservative Muslims strongly deny this. Orthodox Christians and Muslims are taught not only that the sacred scriptures of other religions contain false beliefs; they are often encouraged to try to convert those of other religions to their religious perspective. And while many Muslims and Christians believe in a personal supernatural creator and personally immortality, some Buddhists deny both. This, however, means that an educator can justifiably attempt to convince students that all religions are equally valid expressions of faith only if she or he can justifiably attempt to convince conservative proponents of some of these religions that some of their core doctrinal beliefs need to be modified or rejected. And to attempt to do this in a public school setting will be seen by many as violating the prohibition against both restricting the free exercise of religion and promoting a given religion (Basinger, 2010).

Might it not, though, at least be justifiable for a public school educator to encourage students to respect the right of adherents to other religions to retain their current religious beliefs? If we interpret this as asking whether an educator can justifiably encourage students not to attempt to prohibit adherents to other religions from expressing and acting in accordance with their beliefs, a positive response is noncontroversial since this is only to say once again that educators should encourage students to be tolerant. However, to encourage respect for the religious beliefs of others often carries with it the explicit or implicit assumption that it is inappropriate, if not unethical, to attempt to convince adherents of one religion to convert to another. And for a public school educator to attempt to convince all students that it is

wrong to proselytize will again be seen by some as placing this educator in the legally and morally questionable position of attempting to convince some students to reject or modify what for them is a very fundamental, core religious belief.

Perhaps, however, there is a different, less controversial option for those educators who want to do more than simply encourage tolerance of expression and empathetic understanding. Is it not at least justifiable for the public school teacher to attempt to point out the important common values affirmed by most of the world's major religions, values that we can all accept and should all desire to see lived out? Is it not justifiable for an educator to point out, for instance, that most of the world's major religions prohibit such things as killing, lying, stealing, and sexual exploitation, and that these same religions encourage such things as helping those in need and treating adherents of other religions with respect. To do so, it has been argued, would not simply be of value within the classroom or community. Since religious convictions clearly influence social, political and economic activity on a global scale, emphasizing the shared common values of religions has the potential to facilitate better global relationships. And to encourage such relationships is surely an appropriate goal of public education (Shingleton, 2008).

4.0 Conclusion

Some, of course, will see any focus on "positive commonalities" as yet another thinly veiled attempt to encourage students to modify their current religious beliefs in ways that make such beliefs more accommodating of other religious perspectives. However, most see no legal or ethical reason why a teacher should not expose students to the "positive commonalities" in diverse religious perspectives, and many see this as a helpful step. As we have seen, discussions of religious diversity lend themselves to no easy answers. The issues are many, the arguments complex, and the responses varied. It would be hard, though, to overstate the practical significance of this topic. While some (many) issues that philosophers discuss have practical implications for how we view ourselves and treat others, none is more relevant today than the question of religious diversity.

5.0 Summary

Religious pluralism cannot be ignored in our contemporary global setting. The growth and universal spread of religious sensitivity are compelling for us to recognize the most plausible approach to religious dialogue. We have seen that religious pluralism and diversity require our tolerance and respect of one another. Religious diversity is so pervasive that that it cuts across divisions of religions but it is even found in intra religious affinities. This also affects nearly all facets of our lives and more especially education.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

Explain the nature of religious pluralism and diversity.

How should we approach religious dialogue?
How pervasive is religious diversity?
How has religious diversity affected education?

7.0 References for Further Readings

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MODULE 3

UNIT 1 WORLD RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS I

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The use of modern technological instruments like the Internet has made the world to become what is termed as 'a global village'. As a result of this phenomenal change, our perception of religion is changing. We discover that beyond what we know there is still so much more to be known about other people occupying the different parts of the world, especially as it relates to their religion. In this unit, you will learn about the religious traditions of the world vis-à-vis their historical backgrounds, beliefs, creeds, tenets, social dimensions, ethics and religious specialists.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit you will be able to: Mention

the various religious traditions of the world;

Explain the historical background of any of the religious traditions;

Explain any of features of these religions;

Make comparisons between the various religious traditions;

Identify the social dimensions of these religious traditions; and

Discuss the role of religious specialists.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Brief History of World Religious Traditions

The world is populated by different people with different backgrounds, behaviours, attitudes, ideologies and religious inclinations. Some of the religions of the world are peculiar to certain parts of the globe though the trend is fast changing in the modern times due to global interaction and evangelical zeal of the religions. The major religions of the world are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The key determining factor of this classification is the number of adherents of these religions. Apart from this, some other religions have grown out of some of them that would be regarded as minor religions. For example, Sikhism and Jainism are minor religions because they grew out of Hinduism.

3.1.1 Hinduism

Hinduism is a religious tradition of Indian origin, comprising the beliefs and practices of Hindus. The word Hindu is derived from the River Sindhu, or Indus. The geographical term was Al-Hind, and the people of the land east of the Indus were therefore called Hindus. This was not initially a religious label. The word Hinduism is an English word of more recent origin. Hinduism entered the English language in the early 19th century to describe the beliefs and practices of those residents of India who had not converted to Islam or Christianity and did not practise Judaism or Zoroastrianism.

Hindus themselves prefer to use the Sanskrit term *sanatana dharma* for their religious tradition. *Sanatana dharma* is often translated into English as "eternal tradition" or "eternal religion" but the translation of dharma as "tradition" or "religion" gives an extremely limited, even mistaken, sense of the word. Dharma has many meanings in Sanskrit, the language of some of the Hindu scriptures, including "moral order", "duty", and "right action".

The Hindu community today is found primarily in India, Nepal, and Bali in the Indonesian archipelago. Substantial Hindu communities are present in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, East Africa, and South Africa. Scattered Hindu communities are found in most parts of the Western world. Hindus today number nearly 900 million, including about 20 million who live outside India, making them the third largest religious community in the world, after Christians and Muslims. Three other religions that originated in India branched off from Hinduism: Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

Characteristics of Buddhism

Belief in Brahman: The Ultimate Reality

Various schools have contributed to Hindu thought, each school with a different emphasis. The school known as Vedanta has been the standard form of intellectual Hinduism. According to Vedanta, the highest aim of existence is the realization of the identity or union of the individual's innermost self (atman) with the ultimate reality. Although Vedanta states that this ultimate reality is beyond having a name, the word Brahman is used to refer to it.

Belief in Reincarnation

Reincarnation in Hinduism is referred to as Samsara. According to Hinduism, this current life is merely one link in a chain of lives that extends far into the past and projects far into the future. The point of origin of this chain cannot be determined. The process of involvement in the universe—the chain of births and deaths—is called *samsara*. *Samsara* is caused by a lack of knowledge of the true self and resultant desire for fulfillment outside self. We continue to embody ourselves, or be reborn, in this infinite and eternal universe as a result of these unfulfilled desires. The chain of births lets us resume the pursuit. The law that governs *samsara* is called *karma*. Each birth and death we undergo is determined by the balance sheet of our *karma*—that is, in accordance with the actions performed and the dispositions acquired in the past.

Belief in Karma

Karma is a crucial Hindu concept. According to the doctrine of *karma*, our present condition in life is the consequence of the actions of our previous lives. The choices we have made in the past directly affect our condition in this life, and the choices we make today and thereafter will have consequences for our future lives in *samsara*. An understanding of this interconnection, according to Hindu teachings, can lead an individual towards right choices, deeds, thoughts, and desires, without the need for an external set of commandments.

The principle of *karma* provides the basic framework for Hindu ethics. The word *karma* is sometimes translated into English as "destiny", but *karma* does not imply the absence of free will or freedom of action that destiny does. Under the doctrine of *karma*, the ability to make choices remains with the individual.

When we cause pain or injury, we add to the karmic debt we carry into our future lives. When we give to others in a genuine way, we lighten our karmic load. In the Bhagavad-Gita, an important Hindu text, Krishna states that the best way to be free of debt is by selfless action, or by dedicating every action as an offering to Krishna himself. In addition, human beings can purify themselves of karmic debt through different *yogas* (disciplines), *kriyas* (purification processes), and *bhakti* (devotions).

Belief in Yogas

Hindu thought takes the personality of the seeker as the starting point. It divides human personalities into types dominated by physicality, activity, emotionality, or intellectuality. The composition of our personality intuitively predisposes us to a type of yoga—that is, a path we might follow to achieve union with Brahman. Although many people associate the word yoga with a physical discipline, in its original Hindu meaning yoga refers to any technique that unites the seeker with the ultimate reality.

While physical fitness buffs may seek such a union by practising Hatha yoga, people with different personality traits have other choices. For the action-oriented person there is Karma yoga, the yoga of action, which calls for a life of selfless deeds and actions appropriate to the person's station in life. For the person of feeling, Bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion, calls for unconditional love for a personal divinity. For the person of thought, Jnana yoga, the yoga of knowledge, calls for spiritual and physical discipline intended to bring direct insight into ultimate reality. The yogas do not represent tightly sealed compartments, merely convenient classifications. A well-balanced personality might well employ all four. These yogas are sometimes called *margas* (paths), suggesting that the same destination can be approached by more than one route, and indeed by more than one mode of travel.

3.1.2 Buddhism

Buddhism, a major world religion, founded in north-eastern India and based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who is known as the Buddha, or the Enlightened One. Though Buddhism originated as a monastic movement within the dominant Brahman tradition of the day, it quickly developed in a distinctive direction. The Buddha not only rejected significant aspects of Brahmanic philosophy, but also challenged the authority of the priesthood, denied the validity of the Vedic scriptures, and rejected the sacrificial cult based on them. Moreover, he opened his movement to members of all castes, denying that a person's spiritual worth is a matter of birth.

Gautama was born around 560 BC in Northern India. His father was a king from the Sakya clan and by all standards he was from a background of opulence and luxury. At the age of 16 he got married to a princess called Yasodara who bore him a son named Rahula. On his 29th birthday, he came face to face with some of the harsh realities of life when for the first time he saw a sick man, an old man and a dead man. This made him to realize the subjectivity of all human beings to birth, disease and death. This marked a turning point in his life as he turned to seek a panacea to the problem. Seeing all his possessions as impediments, he renounced them and went in search of peace. He went through

much unsuccessful self-denial until under the Bo tree; he attained the state called '*nirvana*'.

Features of Buddhism

The Four Noble Truths

The major feature of Buddhism is the concept of the Four Noble Truths. Four Noble Truths which in Sanskrit is called *Catvari-Arya-Satyani*, is the four fundamental principles of Buddhism, expounded by the Buddha after his enlightenment in his first sermon in the deer park at Benares. They are as follows: (1) The Holy Truth of Suffering: all existence is suffering (dukkha); (2) The Holy Truth of the Cause of Suffering: the cause (*samudaya*) of suffering is ignorant craving (*tanha*) for pleasure, for perpetuating life, and an inclination to assume that everything ends at death; (3) The Holy Truth of the Suppression of Suffering: suffering can be suppressed (*nirodha*) by withdrawal from and renunciation of craving; (4) The Holy Truth of the Way to the Suppression of Suffering.

The Eightfold Path

The path (*magga*) that leads to the suppression of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path. Although interpreted in various ways, these precepts are accepted by all schools of Buddhism, and essentially summarize the religion. They are held to provide the key to attainment of nirvana.

The Tipitaka

The Buddhist sacred texts called the *tipitaka*, comprise of 31 books that are organized into three collections called the *Vinaya Pitaka* (basket of discipline), the *Sutta Pitaka* (basket of discourses) and the *Abhidhama Pitaka* (basket of ultimate doctrines). Presently, Buddhism has large population of followers especially in countries like Thailand, China, Mongolia and Sri-Lanka. Some of the states in America have Buddhist temples which attest to the emergence of Buddhism in the United States.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learned about two of the major religions of the world and the features of each one of them; they are Hinduism and Buddhism. You have also studied the history of the foundation of both religions, and the individuals who founded them.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

The major religions of the world are Hinduism, Buddhism,

Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Hinduism is the religion of India and has a population of 900 million in India and 20 million outside India. It is the third largest religious community in the world.

Buddhism is started by Siddhartha Gautama who is also called the Buddha which means the enlightened one.

The major feature of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truth and the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to the suppression of suffering.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Discuss the historical background of Buddhism.
2. What are the similarities and the differences of the two religions that you have studied?

7.0 REFERENCES /FURTHER READINGS

Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, Harper & Row: New York, 1965.

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Microsoft Encarta Premium 2006 edition.

UNIT 2 WORLD RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS II

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is the continuation of the studies of the great religions of the world from the last unit. In this unit, you will continue the studies of religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit you will be able to: Mention

the various religious traditions of the world;

Discuss the historical background of any of the religious traditions; Explain any of

features of these religions;

Make comparisons between the various religious traditions; Identify the social

dimensions of these religious traditions; and Explain the role of religious

specialists.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Confucianism

Confucius, which in Chinese is called Kongfuzi was a Chinese philosopher,

founder of Confucianism and one of the most influential figures in Chinese history. According to tradition, Confucius was born in the state of Lu of the noble Kong clan. His original name was Kong Qiu. Accounts of his life record that his father, commander of a district in Lu, died three years after Confucius was born, leaving the family in poverty; but Confucius nevertheless received a fine education, for Lu was famous for preserving the state traditions of the Zhou dynasty. He was married at the age of 19 and had one son and two daughters. During the four years immediately after his marriage, poverty reportedly compelled him to perform menial labours for the chief of the district in which he lived. His mother died in 527 BC, and after a period of mourning he began his career as a teacher, usually travelling about and instructing the small body of disciples that had gathered around him. His fame as a man of learning and character with great reverence for traditional ideals and customs soon spread through the municipality of Lu.

Living as he did in the second half of the Zhou dynasty, when central government had degenerated in China and intrigue and vice were rampant, Confucius deplored the contemporary disorder and lack of moral standards. He came to believe that the only remedy was to convert people once more to the principles and precepts of the sages of antiquity. He therefore lectured to his pupils on the ancient classics of Chinese literature. He also stressed the importance of music, for the Chinese music of this time had ceremonial and religious functions important in state functions and worship. He taught the great value of the power of example. Rulers, he said, can be great only if they themselves lead exemplary lives, and were they willing to be guided by moral principles, their states would inevitably attract citizens and become prosperous and happy.

One popular tradition about Confucius's life states that at the age of 50 he was appointed magistrate of Zhongdu, and the next year minister of crime of the state of Lu. His administration was successful; reforms were introduced, justice was fairly dispensed, and crime was almost eliminated. So powerful did Lu become that the ruler of a neighbouring state manoeuvred to secure the minister's dismissal. It is more likely, however, that he was only a minor official in Lu. In any case, Confucius left his office in 496 BC, travelling about and teaching, vainly hoping that some other prince would allow him to undertake measures of reform. In 484 BC, after a fruitless search for an ideal ruler, he returned for the last time to Lu. He spent the remaining years of his life in retirement, writing commentaries on the classics. He died in Lu and was buried in a tomb at Qufu, Shandong.

The entire teaching of Confucius was practical and ethical, rather than religious. He claimed to be a restorer of ancient morality and held that proper outward acts based on the five virtues of kindness, uprightness, decorum, wisdom, and faithfulness constitute the whole of human duty.

Reverence for parents, living and dead, was one of his key concepts. His view of government was paternalistic, and he enjoined all individuals to observe carefully their duties towards the state. In subsequent centuries

his teachings exerted a powerful influence on Chinese philosophy and the history of China.

The principles of Confucianism are contained in the nine ancient Chinese works handed down by Confucius and his followers. These writings can be divided into two groups: the Five Classics and the Four Books.

The *Wujing* (Five Classics), which originated before the time of Confucius, consist of the Yijing or *I Ching* (Book of Changes), *Shujing* (Book of Documents), *Shijing* (Book of Poetry), *Liji* (Book of Rites), and *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals). The *Yijing* is a manual of divination probably first compiled under the Shang dynasty before the 11th century BC; its supplementary philosophical portion, contained in a series of appendices, may have been written later by Confucius and his disciples. The *Shujing* is a collection of ancient historical documents, and the *Shijing*, an anthology of ancient poems. The *Liji* deals with the principles of conduct, including those for public and private ceremonies; it was destroyed in the 3rd century BC, but presumably much of its material was preserved in the present compilation, which dates from the Han dynasty. The *Chunqiu*, the only work reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, is a chronicle of major historical events in Confucius's home state of Lu and elsewhere in feudal China from the 8th century BC to Confucius's death early in the 5th century BC.

The *Sishu* (Four Books); compilations of the sayings of Confucius and Mencius and of commentaries by followers on their teachings, are the *Lunyu* (Analects), a collection of maxims by Confucius that form the basis of his moral and political philosophy; *Daxue* (The Great Learning) and *Zhongyong* (The Doctrine of the Mean), containing some of Confucius's philosophical utterances arranged systematically with comments and expositions by his disciples; and the *Mengzi* (Book of Mencius), containing the teachings of one of Confucius's great followers.

Confucius's own teachings were passed on as oral traditions and collated in the *Lunyu.* They show him as a self-confessed moral conservative in a turbulent age, appalled at the political chaos and social changes which followed the disintegration of the Zhou kingdom into warring feudal states. This turbulence had forced Confucius and others to start thinking about the lost "Way of the Ancient Kings" of Zhou, and how to restore it, obliging them to become philosophical innovators despite themselves.

For Confucius, social and political order was the same, and the personal virtue of rulers and gentlemen ensured the health of the state. His keys to good order were rites (*li*) and music, for Chinese music of the period was central to religious and official rites, and Confucius valued both its ritual function and its power to move men's hearts. He also valued the poems of ancient Chinese literature (most of which were sung to music) as civilizing and edifying influences. Allied to this was his emphasis on the rectification of names, ensuring that the correct social and other distinctions were maintained by using only the appropriate words for them. A state

provided with the most befitting rites and music, selected from the various available traditions, would automatically produce virtuous and happy citizens; laws would be almost unnecessary because disputes would never arise. Confucius roamed China seeking in vain for a sympathetic ruler to adopt his scheme.

The keynote of Confucian ethics is *ren*, variously translated as "love", "goodness", "humanity", and "human-heartedness". *Ren* is a supreme virtue representing human qualities at their best; in Confucius's time it apparently was associated with the ruling class and had a meaning more like "nobility", but its usage soon broadened. In human relations, construed as those between one person and another, *ren* is manifested in *zhong*, or faithfulness to oneself and others, and *shu*, or altruism, best expressed in the Confucian golden rule, "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself". Other important Confucian virtues include righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), integrity (*xin*), and filial piety (*xiao*). One who possesses all these virtues becomes a *junzi* (perfect gentleman). Politically, Confucius advocated a paternalistic government in which the sovereign is benevolent and honourable and the subjects are respectful and obedient. A ruler should cultivate moral perfection in order to set a good example to the people, and to attract subjects to swell his realm. In education, Confucius upheld a theory, which was remarkable for the feudal period, in which he lived, that "in education, there is no class distinction".

3.2 Taoism

Taoism also known as Daoism is a tradition of Chinese philosophy and Chinese religion, first arising in about the 4th century BC. Among native Chinese schools of thought, the influence of Daoism has been second only to that of Confucianism. Daoism as now understood consists of two separate streams, a school of philosophical thought originating in the classical age of Zhou dynasty China, and a system of religious belief arising some 500 years later in the Han dynasty. These two are normally termed philosophical and religious Daoism, and the Daoist basis of the latter lies in the revelation from the sage Laozi which a Daoist called Zhang Daoling claimed to have received in AD 142 in the Sichuan Mountains. Philosophical Daoism has therefore been preserved beneath a mass of religious accretions derived from native Chinese paganism, shamanism, divination, and superstition; while religious Daoism is now a thriving creed interwoven with Chinese popular culture.

Philosophical Daoism arose out of the intellectual ferment of the Zhou dynasty, in which various philosophical schools competed to advise rulers and others on the correct way to live and govern in a world racked by political and social change. Its likely origins are in the so-called Yangist school, despised by Mencius, who caricatured its doctrines by declaring that Yangists would not pluck a hair from their

own heads to benefit the whole world. In fact it apparently preached self-cultivation and withdrawal to private life, drawing on a native Chinese tradition of mysticism and contemplative exercises resembling yoga. This tradition was developed in the late 4th century BC by the philosopher Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu), who began as a Yangist. Soon after, an anonymous thinker, perhaps a minor official, produced a book of related reflections under the name of the semi-mythical figure Laozi (Lao-tzu), who had allegedly instructed Confucius. Evidence suggests that while Zhuangzi saw his beliefs as purely for private use, Laozi presented his as an explicit manual of government.

3.3 Islam

The Arabic word *islam* literally means "surrender" or "submission". As the name of the religion it is understood to mean "surrender or submission to God". One who has thus surrendered is a Muslim. In theory, all that is necessary for one to become a Muslim is to recite sincerely the short statement of faith known as the *shahadah: I witness that there is no god but God [Allah] and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.*

Although in an historical sense Muslims regard their religion as dating from the time of Muhammad in the early 7th century AD, in a religious sense they see it as identical with the true monotheism which prophets before Muhammad, such as Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Isa), had taught. In the Koran, Abraham is referred to as a Muslim. The followers of these and other prophets are held to have corrupted their teachings, but God in His mercy sent Muhammad to call mankind yet again to the truth.

Features of Islam

The Five Duties

Five duties have traditionally been seen as obligatory for all Muslims, although some mystics (Sufis) have allegorized them and many Muslims observe them only partially. These duties are called five pillars of Islam: bearing witness to the unity and uniqueness of God and to the prophethood of Muhammad (*shahadah*); prayer at the prescribed times each day (*salat*); fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*); pilgrimage to Mecca, and the performance of certain prescribed rituals in and around Mecca at a specified time of the year (hajj); and paying a certain amount out of one's wealth as alms for the poor and some other categories of Muslims (*zakat*). The first of these pillars balances external action (the recitation of the *shahadah*) with internal conviction (although different groups within Islam have held different views about the relative importance of recitation and belief in the *shahadah*); the other four, although they take belief for granted, consist predominantly of external acts.

Other or Obligatory Duties

There are other duties and practices regarded as obligatory. As in Judaism, the eating of pork is prohibited and male circumcision is the norm (the latter is not mentioned in the Koran). Consumption of alcohol is forbidden. Meat must be slaughtered according to an approved ritual or else it is not *halal.*

In some Muslim communities practices which are essentially local customs have come to be identified as Islamic: the wearing of a sari, for example. There are variant practices concerning the covering of the head or face of a woman in public. Koranic texts that address the issue are interpreted by some to mean that the entire head and face of a woman should be covered, by others as indicating that some sort of veil or head scarf should be worn. Others argue that the Koran does not require any such covering.

3.4 Judaism

Judaism is the religious culture of the Jews (also known as the people of Israel); one of the world's oldest continuing religious traditions.
Judaism originated in the land of Israel (also known as Palestine) in the Middle East in c. 1800 BC. Due to invasions and migration, today's Jewish communities are found all around the world. In mid-1993 the total world Jewish population was some 14.5 million, of whom about 6.8 million lived in North America, more than 3.6 million in Israel, and more than 1.9 million in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the three largest centres of Jewish settlement. Just fewer than 1 million Jews lived in the rest of Europe, most of them in France and Great Britain, and 600,000 in the rest of Asia. Around 1.1 million Jews lived in Central and South America, and about 200,000 in Africa.

Features of Judaism

Monotheism

As a rich and complex religious tradition, Judaism has never been monolithic. Its various historical forms nonetheless have shared certain characteristic features. The most essential of these is a radical monotheism, that is, the belief that a single, transcendent God created the universe and continues providentially to govern it. Underpinning this monotheism is the teleological conviction that the world is both intelligible and purposive, because a single divine intelligence stands behind it. Nothing that humanity experiences is capricious; everything ultimately has meaning. The mind of God is manifest to the traditional Jew in both the natural order, through creation, and the social-historical order, through revelation. The same God who created the world revealed Himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The content of that revelation is the Torah ("revealed instruction", the core of the Hebrew Bible), God's will for humankind expressed in commandments (*mizvoth*)

by which individuals are to regulate their lives in interacting with one another and with God. By living in accordance with God's laws and submitting to the divine will, humanity can become a harmonious part of the cosmos.

Covenant

A second major concept in Judaism is that of the covenant (*berith*), or contractual agreement, between God and the Jewish people. According to tradition, the God of creation entered into a special relationship with the Jewish people at Sinai. They would acknowledge God as their sole ultimate king and legislator, agreeing to obey His laws; God, in turn, would acknowledge Israel as His particular people, and be especially mindful of them. Both biblical authors and later Jewish tradition view this covenant in a universal context. Only after successive failures to establish a covenant with rebellious humanity did God turn to a particular segment of it. Israel is to be a "kingdom of priests", and the ideal social order that it establishes in accordance with the divine laws is to be a model for the human race. Israel thus stands between God and humanity, representing each to the other.

The idea of the covenant also determines the way in which both nature and history traditionally have been viewed in Judaism. Israel's well- being is seen to depend on obedience to God's commandments. Both natural and historical events that befall Israel are interpreted as emanating from God and as influenced by Israel's religious behaviour. A direct causal connection is thus made between human behaviour and human destiny. This perspective intensifies the problem of theodicy (God's justice) in Judaism, because the historical experience of both individuals and the Jewish people has frequently been interpreted as being one of suffering. Much Jewish religious thought, from the biblical Book of Job onward, has been preoccupied with the problem of affirming justice and meaning in the face of apparent injustice. In time, the problem was mitigated by the belief that virtue and obedience ultimately would be rewarded and sin punished by divine judgment after death, thereby redressing inequities in this world. The indignities of foreign domination and forced exile from the land of Israel suffered by the Jewish people also would be redressed at the end of time, when God would send His Messiah (*mashiah*, "one anointed" with oil as Israelite kings were), a scion of the royal house of David, to redeem the Jews and restore them to sovereignty in their land. Messianism, from early on, has been a significant strand of Jewish thought. Yearning for the Messiah's coming was particularly intense in periods of calamity. Ultimately, a connection was drawn between the messianic idea and the concept of the Torah: the individual Jew, through proper study and observance of God's commandments, could hasten the Messiah's arrival. Each individual's action thus assumed a cosmic importance.

The Rabbinic Tradition

Although all forms of Judaism have been rooted in the Hebrew Bible (referred to by Jews as the Tanach, an acronym for its three sections: Torah, the Pentateuch; Naviim, the prophetic literature; and Ketubim,

the other writings), it would be an error to think of Judaism as simply the "religion of The Book". Contemporary Judaism is ultimately derived from the rabbinic movement of the first centuries of the Christian era in Palestine and Babylonia and is therefore called rabbinic Judaism. A rabbi (*rabbi* meaning "my teacher" in Aramaic and Hebrew) is a Jewish sage adept in studying the Scriptures. Jewish tradition maintains that God revealed to Moses on Sinai a twofold Torah. In addition to the written Torah (Scripture), God revealed an oral Torah, faithfully transmitted by word of mouth in an unbroken chain from Moses to successive generations, from master to disciple, and preserved now among the rabbis themselves. The oral Torah was encapsulated in the Mishnah ("that which is learnt or memorized"), the earliest document of rabbinic literature, edited in Palestine at the turn of the 3rd century. Subsequent rabbinic study of the Mishnah in Palestine and Babylonia generated the Talmud ("that which is studied"), a wide-ranging commentary on the Mishnah. It later became known as the Gemara (Aramaic for "learning" or "completion"), and today the term "Talmud" is often used to refer to the Mishnah and Gemara together. Two Talmuds were produced: the Palestinian or Yerushalmi ("of Jerusalem") Talmud, completed around 450 CE, and the Babylonian Talmud, completed around 550 CE, which is larger and considered to be more authoritative. The Talmud is the foundation document of rabbinic Judaism.

Early rabbinic writings also include exegetical and homiletical commentaries on Scripture like the Midrashim and the Midrash and several Aramaic translations of the Pentateuch and other scriptural books like the Targums.

3.5 Christianity

Christianity is a major world religion, having substantial representation in all the populated continents of the globe. Its total membership may exceed 1.7 billion people.

Like any system of beliefs and values, Christianity is in many ways comprehensible only "from the inside", to those who share the beliefs and strive to live by the values; and a description that would ignore these "inside" aspects of it would not be historically faithful. To a degree that those on the inside often fail to recognize, however, such a system of beliefs and values can also be described in a way that makes sense to an interested observer who does not or even cannot, share their outlook.

Features of Christianity

Creeds

Creeds are authoritative summaries of the principal articles of faith of various Churches or bodies of believers. As religions develop, originally simple doctrines are subject to elaboration and interpretation that cause differences of opinion. Detailed creeds become necessary to emphasize the differences between the tenets of schismatic branches and to serve as formulations of belief when liturgical usage, as in the administration of baptism, requires a profession of faith.

In the Christian Church, the Apostles' Creed was the earliest summation of doctrine; it has been used with only minor variations since the 2nd century. In addition to the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed are in common use in the Roman Catholic liturgy. In the Orthodox Church, the only creed formally adopted was the Nicene Creed, without the insertion of *filioque* in connection with the source of the Holy Spirit.

With the Reformation, the establishment of the various Protestant Churches necessitated the formulation of new creeds, which, because of the many differences in theology and doctrine, were much longer than the creeds of the ancient Church. The Augsburg Confession is accepted by Lutherans throughout the world, as is the Smaller Catechism of Martin Luther. The Formula of Concord, accepted by most early Lutherans, is now more limited in acceptance. The doctrines of the Church of England are summarized in the Thirty-Nine Articles, and those of the Presbyterians, in the Westminster Confession. Most Reformed Churches of Europe subscribe to the *Helvetica Posterior*, or Second Helvetic Confession, of the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger, and most Calvinists accept the Heidelberg Catechism.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have studied about the major religions of the world and the features of each one of them. You have studied about Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. You have also learned about the history of their foundations, and the individuals who founded them.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

Confucianism was founded by Confucius, a Chinese philosopher.

The principles of Confucianism are contained in 9 ancient Chinese works including five classics and four books.

Taoism is also called Daoism. It is the second popular philosophy among the Chinese after Confucianism.

Islam is another major world religion. It is based on the 5 pillars of Islam.

Judaism is the religious culture of the Jews. The rabbinic tradition is the interpretation and the collection of commentaries on scriptures.

Christianity as the largest religion has 1.7 billion adherents and is based on creeds.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Discuss the historical background of Confucianism.

2. What are the similarities and the differences of two of the major religions that you have studied?

7.0 REFERENCES /FURTHER READINGS

Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, Harper & Row: New York, 1965.

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UNIT 3 STRUCTURE OF RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you studied the major religions of the world ranging from the Oriental religion to the Palestinian-based religions, that is, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In this unit, you will be studying the structures of religion. This implies the features that constitute religion. The study of the structures of religion is imperative as a result of our definition of religion.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Define and explain myths and symbols;

Explain the role of sacred places in religion;

Discuss the role of rituals in religion; and

Explain the function of sacred community in religion.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Structure of Religion

Traditionalism

Current modes of religious activity always seem to look backward for origins, precedents and standards. However, as cultures become complex and literate, these traditions of ancient thoughts and practices become more elaborate and stylized. In spite of the degree of elaboration, two things are taken for granted – the original creative action, the life and words of the individual founder, and even

in the authorless antiquity, of a tradition's scripture as in the case of Hinduism are taken as models of pristine purity and powers fully authoritative for all members of the adherents of the faith.

The basic trust of traditionalism is to maintain itself, no matter how great the actual changes are in a particular historical religious tradition. Religious reformers speak of reforming religion in terms of its most holy past. Thus revivalist Islam speaks of returning to pure Quranic faith and practice. Zen seeks to back directly to the mind of Buddha by-passing all historical forms and scripturalism. Protestantism sought to return to New Testament Christianity, eliminating all the Roman Catholic accretions; and the Roman Catholic responded that its doctrine, ritual and authority dates back to Christ himself therefore older than Protestantism.

Myths and Symbols

Religion is full of myths and symbols. Myths are fanciful tales of the primitive spun out as explanation of beginnings. Creation myths are rationalizations of what pre-scientific cultures cannot understand through other means. Symbol is the language of myth. Ordinary language will not convey the message that myths are out to convey properly. Symbols stand for something other than itself. The importance of symbol in religion can be seen from the variety of rituals, the speech of the ritual officials, artefacts used in the rituals (like paintings and sculptures) shrines and sanctuaries of all levels and types.

Symbols are more lasting than their explanatory doctrinal forms because they speak to the human imagination and human feelings and not merely to the rational sense. Religious symbols often embody what is felt to be the central tenet of the religion involved. They are its sacramental forms and must be preserved at all costs.

Concepts of Salvation

All religions are basically conceived of as saving of human beings at one level or the other. The two aspects to salvation are what humans are to be saved from and what they are saved to. This however varies from culture to culture and from religion to religion. At the primitive level, it is achieved mainly in the realm of physical dangers and goods. Primitive groups perform rituals for salvation from starvation, from death by disease, from wild animals and enemies to freedom from dangers and diseases. Rituals, charms and magic are the means by which these are achieved in the primitive form of religion.

With the development of cultures there came a change in the nature of religious salvation. Group values come to play a larger and more conscious role – the group whether tribal kinship or nation state – comes to be a sacred entity in its own right and perhaps the pre-eminent ones in some cases. For instance, the Roman religion was essentially a state religion, whose major purpose was the preservation or salvation of the state's prosperity and power. The emperors at this time were considered incarnate deities, as was the case in Egypt with the Pharaohs in an earlier era. Inner values relatively unimportant to primitive and early nationalistic

cultures soon became the issues of prime religious importance. Inner state of mind, the cultivation of ecstasy and concern about the personal survival of physical death became important especially during the time of social political turmoil. As time went on, inner development, experiences and values became the impetus for religious development. The religious traditions of Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are all oriented toward the inner life. Their doctrines, texts, religious disciplines and even organizations aim to cultivate the inner life of prayer, faith, enlightenment and purity of character.

Sacred Places and Objects

One of the striking features of religion is the presence of special religious areas and structures set apart from ordinary space by physical, ritual and psychological barriers. Precincts, churches, mosques, synagogues and shrines are the highly visible manifestations of religious discontinuity with the surrounding world. Various physical actions are often required of those who enter sacred areas to indicate this separation. These include ablution, removal of footwear, prayer and incantation, bowing and kneeling, silence, preparatory fasting, special garb and inwards acts of contrition.

Within the more spacious, there are grades of sacredness that enshrine special sacred objects or relics. For example, in the last Jewish temple in Jerusalem, there was a spatial progression from the outermost court of the gentiles to the women's court to the men's court, and the priest's enclosure until it gets to the Holy of the Holies where the Ark of Covenant lies and in some sense the presence of Yahweh. In Japan, the Buddhist temple usually contains large Buddha images at the rear of ornately decorated altars.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From your study so far in this unit you have learnt about the structures of religious life. You can therefore conclude by saying that the structures of religion are very important for an in depth study of religion because it enables us to know the component parts of religion, that is what religion comprises of structurally.

5.0 SUMMARY

These are the major points that you have studied in this unit:

In this unit you have learnt about the structure of religion and the identifiable features in this structure are:

Traditionalism Myths and

symbols Concepts of

salvation Sacred places

and objects

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Mention and explain identifiable features of religion.

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UNIT 4 RELIGIOUS AGENCIES AND SPECIALISTS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Religion as we have rightly observed from our study cannot be practiced in isolation since man is apart from his deep seated religious inclinations-a social animal. With the changing life patterns in the world around us and in our local communities there is a growing pattern or trend that religion is not left out in almost everything. Religion, through the use of various religious agencies makes use of their basic teachings to make impact on the life of people and the society at large. Though these can be said of almost all the major religions of the world, the Christian teaching on love and compassion forms the basis for the establishment of charitable organizations that reach out to people who are in dire need of help and in whatever form.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Explain what religious agencies are

Define religious agents

List examples of religious agencies

Discuss the role of religious agencies

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Religious Agencies

> These are service groups within religious organizations that reach out to people through their programmes fashioned to take care of the welfare of other people outside or within their religious affiliation. The areas of interest of these organizations are diverse and they include education, poverty alleviation, food, security, economy and justice among others.

We will examine some of these agencies as examples of what we meant by religious agencies.

3.2 Religious Agents

The religious agents can be best defined as the various individuals who are at the helm of affairs of the various religious agents. It has to be stated that contrary to expectation, these so called religious agents may not be members of the clergy of the religion. They are usually simply faithful adherents of their religion. This is usually a ploy to enhance the acceptability of these religious agents to the people of other religions that they may have to serve.

3.3 The Role of Religious Agencies

As stated sated above, these religious agencies are the means through which the various religions tries to influence the society in which they live positively. It is the practical outliving of their religion. In the world so far, the following have been identified as the roles of religious agencies:

Social Development

One major area in which religious agencies have been at work is that of social development. The task of developing the society has been found to be too enormous for the government resources alone, therefore various religious agencies have become useful in supporting the government in the quest of societal development. These include the provision of social services in all ramifications. Recognizing this role as that of religious agencies, Theodore E. Cardinal McCarrick, the Archbishop of Washington Diocese who also doubles as the Chairman of the United States Domestic Policy Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a letter to the tow distinguished Senators of the United States has this to say over the CARE (Charity, Aid Recovery and Empowerment Act) bill that was passed in 2002 by the United States Senate:

> We support the legislation's goal of engaging more community and faith-based organizations in tackling our nation's social problems, and its affirmation of the complementary roles and responsibilities of religious groups, community organizations and government in addressing these problems. While religious and secular charities play a key role in providing social services, they

cannot take the government's rightful place in assuring that the basic needs of all Americans are addressed. The

> legislation recognizes this reality by its inclusion of additional resources for the SSBG program, which provides community groups and religious agencies with federal funds to assist working families, abused and abandoned children, persons with disabilities, and the frail elderly.

Refugee Resettlement

Refugees are people that are displaced from their own land and at times countries and had to be resettled somewhere else usually due to some natural disasters as in the case of the tsunami that engulfed the Asian Coast recently of the Hurricane Katrina that devastated part of the United States.

In this case religious agencies have always been known to rise up to the emergency in terms sending aid. Most of the time, medical aids are sent, food and tent for shelter are also sent to ensure that the pains caused by the disaster is ameliorated. On this issue, S. J. Nawyn says that:

> The majority of voluntary agencies that resettle refugees in the U.S. are faith-based organizations. Although the federal government prohibits resettlement agencies from spending federal dollars on religious activities, faith-based resettlement agencies still find ways to incorporate religion in their organizational activities and to mobilize religious resources for refugee rights and services. Based on research with 36 refugee resettlement and assistance organizations in four cities, this paper explores the ways in which religious discourse and religious networks are incorporated in refugee resettlement and will also suggest possibilities for expanding the role of religion in advocating for greater refugee rights.

From this statement it becomes clear that a lot of religious agencies (in this article referred to as faith-based organizations) play a high role in the resettlement of refugees.

World Peace

Another remarkable area in which religious agencies are at work in the society today is the promotion of world peace. Though contrary to what many think (since religion has always been used by miscreants to cause war and other forms of violence), religious agencies in the world today are striving towards achieving world peace. On this issue, Dr. Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General in his Statement to the Millennium World

Peace Summit, admits that:

> Religion wields the power to mobilize the hearts and minds of the people and to urge them forward on the path toward peace and mutual understanding. It has a moral authority and an ethical sensitivity that complement the resources and expertise of governments and civil groups. Indeed, religion has been at the heart of many of history's great social movements. The special role of religious and spiritual leadership is to take a long view, not from an ivory tower, but with a perspective that is detached from immediate exigencies and the often partisan struggles of day-to-day political life.

This fact is well played out in the Sierra-Leone. David Lord states that:

> Among the numerous players involved in shaping the Lomé Peace Agreement, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) stands out as the most highly visible and effective non-governmental bridge builder between the warring factions and a population devastated and divided by more than eight years of violence.
>
> With Muslims making up an estimated sixty per cent of Sierra Leone's 4.5 million people and Christians another fifteen to twenty per cent, the mosques and churches and their agencies were key players in the spiritual, cultural and socio-economic development of Sierra Leone before and after independence.

From the above, it becomes so glaring that religious agencies are a force to reckon with in the society.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

List some functions of Religious Agencies

3.3 Examples of Religious Agencies

There are countless numbers of religious agencies in almost every religion of the world. Therefore to cite examples, one would just name those that are international and inter-religious.

World Council of Religious Leaders

This council was set up in 2002 to be able to assist the United Nations in the addressing global social and environmental problems, prevention,

resolution and healing of conflicts as well as the creation of a more peaceful, just and sustainable society. It aims to encourage religious traditions and the United Nations to work in closer cooperation in building a community of the world's religion to work for the benefit of the global family. It has to be stated that it is not however an organ of the United Nations which is a secular organization neither does it have any status of the body.

International Red Cross Society

It has to be on record that it was the stirring records of Florence Nightingale in the humane and efficient treatment of the wounded both in the American Civil War and the Franco-German War that led to the establishment of the Red Cross Society which is now established in every civilized land. One of the purposes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is to provide aid to civilians caught up in war zones or political strife.

The Red Cross emblem was adopted in 1864 at an international conference in Geneva, Switzerland, as a recognizable symbol to be worn by medical personnel aiding wounded soldiers during wartime. The emblem is a reversed version of the Swiss flag, which shows a white cross on a red background. Today it is used by many Red Cross agencies around the world. It has to be noted the bearing its religious undertone, a Red Crescent emblem is substituted by the relief societies of Islamic nations.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit you have learnt the definition of religious agencies and religious agents. You have also learnt about the three major sub-headings under which the role of religious agencies can be grouped, namely: social development, world peace and refugee settlement. Two major religious agencies: the World Council of Religious Leaders and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.3

List other religious agencies that you know and their functions

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

Religious agencies are the arms other than religion through which religious organizations reaches their society.

Religious agents are those who direct the affairs of the religious agencies.

Religious agencies play a lot of role in social development, world peace and the settlement of refugees world-wide.

The World Council of Religious Leaders and the International Red Cross (or Red Crescent) Society are examples of Religious Agencies.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss the importance and the relevance of religious agencies

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 RELIGION AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, you studied the religious agencies and those that can be considered as specialist in the area of religion. In this unit, you will be focusing on the relationship of between religion and other social institutions. Religion has over the centuries played significant roles in the lives of not only the adherents but in the society at large. These roles cut across other areas in the lives of the people living in the society ranging from politics to economy, medicine and education. The visible roles of religion in the society become particularly significant in its interactions with the social institutions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

Explain the role of religion in the social institutions;

Trace the history of religion and its role in education;

Comment on the role of religion in medicine;

Discuss to what extent religion can determine the economy of a nation; and

Discuss the influence religion can have on politics.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Religion and Politics

From time immemorial both religion and politics have a very strong hold on humans. The ancient Greek philosophers were of the opinion that if there was to be political stability, there is the need for religious homogeneity. This belief was the basis of Hellenism and the spread of the Hellenistic culture in the Mediterranean world. It has to be noted also that this is the major cause of the Jewish revolt then. The Microsoft Encarta Premium puts it this way:

> The introduction into the Middle East of Greek culture, beginning with the conquests of Alexander the Great in 331 BCE, put the indigenous cultures of the region on the defensive. The Maccabean revolt of 165-142 BCE, started by a family called Maccabees, began as a civil war between Jewish Hellenizers and resistant Israelites; it ended as a successful war for Judaean political independence from Syrian occupying forces led by Antiochus Epiphanes. This political and cultural turmoil had a major impact on religion.

This philosophy still holds sway among Muslims today and other religions with political character.

In most African societies there is strictly no demarcation between the religious and the political. For example, among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria, the Oba, that is the monarch that wields the political authority and power is also considered the head of the religious life of the people. The king is therefore seen as holding power in trust for the Supreme Being and he is usually greeted as "second in command to the gods". To date, one cannot talk of a dichotomy between religion and politics in Yorubaland. Despite the advent of western civilization that opens the way for other religion which eventually have their own adherents, the King as the monarchy is still expected to be non-partisan. He is therefore regarded as belonging to all the religions practiced by all his subjects.

The 16th Century reformation brought about King Henry VIII's schism from the Catholic Church of Rome. He therefore established the Church of England, which he controlled –thereby uniting religious and political authorities under the English Monarchy. It was the religious pluralism of the 1800 that eventually led to the separation of the State from a single

cohesive church. To date, the Vatican is almost the only country where

the Pope as the religious head is also the Head of State. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad combined political power with religious leadership. This is still in vogue in most religious nations such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran and Iraq.

The general contemporary trend however is that nations are regarded to be secularly administered with freedom granted to the citizens to belong to any religion of their choice and with followers of various religions taking part in the governance. Nigeria is a typical example of this.

3.2 Religion and Economy

Religion from Max Weber's theory, in the course of its interaction with the forms and goals of economic life gave rise to modern capitalism in the western world. Modern capitalism developed in the 7th Century because the capitalists became more rational with their methods. They were motivated by the ethical spirit which was believed to have given the capitalist enterprise the dignity of being of service to God as well as the fulfillment of his wishes to humans.

Apart from this modern notion of the development of capitalism, religion has also played a high economic role in the life of the traditional Africans and still does to date. For example, part of its economic role is the guiding of the agricultural life of the people. One instance is that in many societies, yam cannot be harvested and taken to the market for sale except certain religious festivals take place; thereby regulating the economy of those societies.

3.3 Religion and Medicine

There has always been a symbiotic relationship between religion and medicine. There is no way one can discuss medicine without looking at the influence of religion on it. The connectivity between religion and medicine can be examined from the African society point of view and from the history of modern medicine. Mostly, the religious leaders of the various African religious cults are medicine men and healers. For example, apart from being a religious figure, the diviner is also at the same time a healer that can give medical prescriptions. In fact, the guild of the art of healing in most African societies remains a religious cult.

What is today called modern medicine has its root in Greek civilization. It has to be noted that in the earliest times, Greek medicine also grew out of religion. Apart from the fact that modern medicine grew out of religion, the spread of modern medicine to Africa and Nigeria in particular is closely related to the growth of Christianity in Africa. This

is because as the missionaries came to Africa they were followed by

doctors who came along as physicians. Most of the early missions built hospitals. Examples are Baptist Hospital and Catholic Hospital among others.

There is also the faith dimension to medicine that has to be mentioned. In such churches, there are always maternity homes where deliveries are made especially by members of the church. They find patronage basically because those who patronize them believe that the personnel there possess spiritual powers which can be of help in times of trouble.

3.4 Religion and Education

The role of religion in education both formally and informally has been significant. It is the religionists that we owe the literary development of the world to. In their bid to prove the existence of God by employing rational methods, Christian philosophers have made their marks in world literary development. Thomas Aquinas is a good example of this. Christianity has also had to use education to further the spread of the religion. Those who were to become involved in evangelism had to be formally trained educationally. In Islam too, Muslim philosophers are to be credited also for the mark they mad eon the literary world, especially in science and astronomy.

In the Nigerian circumstances, the early missionaries established several schools like CMS (Christ Missionary Society) Grammar School, Anglican Girls' Grammar School and also schools like Ansar-ur-deen College for the Muslims among others.

4.0 CONCLUSION

On the whole, the role of religion in almost every area of human life is very considerable and significant. In fact, from the conduct of humans, their attitude and behaviour, scholars have observed are largely due to their religious beliefs. What this portends is that man is a religious being. This fact is expressed by Mbiti when he says that, Africans are notoriously religious.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points you have learnt in this unit:

Almost all religion begins with a close relationship with politics.

In the beginning, Anglicanism was the state religion of England

Roman Catholicism and Islam are still upholding the close affinity between religion and politics

Capitalism is seen as God-ordained form of economy

What today is known as modern day medicine grew out of religion

Education was used as a means of spreading religion by both Christian and Muslim missionaries.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Explain the role of religion in politics, economy, medicine and education.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 6 FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this course and you will be studying the functions of religion. These functions would be seen from two broad perspectives: the social and the psychological. While the social functions of religion has to do more with what religion does within the society, the psychological functions of religion is concerned more with what religion has to do with the individual which is also subjective.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

Enumerate and discuss the social functions of religion; and

Enumerate and discuss the psychological functions of religion

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Social Functions of Religion

Religion does certainly have a role to play within the society and this tendency of religion is what has opened the field of study called the sociology of religion. In its broad category, religion can be said to play four major roles in the society. The following are the roles of religion in the society.

Provides support for social norms

Religion is a major support for the norms of the society. Religion is vital and necessary for societal maintenance and regulation. The value-system

of a community or society always correlates with, and to a degree

dependent upon, a more or less shared system of religious beliefs and convictions. Religion supports, reinforces, reaffirms, and maintains the fundamental values of the society. For example, in most African societies, religion is used to give a divine support for the rules of the society. It can be said to give sanctity, more than human legitimacy, and even, through super-empirical reference, transcendent and supernatural importance to some values. An example of this is the belief among the Yoruba people of Nigeria that it is a taboo for anyone to sit on a mortar. The sanction of this is the evocation of the wrath of Sango-the god of thunder- who can strike the disobedient down. However, this is just a rule that is made to disallow people from desecrating the mortar that is used to make food for the household.

In most societies, religions play an important role in social control by defining what is right and wrong behaviours. If individuals do the right things in life, they may earn the approval of the gods. If they do the wrong things, they may suffer supernatural retribution. For instance, the Qur'an, not only provides detailed lists of specific kinds of crimes and appropriate earthly punishments, it also gives descriptions of how to do mundane tasks such as eating specific kinds of food. The sacred texts of religions usually set precedents for proper behaviour in common situations. The Judeo-Christian Bible stories of Adam and Eve, Cane and Able, Noah, Job, Moses, Solomon, and even Jesus provide examples of how virtuous people should lead their lives. It does not matter whether the sacred stories or myths of a religion actually occurred in every detail--they are still illustrative of correct thought and behaviour.

Provides social integration

Religion integrates and unifies the society. Some of the oldest, persistent and most cohesive forms of social groupings have grown out of religion. This fact can be exemplified in one of the problems facing the use of cells in the growth of a church. The people in the cells may become so united that they may no longer want anybody else to come in to the group thus negating the very purpose for which cell groups are created. These social groups that have existed based on religion have varied widely from mere families, primitive, totemic groups, and small modern cults and sects, to the memberships of great denominations, and great, widely dispersed world religions. Religion fosters group life in various ways. The common ultimate values, ends and goals fostered by religion are a most important factor. Without a system of values there can be no society. Where such a value system prevails, it always unifies all who possess it; it enables members of the society to operate as a system. The religious beliefs also reflect the values which are expressed in creeds, dogmas, and doctrines, and form what Durkheim calls a credo. As he

points out, a religious group can not exist without a collective credo, and the more extensive the credo, the more unified and strong is the group. The credo unifies and socializes men by attaching them completely to an identical body of doctrine; the more extensive and firm the body of doctrine, the firmer the group. The religious symbolism, and especially the closely related rites and worship forms, constitute a powerful bond for the members of the particular faith. The common codes, for religious action as such and in their ethical aspects for everyday moral behavior, bind the devotees together. These are ways of jointly participating in significantly symbolized, standardized, and ordered religiously sanctified behavior. The codes are mechanism for training in, and directing and enforcing, uniform social interaction, and for continually and publicly reasserting the solidarity of the group. Durkheim noted long ago that religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things... unites into one single moral community... all those who adhere to them".

The unifying effect of religion is also brought out in the fact that historically people-groups have clung together as more or less cohesive cultural units, with religion as the dominant bond, even though spatially dispersed and not politically organized. The Jews, for 2500 years have been a prime example. It should be pointed out that the integrating function of religion, for good or ill, has often supported or been identified with other groupings be it political or ethnic.

Provides Stability

Religion usually exercises a stabilizing-conserving function. As such it acts as an anchor for the people. There is a marked tendency for religions, once firmly established, to resist change, not only in their own doctrines and policies and practices, but also in secular affairs having religious relevance. It has thus been a significant factor in the conservation of social values, though also in some measure, an obstacle to the creation or diffusion of new ones. It tends to support the longstanding precious sentiments, the traditional ways of thinking, and the customary ways of living. As Yinger has pointed out, the "...reliance on symbols, on tradition, on sacred writings, on the cultivation of emotional feelings of identity and harmony with sacred values, turns one to the past far more than to the future". Historically, religion has also functioned as a tremendous engine of vindication, enforcement, sanction, and perpetuation of various other institutions.

An example of this can be found in the history of Christianity and also in all denominational history. Let us cite as an example the coming of Neo-Pentecostalism into the church in the last few decades. Most orthodox churches fought against the wave on the ground that they were

protecting their denominational distinctiveness. In fact many churches suffered schisms as a result of this inability to adapt to changes. Also, the persecution of other Christians that came in the Catholic Church is also an example of the use of religion as an instrument of vindication against the others.

Provides motivation

Religion also energizes and motivates both individuals and groups. Much of the important individual and social action has been owing to religious incentives. The great ultimate ends of religion have served as magnificent beacon lights that lured people toward them with an almost irresistible force, mobilizing energies and inducing sacrifices; for example, the Crusades, mission efforts, just wars. Another great example of his is the social recovery or revolution that took place in Great Britain due to the influence of religion. The eradication of the slave trade was an example of this as seen in the quest of William Wilberforce and his colleagues. Much effort has been expended in the sincere effort to apply the teaching and admonitions of religion. The insuperable reward systems that most religions embody have great motivating effects. Religion provides the most attractive rewards, either in this world or the next, for those who not merely abide by its norms, but who engage in good works. Religion usually acts as a powerful aid of social control, enforcing what people should or should not do. Among primitive peoples the sanctions and dictates of religion were more binding than any of the other controls exercised by the group; and in modern societies such influence is still great. Religion has its own supernatural prescriptions that are at the same time codes of behaviour for the here and now.

Provides interpretation of important life cycles

Religion provides interpretation of important life cycles in society and life events. In Africa, you will recall that the life cycles are always marked with religious festivals as there are really no demarcation between the sacred and the secular. For example, the birth of a child, the naming of the child, the rites of adulthood (either of manhood or of womanhood), marriage and death are all important religious and social celebrations.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1

Why is religion centrally important to the existence of the society?

3.2 The Psychological Functions of Religion

As indicated earlier, religion has a role also to play in the individual. It also has to be noted too that the functions of religion to the individual is more psychological than physical. Although these psychological functions of religion are not of direct significance in social organization, they have important indirect consequences. If these psychological functions of religion are performed, the individual is a composed, ordered, motivated, and becomes an emotionally secured associate; he is not greatly frustrated, and he is not anomic; he is better fitted to perform his social life among his fellows. The following are the psychological or individual functions of religion:

Religion deals with Human's basic worries

Religion helps people to deal with the basic worries of this world which include the fear of death, suffering, fear and anxiety among many others. Religion does this by binding the individual to the supernatural and gives them cosmic peace and a sense of supreme fulfillment, thereby being of great therapeutic value for them. It gives people aid, comfort, even solace, in meeting mundane life situations where their own unassisted practical knowledge and skill are felt by them to be inadequate. People are confronted with the recurrent crises, such as great natural catastrophes and the great transitions of life: marriage, incurable disease, widowhood, old age, the certainty of death. They have to cope with frustration and other emotional disturbances. Their religious beliefs provide them with plausible explanations for many conditions which cause them great concern, and their religious faith makes possible fortitude, equanimity, and consolation, enabling them to endure colossal misfortune, fear, frustration, uncertainty, suffering, evil, and danger. For example when someone fails to achieve something the way they want, they console themselves by saying that maybe God wants it that way, and that they have to submit to God's will.

Religion makes the world understandable

It is an accepted fact that this world is a puzzle – a mystery that often defiles understanding. In this maze called 'life', religion helps people by providing a kind of understanding to the world. Religion at its best also offers the experience of spiritual fulfilment by inviting man into the highest realm of the spirit. Religion can summate, epitomize, relate, and conserve all the highest ideals and values. There is also the possibility, among higher religions, of experiencing consistent meaning in life and enjoying guidance and expansiveness. The kind of religious experience that most moderns seek not only provides, clarifies, and relates human

yearnings, values, ideals, and purposes; it also provides facilities and

incitements for the development of personality, sociality, and creativeness. Under the religious impulse, whether theistic or humanistic, men have joy in living; life leads somewhere. Religion at its best is out in front, ever beckoning and leading on, mobilizing all man's scattered energies in one triumphant sense of his own infinite importance. Religion makes people feel at home in the world by making them have the experience of being helpfully allied with what they cannot fully understand; they are a coordinate part of all of the mysterious energy, being, and movement.

Provides meaning and purpose in life

One of the many basic questions that humans are faced with on planet earth is finding answers to the purpose for which they have been created, and the meaning of existence in general. We might need to point out that the issue of the purpose of existence is the basic quest of the Philosopher (the teacher (as in Good News Version) or preacher (as in King James' Version) in the book of Ecclesiastics. Religion helps humans to make a meaning and purpose out of their earthly existence by aligning them with God, and by making them make God's purpose their own purpose. This truth is seen in Philosopher's conclusion of his search for meaning in this world as recorded in the book of Ecclesiastics: "fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole man." Religion makes humans to see that they can only be complete by seeing God as the end of all things.

Interprets life-cycle events: birth, adulthood, marriage and death

Though it has be mentioned earlier that interpretation of the life-cycle events is part of the sociological functions of religion, it also has to be mentioned at this point because since an individual is the focus of these events, it also have an individualistic function. For example, most men see religion as the basis of these life cycles. For a Christian it is a divine command to get married (most pastors would quote the passage "he that finds a wife finds a good thing") and it is God's will to procreate as he has commanded that we should reproduce and replenish the earth.

Religion provides the hope of eternity

Religion usually also includes a principle of compensation, mainly in a promised perfect future state. The belief in immortality, where held, functions as a redress for the ills and disappointments of the here and now. The tensions accompanying a repressive consciousness of wrongdoing or sinning or some tormenting secret are relieved for the less self-contained or self-sufficient by confession, repentance, and penance. The feeling of individual inferiority, defeat, or humiliation

growing out of various social situations or individual deficiencies or failures is compensated for by communion in worship or prayer with a friendly, but all-victorious Father-God, as well as by sympathetic fellowship with others who share this faith, and by opportunities in religious acts for giving vent to emotions and energies. In providing for these inner individual functions, religion undertakes on behalf of individual peace of mind, and well-being for which there is no other institution. Death therefore, is not permanent defeat and disappearance; humans have a second chance. They are not lost in the abyss of endless time; they have endless existence.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

What would you say is the role of religion in the life of humans?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit which is the last unit of this course, you have studied the functions of religion in the individual and in the societal. You have been taught that the functions of religion in the individual are psychological but that it has a lot of indirect influence on the sociological functions.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this course:

There are fivefold sociological functions of religion:

It provides support for social norms

It provides social integration

It provides stability

It provides motivation

It provides interpretation of important life cycle events.

There are fivefold psychological (individual) functions of religion:

It deals with people's basic worries

It makes the world understandable

It provides meaning and purpose in life

It interprets life cycle events

It provides the hope of eternity.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Discuss the importance of the role of religion to the individual

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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