



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**COURSE CODE: ISL 313**

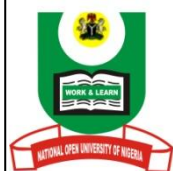
**COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS**

**COURSE  
GUIDE****ISL313  
INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS**

**Course Team**

Dr. Makanjuola Akande Kareem (Course Developer/Writer) – College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State  
Dr. Ibrahim Uthman (Course Editor) – University of Ibadan  
Professor Asif F. Ahmed (Programme Leader) – NOUN  
Dr Adejoro Raheem Mustapha (Course Coordinator) – NOUN

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**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

National Open University of Nigeria  
Headquarters  
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way  
Victoria Island, Lagos

Abuja Office  
5 Dar es Salaam Street  
Off Aminu Kano Crescent  
Wuse II, Abuja

e-mail: [centralinfo@nou.edu.ng](mailto:centralinfo@nou.edu.ng)

URL: [www.nou.edu.ng](http://www.nou.edu.ng)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome! ISL313: Introduction to World Religions is a two-credit unit course for Students of Arabic and Islamic studies at the 300 level. This course textbook is developed against the background that the knowledge of World Religions will afford learners the ability to relate with other religious groups and thereby instill the spirit of peaceful co existence in the world. This course-guide is an overview of the entire course. You will also read about how it is structured out as well as the requirements for making a success of your endeavor in undergoing the Course.

## **COURSE AIMS**

The concern of this Course is to help you to be competent in the discussion of related issues in religion around the world. You will, in the course of this study be exposed to the following:

1. Meaning and Concepts of World Religions
2. Aims and objectives of Religion
3. The historical origin of some World Religions
4. The Beliefs and Customs; size and Functions of Religions

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

To achieve the above aims, overall objectives are set for ISL313. This is exclusive of the specific objectives, which are stated for every unit. You are passionately advised to read them before venturing into the subject matters as it will prepare your mind for better grasping of the message. It is expected that by the time you complete this course you will be able to:

- discuss the major religions of the world
- explain the interaction of faith and customs among the religions
- give details of the peculiarities of the practitioners of the african traditional religion
- apply the lessons to life situations.

## **WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE**

For you to complete this course, you must read and understand all the study units and all the related materials. You will be required to submit written assignments at the end of each unit for the purpose of assessment. You are also going to write a final examination at the end of the course.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

The following are the major materials you need for this course:

1. Course guide
2. Study Units
3. Assignment File
4. Relevant Textbooks including the ones listed in each unit

## **STUDY UNITS**

There are 14 units (of three modules) for this course. They are:

### **Module 1**

- Unit 1        Meaning and Concepts of Religion
- Unit 2        Aims and Objectives of Religion
- Unit 3        Origin of Religion
- Unit 4        Origin of some specific world Religions I
- Unit 5        Origin of some specific world Religions II

### **Module 2**

- Unit 1        Origin of some specific world religions III
- Unit 2        Major Religions of the World
- Unit 3        Beliefs and Customs of some World Religions
- Unit 4        Notes on the size of some specific World Religions I
- Unit 5        Notes on the size of some specific World Religions II

### **Module 3**

- Unit 1        Practice and Rituals in African Traditional Religion
- Unit 2        Functions of Religion
- Unit 3        Impact of Religion in the life of a Society
- Unit 4        Relationship of humanity with Religion

## **TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES**

Some books have been recommended for this course, they will assist you a lot if you can purchase some of them for further reading. These among many others include:

- E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London, Longmans Group Limited, 1972).

- E. Dada Adelowo, *Methods and Theories of Religion* (Ado-Ekiti, Olugbenga Press and Publishers).
- H. Abdalati, *Islam in Focus* (Rhyadh, Wamy, Islamic Teaching Centre, n.d.).
- M.M. Ali, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Ahmadiyyat Isha'at Islam, 1978)
- M.F. Karim, *Al-Hadis an English Translation and Commentary of Mishkatul-Masabih* (Lohore, The Book House, 1940).
- Harvey, Graham, *Indigenous Religions: A Companion* (London and New York, Cassell, 2000).
- G.L. Berry, *Religions of the World* (Canada, Barnes and Noble, 1958).
- Bamire, B.A. (2002). *Top secret About Christianity, Other Fetish Religions and Islam*. Lagos: AC-Bayaan Islamic Publications Limited.
- M.A. Kareem, *Comparative Religion Islamic Series* (Ado-Ekiti, College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, 2002).
- The New Catholic Encyclopedia: Arts The Holy Trinity Vol. 14*, pp. 295-299, 1967
- A.Y. Ali, *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran, Translation and Commentary* (London, Islamic Foundation, 1975).
- A.R.I. Doi, *The Cardinal Principles of Islam* (Islamic Publication Bureau, 1979).
- D.J. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary*
- E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London, S.C.M., 1973).
- F.M. Arthur, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspectives* (New York Orbis, Books, 1981).
- T.P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam* (New Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 1977).
- Wande Abimbola, e.d. and translation. *Ifa Divination Poetry* (New York, NOK, 1977).



Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1954).

C.L. Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba* (Ibadan, UPL, 1980)

J.B. Danquah, *The Ayhan Doctrine of God* (London, Coss, 1960).

S. Gill, *Academic Study of Religion*, PDF-Adobe Reader Journal of American Religion

World Eras Encyclopedia, Vol. 10, Pierre-Damien Mruyek (New York, Thomson, 2003).

J. Baldick, *Black God: The Afroasiatic Roots of Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religions* (New York, Syracuse University Press, 1997).

R.A. Heinlien, *Quotes about Humanity* (America, Science Fictions Writers, 1907-1988).

A. Rahim, *Islamic History* (Lagos, IPB, 1983).

M.O.A. Abdul, *The Classical Caliphate* (Lagos, IPB, 19

## **ASSESSMENT FILE**

You will be given an assessment file and a marking scheme. The assessment file will contain details of the work to be submitted to your tutor for marking. You will be evaluated in two ways: the tutor marked assignments and the written examination. Your final marks depend on what you scored in these two.

You must submit your assignments to your tutor for formal assessment which necessarily followed the stipulated schedule and deadline. Your submitted work for assessment will be 30% of your total score.

## **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS (TMAS)**

You are expected to submit specified numbers of 'TMAs'. Each of these units has a TMA. You will be assessed on only four but the best three will represent your 30% grading.

On completion of any assignment, you must send it with TMA to your tutor. Ensure that the assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submission. In the event of any logistics for incompleteness of any work to time, contact your tutor immediately for

possible extension; for this shall not be granted after the due date unless for exceptional situations.

## FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination will cover three hours. You will be tested in all aspects of the course. Endeavour to read the unit again before the exam. 70% is the score for final examination out of the total course grading. The questions will be similar to the ones you have treated in the TMAs.

## COURSE MARKING SCHEME

This table represents the layout for the actual course mark:

Assessment	Marks
Best three assignments	30%
Final Examination	70%
Total	100%

## COURSE OVERVIEW AND PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

Unit	Title of Work	Week Activity	Assignment
<b>Module 1</b>			
Unit 1	Meaning and Concepts of Religion	Week 1	Assignment 1
Unit 2	Aims and Objectives of Religion	Week 2	Assignment 2
Unit 3	Origin of Religion	Week 3	Assignment 3
Unit 4	Origin of some specific world Religions I	Week 4	Assignment 4
Unit 5	Origin of some specific world Religions II	Week 5	Assignment 5
<b>Module 2</b>			
Unit 1	Origin of some specific world religions III	Week 6	Assignment 6
Unit 2	Major Religions of the World	Week 7	Assignment 7
Unit 3	Beliefs and Customs of some World Religions	Week 8	Assignment 8
Unit 4	Notes on the size of some specific World Religions I	Week 9	Assignment 9
Unit 5	Notes on the size of some specific World Religions II	Week 10	Assignment 10

<b>Module 3</b>			
Unit 1	Practice and Rituals in African Traditional Religion	Week 11	Assignment 11
Unit 2	Functions of Religion	Week 12	Assignment 12
Unit 3	Impact of Religion in the life of a Society	Week 13	Assignment 13
Unit 4	Relationship of humanity with Religion	Week 14	Assignment 14
	<b>Revision I</b>		
	<b>Examination I</b>		
	<b>Total 14</b>		

## HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

In distant learning, the study unit replaces the University lecturer. The advantage is that you can read and work through the course materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. Just a lecturer might give you in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate times. Each of the study units has common features which are designed to aid your learning.

The first feature is an instruction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with other units and the course as a whole.

Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives assist you to know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit you should use these objectives to guide your study. When you finish the unit, you should go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. Self-Assessment Exercises are interspersed through each study unit and answers are given at the end of the course. These exercises are designed to help you recall what you have studied and to evaluate your learning by yourself. You should do each Self-Assessment Exercise as you come into it in the study unit.

The summary at the end of each unit also helps you to recall all the main topics discussed in the main content of each unit. There are also tutor-marked questions at the end of each unit. Working on these questions will help you achieve the objectives of each unit and prepared you for the assignments which you will submit and the final examination.

It should take you about three hours to complete a study unit, the exercises and assignments. When you have completed the first study unit take note of how long it took you and use this information to draw up a time -table to guide the study for the rest of your course. The wide

margins on the right and left of the pages of your study book are meant for you to make notes of main ideas or key points at which you can use when revising the course. If you make use of all these features you will significantly increase the chances of passing the course.

## **COURSE DELIVERY**

As an open and distant learner, you learn through several ways. You learn when you interact with the content in your course materials in the same way a student interacts with the teacher in a conventional institution. You also learn when you are guided through the course: however you are not taught the course. Instead your course materials are your teacher, and as such you will not be able to get any answer to any of the questions which may arise from your study of the material. It is for this reason that, in addition to the course material which you have received, the delivery of this course is supported by tutorial, facilitation, and by counseling support services. Although these services are not compulsory, you are encouraged to take maximum advantage of them.

## **TUTORIAL SESSIONS**

The total number of tutorial hours for this course is 8 hours.

Tutorial sessions form a part of your learning process as they offer you an opportunity to have face to face contact with your tutorial facilitator and to receive answers to questions or seek clarifications on a study unit that you may have. Also you may contact your tutorial facilitator by phone or email.

On your part, you will be expected to prepare ahead of time by studying the relevant study units, write your questions so as to gain maximum benefit from tutorial sessions. Information about the location and time schedule for facilitator will be available at your study centre.

Tutorial sessions are flexible arrangement between you and your tutorial facilitator you will need to contact your study centre to arrange the time schedule for the sessions. You will also need to obtain your tutorial facilitator's phone number and e-mail address.

Tutorial sessions are optional. However, the benefits of participating in them provide you a forum for interaction and peer group discussions which will minimize the isolation you may experience as a distance learner.

## **FACILITATION**

Facilitation is learning that takes place both within and outside of tutorial sessions. Your tutorial facilitator guides your learning by doing the following:

- Provide answers to your questions during tutorial sessions, on phone or by email;
- Coordinate group discussion.
- Provide feedback on your assignments;
- Pose questions to confirm learning outcomes;
- Coordinate mark and record your assignment/examination score; and monitor your progress.

The language of instruction for this course is English. The course material is available in print or CD formats, and also on the university website. On your part, you will be expected to prepare ahead of time by studying the relevant study units, write your questions so as to gain maximum benefit from facilitation. Information about the location and time schedule for facilitation will be available at your study centre. Time of facilitation is a flexible arrangement between you and your tutorial facilitator. You should contact your tutorial facilitator if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units.
- You have difficulty with the self assessment exercises.
- You have a question or a problem with an assignment, with your tutorial facilitator's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

## **COUNSELING**

Counseling forms a part of your learning because it is provided to make your learning experience easier. Counseling is available to you at two stairs, academic and personal counseling. Student Counselors are available at the study centres to provide guidance for personal issues that may affect your studies. Your study centre manager and tutorial facilitators can assist you with questions on academic matters such as course materials, facilitation, grades and so on. Make sure that you have the phone numbers and email addresses of your study centre and various individuals.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There are three components of assessment for this course: self assessment exercises and assignments at the end of each study unit; the

tutor-marked assignments; and a written examination. In doing these assignments, you are expected to use the information gathered during your study of the course. Below are detailed explanations on how to do each assignment.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAES)**

There are Self Assessment Exercises spread out through your course material. You should attempt each exercise immediately after reading the section that precedes it. Possible answers to the exercise are provided at the end of the course book; however, you should check the answers only after you must have attempted the exercises. The exercises are for you to evaluate your learning; they are not to be submitted. There are also questions spread through each unit. You required attempting these questions after you have read a study unit.

Again, the questions are to help you assess your knowledge of the contents of the unit. You are not required to submit the answers for SAEs.

### **GUIDELINE FOR WRITING TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

1. On the cover page of your assignment, write the course code and title, assignment number (TMA 1, TMA 2 ...), and date of submission, your name and matriculation number.  
It should look like this:  
Course Code \_\_\_\_\_ Course Title \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor-Marked  
Assignment \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Submission \_\_\_\_\_ Name  
\_\_\_\_\_ Matriculation Number \_\_\_\_\_
2. You should endeavour to be concise and straight to the point in your answers. Your answer should be based on your course materials, further readings and experience. However, do not copy from any of these materials. If you do, you will be penalized. Remember to give relevant examples and illustrations.
3. Use ruled foolscap-sized paper for writing answers. Make and keep a copy of your assignments.
4. Your answers should be hand-written by you. Leave a margin of about 1.5 inches of the left side and about 5 lines before the answer to the next question for your tutorial facilitator's comments.

5. When you have completed each assignment, make sure that each assignment reaches your tutorial facilitator on or before the deadline. If for any reason you cannot complete your work on time, contact your study centre manager and tutorial facilitator before the assignment is due to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions will not be granted after the due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

## **FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING**

The final examination for ISL 313 will be of two hours duration, and will carry 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the kinds of Self-Assessment Exercises and questions in the Tutor-Marked Assignments which you have previously encountered. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You should use the time between finishing the last unit and taking the examination to revise the entire course. You will find it useful to review your answers to Self-Assessment Exercises and Tutor-Marked Assignment before the examination.

For you to be eligible to sit for the final examination you must have done the following: you should have submitted all the four Tutor-Marked Assignments for the course. You should have registered to sit for the examination. The deadline for examination registration will be available at your study centre. Failure to submit your assignments or to register for the examination (even if you sit for the examination) means that you will not have a score for the course.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, ISL 313: Introduction to World Religions provides you with the knowledge of the meaning, aims and objectives of the World Religions. It also contains their history of origin, beliefs and customs, the size and locations, their functions, impacts and relationship with humanity were also discussed. The course is concluded with the interaction of beliefs and concepts of African Traditional Religions their practice and rituals. Without any doubt, you will also be able to discuss the themes and explain the contents of each of unit and able to find out the divergence and convergence among the different World Religions. Most importantly, you will be able to apply their lesson to the society with respect to good human relationship and the concern for the hereafter.

**SUMMARY**

All the features of this course guide have been designed to facilitate your learning in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the course. They include the aims and objectives, course summary, course overview, self assessment exercise and study questions. You should ensure that you make maximum use of them in your study to achieve maximum results.

Have a pleasant study and successful outcome in your examination.



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**MODULE 1**

Unit 1	Meaning and Concepts of Religion
Unit 2	Aims and Objectives of Religion
Unit 3	Origin of Religion
Unit 4	Origin of some Specific World Religions I
Unit 5	Origin of some Specific World Religions II

**UNIT 1 MEANING AND CONCEPTS OF RELIGION****CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
	3.1 Meaning of Religion
	3.2 Concepts of Religion
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Different meanings and definitions of religion will be dealt with in this unit. This will give a clear picture of what it is or what it is not. The second part will discuss the various concepts of religion from the very early time to the contemporary period.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- define religion
- identify what is and what is not religion
- differentiate between religion and religiose or religionism
- discuss some concepts of religion from different angles.

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT****3.1 Meaning of Religion**

The original old meaning of religion comes from Latin word religare which means re-link, create a tie to God or re-unite with God. It includes

techniques of meditation. It could also be derived from another Latin world - religion, which denotes both earnest observance of ritual obligations and an inward spirit of reverence. In modern usage, religion covers a wide spectrum of meanings reflecting the enormous variety of ways the term can be interpreted.

Religion is a belief in some superhuman power or powers, particularly in a God or gods. This belief usually involves: obedience, reverence, and worship; as part of a system which defines a code of living, especially a way of achieving spiritual or material improvement. In religious studies, religion has been described as a cultural system that creates powerful and long lasting meaning, by establishing symbols that relate to humanity, to beliefs and values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They intend to derive morality, ethics, religious laws or preferred life system from their ideas about the cosmos and human nature.

The word religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or belief system, but religion differs from private belief in that it has a public aspect. Most religions have organised behaviours including clerical hierarchies; a definition of what constitutes adherence or membership, congregations of laity, regular meetings or services for the purposes of veneration of a deity or for prayer, holy places and scriptures. The practice of a religion may also include: sermons, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trainings, initiations, funeral services, matrimonial services, meditation, music, arts, dance, public service or other human culture.

Many scholars have written a lot about what religion is. The most surprising thing is that to attempt a definitive definition of religion is almost impossible, if not altogether impossible task, and every serious scholar is on the verge of abandoning the task.

One Professor Leuba enumerates 48 definitions of religion from as many great men and added 2 of his own to give 50, yet none of the scholars is convinced by any of these definitions except his own.

E. Bolaji Idowu, also, gives his own which is considered by many as comprehensive but rather too long for easy comprehension.

In this regard, Anon warns about the difficulty of framing a correct definition. According to him, a definition of religion that will be acceptable should apply to nothing but religion. What we need to know are the condiments that make up religion. It is these condiments that will help us in maintaining the hypothesis of religion. Here, the following items can be identified: the force that the scriptures usually label God, the supersensible word in general, the phenomenon of

revelation, man, the created order, and the relationship or the interaction between one and the other of these elements. From this premise, we can proceed to present some of the definitions.

Religion can be defined as man's efforts in satisfying certain emotional need by establishing and maintaining cordial relations between himself and spiritual powers on the one hand, and his fellowman and other creatures on the other. Religion is primarily ritual, the action of men to maintain power of equilibrium and preserve the harmony of this dynamic cosmos. It can, also be defined as a process of communion with God and other spiritual forces and a means of looking for security.

To some, religion is a necessity, spiritual, social, and universal. It is not to bewilder man but to guide him. It is not to deprive him of anything useful or to border him or oppress his qualities, but it opens for him inexhaustible treasure of sound thinking and right action.

Religion is a system by means of which a group struggles with the ultimate problems of human life. It is the refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration and to allow hostility to tear apart one's human association.

Religion is, therefore not religionism which entails excessive religious enthusiasm or religiose which is excessively or sentimentally religious.

Rather according to some, it is belief, worship and the opinions of people concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life.

Religion can also be seen as an engagement with that which is believed to be a spiritual reality. Religion is a world-wide phenomenon that has played a part in all human culture and is much broader.

It is not an object with a simple, fixed meaning or even a zone with clear boundaries. It is an aspect of life that may intersect, incorporate, or transcend other aspects of life and society. In some ways, there are as many forms of religious expressions as there are human cultural environments.

## **3.2 Concepts of Religion**

### **Sociological Concept**

In many cases, the things that people consider sacred are determined by the community to which they belong. The holiest things in the world to one group - its gods, saviours, scriptures, or sacraments – are not

necessarily seen as sacred absolutely by another group. There notion is that sacredness is a value that a society places on objects, that such an object shapes and generates the religious feelings of its members and that religiousness is therefore a function of social belonging. This was first suggested by Emile Durkheim. She claims that, it is the authority and beliefs of a society that make things sacred or non-sacred.

### **Religion as Numinous Experience**

This concept attempts to emphasis individual experience. This was developed by German theologian Rudolf Otto. He argues that the experience of the numinous, “spiritual power”, is the distinctive core of religiousness. Such experience is marked by awe in the face of the mysterious reality that dramatically intersects our limited vulnerable existence. He said, further, that it is this reality that religious traditions symbolises by concept such as God. The religious ideas such as the wrath of God or the peace of God express the different aspects of numinous experience.

### **Religion as an Individual Phenomenon**

For many people, religion is best understood at the level of individual’s spiritual life. William James, an American Philosopher and Psychologist, attempted to study different forms that religious experience can take, from extreme asceticism and mystical union with the divine, to modern techniques of positive thinking. He gave special attention to conversion experiences or self-changing encounters with spiritual forces. He found out that contact with something divine changes the lives of the people. Many of the episodes came in the form of a sudden and unsolicited consciousness of spiritual unity or insight. They were mystical experiences and were incapable of being described in words. The notion of a creative unconscious understood element of the mind surrounding the individual ego and expressed through religious symbols, also described religion, as an individual phenomenon.

### **Religion as Experience Mediated by the Sacred**

People like Eliade, see religion as believing in the divine foundations of life transforming the significance of natural objects and activities. He believed that for homo religious (religious man), a term used by Eliade to designate a person who lives according to a religious worldview, time, space, the earth, the sky, and human body, can all come to have a symbolic religious meaning. Others like Rudolf and Otto, held that the study of religion must not reduce its subject matter to something merely social or psychological, but must take seriously the idea that in the

believer's world, the experience of sacredness defines a distinctive reality.

Myth and rituals presents the central language by means of which religious worlds are structured. Myth is not mere fiction or folktale but the powerful words and stories that recount the actions of gods and founders and the guidelines they set down for human life. In this sense, myth describes not what is simply fantastic but what is most real, naming the spiritual forces that established the world and that continue to permeate it. Religion has its own language to describe the spiritual order of the universe, just as science has its description of the physical world.

### **Islamic Concept of Religion**

Throughout history, religion has been abused and misunderstood. Some use it as a means of exploitation and suppression, as a pretext for prejudice and persecution. Some other people use it as a source of power and domination over the elite and the masses alike. In the name of religion unjustifiable wars have been launched, freedom of thought and consciences have been oppressed, science has been persecuted, the right of the individual to maturity has been denied, and man's dignity and honour have been flagrantly debased. And in the name of religion, injustice has been unlighted upon humanity with the result that religion itself has suffered many losses. These are historical facts which no one can deny. But, is this the proper function of religion? The answer is no. There are many religions in the world, and each one claims to be the one and only true religion. Each religion is supposed to have come from God for the right guidance of man. But those claims contradict each other and have caused dissension among people and vehement reaction to religion instead of welding mankind into one universal brotherhood under one Universal Benevolent God. This situation makes any neutral observer confused and perhaps averse to all kinds of religion.

The Islamic concept of religion is unique in the broadest sense of the word. It is true that genuine religion must come from God for the right guidance of man. And it is equally true that human nature and major human needs are basically the same at all times. This conception leads to one conclusion, and that is: There is only one true religion coming from the One and the Same God, to deal with the outstanding human problems of all times. This religion is Islam. But it should be borne in mind that Islam was not taught by Prophet Muhammad alone. On the contrary, Islam had been taught by all the prophets before Muhammad, and the true followers of Abraham and Moses as well as those of Jesus and the rest were all called Muslims. So Islam has been, and will continue to be, the true universal religion of God, because God is one

and he is Changeless, and because human nature and major human needs are fundamentally the same, irrespective of time and place, of race and age, and of any other considerations.

Bearing this in mind, the Islamic concept maintains that religion is not only a spiritual and intellectual necessity but also a social and universal need. It is not to bewilder man but to guide him. It is not to debase him but to elevate his moral nature. It is not to deprive him of anything useful, or to burden him, or to oppress his qualities but to open for him inexhaustible treasures of sound thinking and right action. It is not to confine him to narrow limits but to launch him into wide horizons of truth and goodness. In short, true religion is to acquaint man with God as well as with himself and the rest of the universe. This is by no means an oversimplification of the function of religion. Here is what it means.

When the purpose of true religion is carefully examined, it will be found that religion satisfies the spiritual and moderate material needs of man. It unites his psychological knots and complexes, sublimates his instincts and aspirations, and disciplines his desires and the whole course of life. It improves his knowledge of God - the Highest Truth in the universe, and of his own self. It teaches him about the secrets of life and the nature of man. It also teaches them about good and evil, and about right and wrong. It purifies the soul from evil, clears the mind from doubts, strengthens the character and corrects the thinking and convictions of man. All these can be achieved only when man faithfully observes the spiritual duties and physical regulations introduced by religion.

On the other hand, true religion educates man and trains him in hope and patience, in truthfulness and honesty, in love for the right and good, in courage and endurance all of which are required for the mastery of the great art of living. Moreover, true religion insures man against fears and spiritual losses, and assures him of God's aid and unbreakable alliance. It provides man with peace and security and makes his life meaningful.

That is what true religion can do for humanity, and that is the concept of religion in Islam. Any religion which fails to bear these fruits is not Islam or, rather, is not religion at all, and any man who fails to draw these benefits from religion is not religious or God-minded.

God is absolutely true when He says in the Holy Qur'an: "Verily the religion with God is Islam (Qur'an, 3:85)." "Nor did the People of the Book differ there from except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of God, God is swift in calling to account (Qur'an, 3:19)". And if anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. What do you understand by religion?
- ii. Identify some concepts of religion and explain each of them briefly.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Religion means different things to different people. Consequently, it is difficult to get a definitive definition of the term 'religion.'

Many people, religious scholars inclusive, have different ideas about religion. While some doubted the reality of religion, others had genuine proof of its reality.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

At the onset of this unit, the meanings of religion are presented. Different concepts of religions are identified and discussed. At the end, it was found that religion is not only a spiritual and intellectual necessity but a social and universal need. It is to acquaint man with God as well as himself and the rest of the universes.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss what religion is and what it is not.
2. Compare the different concepts of religion with each other and come up with the one that is most acceptable to you.

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## **UNIT 2     AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RELIGIONS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Aims and Objectives of Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Religion, just like any other systems in the world, has its own purpose, objectives and aims which its people or adherents pursue vigorously to achieve. There are general as well as specific aims of religion depending on the belief and aspirations of the devotees. Studying the purposes, goals and aims of religion will, to a great extent, show its essence and justifies why religion should be studied in educational institutions.

In this unit, attempt will be made to identify the aims and objectives of the world religions

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- identify the general and specific aims of religion and
- state convincingly the aims of religion.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Aims and Objectives of Religion**

The major aims and objectives of religion include the following:

- When Prophet Adam (AS) was created, Allah put him in al-Jannat (the Garden of Eden) to live there with comfort. He and his wife (Hawau) were also commanded not to eat from a special tree in the garden but they were misled by Shaitan. They were driven out of the garden with another special instruction that “whenever there comes to you guidance from Allah and whoever follows it, there shall be no fear on them, nor shall they grieve.” With this singular episode, man needs to re-unite with Allah

through religion for him to be returned to his former glorious beginning.

Re-link is therefore one of the purposes and goals of religion. A true religion must include technique of meditation to get the knowledge about the nature of God and how to re-unite with Him. A teaching which does not include how to achieve God-Union, *unio mysteries* is a teaching empty of truth and love of God. Therefore, one of the major aims of religion is to show the path to reach the Almighty.

- Mankind was created a single nation, and Allah sent His messenger with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth to judge between people in matters wherein they differed, but the people after clear signs came to them did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. Allah by His grace guided the believers to the truth concerning wherein they differed, for Allah guides whom He wills to the path that is straight. With the good news as well as warnings, mankind after these, should have no plea against Allah. This is one of the aims of religion, that is, to guide mankind to the right path.
- Another aim of religion is to worship the supernatural. To get people worship God or gods. It is, also, to teach man the secret of the divine.
- Religion aims at finding a way of communicating with the supernatural being. There are different means of communication. The liturgies of people are their means of communicating with their objects of worship. It is an ingrained habit in man to call his objects of worship by attributive names. They sing the praises of their heroes, heroines and their ancestry, the longer the list of his praise names and appellations the higher the prestige of their lineage. In their liturgies, we learn much about the names of the deity and his attributes, capabilities and the hopes which are reposed in them. There was an irresistible urge laid upon him (the deity) to make contact with the supernatural world because his very life depended upon it.
- Man in his course of life is sometimes in a state of dilemma. He is always desirous of finding a way out of his problem. This at times is beyond the ability of the person concerned, and this might have been one of the reasons while he must contact a realm that is beyond him and capable of finding the right guidance to solve the problems. This led, to a system of divination either

through the consultation of oracles by the traditionalists, Christians or through *istikhārah* in Islam. Another aim of Religion therefore could be to find guidance on a becloud issue. The aim may go further beyond finding ways out of problems, it could include wanting to know how the universal came to existence and the cause of the existence. It is true that science has been able to resolve this to some extent, but some unexplainable issues also go beyond the comprehension of science. Religions, through communion with the divine, have provided answers to these. For instance, the issues of creation, why things fail despite all the scientific acumen surrounding it, and the eschatological issues, are some of the areas which science has failed to explain. So religion aims at explaining the forces of nature, electromagnetism, strong and weak nuclear forces and gravity to unify them and generally the life around and beyond us.

- The aim of religion is to make the world a better place to live in. It is to help people in the world to be selfless and not selfish, to love every one as ourselves, to tolerate and accommodate one another and thereby bring peace and happiness into a society. It is to bring up a community with a strong ethics that will make them human and not animal.
- Religion aims at commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong in order to prevent man from entering hell and to enable him enter into paradise. What has been discussed above seems to be the general aims of religion. But, it should be noted that there are a lot of religions in the world having different aims and objectives. As a result of the enormity of the specific aims and objectives of the various religions, students would be left to find these out as part of their efforts to know more about this topic.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. What are the general aims of Religion?
- ii. List out and explain the major and specific objectives of some world religions.

## **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

There are two main types of aims and objectives of religion. One is general and it cut across majority of the world religions. The other one is the specific aims and objectives of each of the world religions. Some of the general aims and objectives include, the worship of the supernatural being called God or gods as the case may be, the re-union with the creator, and fosterage of peace and happiness in a society. The specific

aims and objectives of some world religions differ from each other.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we identified some main aims and objectives of the World Religions. They include: showing the path to reach the Almighty, to worship the supernatural being or beings, to find a way out of main's problems, to unite the human race into a single nation under God, and to make the world a better place to live in. Each of the world religions has its own specific aims and objectives that are in some ways different from one another.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Distinguish between the general aims of religion and the specific aim of each of the world religions.
2. List the major difference between some of the major religions in the world and explain what you think might be responsible for the identified differences.
3. Compare the aims of science with the aims of religion in terms of the natural world and the eschatological issues.

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## **UNIT 3      ORIGIN OF RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Origin of Religion
  - 3.2 Origin of Religion - History of Belief
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The knowledge of the origin of a system would help in assessing the nature, goals, methods, activities, efforts and results of such system. The origin of religion will assist us in the background upon which the whole edifice of the religion is built. In this unit, therefore, we shall deal with the origin of religion as a whole. After this, we shall, also, treat the origin of some major religions of the world, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and the African Traditional Religions.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- identify and explain the various origins of the world religions
- explain the effects of some of the various religious activities in the world.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Origin of Religion**

Religion has been with man from the earliest time. It started right from the beginning of the creation. Religion had its birth in the fear of early man. Among most of the earliest primitives, there were two kinds of spirits -hostile spirits and neutral spirits. It was later that a belief in good or helpful forces, and the idea of “God” came to be. To hide from evil spirits seems a sensible thing to do. Mourning clothes are found very early in the history of man, and it is quite possible that they were originally used as a disguise to hide one from the spirits of the dead,

since all such spirits were considered evil. Later it was believed that spirits could be made friendly through the performance of certain rituals, the observance of a fetish, or through the craft of a medicine man.

People like James Frazer (1854-1941) opined that “religion grew out of magic”. Hence, they did not believe in any form of religion at all. In his own opinion, Edward Taylor said that “since man could frequently dream about their death, there is no where called paradise or hell. These people considered religion as taking a step from fetish (the use of some charms or luck symbol), to the setting up of an idol or totem. The next step is to house the idol, and the first church appeared at such a stage. The medicine man became an idol-tender, or priest. To maintain his power, the priest built up a complicated ritual which only he and a chosen few could properly perform. To them there were many ways of going wrong but only one way of going right.

But long before man had advanced to any of these refinements which mark a cultural religion, he had a religious belief. This was at first based in natural objects, visible but intangible - the shadow which stayed by one's side, dreams, the breath on a cold day. Then came a belief in spirits recognisable to other sense than sight - the sighing of the wind, the whispering of leaves, and the voice of running water. Together with these spirits, primitive man believed that inanimate objects also possessed spirits.

The importance of this early religion should not be under estimated. It had the same efficacy as have some higher forms of religion. It required faith to restore self-confidence and this makes what is seemingly hopeless become attainable.

As soon as the fetish became a totem or an idol, gifts to it were obviously in order. These gifts were the origin of sacrifice. Things most precious to man were thought to be almost precious to the god; hence prized cereals, drinks, animals of the chase, and even life itself became the common subjects of sacrifice. Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1936) tried to explain the origin of religion and the existence of God as something doubtful.

Generally, the world scientists conclude the matter of religion that it is impossible to reach the origin of religion or God. They said that if it is the matter of religion we have to explain it away.

### **3.2 Origin of Religion - History of Belief**

The origin of religion can generally be traced to the ancient Near East and classified in three basic categories: polytheistic, pantheistic and monotheistic. Atheism is really a modern belief that resulted from the “Enlightenment” period of the 18th century.

#### **Origin of Religion - Polytheism**

The origin of religion and polytheistic systems:

Polytheism (a belief in many gods) is thought to have originated with Hinduism in about 2500 BC. Hindu beliefs were recorded in the Bhagavad Gita, which revealed that many gods were subject to a supreme Brahman god. Polytheism was also the religion of many other ancient cultures, including Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. The ancient polytheistic belief systems viewed gods as being in control of all natural events such as rainfall, harvests and fertility. Generally, polytheistic cultures believed in sacrifices to appease their gods. For instance, the Canaanites sacrificed to the rain and the harvest, while Ashteroth controlled fertility and reproduction. The Greeks and Romans developed polytheism to a highly structured pantheon of gods and goddesses.

#### **Origin of Religion - Pantheism**

The origin of religions and pantheistic systems:

Pantheism (a belief that all is god) prevailed in numerous ancient cultures. The belief that the universe itself was divine was typified in the Animism beliefs of the African and American Indian cultures, the later Egyptian religion under the Pharaohs, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism in the cultures of the Far East. Pantheistic beliefs are also finding resurgence among various New Age movements. Generally, pantheism is the principle that god is everything, and everything is god.

Therefore, nature is also part of god. We must be in harmony with nature. We must nurture it and be nurtured by it. Mankind is no different than any other animal. We must live in harmony with them, understand them, and learn from them, focusing on the relationship between mankind and the elements of nature.

#### **Origin of Religion – Monotheism**

The origin of religion and monotheistic systems:

Monotheism (a belief in one God) is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian and Muslim line of religions, which began with a man named

Abraham in about 2000 BC. From this point in history, God began revealing Himself to the world through the nation of Israel. The Jewish Scriptures record the journey of the Israelites from slaves in Egypt to the “promised land” in Canaan under the leadership of Moses. During a period of about 1500 years, God revealed what became the Old Testament of the Bible, relating the history of Israel with the character and laws of God. During the period of the Roman Empire, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as the long awaited Messiah. The ministry of Jesus ended in about 32 AD with His crucifixion and resurrection. After Christ’s ascension into heaven, the Christian church grew in His name and the New Testament was written. About 600 years later, Muhammad began preaching in Mecca. Muhammad believed he was the ultimate prophet of God, and his teaching became the precepts of Islam as recorded in the Qur’an.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. What is magic and how did it emerge from religion?
- ii. What role has fear played in the growth of religion?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Religion began with the creation of man on earth. Fear plays very significant roles in the growth of religion. The human and environmental factors are responsible for the origin of religion and the source took different forms in history.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Religion started right from the time of creation. It has its birth in the fear of early man. The idea of idolatry began from the use of fetish, some charms or luck symbols to set up a totem.

The origin of religion can be classified into polytheism, pantheism and monotheism.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Compare and contrast the concept of polytheism, pantheism and monotheism in the origin of religion.
2. Explain the contributions of the ancient Near East to the origin of religion.



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## **UNIT 4 ORIGIN OF SOME SPECIFIC WORLD RELIGIONS I**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Buddhism
  - 3.2 Hinduism
  - 3.3 Taoism
  - 3.4 Confucianism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, the origin of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism will be treated. This will include the biography of their founders and what the religions stand for.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- explain the origin of the selected world religions
- give the biography of the founders of those selected religions and
- list the similarities and dissimilarities in their origin.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Buddhism**

Buddhism was a religion in about 1600 B.C. by a man called Siddhartha Gautama as an alternative way of searching for enlightenment without God. The man was called “Buddha” by his followers, meaning the Awakened, the Enlightened or The Saviour. Buddhism like Christianity had series of denominations, sects, and diverse faith.

Buddhists have their own “trinity” as in Christianity. The followers put their belief on “miracles” as the Christians do. They (Buddhists) worship many idols as Christians bow down for images of their past sages such as Mary, Fatimah, Joseph, Jesus and angels. Buddhists are many in

Western Europe, Soviet Union, Korea, Japan, China, Thailand, Latin America and North America.

### **The Biography of the Founder of Buddhism**

Siddhartha Guatama the founder of Buddhism was born in India on the full-moon day of May 623 B.C. by king Suddhodama and Queen Maha-Maya.

Queen Maha-Maya had her pregnancy through dream without sexual intercourse with her husband. Its narration is as follows:-

At one night, four angles came to Queen Maha-Maya and lifted her up. Together with her couch and carried her away to the mountains called "Himalaya". In addition, the wives of these guardians angles came and conducted her to the lake called "Anotatta", and bathed her to remove every human stain in her. From there she was taken to a golden house in a hill called "Silver Hill".

In the golden mansion, the angels spread a divine couch with its head towards the east, and they laid Queen Maha-Maya upon it. Then the future Buddha came with a superb white elephant, walked round his mother's couch three times, and entered her womb through her right side. On the following morning, the queen told her husband what she dreamt in the night. Then the King summoned sixty-four eminent Hindu priests and asked them for an interpretation and the priests interpreted as follows.

"Dear King, sooner, you will have a son, and the son will become a universal monarch, even the boy will become a "Buddha" and the "Saviour". Thereafter about thirty-two miracles were said to have occurred. For example, on the day that Buddha was born in the mighty ocean, the water became sweet. The fire went out on all hills. All musical instruments gave forth their notes without being played upon. The world was suddenly quaked, quivered and shook in a garden named "Lambinigrove". The tree obliged by bending down to within queen Maha-Maya's reach to hold when she wanted to give birth to Buddha. Siddhartha married his cousin at the age of sixteen, her name was Princess Yasodhara and he had a son named "Raahula. Gautama was also called "Tathagata" (the great teacher) and "Sakyamuni" (sage of Sakya tribe). He died in the year 548 B.C. at the age of 80 years. Being the miraculous one, everybody wanted to know Siddhartha Gautama, and he became the hero among the people of his time. People believed in him very much to the extent that he and his mother were taken as gods.

## How Buddhism was founded

Buddhism is not a religion directly from God Almighty but its founder was taken for a god by his followers as they believed in his miraculous sayings and copied his deeds. Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of this religion, started his research about the problems facing the human beings by asking the religious teachers of his time many questions about the critical and sorrowful life of the human beings. Such questions go thus: “why were men born and die? Why do many sicknesses occur to human being? Why do the young people become old? If there is someone called God at all, that God must be an unkind one because he created his creatures to suffer, grow old and die. Buddha sought answers to his questions from Hindus and guru teachers but their answers were negative to him.

To get the answers himself, Buddha proceeded on a meditation course, fasting, Yoga, self-denial, but still his efforts were in vain. Then he decided that the answers to his questions were to be found in his own consciousness. He sat in meditation under an Indian fig tree (papal) for about two months (49 days). Buddha was attacked by many evil spirits there especially devil Mara, but he did not relent in his effort until the time he achieved his objectives. He had great knowledge and enlightenment to understand everything.

However, his enlightenment stands on the doctrine of “god exists not”. He knew everything only about the life problems.

Buddha became the healer of many who are sick and the saviour of many dying old ones, and so on. Then many started to learn his way and system of meditation and enlightenment and through this, Buddha became their god.

### 3.2 Hinduism

Hinduism is a religion of confusion because it is a religion of monotheism (who says that God is one) but based on polytheism (doctrine of many gods).

They believed in a spirit who to them is a Supreme Being, the spirit is called “Brahman” symbolised by the syllable OM or AUM and many facets or manifestations. Hinduism believed in 300,000,000 (Three Hundred Million) gods in one. That is God is one but appeared to them in 300,000,000 ways. They even have their own doctrine of TRINITY called “Trimurti” or “Triad of gods” and they are:

1. Brahma (the Creator)
2. Vishnu (the preserver or the saviour)

### 3. Siva (the Sagara, and so on).

Hindus worship rivers and the most popular river that they worship is “River Ganger” the river that they believe is the mother of gods.

Hindus are involved in many cults like secret cult of Krishna, Rama, Durga, Skanda, Guru and so on. Their custom is to bath in a nearby river or at home if there is no river or stream available very early in the morning to make them holy.

They use to worship their idols with red powder and then offer flowers and food to their god, who they place in one corner at their room popularly known as “Ganesa”. Hindus like others, have their own Holy Books such as “Vedas” and so on.

The origin of Hinduism was from ancient IRAN and BABYLON but its cradle is in Indian and Pakistan and their environs. Hardly can you differentiate Hindus from Muslims in the aspect of dressing, because Hindus like Muslims, wear turban and their female wings are always in Hijāb (head cover) but Muslims and Hindus are different in faith because Muslims believe in “Lā ilāha illā Allah, Muhammad Rasūlullah” There is no deity but (God) Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah while Hindus believe in idol and sage worship. Their turbans and Hijābs do not make them not to believe in 300 million idols and they still claim that they practice monotheism.

Despite the fact that Hindus worship their sages, masters and their teachers as gods, they still claim that they are not polytheists and that if anybody sees different gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, they are mere representatives of the powerful and One Supreme (God).

### 3.3 Taoism

Tao means, “The way of worship or “The path to heavens” while “Taoism” means to follow the way or path to heavens. Taoism is a philosophical religion that originated in China in about 600 B.C. The founder was named Li-Erh but popularly known as Lao-tzu. Lao-tzu means “the old one” they called him so because as legend has it, he remained in his mother’s womb for so many years that when he was born his hair was already grey. Li-Erh was a hard-working man during his lifetime. He served as a clerk at Loyang in central China and his record was clean. Li-Erh resided in Chou most of his life but nobody knew where he died because immediately he wrote his book in which he discussed the concepts of the way and power, he departed from his house and nobody saw him anymore. But in about the second century A.D, that was about 800 years after Lao-tzu departed, one man called

Chang Taoling popularly known as Changing claimed that he received a personal revelation from Lao-tzu (Li-Erh) in which Li-Erh told him that he succeeded in making the elixir of life and ascended alive to heaven, riding a tiger from Mount Lung-hu in Kiangsi province. If this story is true then Li-Erh has been in heaven before Jesus came to this world.

### **The Belief in Taoism**

1. They believed that “Tao” was the controller of every seen and unseen things and there is nothing like God beside “Tao”
2. They believed that “Heaven” itself was the cause of everything.
3. Then they worship Heaven the provider and “Tao” the controller
4. They believed that everyone must apply the concept of “Tao” to his affairs before he can do proper things in proper time.
5. Taoism must overlook all worldly materials and stand firmly in believing in “Tao” because disaster will follow wealth and titles.

### **3.4 Confucianism**

Confucianism is a religion derived from the Philosophy of Taoism and Buddhism. Confucianism is a religion hardly distinguished from Taoism and Buddhism. Adherents of the three religions work together and worship the same god of wealth and offer sacrifices at temples on festive days. Confucianism was founded by a prominent sage of China called Confucius who was born in the town of Tsou, in Ch’angping district of the country of Lu. He was born in 551 B.C. during the second year of Duke Hsiang of Lu. His other name was Chungni while his surname was K’ung. His mother begot him through her prayer to a hill (idol) called Nich’lu.

Confucius became orphan at the age of 20 because his father died shortly after his birth and his mother died when Confucius clocked 20.

Confucius devoted himself to scholarly studies and this led him to become a philosopher. He was also hard-working as he worked with the government of his native state of LU.

Chungni was also a teacher who taught people of his time subjects like ethics, civics, poetry, literature and music and by his hard work everybody nicknamed him as “Ancient Most Holy Teacher”

We even learnt about Kung (Confucius) that he was not named Confucius in his early life but later when the prominent people of his time saw his work and honesty they called him Confucius which means “Kun Fu-Tzu” in transliteration of Chinese Language meaning “Kung the Master” so, Confucius became an honoured teacher among Orientals simply because he was a good student and the wisest sage of his time. Confucius tried a lot to teach people of his time the rules and conduct

that can lead people to restore peace and order to the society which is the fundamental of his religion. He died in the year 479 B.C.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Explain why Buddhism is referred to as a religion without God, yet it is referred to as a religion of enlightenment.
- ii. Discuss Hinduism as a religion of confusion.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Some religions emerged as a result of research efforts but still claim to be a religion of enlightenment. Some emerged by deifying their founders and others are referred to as the religion of confusion, while some are philosophical in their origin.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Buddhism is founded by Siddhartha Guatama in the 5th century B.C. It originated as a result of the effort of the founder's research into other world religions. Later he was deified by his followers.

Hinduism is a religion of confusion because it combined monotheism with polytheism and has its own Trinity like the Christians. Its origin was from Iran and Babylon but its cradle is in India and Pakistan.

Taoism started in China in about 600 B.C. and departed the world through a mysterious means. Confucianism was derived from the philosophies of Buddhism and Taoism.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Assess the similarities and dissimilarities of the origin of these far eastern religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 5 ORIGIN OF SOME SPECIFIC WORLD RELIGIONS II**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Judaism
  - 3.2 Christianity
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The origin of Judaism as a world religion will be discussed in this unit. Prophets Ibrahim's and Musa's connection with the emergence of Judaism will also be examined.

Christianity, which is considered by some as the largest religion in the world, would form part of our focus in this unit. The arguments relating to its foundation and emergence will be dealt with. The role of Paul in the contemporary Christendom would be discussed.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- discuss the origin of Judaism and Christianity
- explain the role of Jews and the children of Israel in the emergence of Judaism and Christianity
- explain the role of Paul in the present day Christianity.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Judaism**

According to the Encyclopedia Americana, Judaism is the religion of the Jews with a history of about 3000 years. The Bible or any subsequent Jewish literature made no reference to the name anywhere in them or present a formal creed-demanding acceptance. At times, efforts were made to formulate a doctrine of Judaism but a creedal statement never became the criterion of Judaism.



From the earliest period, each generation contributed to the development of Jewish values and thoughts. The Bible will enlighten people about the Jewish ethical values, religious ideas and theological and social elements.

The Biblical texts were often interpreted to reflect the changing circumstances of Jewish life. To this end, large bodies of legal and non-legal literature were created as a guide to behaviours. Nothing was considered to be outside the domain of the Jewish law.

The first set of divine law given to the Israelites came through Prophet Moses. It was given to him on Mount Sinai. The content of the law is contained in Exodus 20:1-19. Jews hold the law as the basis of their actions.

Judaism was brought about as a result of many years of the record of the Jewish life which composed their law and history, myths and saga, poetry and prayer that reveal the religious and spiritual foundation of their belief.

Judaism is closely related to Christianity and Islam both of which drew heavily from its religious and ethical teachings. Christianity incorporated the Jewish Bible in its own scripture (O.T.) and Islam incorporated the great figures of the biblical times into the religion and described them as Muslims. The holy places of Jews became holy to Islam.

The main aim of the Jewish teachings is to create God's kingdom on earth with the arrival of the Messiah or the Anointed one. He is expected to be a descendant of King David, who will rule in Jerusalem and rebuild the destroyed sanctuary. He will preach universal brotherhood in which all nations will acknowledge God as the Supreme Being. Those who are righteous in the earthly life will experience a resurrection. This messianic doctrine is different from the Christian's because its fulfillment is to be on the earth not in the heaven. Many messiahs have come to betray them on this issue, Jesus even, says in John 10:8 that all who came before him are thieves and robbers.

### **Abraham and Judaism**

People thought that Judaism was the religion of Abraham, many even say that this religion started from Abraham.

In the first case, if Abraham was a Jew that does not mean that Abraham was Judaist because not all Jews belong to Judaism and not all

Judaists are Jews. An example from this, every tribe has its local religion like the Yoruba's. Ancient Yoruba believed in idols like *ifa*, *osun*, *oro*, *ogun*, *sango* and so on.

In the second case, "Judah" the man that they derived "Judaism" from his name was a descendant of Abraham. So, Abraham cannot be in the religion established after his departure from earth.

### **Moses (Musa A.S.) and Judaism**

Moses is supposed to be the founder of Judaism. Even the Jews say that their religion was the one that Moses laid down. Moses (Musa A.S.) was born in Egypt in the year 1593 B.C. where Israelites have been as slaves since 1728 B.C. In the year 1513 B.C. when Moses was at the age of 80 years (God) Allah commanded him to redeem the children of Israel out of the yoke of Egyptians. Moses did accordingly and when the children of Israel were redeemed, Moses took them to the Promised Land. On their journey, Allah (God) gave Moses (Musa A.S.) the "Laws" both oral and written. The Ten Commandments were regarded as written "Laws" while about six hundred (600) Laws that were given to the children of Israel were regarded as oral "Laws". Compare Bible Exodus 20:1-17, 21:1-36, Ex. 22:1-31, 23:1-33, 30:17-20, Deut 6:4-9.

Through these commandments, the religion of Israel was formed but was not named "Judaism" by the time of Moses (Musa A.S.)

By that time, the children of Israel started their satanic act of idolatry by bowing their head to calf image. Moses warned them seriously but majority of them were obstinate fellows. Moses died and left his people in two groups, those who believed and followed God's commandments that Moses brought and the second sect was the idol worshipers'.

Therefore, Moses was not a Jew or a Christian because he preached and practiced monotheism and not polytheism.

### **The Children of Israel (Banu-Israil)**

Before the word "JEWS" came out, the people of Israel were known as "Banu Israil" (The children of Israel) and that was after the departure of Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.). Because "Israel" that they affiliate their name with, was one of the grand sons of Ibrahim (A.S.)

Israel (Jacob) was the son of Isaac (Prophet Is-haq A.S.) while Isaac (Prophet Is-haq A.S.) was the son of Abraham (Prophet Ibrahim A.S.)

Jacob got his nickname “ISRAEL” when he wrestled with God (as the Bible says) and he prevailed (won God) and God said ... Your name shall no more be called JACOB, but ISRAEL for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” Exodus 4:22. This is where the name ‘ISRAEL’ was first mentioned and from this ‘BANU ISRAEL’ the children of Israel came out.

During the lifetime of Moses, Allah (God) addressed the people of Israel as the children of Israel that is why you come across this name in many passages of the Holy Quran.

The name “Jews” was derived from the name of “Judah”. Jacob (Israel) the son of Isaac had twelve sons who became the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israelites; one of those sons was “Judah” from which the name “Jew” was eventually derived.

The Bible described Judah as follows:-

Genesis 29:35 describes Judah as the last born of his mother (1st Chronicles 2:1-8). These are the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulum, Dau, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. The son of Judah; Er, Onan, and Shelah, these three, Bath-Shua the Canaanites bore to him. Now, Er, Judah’s first born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he (Judah) slew him. (Judah killed his first born). His (Judah) Daughter-In-Law, Tamar, also bore him Perez and Serah. Judah had five sons in all.

In the year 80 B.C. the people of Israel founded another religion after they had totally lost the true way of God that was laid down for them

by Moses, and that religion was named JUDAISM’, that is religion of the people of Judah.

### **3.2 Christianity**

Some scholars of religion have divided the origin of Christianity into two basic eras:

- (a) The era of Jesus
- (b) The era after Jesus Christ himself.

The religion of Jesus Christ was Judaism because he was a Jew. He preached the monotheistic existence of God (Mark 12:28-32). They claim that Jesus, even emphasised that He had not brought or abolished any new religion or law but that He only came to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17-19):

*Think not that I have come to abolish the law and prophets: I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till the heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

So His teachings on faith, worship and behaviour were based on the reformed laws of the laws of the Jews. For instance, He summarised all the laws of God into two major parts in Mark 12:28-32.

*Which commandments is the first of all? Jesus answered, "The first is, hear, O Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength". The second is this, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these*

This is the understanding of some people about the origin of Christianity. But the other view traces the origin to the era after Jesus Christ. The religion was given the name Christianity years after the departure of Jesus in Antioch (Act 11:19-26). It is a religion instituted in Palestine in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This might be why Muslims doubt whether or not Jesus was a Christian and assert that he was a Muslim.

## **Jesus and Christianity**

During the lifetime of Jesus the son of Mary (on whom, be God's peace and blessing) He worshiped His God (Allah) with the 'ONENESS OF GOD' without mixture of trinity or Divinity of Mary, Joseph, Angel or anything. He did not associate anything with His God.

Jesus lived 33 years on earth and the duration of His ministry was 3 years and when the enemies tried to killed Him Allah carried Him out of earth and placed Him somewhere in heaven (Qur'an 4:157-159) when Jesus was no more, His followers remained in the land of Israel where Judaism was prevailing. They remained in fear of the continuation of persecution of the people of Israel especially one man called "Paul" who bitterly persecuted the disciples. Compare Acts 26:9-11.

After the tragic disappearance of Jesus from the world, there was panic amongst the disciples and they went underground. After some time they began to reassemble at the scene of departure of their leader. How many of the 12 disciples and 70 other followers who came back are not known. It is, however, certain that those who dared the Jews and the Romans were men of faith, sincerity and courage and possessed very deep love for Jesus. This small band of devoted men was meeting regularly to pray the way Jesus taught them.

### **Paul Joined the Apostles**

Paul the arch-enemy of Jesus and His disciples never met Jesus or anyone who has seen Jesus. But he just stood as a persecutor on what people told him about Jesus. When Stephen was stoned to death, Paul was the ring leader who gave the order to do so. It was Barnabas who invited him when Paul requested for this according to Acts 9:26-27.

Before Paul joined the Apostles, he went to an Arabia country (unknown place) where he went for another research for 3 years, may be (to finish his work to wipe away Jesus, His disciples and His doctrine of oneness of God). The sudden arrival of Paul caused more suspicion than surprise. Could a leopard change his spots was a question on every one's lips. Then, again, Paul acted in a very unusual way. Instead of trying to learn from them he tried to teach them what true Christianity was. He claimed that he had seen Jesus in a dream and later on, he went to the third heaven to interview Jesus to check if what he heard in his dream was correct. The apostles did not accept the miracle of Paul, more so because what Paul heard in his dream was different from what they heard Jesus said from His own lips.

Paul then changed his gear and said (Act 22:6-10): "As I made my Journey and drew nigh unto Damascus about noon. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Paul, Paul why do you persecute me?" And I answered, who are you, Lord? Now those who were with me saw the Light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me: "Rise and go into Damascus and there you will be told all that are appointed for you to do".

So also the acts of Apostles 9:7 testifies further "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless hearing the voice but seeing no one, with the above quoted chapter one would see that they contradicted each other as verse (9) of the above stated that "But did not hear the voice".

The disciples said that "how can you a sinner could be sent by Jesus and even for what purpose. You cannot lead us because you are not among

us right from the beginning of our master's ministry till the end of His time on earth, and Jesus has said that "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church ... Matthew 16:18 so Peter must be the leader of our group and not anyone else".

The dispute between Paul and apostles was a foregone conclusion. In the heated debate what the apostles said is not known but what Paul said in his defense is mentioned in the Bible. He said "if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto His glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner" (Roman 3:7). Paul obviously admits the 'lie' but justifies it under the extenuating circumstance that the glory of God had more abounded through it. According to this reasoning some scholars opined that if the man Jesus was elevated to Godhead what objections could the apostles have?

The apostles then asked for his mission to them. His mission started from the doctrine of duplication of Jesus as "Jesus was a God and a man" secondly, he Paul was the authorised leader of Apostles. As the authorised leader Paul started his preaching and said and I quote "Hebrew 6:1" Let us leave (abandon) the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God".

The argument started how can someone come and tell us to abandon the doctrine laid down by our master? What is the maturity that is better than the elementary doctrine of Jesus? What is the dead work that this man talks about? Definitely this man came to spoil our master's works. That was what the disciples thought. At long last, Paul laid down the doctrine of Paul-line which is doctrine according to Paul's will.

This line of argument did not appeal to the Apostles and the debate dragged on. When almost a breaking point was reached, Barnabas intervened. The net result was that the Apostles accepted Paul but rejected Pauline Christianity. This compromise did not satisfy Paul and he left in anger for Tarsus his home town.

A few Apostles had settled in Antioch. They had gone there after the martyrdom of Stephen, as they feared another spate of persecution from Paul and his gang.

### **The Apostles were named "The Antiochene"**

The group of the fleeing apostles of Jesus that settled at Antioch were known as "Antiochene" that was the religion of those who fled to the city called "Antioch". The disciples did not blush to answer those who called them "Antiochene", they knew that the name did not matter and

the more their faith in oneness of God, prophet hood of Jesus and so on was unshakable.

In this city of luxurious and fast living the migrating Apostles became well known for their facts, piety and moral life. People, who got tired of leaving an immoral life, began to cluster round them. Thus the ground was prepared to bring the light of faith in their sinful life. This encouraged the Apostles in Jerusalem to send a mission to Antioch to propagate the faith and bring relief of those who were longing to change from the life of sin to the life of piety. The disciples decided to ask Barnabas to undertake the first ever mission for preaching the gospel to the people of Antioch. Due to his efforts “a considerable crowd was added to the Lord”. Next, Barnabas wanted to extend his activity beyond Antioch. With this in view he went to Tarsus and brought back Paul with him. Here Paul met the same Apostles who had fled to Antioch to escape from the terror of his persecution. But they both settled down to plan together the evangelical work in the country around.

They worked together for some time but the old controversy was ultimately revived, that was when Paul re-introduced his doctrine of Pauline Christianity.

Under these circumstances Paul produced a religion that encompassed different contradictory elements. He took the Unitarianism of the Jews and added it to the Trinitarian of the Pagans. This admixture was added to Christianity. Jesus was deified but the words of Plato were put in His sacred mouth. Out of the “Word” that had become flesh (the word of command to Mary’s womb that became a zygote and eventually human being). Paul accepted the flesh but interpreted the “Word” at his discretion. Thus a synthetic religion was produced. Mathematically absurd, historically false, yet it was physiologically impressive. The result of this controversial religious system was that they again parted company. From now on Barnabas mysteriously faded away from the pages of the Bible.

Christianity was formed by Paul (Acts 11:25) and I quote: “St Barnabas went to Taurus to look for Saul (Paul) and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch for a whole year.

They met with the church and taught a large company of people and in Antioch, the disciples were for the first time called Christians, where curiosity was born.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine and discuss the following terms in Judaism and Christianity: Jew, Judah, children of Israel, Judaism, Christianity, Antiochene and Pauline.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Judaism, a tribal religion was the first known religion in Israel though the name cannot be found in the Old or New Testaments of the Bible. It was brought about as a result of many years of the record of the Jewish life which comprised their history, law, myths, saga, poetry and prayer.

Christianity evolved from Judaism but ended up into our contemporary Christian that some preferred to address as Pauline.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

Judaism is the religion of the Jewish tribe with a long history of her culture. Though the name does not appear in any scripture, it has attained the status of a world religion.

Christianity is an off-shoot of Judaism, that is developed around or about Jesus Christ but with the change of time it metamorphosed into Pauline, the contemporary Christianity.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Trace the history of Judaism to the rise of Jesus Christ as a prophet of God.
2. Of what relationship is Judaism to Christianity and some other world religions?

### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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**MODULE 2**

Unit 1	Origin of some Specific World Religions III
Unit 2	Major Religions of the World
Unit 3	Beliefs and Customs of some World Religions
Unit 4	Notes on the size of some Specific World Religions I
Unit 5	Notes on the size of some Specific World Religions II

**UNIT 1      ORIGIN OF SOME SPECIFIC WORLD RELIGIONS III****CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
	3.1    Islam
	3.2    African Traditional Religion (ATR)
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignments
7.0	References/Further Reading

**1.0    INTRODUCTION**

This unit deals with the origin of Islam and the African Traditional Religion. The argument on whether Islam began with Muhammad or started with the creation of man on earth would be keenly examined. The fact that the African Traditional Religion started with fear of some creatures of God or the deification of some men of history would be investigated.

**2.0    OBJECTIVES**

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

- identify and explain the real origin of Islam
- distinguish between the different claims about the origin of Islam at different periods in history
- explain the sources of African Traditional Religion.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Islam

To Muslims, Islam is more than the religion brought to Arabia or to the entire world by Muhammad ibn Abdullahi ibn Abdul-Muttalib through angel Gabriel from Allah. It is the religion of all prophets of God and all nations of the world. In this regard the Qur'an says:

*And who forsaketh the religion of Abraham save him who befooleth himself? Verily we chose him in the world and lo! In the Hereafter he is among the righteous. When his Lord said unto him surrender (aslim): he said: I have surrendered (aslamtu) to the Lord of the worlds. The same did Abraham enjoin upon his sons and also Jacob (saying): O my sons! Lo! Allah hath chosen for you the true religion, then die not except in the Faith of Islam (Quran 2:131-132).*

Also in Surat al-Hajj the religion chosen for prophet Ibrahim is Islam by naming his children or followers Muslims. The verse says:

*He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion; it is the religion of your father, Abraham It is He who has named you Muslims both before and after this (revelation) (Quran 22:78)*

On the basis of the above Qur'anic verses, Muslims claim that all religious beliefs of the prophets before Muhammad were the same, although brought different stages of the development of human civilisation with which the religious messages had to accord.

The origin of Islam, to them, dates back to the period of creation when Allah ordered the angels to bow down to Adam. The entire angel obeyed, except Iblis (Satan). For this singular act he was rejected, accursed and named a kāfir (unbeliever) (Qur'an 7:11; 20: 116 and 20:34). As the angels submitted themselves and carried out the order of Allah, they were taken to be Muslims. Islam means total submission to the will of Allah. But Iblis is regarded as: kāfir or non-Muslim because of his rejection of faith or refusal to obey Allah's command. This is the beginning of Islam and the beginning of religion.

By this concept, Muslims believe that anybody who submits to God's command whole-heartedly is a Muslim, that is, one who submits to Allah's will. In this wise, Adam was a Muslim because he obeyed Allah by staying in the garden of Aden until Satan came there to deceive him

and Eve to disregard the commandment of Allah. But when they realised their weakness, they quickly repented and submitted again to Allah. They prayed for forgiveness and they were forgiven. (Quran 2:37 and 7:23). Noah (Nūh) was a Muslim since he was sent with Allah's message. He preached for about a period of 950 years.

Moses obeyed Allah and carried Allah's message to Pharaoh and to the children of Israel. Other prophets after them, including prophet 'Īsa who is known in English as Jesus with the title of messiah or Christ are Muslims. They also claim that the Holy Bible supports the idea that Jesus was a Muslim because:

- (i) Jesus believed that God is one and no other (John 17:3 Mathew 4:8-10 and Mark 12:28-32). He used to worship God (Mathew 26:36-39; Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:40-46).
- (ii) He preached about repentance and the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:35-38) and encouraged his disciples to pray to God alone, who alone can answer their prayers (Mathew 6:5-6).
- (iii) He asked people to give alms (Mathew 6:2-4)
- (iv) He fasted and encouraged his followers to do the same (Mathew 4:1-2; Luke 5:33).

According to them, Muhammad was one of the prophets of Islam and the last of them (Quran 33:40).

*The main message of all the prophets of Islam according to the Qur'an is the confession of the indivisible unity to Allah (Quran 21:25).*

*And we sent no messenger before thee (Muhammad) but we inspired him (saying): there is no God save me (Allah), so worship Me.*

Anybody who believes this Unity of God and proclaims it is a Muslim. In the light of this, all prophets of Allah from Adam to Muhammad were Muslims.

But generally speaking, non-Muslims or some uninformed Muslims do not understand Islam in the way just explained. They feel that Islam originated in Arabia in the 7th century C.E. when the angel of Allah, Jibril, appeared to Muhammad in cave Hirah and called him to prophet hood.

Then he started preaching the monotheistic existence of Allah. Based on this understanding, Islam is believed by some to be the offshoot of Christianity which is in turn an off-shoot of Judaism.

Muslim scholars say that the Qur'an emphatically claims that Muhammad has not brought anything new in religion:

*Say; I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow but that which is revealed to me by inspiration. I am but a Warner open and clear (Qur'an 46:9).*

This reference is apparently similar to what is in the Bible, Mathew 24:36; Mark 13:32-37.

However, Muslims believe in the divine origin of all the great religions of the world. The Qur'an declares that God has raised prophets in every nation to guide the people to the path of truth and righteousness. To them, God, being the loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds, cannot become partial and choose one nation to the exclusion of all others for revealing His messages. A Muslim must believe in the founders of all the great religions, though he may feel sorry to see how some of their adherents have forsaken and altered the true teachings of Moses and Jesus. Nevertheless, he can never speak against the holy prophets of those religions. This is because he has been directed by the Qur'an to believe in them as true and righteous prophets of God. He has the same respect and love for them as he has for Prophet Muhammad (Qur'an 2:136).

From the two views discussed above, one can conclude that only one religion has been revealed by God to mankind though each nation or group of people has always been exposed to one stage of it or the other. The divine message was brought to perfection by the last prophet of Allah who is believed by the Muslims to be Muhammad.

### **3.2 African Traditional Religion (A.T.R.)**

Africans like any other nations of the world have idea about God and Religion. They believe in the One Supreme Being called by different names according to their language and understanding.

The origin of the A.T.R. is traced to the fear of some creatures of Allah. They worship the spirits of water, hills and ancestors. Some of their former heroes and heroines were turned to gods because of their

perceived powers. Some turned themselves to idols by changing in annoyance to stones, waters, and so on.

Notwithstanding the causes of their being deified, it is believed that all the idols were former messengers of God. Hence, the African Traditional Religion could not be said to originate from other than God. Every nation is believed to have had one prophet at different time of history; God was not partial in sending messengers to the Jews and Arabs to guide them and, at the same time, neglect Africans. The Qur'an dispels this notion when it says: "...And there never was a people without a Warner, having lived among them (Qur'an 35:24) and "And to every nation there was a guide (Qur'an 13:7)". Therefore, every religion of the world originated from Allah.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. When and how did religion begin in the world?
- ii. Choose any five of the religions and explain their emergence.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

All religions in the world has a solid beginning upon which its beliefs, tenets, ethnics and worship are based. There are reasons for the formation of that system. The fear or love of the spirits might have been responsible. All religions originated from the Creator of the Universe.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Religion in general has the same origin, that is, in the fear of early man. It started right from the beginning of creation. Some say that it grew out of magic while some others say that the origin of religion is doubtful. The scientists on their part conclude that it is impossible to reach the origin of religion or God and that the matter of religion should be explained away.

The origin of religion can generally be traced to the ancient Near East and classified in three categories: polytheistic, pantheistic and monotheistic. Atheism is really a modern belief that resulted from the "Enlightenment" period of the 18th century C.E.

Each of the world religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and so on, has its founder or someone around whom it is founded. But it is only Islam that came directly from God, Allah the creator of the created.

The different origins affect the activities of the adherents of those religions.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the connection of Abraham, Moses and Judah with the formation of Judaism
2. Write short notes on each of the following:
  - (a) Ancient formation of religion
  - (b) Atheism, polytheism and monotheism
3. What are the similarities and dissimilarities among the world religions?

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## **UNIT 2 MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Major Religion of the World
  - 3.2 The Classical World Religion List
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The issue of whether there is one or many religions in the world will be discussed in this unit. Also, the most recognised religions in the world and the size and location of each of the world major religions would be identified. The unit will also briefly touch some of the beliefs and customs and the influences of world religions as parts of the discussion.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- discuss the influence of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Traditional religions in the contemporary world
- describe their beliefs, scriptures, traditions and customs
- locate the geographic distribution of the religions in the contemporary world.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Major Religions of the World**

There are arguments whether there is one or many religions in the world. According to Adelowo, evidences abound in the world to establish the hypothesis that there is only one religion in the world. The following can be mentioned: one God, one created order, one man or one race of humanity. The idea of God belongs to the priori aspect of religious experience. This object of worship is popularly known as one that has no equal, no partner. It is also believed that He is incomparable as the creator of the world and all therein. It is the Being that breathed into man the breath of life. Thus man is made religious in his essence. In

addition as a result of his breath of life in him, man becomes rational, responsive and responsible. He can now apprehend and comprehend revelation and reflect on it. He is now related to his creator, his God, to whom he is responsible in the world. This situation is the same anywhere in the world because God is a Universal Being. On this basis, and the fact that man is man everywhere, and the fact that God uses the same created order to reveal Himself to man, one can subscribe to the thesis that there is only one religion in the world. Nobody, anywhere in the world, has been able to come out with the thesis that there is another God with capital, 'G', elsewhere apart from the Yahweh of Israel, the Elohim mentioned in the Bible, the Allah of Muslims, the Olodumare of Yoruba traditional religion, the Ngewo of the Mende of Sierra Leone, the Osanobua of the Edo of Nigeria and the Nyame of the Akan of Ghana. If it is the same God that runs through all these localities and territories, then it stands to reason that there is only one God, one abode of God (heaven), one faith, one creed, in the world and that people from various localities and directions mentioned above are shooting towards the same goal, though from different angles. On that note, one can talk of only one religion but different religious expressions or reflections of that one God, one religion, one revelation, and one faith. Religions are thus reflections on the same individual truth of unity.

If all who profess to practice religion look up to the abode of God - heaven, one heaven - it stands to reason that all 'religious' groups point to the same direction and practice the same religion. All the people that practice religion, believe that they come from heaven and that when they die, they will return to heaven. There is no other heaven occupied by another God of another religious group. All the groups point to the same God and the same heaven. All of them point to the same religion. Thus, at the end of the age, all will return to the same place to be judged by the same Being, with the same undeviating standard of righteousness. God is the common denominator. He is related to one and all.

The created order is one of the media of revelation. The authors of the first chapter of Genesis describe the pre-cosmic situation as dark chaos indescribable. He presents us with a picture of non-existence. Then appeared the spirit of God; God in creative activity. The spirit, like a mother-bird, at upon the dark chaos, and, as a result of God's creative energy, there was cohesion, order, life, and meaning. Thus from the point of creation, in the very act of creation, the stamp of the maker, the seal of God's self-disclosure, has been put all over the face of the created order, the land, the earth, the cosmos. It is the same land everywhere in the world. It is the same God using the same land to reveal Himself to His prophets, His saints and His peoples all over the world. The encounter of Allah and Muhammad on mount Hira, the



encounter of Yahweh and Moses in Egypt, the encounter of Yahweh and Jacob (new Israel) in Bethel and Penuel can be mentioned in this regard. If this is the case, it may not be out of point to put forward the thesis that the whole world received revelation from the same God, and on the same land (cosmos or created order). In this perspective, again, the thesis that there is only one religion in the world becomes established.

The universal foci of ethical relationships in religion, God and man are other items one can use to support the thesis that there is only one religion in the world.

God is the basis of ethics or moral values in any religion. If we follow the thesis of Bolaji Idowu that gods and ancestors, or any spirits for that matter, do not have existence apart from the Supreme Being, one may be tempted to postulate that the ethics in connection with the lesser beings are the same thing with the ethics issued by the Supreme Being. Here, we must be very careful to note that God is not within the rank and file of any of those lesser beings. He is one without equal; He is incomparable, He is universal. It is in consequence of His universality, the universality of His ethical-code, the fact that man is man everywhere, and that Man, the creature of the Supreme Being, is spread all over the world, that one may be inclined to subscribe to the thesis that there is only one God, one man or one race of humanity and one religion in the theocratic world. He who is prepared to accept the divine rulership of the world will not hesitate to subscribe to the view above. However, by his constitution, man is free to react or reflect differently, in different places, and at different times, to this single indivisible truth of unity. The various reflections or reactions have not, and will never, change this indivisible truth of unity as the power involved is unchanging. He is the wholly other, the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause, the prime mover, the eternal.

Established above are facts or evidences establishing the fact of one God, one cosmos, one race of humanity and thus one revelation, one faith, or one religion. However, coming to the practice of religion, evidences abound to show that there is plurality of religions, or rather what we may call religious reflections, in the world.

### **3.2 The Classical World Religion List**

There are 12 classical world religions. This is the list of religions described most often in surveys of the subject, and studied in world religious classes (some of them more for historical rather than contemporary reasons):

Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism.

In modern Western thought, the first writers to divide the world into “world religions” were Christians. Originally, three religions were recognised: Christianity, Judaism and Paganism (i.e. everybody else).

After many centuries, with the increased western awareness of eastern history and philosophy, and the development of Islam, other religions were added to the list. Many far eastern ways of thought, in fact, were given the status of “world religion” while equally advanced religious cultures in technologically less developed or pre-literate societies (such as in Australia, Africa, South America, and Polynesia) were grouped together as pagans or “animists” regardless of their actual theology. It is true that by the standards applied at the time, the far eastern religions encountered by the westerners were often in a different category altogether than the religions they classified as pagan. One cannot directly compare, for example, the local beliefs of the Polynesian islands of Kiribati during the 1500s to the organisational, political, literary and philosophical sophistication of Chinese Taoism during the same period. But one could certainly question whether Japanese Shinto, as an official “world religion”, was theologically or spiritually more ‘advanced’ than African Yoruba religion, which was classified simply as animism or paganism.

During the 1800s comparative religion scholars increasingly recognised Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism as the most significant “world religions”. Even today, they are considered the “Big Five” and are the religions most likely to be covered in world religion books.

Five smaller or more localised religions/philosophies brought the list of world religions to (10) ten: Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Baha'i, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.

About early 1900, comparative religion writers in England began to take note of the Sikhs which had begun to emigrate there from India. Sikhs, if mentioned at all, had been classified as a sect of Hinduism during the first three hundred years of their history. But after the influential British writers began to classify Sikhism as a distinct, major world religion, the rest of the world soon followed their example.

Baha'i is the most recent entrant to the “Classical” list. The religion is only about 150 years old. On its official website, Baha'i claims 5 million adherents worldwide, established in 235 countries and territories

throughout the world. While most comparative religion textbooks produced during this century either ignore them or group them as a Muslim sect, the most recent books give them separate status and often their own chapter. Baha'i has achieved this status partially through their worldwide geographical spread and increasing numbers, and partially by constantly insisting that they are indeed the "newest world religion".

The classical set of 12 is not necessarily the most accurate reflection of the present, real-world religious situation.

There are many distinct religions or religious movements which have more adherents than some of the classical world religions, but which are not part of the classical list for various reasons. These reasons include:

- i. The religion which are not included on the classical list are too new (Scientology, Neo-Paganism)
- ii. They are concentrated in only one country (Cao Dai, Ch'ondogyo, Tenrikyo)
- iii. They lack identifiable central organisations or unifying scriptural literature (Neo-Paganism, New Age, Spiritism)
- iv. Their adherents primarily name a different, more established traditional religion as their religious preference
- v. Their religion is still strongly associated with a major religion from which it arose.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Discuss the issue of whether there are one or more religions in the world.
- ii. Justify the criteria used to classify the world religions.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Facts have been established that there is one God, one Cosmo, one human race and thus one revelation, one faith or one religion. However, the practice of religion shows that there is plurality of religions, or rather what may be referred to as religious reflections in the world.

The list of the most often described and studied religions are 12. Although, there are those which have more adherents than some of the classical world religions they are not included among the list for some obvious reasons.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

The hypothesis that there is only one religion in the world has been established. That there is only one God, one created order, one man or one race of humanity.

The eschatological reflections of religion reveal that all religious groups point to the same direction and practice the same religion but at different levels. All of those who practice religion believe that they come from heaven and when they die, they will return to heaven. Any god, ancestor, or spirits do not exist apart from the Supreme God who is the author of ethics.

There are reasons for group classifying religions as major or minor and why some are not included in the list of recognised religions of the world.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the idea of one God, one religion, one Cosmo and one humanity from the religious perspective.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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## **UNIT 3 BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS OF SOME WORLD RELIGIONS**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Judaism
  - 3.2 Christianity
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  - 3.4 Buddhism
  - 3.5 Hinduism
  - 3.6 Classical World Religions Ranked by Internal Religious Similarity
  - 3.7 How Adherent are Counted
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of our discussion in this unit is beliefs and customs of some world religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

We shall also look into the ranking of the classical world religions by internal similarity. We will also discuss how the adherents of religions are counted.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- explain the major beliefs and customs of some classical religions of the world
- identify how the adherents of the various religions are counted.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Judaism**

Judaism began in the 1950 BC. Abraham's covenant was to travel to Canaan then to Egypt where the children of Israel were in bondage.

They were saved through Moses and their Exodus. Moses on Mt. Sinai was given the 10 commandments to guide the children of Israel. The Torah, the sacred scripture, Pentateuch, consists of the Old Testament and Abraham's history. Mishnah was one of the writings of the prophets. Talmud was also other writings of the Jewish tradition.

### **Beliefs and Customs of the Jew**

The Jews believe that they should always keep the Lord before them. Religious customs, praying 3 times a day, worship on the Sabbath day i.e. Saturday is considered acts of worship... Whole Torah (Pentateuch) is read each year. Diet, (their food) must be Kosher. Holy days and festivals are: Passover (spring), Shabuoth (fall) Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, Hanukkah (winter), Purim (march).

### **Settlement and Diaspora**

Their settlement was in Palestine during the 1250 BC - 1050 BC. They worship Yahweh and uphold ethical monotheism: God's laws are our laws, Jerusalem: the Holy city and the Solomon's temple destroyed in 586BZ. They were deported to Babylon and the 2nd temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Rabbis (teachers) carry the faith throughout the world.

## **3.2 Christianity**

Christianity began over 2000 years ago. The Apostles formed the body of early Christians. Christ's death caused a division among the Apostles at the new council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Their text is the New Testament, though reference is still made to the Old Testament. They believe in the Holy Trinity, Immaculate Conception, and the afterlife. Customs and holidays are: weekly worship, holy week, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, are parts of their customs.

The Nicene Creed consists of the beliefs in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, seen and unseen. They believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, eternally begotten of the father, God from God, light from light, true God from the God, begotten, not made, of one being with the father. Through Him all things were made for us and for our salvation. He came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit; He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; suffered death and was buried, for the sake of the Christians. On the third day He rose again, in accordance with the scriptures, He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will

have no end. They believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the son). With the Father and the son He is worshipped and gloried. He has spoken through the Prophets. They believe in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. They acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. They look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

### 3.3 Islam

Islam is based on 5 pillars which are: Faith (Imān) i.e. to believe that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger; Prayer (Salāt) which is observed 5 times daily; Giving Alms (Zakāt) to the poor and the needy. All things belong to God so we should donate to the needy; Fasting (Sawm) during the month of Ramadan, from dawn to sun set; and Pilgrimage (Hajj) which is journeying to Mecca and the Ka'ba for religious purpose once in lifetime.

### 3.4 Buddhism

The founder was Siddhartha Gautama (560-490 BC), the Buddha; the enlightened one. Buddhist beliefs: no real Gods or Deities, goal; nirvana not Brahma. They have four noble truths: life is suffering, suffering is caused by desire and resistance to change, we can end suffering by ending desire, we can end desire and suffering by following the eightfold path. Eight fold path; right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

### 3.5 Hinduism

Hinduism began between 4000-2500 BC by the Aryan peoples' oral tradition, Vedas and Upanishads. Aryan caste system consists of Brahmins: priests, ksatriyas; warriors and rulers, vaisyas; merchants, farmers, artisans, sudras; manual laborers, untouchable dirty work. Hindu believes in hamster wheel; Brahman, atman, reincarnation, karma and moksha.

## Parameters of ranking religions

In order to rank religions by size, two parameters must be defined:

- i. What constitutes a "religion"?
- ii. How is "size" determined?

With a working definition of "a religion" and a method for measuring size, criteria for what constitutes a "major" religion must be



determined; otherwise this list could be impractically inclusive and long. “Major religions” for the purpose of this list are:

- i. Large - at least 5,000,000 adherents
- ii. Widespread - appreciable numbers of members live and worship in more than just one country or limited region.
- iii. Independent - the religion is clearly independent and distinct from a broader religion.

### **3.6 Classical World Religions Ranked by Internal Religious Similarity**

Baha’i, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Taoism, Shinto, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism.

No value judgment is implied by this list. There are adjectives with both positive and negative connotations which describe both ends of this spectrum. From an academic, comparative religions viewpoint, there is no basis for prescribing whether it is better for a religion to be highly unified, cohesive, monolithic, and lacking in internal religious diversity, or whether it is better to be fragmented, schismatic, diverse, multifaceted and abounding in variations on the same theme.

In a practical sense, most people actually practice only one form of whatever religion they belong to. Buddhism, for example, if viewed as a whole, can be understood to have a large amount of internal variation, including the Theravada and Mahayana branches, all of their sub-schools, various revivalist sects, as well as Tibetan and modern western forms. But most actual Buddhists are not actually involved in all of these; rather they practice one, internally cohesive, fairly unified form, such as the Geluk order to Tibetan Buddhism, or Japanese Amida-Buddha worship.

How is classification done for official government figures? It is important to note that data for the size of various religions within a given country often come from government census figures or official estimates. Such governmental endeavours are interested primarily in physical population demographics, such as how many people live in a household and how many telephones there are per person. These studies are not theological treatises. They merely classify Hindus as all people who call themselves Hindu, Muslims as all people who call themselves Muslim, Christians as all people who call themselves Christian.

From a sociological and historical perspective, most religions have arisen from within existing religious frameworks: Christianity from Judaism, Buddhism from Hinduism, Babi and Bahai faiths from Islam,

etc. For the purposes of defining a religion, we need to have some cut off points. For instance should Sikhism be listed as a Hindu sect (as in many older textbooks), or a world religion in its own right?

To manage this question, we have chosen once again to use the most commonly-recognised divisions in comparative religious texts. These definitions are primarily sociological and historical, not doctrinal or theological in nature.

We recognised that within many religious traditions there are deeply felt arguments for excluding certain groups from their description of their religion. For example, councils of Muslim leaders have voted to no longer accept Ahmadis as valid Muslims, although Ahmadis consider themselves orthodox Muslims. Many Evangelical Protestant churches exclude all non-evangelical or non-protestant groups from their definitions of Christianity. On the other hand, some Hindu writers are so inclusive that they claim as Hindus adherents of any religion that arose in a Hindu environment, including Buddhists, Janis and Sikhs. These definitions are theological in nature and of little use in this statistical context.

Groups such as Rastafarians, Mandeans, Tenrikyo and the Church of Scientology are too small, too new or too unimportant in world history to be included in most surveys of “major world religions”. Thus, in including such groups in this listing, it is not always possible to appeal to a consensus within comparative religion literature. Where classification is unclear, we have used two criteria:

- i. Does the faith group consider itself to be part of (or the definitive version of) a larger religion?
- ii. Does the larger religion consider the faith group to be part of its tradition?

If the answer to both of these questions is no, then the faith group is probably a distinct religion. If the answer to both questions is yes, the faith group is a division within the larger religion. If the answer to only one of the questions is yes, there is a judgment call to be made, but of course we give more weight to a group’s self-concept. For example, Tenrikyo arose in the 1830s in Japan in a Shinto context. The founder explained that her new revelations came from various Shinto Kami (gods). Thus, Tenrikyo was classified by the Japanese ministry of religion as a Shinto sect for about 100 years. Then the leaders of Tenrikyo asked that the faith no longer be classified as a Shinto faith. Outsiders would agree that Tenrikyo has emerged as something identifiably distinct from traditional Shinto religion, although many world religion writers include Tenrikyo in chapters on Shinto or

Japanese religion for the sake of simplicity. Based on these facts we include Tenrikyo as a distinct religion.

Even fairly contemporary and progressive writers have a “youth cut-off” requirement for their listings of major world religions. Many writers will classify newer movements as “long established” means at least as old as the Babi & Baha’i faiths. This is a valid criterion, although for the most part we are not using it here. Many of the movements that seem like distinct new religions may die out within a few generations. Many of the most recent movements, such as Seicho-No-Ie, Ananikyo, Ch’ondogyo and other Asian new religious movements are overtly syncretistic or Universalist, similar in some ways they originated many years later than the Baha’i faith. Other new religious movements of this century have primarily remained within established world religions, such as new Buddhist (Western Buddhist Order), Hindu (Hare Krishna), Muslim (Nation of Islam), Jewish (Reconstructionism), and Christian (Pentecostalism, neo-Evangelicalism, Calvary Chapel) movements and denominations. Other new religious movements of the 20th century, especially recently, have been new formulations of long-dormant faiths, such as Neo-Pagan and neo-shamanist groups. Scientology, is one of the few movements of the 20th century that has grown large enough and escaped its predecessor religious matrix thoroughly enough to be considered a distinct world religion. Even its oft-criticised differences lend credence to the notion that it is truly a unique, new religion, and not a part of Hinduism, Buddhism or some other faiths.

But Ahmadiyya (a recent offshoot of Islam), is not included on this list as a separate religion because its adherents claim to be Muslims, view themselves as completely Muslims, and wish to be classified as part of Islam.

Also, in keeping with the sociological perspective, we are applying Emile Durkheim’s classical definition of religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practice which unite into one single moral community...”

To this definition, we add its more recent reformulation describing religion as an ultimate concern with transformational/motivational effect. With these sociological (non- theological) definitions we could include in this list schools of thought which are not always considered “religions”, such as atheism, humanism, communism/Marxism/Maoism, and Confucianism. Every human is in certain respects: like all other humans, like some other humans and like no other human.

When referring to the “size” of a religion, what is usually meant is its number of adherents. Other measurements, such as how many churches or meeting places a faith group owns or how many congregations/meeting groups there are, can also be instructive, but are usually not used as a measure of overall size. Measures of religiosity and the degree to which a religious tradition has a meaningful impact on its adherents may be more important than raw adherent counts, but such measures are not as readily available nor are they easily comparable between groups.

### 3.7 How Adherents are counted

There are five main methods for determining the number of adherents in faith group:

- i. **Organisational reporting:** Religious bodies are asked how many adherents or members they have. This is the simplest and least expensive method, but it can be highly unreliable. Different faith groups measure membership differently. Some count as members only those who are actively attending services or who have passed through a lengthy initiation process.
- ii. Other groups count all who have been baptised as infants and are thus on the church records, even though some of those people may have joined other faith groups as adults. Some groups over-report membership and others under-report membership. When asked what religion they consider themselves to be a part of, many may name a religion that does not have them on their rolls. In the United States, for instance, three times as many people claim to be Unitarian Universalists than are actually on church records.
- iii. **Census Records:** Many countries periodically conduct a comprehensive household-by-household census. Religious preference is often a question included in these census counts. This is a highly reliable method for determining the religious self-identification of a given population. But censuses are usually conducted infrequently. The latest census may be too old to indicate recent trends in religious membership. Also, many countries either have no accurate census data, or do not include questions regarding religious affiliation. It has been over 50 years since the United States included such a question in its national census, but Canada, India, New Zealand, Australia and other countries have very thorough recent census data on the topic.

- iv. **Polls and surveys:** Statistical sampling using surveys and polls are used to determine affiliation based on religious self-identification. The accuracy of these surveys depends largely on the quality of the study and especially the size of the sample population. Rarely are statistical surveys of religious affiliation done with large enough sample sizes to accurately count the adherents of small minority religious groups.
- v. **Estimates based on indirect data:** Many adherent counts are only obtained by estimates based on indirect data rather than direct questioning or directly from membership roles. Wiccan groups have traditionally been secretive and often their numbers can only be estimated based on magazine circulations, attendance at conferences, etc. The counts of many ethnic-based faith groups such as tribal religions are generally based on the size of associated ethnic groups. Adherents of some tribal religions are sometimes counted simply by counting the members of the tribe and assuming everybody in it is an adherent of the religion. Counts of eastern orthodox religious bodies are often done the same way. Such estimates may be highly unreliable.
- vi. **Field work:** To count some small groups, or to count the number of adherents a larger group has within a specific geographical areas, researchers sometimes do “field work” to count adherents. This is often the only way to count members of small tribal groups or semi-secretive, publicity-shy sects. Field work may involve contacting leaders of individual congregations, temples, and so on, conducting interviews with adherents, counting living within enclaves of the group, or counting those participating in key activities. There is substantial overlap between “estimates” and “field work”.

For the purposes of this list of major world religions, we have used adherent counts or estimates based on self-identification. We have also favored inclusive rather than exclusive adherent counts, meaning all people who are part of a religious community, children as well as adults, rather than “full communicants”. It should be remembered, however, that self-identification is not the only legitimate measure of a religious group’s size. In collecting census or survey data based on self-identification, statisticians find that nearly everybody claims to belong to a religion. Some people claiming membership in a certain denomination may actually attend religious services regularly, contribute resources to the group, and influenced by its teachings. Other people may name the denomination, but chose it as their religion only because they recall its name as the church their grandfather attended as boy. Detailed analysis of the size of individual groups requires

knowledge of both self-identification data as well as data based on organisational reporting.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Explain the major beliefs and customs of some major world religions.
- ii. Identify and explain how the adherents of religions are counted.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Judaism which began in the 1950 B.C. is a monotheistic religion. Moses who was the first prophet of Israelites brought the 10 commandments of them. The Torah, the sacred scripture, consists of the Old Testament and Abraham's history. Mishnah and Talmud are other sacred scriptures of the Jews. They believe to keep the Lord always before them. All of their life is an act of worship.

Christianity is a monotheistic religion but at the same time believe in Trinity and the Immaculate Mary as co-gods/God.

Islam, on the other hand, holds to the belief in the unitary existence of God without any associate in His person, His works and His names.

The Buddhists belief in no real God or Deities and uphold four noble truth.

It is noted that detailed analysis of the size of the different groups requires the knowledge of both self-identification data and data based on organisational reporting.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, the major beliefs and customs of some world religions have been treated. Their beliefs and customs influence the total way of life. Adherents of religions around the world are counted in relation to their self-identification and data collected from organisational reporting.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

List out and discuss any three of the beliefs and customs of the adherents of the following religions: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism.

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## **UNIT 4    NOTES ON THE SIZE OF SPECIFIC WORLD RELIGIONS I**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Christianity
  - 3.2 Islam
  - 3.3 Secular/Non-Religious/Agnostic/Atheist
  - 3.4 Hinduism
  - 3.5 Buddhism
  - 3.6 Chinese Traditional Religion
  - 3.7 Primal-Indigenous
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The materials to describe the listing groups as major religions and determining their general size would be discussed in this unit. Each of the selected religious such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, secular or non-religions or agnostic or atheist, Chinese Traditional Religion, Primal-Indigenous and African Traditional and African Diasporic Religion, Sikhism, Judaism, Babi and Bahai Faiths, and so on would be discussed in relation to their size to give a rough estimate of what they are in the world.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- explain the numerical distribution of the major religions of the world.
- discuss the reasons for such distributions.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Christianity**

David B. Barrett's World Christian Encyclopedia gives an oft-cited figure of 1.9 billion Christians (or about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the world population), and projected that by the year 2000 there will be 2.1 billion Christians in the



world. The 2001 edition of the world Christian encyclopedia stated there were 2.1 billion Christians in the world. Regardless of the degree of accuracy of this figure, Christianity, if taken as a whole, is unarguably the largest world religion-the largest religion in the world. Keep in mind that although Christianity is the world's largest religion, it is an umbrella term that comprises many different branches and denominations.

Contemporary sociologists and religious leaders generally consider pan denominational classifications based not on historical denominational divisions but on current theological positions, organisational alignments, etc. to be more relevant. Such groupings include: Evangelicals, Pentecostals, "Great Commission Christians", "C.S. Lewis Christians", Liberal Protestants, Conservative Protestants, Fundamentalists, etc.

### **3.2 Islam**

Contemporary figures for Islam are usually between 1 billion and 1.8 billion, with 1 billion being a figure frequently given in many comparative religions texts, probably because it's such a nice, round number. That figure appears to be dated, however. Relatively high birth rates in Muslim countries continue to make Islam a fast-growing religion. The largest and best known branches of Islam are Sunni and Shiite.

Many Muslims (and some non-Muslim) observers claim that there are more practicing Muslims than practicing Christians in the world. It seems likely, but we would point out that there are different opinions on the matter, and a Muslim may define "practicing" differently than a Christian. In any case, the primary criterion for the rankings on this page is self-identification, which has nothing to do with practice.

Smaller groups within Islam include Sufis, although some Sufis regard their practice of Sufism as pan-denominational or non-denominational, Druze, the U.S. - based nation of Islam (previously known as "Black Muslims"), and Ahmadiyya. As is true with all major religions, there are adherents within all branches of Islam who consider some of or all of the other branches heterodox or not actually part of their religion. But these classifications are based primarily on historical lineage and self-identification. Protestations and disagreements based on exclusive internal concepts of belief or practice are normal, but are largely immaterial with regards to historical, taxonomic and statistical classification.

### 3.3 Secular/Non-religious/Agnostic/Atheist

This is a highly disparate group and not a single religion. Although atheists are a small subset of this grouping, this category is not synonymous with atheism. People who specify atheism as their religious preference actually make up less than one-half of one per cent of the population in many countries where much large numbers claim no religious preference, such as the United States (13.2%) and Australia (15% non-religious).

Although figures vary for each country, average numbers indicate that roughly half of the people who self-identify as “non-religious” also answer “yes” when asked if they believe in God or a Higher Power.

One portion of this broad grouping includes those who are best described as “non-religious”, i.e. those who are essentially passive with regards to organised religion, generally affirming neither belief nor disbelief. They may be neither contemplative about philosophy and spiritually nor involved in a religious/faith/philosophical community. Although a certain percentage of people in many countries classify themselves as non-religious in surveys, there are few data indicating how many of these fit the passive “non-religious” criteria described above, versus those who actually do contemplate such matters, but simply have their own personal philosophy and no stated affiliation with an organised religion.

For the purpose of this list, this grouping also includes more proactive or well-defined philosophies such as secular humanism, atheism, agnosticism, deism, pantheism, free thought, etc., most of which can be classified as religion in the sociological sense, albeit secular religions. A minority among atheists is quite fervent in their beliefs and actively endeavours to proselytise atheism.

The “Secular/non-religious/etc” Category is probably the most speculative estimate in this list, as this segment of society is difficult to count. The vast majority in this grouping are not aligned with any kind of membership organisation. Most figures come from census and survey data, which most countries conduct only infrequently.

The highest figure we have for “Non-religious” is 20 % of the world population, or about 1.2 billion: “over 20 per cent of the world’s population does not claim any allegiance to a religion. Most are agnostics. Others are atheists, who deny the existence of God”. But such a high figure is difficult to support with current country by country statistics, and perhaps reflects communist-era official government statistics. Most current estimates of the world number of

secular/non-religious/agnostic/atheist/etc. are between 800 and 1 billion.

Estimates for atheism alone (as a primary religious preference) range from 200 to 240 million. But these come primarily from China and former Soviet Union nations (especially Russia). Prior to communist takeovers of these regions and government's attempts to eradicate religion, both places had very high levels of affiliation with organised religions (especially Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism), as well as high levels of participation in and belief in traditional local traditions such as shamanism, ancestor ceremonies, spiritism, etc. since the fall of communism in former soviet nations and the relaxation of anti-religious policies in China, observed religious affiliation and activity has increased dramatically, especially in Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam.

China probably does have the largest number of actual atheists of any country in the world and many Russians clearly remain atheists. But at this point, it is difficult to accurately determine how many of those classified as atheists or non-religious during communist-era in USSR and by the current Chinese government are actually atheists according to their personal beliefs, and how many are un-registered religious adherents or participants in less-organised traditional systems that are oriented around ancestors, animism, shamanism, etc. Many people are unaware, for instance, that China has one of the largest, most active Christian communities in the world, and that in many former soviet nations, religions such as shamanism, Islam and Russian orthodoxy remained even while official government reports announced the elimination of religion in these regions.

In the Western world, Europe is by far the place with the most self-avowed non-religious, atheists and agnostics, with the non-religious proportion of the population particularly high in Scandinavia. The encyclopedia Britannica reports approximately 41 million atheists in Europe. The self-described non-religious segment of society in Australia and New Zealand is also high, at around 15%. In Australia less than a tenth of one per cent described themselves as atheists. In the U.S. about 13.2% of the population describe themselves as non-religious, 0.5% describes themselves as agnostic, and a smaller number describe themselves as atheists.

Zuckerman (2005), compiled the numbers of people who don't believe in God, based primarily on polling and survey data, for every country in the world. He totaled the survey-based and poll-based estimates of non-believers from the top 50 countries with the highest proportion of people who do not believe in God, and added to this number the non-believers from highly populous countries (Mexico, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Georgia, Uzbekistan, India, Ireland, and Chile). The

remaining countries had proportionately miniscule populations of atheists/agnostics/non-believers. Zuckerman concluded, “the grand total worldwide number of atheists, agnostics, and non-believers in God is somewhere between 504,962,830 and 749,247,571. These minimum/maximum numbers are conservative estimates; were one to factor in a mere 25 % of such highly populated countries as Egypt, Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, Burma, Tanzania, and Iran, as non-believers in God, estimates would be significantly larger. Also, these numbers are only for non-believers of God, specifically. Were one to include all ‘non-religious’ people in general, the numbers would nearly double nonbelievers in God as a group come in fourth place after Christianity (2 billion), Islam (1.2billion), and Hinduism (900 million) in terms of global ranking of commonly-held belief systems”.

It cannot be said based on Zuckerman’s analysis that “1.5 billion people do not believe in God”. A large proportion of the people classified as “non-religious” expressly do believe in God or a Higher Power. The 750 million figures is already an attempt to estimate the total population of people who do not believe in God.

All those who profess religious belief are not necessarily registered members of a church or denomination, but in the U.S. the majority of professed Christians and adherents of other religions are also officially affiliated with an organisation. The majority of agnostics, atheists and of course non-religious are not members of an organisation associated with their position.

It may also be noted that the estimated figures presented in this particular “major religions” summary list are based on self identification. Among all groups there exist proportions which are only nominal adherents. This segment may identify themselves as members of a certain religion and accept the religion as their primary philosophical system, yet not actively practice the religion in the normative sense. This segment may be thought of as being functionally non-religious or “secularised”, but this segment is not what is meant by the “non-religious” category on this major religious list. Accurate estimates of the size of this group are difficult to obtain because national government censuses only ask about preferred affiliation, not about religious practice. There are data available from non-census sampling surveys that ask about practice and belief, but these are usually limited in scope to narrow questions such as church attendance, and do not entirely reveal the proportion of society which is non-attending, but nevertheless privately practicing and/or believing. In many countries (Germany is a good example) there is also segment of the population which is counted as adherents of a religion, but which do not personally profess belief in that religion.

The use of the term “non-religious” or “secular” here refers to belief or participation in systems which are not traditionally labeled “religions”. Of course, in the absence of traditional religions, society exhibits the same behavioral, social and psychological phenomena associated with religious cultures, but in association with secular, political, ethnic, commercial or other systems. Marxism and Maoism, for instance, had their scriptures, authority, symbolism, liturgy, clergy, prophets, proselytising, etc. sports, art, patriotism, music, drugs, mass media and social causes have all been observed to fulfill roles similar to religion in the lives of individuals - capturing the imagination and serving as a source of values, beliefs and social interaction. In a broader sense, sociologists point out that there are no truly “secular societies”, and that the world “non-religious” is a misnomer. Sociologically speaking, “non religious” people are simply those who derive their worldview and value system primarily from alternative, secular, cultural or otherwise non-revealed systems (“religions”) rather than traditional religious systems. Like traditional religions, secular systems (such as communism, Platonism, Freudian psychology, Nazism, pantheism, atheism, nationalist, etc). Typically have favoured spokespeople and typically claim to present a universally valid and applicable truth. Like traditional religions, secular systems are subject to both rapid and gradual changes in popularity, modification, and extinction.

These are some of the factors which make estimating the size of the secular (non-religious, agnostic, atheist, etc) segment of society difficult.

### **3.4 Hinduism**

The highest figure we have seen for Hinduism is 1.4 billion, Clarke, Peter B., editor, the religions of the world: understanding the living faiths, Marshall Editions limited: USA (1993). Is actually higher than the highest figure we have seen for Islam. But this is aberration. World Hinduism adherent figure are usually between 850 million and one billion.

### **3.5 Buddhism**

World estimates for Buddhism vary between 230 and 500 million, with most around 350 million.

### **3.6 Chinese Traditional Religion**

In older world religion books the estimates of the total number of adherents of Confucianism range up to 350 million. Other books, including older versions of the encyclopedia Britannica, have listed

Chinese religionists under “Taoism” with adherent estimates up to about 200 million. But these figures are all based on counts of the same segment of Chinese people throughout the world - people practising what is, sociologically, more accurately called Chinese traditional religion, and often called Chinese folk religion. The word “traditional” is preferable to “folk” because “folk” might imply only the local, tribal customs and beliefs such as ancestor worship and nature beliefs.

In comparative religion texts Confucianism, Taoism and Chinese Buddhism are sometimes addressed in three separate chapters, and sometimes treated in one chapter as “Chinese religion.” Even today there are very valid reasons for distinguishing Taoism from Confucianism, and distinguishing both from Chinese Buddhism and non-scriptural Chinese folk religion. For religious, philosophical, historical and scriptural purposes, distinguishing between these separate traditions is quite manageable. There are a number of people who identify themselves especially as “Taoist”. There are a smaller number of people, including non-Chinese, who consciously practice a “pure” form of Taoist religion, unconcerned with Confucianism, Chinese folk practices, ancestor devotion, and so on.

About 50 years ago religious Taoism was one of the largest, strongest institutions in China. Since the Cultural Revolution and the government’s campaign to destroy non-communist religion, Taoism lost, for the most part, the main mechanism through which it remained distinct from the larger Chinese religious environment: its large numbers of temples and Taoist clergy. Although Islam, Buddhism and Christianity have bounced back and even surpassed pre-communist levels in China, Taoism has not. Today, despite the existence of some self-identified Taoists and pure Taoists in the West, Taoism is difficult to isolate as a large, independent religion from a statistical and sociological perspective. Hence, in this list, which is explicitly statistical and sociological in perspective, Taoism should be thought of as a major branch of Chinese traditional religion.

The situation is similar with Confucianism in China and in Korea it is true that recent census data show about five million Koreans name Confucianism as their religion, and there are even some Confucian schools and institutes in Korea. But they are under Chinese traditional religion grouping, rather than separating them based only on what country they live in.

### **3.7 Primal-Indigenous**

Primal-Indigenous alternatively termed “tribal religionists”, “ethnic religionists”, or “animists”, estimates range from 100 million to 457

million. (457 million is the combined total for “ethno-religionists,” “animists”, and “shamanists”. But this total includes all African traditional religionists, which we have listed as a separate category. This group also includes, but is not limited to people whose native religion is a form of shamanism or paganism (such as millions of people in traditional Siberian shamanist cultures). Obviously this is broad classification, not a single religion. This grouping includes thousand of distinct religious traditions, mostly the religious - cultural worldviews of peoples who have been grouped together in one category because they are pre-literate or less advanced technologically than western/European cultures. These are similarities among many primal-indigenous religions/cultures, such as use of an oral rather than written canon, and a lack of rigid boundaries between the sacred and secular (profane) aspects of life. But few, if any, generalisations hold for all groups.

Previously, adherents of African Traditional Religion were grouped here, and many religious statisticians would continue to do so. Most remaining primal-indigenous religionists are in Asia.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Account for the difference in the distribution of religion in different parts of the world with specific examples.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The argument of whether there is one or many religions in the world has been settled with the fact that there is only one religion, because there is only one God in the whole universe. It is also possible to talk of religions as a result of different times of revelation, different places of revelation, varying reactions to revelations, individualities and myriads of objects of worship, rituals, belief systems, practices and good number of other things.

However, according to Adelowo, if man will be prepared to accept the divine rulership of this world, if man will let God be God and man be man, the question of religion or religions will not constitute any problem in rational activities.

Some religions of the world are considered major because of the number of their adherents and the vast geographic territory they possess.

It may not be possible to identify the total number of religions of the world as some may not be recognised because:

- i. They are not distinct, independent religion, but a branch of a broader religion.
- ii. They lack appreciable communities of adherents outside their own territory.
- iii. They are relatively new.
- iv. They are too small.

Example of those religions includes: Mandeans, Plkoyan, Chorodogyo, Wonbulgyo, Vondoun, Falun Dafa, Roma, Rastafarianism and so on.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit and some previous ones, we have been able to resolve the issue of singularity or plurality of religions. The different expressions and reflections of religion gives the evidence that we can talk of world religions and also for the fact that there is one God, one cosmos, one race of humanity, one revelation and one faith there is also one religion in the world.

There are 12 classical world religions and of which five have been identified as the 'big five'. The size of each of the religion is based on the number of adherent and the space they occupied in the universe.

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## **UNIT 5      NOTES ON THE SIZE OF SPECIFIC WORLD RELIGIONS II**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 African Traditional and African Diasporic Religion
  - 3.2 Sikhism
  - 3.3 Judaism
  - 3.4 Babi and Baha'i Faiths
  - 3.5 Jainism
  - 3.6 Shinto
  - 3.7 Zoroastrianism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Our discussions in this unit would be the continuation of discussions in the last unit. In this unit, the African Traditional and African Diasporic Religion, Sikhism, Judaism, Babi and Bahai Faiths, and so on would be discussed in relation to their size to give a rough estimate of what they are in the world.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- explain the numerical distribution of the major religions discussed under this unit
- discuss the reasons for such distributions.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENTS**

#### **3.1 African Traditional & African Diaspora Religion**

It may seem incongruous to distinguish African primal (traditional) religions from the general primal-indigenous category. But the “primal-indigenous” religions are primarily tribal and composed of pre-technological peoples. While there is certainly overlap between this category and non-African primal-indigenous religious adherents, there are reasons for separating the two, best illustrated by focusing

specifically on Yoruba, which is probably the largest African traditional religious/tribal complex. African traditional religion was the religion of the vast Yoruba nation states which existed before European colonialism and its practitioners today - certainly those in the Caribbean, South America and the U.S. - are integrated into a technological, industrial society, yet still proclaim affiliation to this African - based religious system. Cohesive rituals, beliefs and organisation were spread throughout the world of Yoruba (and other major African religious/tribal groups such as Fon), to an extent characteristic of nations and many organised religions, not simply tribes.

Just as Yoruba may legitimately be distinguished from the general “primal-indigenous” classification, valid arguments could be made that other religious traditions such as native American religion (less than 10,000 self-identified U.S. adherents) and Siberian shamanism should also be separate. But African traditional religion has been singled out because of its much larger size, its considerable spread far beyond its region of origin and the remarkable degree to which it remains an influential, identifiable religion even today.

African Diaspora religions are those which have arisen, typically in the western hemisphere, among Africans who retained much of their traditional culture and beliefs but adapted to new environments. These include Santeria, Candomble, Vodoun, Sango, etc. In many areas of subgroups the African elements exist alongside an overlay of European-based elements borrowed from the economically dominant culture, from influences such as Catholicism and Kardecian spiritism. The fact that these religions exist within technologically advanced cultures alongside ‘classical’ organised religions (such as Christianity) is one of the reasons for grouping these adherents separately from the general “primal indigenous” category. Adherents of African Diaspora Religions typically have no real tribal affiliation, may be converts to African based religion, and are not necessarily African or black in their race and ethnicity.

Regarding Santeria alone: it is difficult to determine worldwide numbers of Santerians, as the religion is syncretistic, goes by different names (including Lukumi, an Candomble in Brazil) and has been actively suppressed by the communist government in the country where it is perhaps the largest: Cuba. Estimates of Santerians include 800,000 in the U.S. and one million in Brazil, plus 3 million in Cuba (although many Cuban practitioners identify themselves officially as Catholics or communists/atheists). A worldwide number of people who at least sometimes self-identify as adherents of this loosely-organised religious category might be 3 million, but this is just an estimate.

Regarding vodoun: for the most part, Voodoo (or “vodoun”) is not an organised religion, but a form of African Traditional Religion practiced primarily in Haiti, Cuba and Benin, often blended with Catholicism. Other methods of counting adherents could count practitioners as general primal-indigenous religionist (tribal) and/or Christians. Vodoun is typically classified as an Afro-Caribbean and/or Afro-Brazilian syncretistic religion, along with Santeria (Lukumi) and Candomble. Some sources refer to Vodoun as the Haitian form of Santeria; other sources refer to Santeria as a form of Vodoun. From a worldwide and historical perspective, Vodoun is properly classified as a branch of African Diasporic religion, in the same way that Lutheranism is a subset of Christianity.

Regarding the number of practitioners, the “50 million estimate the number of adherents are hopelessly unreliable. Some sources give numbers in the range of 2.8 to 3.2 million”. A figure of 50 million is doubtful because this is primarily a Caribbean religious movement and there are only 30 million people in the Caribbean, the majority of who are clearly self-identified Christians.

In the Americas (especially the Caribbean, Brazil and the United States), there is a large number of people who practice some form of Yoruba diasporan religion, especially forms of Santeria and Vodoun. But it should be noted that many practitioners of voodoo would name something else, i.e. Catholicism as their religion, even those who practice Santeria or Voodoo more often than they practice Catholicism mostly identifies themselves as Catholic.

On Yoruba religion, Osunmilaya, a practitioner and scholar on the subject wrote:

I would make only a few changes. Instead of the term “santerian” perhaps the term ‘aborisha’, which refers to both initiated and uninitiated devotees, would be more acceptable. Some practitioners don’t like the term Santeria at all because it implies that the tradition is a minor, heretical sect of Catholicism.

Vodoun is more properly classified as Dahomean and Fon in origin, not Yoruba. It does not appear in Brazil in the Haitian form. However, some Candomble houses may identify as Dahomean nation.

A critical component of the spirits influence upon the Yoruba traditions as practiced in the western hemisphere is the pervasive influence of the Bakongo tradition, known as Palo Monte and Umbanda. What I have seen in practice has a lot of Kardecian influence, but as one becomes more immersed into the actual tradition, the outer layer of Catholicism

peels away to reveal a tradition that, in reality, is very much un-syncretised.

### **3.2 Sikhism**

In the late 1990s the highest estimate we had for the number of Sikhs in the world was 20 million. Most estimates were between 16 and 18 million. About 80% of the world's Sikhs live in the province of Punjab, in India. Recent publications estimate 23 million Sikhs worldwide.

### **3.3 Judaism**

Estimates of the world's Jewish population range from about 12 million to over 17 million. On the high end of realistic estimates of how many people would consider themselves Jews seems to be about 15 million, but a figure of this height would include a large number of non-practicing, purely ethnic Jews. Judaism is far more important in areas such as history, literature, science, politics, and religion, than its relatively small numbers might suggest. The American Jewish year book published in 2000 by the American Jewish committee, reports that they are currently 5.7 million Jews in the United states, 362,000 in Canada, and 13,191,500 worldwide.

### **3.4 Babi and Baha'i Faiths**

At least, 98% of the adherents of the Babi and Baha'i faiths belong to the same religious body, the Baha'is world faith with headquarters in Haifa, Israel. But statistical practices differ in each country and figures are not always released to the public. Most recent published estimates of the world Baha'i population are about 6.5 million. This is the figure provided in current Baha'i publications. A recent, updated estimate in the 1998 encyclopedia Britannica is reportedly 7.67 million. The accuracy of all of these figures is difficult to determine, and the organisation does not provide a breakdown of membership data for each country.

### **3.5 Jainism**

The highest published figure we have seen for Jainism is 10 million, but this is clearly incorrect. Almost all estimates for the world population are under 5 million. This religion is almost entirely confined to India and to ethnic Janis. It is importance historically and philosophically far outstrips its relatively small number of adherents.

### 3.6 Shinto

Shinto is one of the 'classic' eleven or twelve 'major world religions'. But adherent counts for this religion are problematic and often misunderstood. In all a nutshell, Shinto is simply the indigenous ethnic practice of Japan and its importance is almost entirely historical and cultural, not contemporary. The number of adherent of Shinto are often reported as being around 100 million, or around 75 to 90% of the Japanese population. The Shinto religious bodies have on record most Japanese citizens because of laws established in the 17th century which required registration with the Shinto shrines. Essentially everybody within local 'shrine districts' were counted as adherents. This is comparable to certain Catholic and Protestant nations in Europe where the majority of people have been christened or otherwise counted as a member of the state church, but where large proportions of the population are non-practicing.

### 3.7 Zoroastrianism

This religion is in every major comparative religion text book, yet during the 1990s and for a few years thereafter it was actually listed in the Guinness Book of world records as the 'major religion nearest extinction'.

The Zoroastrians (or 'Parsees') are sometimes credited with being the first monotheists and having had significant influence in the formation of current, larger world religions. To whatever degree that is true, some observers believed Zoroastrianism was in a precarious state and its position as a 'major' contemporary world religion was tenuous. Prior to some increased reforms, most Zoroastrians did not believe in allowing conversion. They had even stricter rules than Jews about whether or not children of mixed marriages would be considered Zoroastrians. Until about 2002, most published estimates for the world total of Zoroastrians were 100 to 125 thousand. More recent publications of many major encyclopedias and world almanacs include population estimates of 2 to 3.5 million. The government of India has actively encouraged the growth of its Zoroastrian population. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and subsequent U.S.-led intervention in the middle east, the Parsees of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan have been receiving less persecution than before, and have been less reticent about identifying themselves, and there seems to be an increased respect for an interest in this classical Persian religion which was once one of the largest in the world.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss some of the characteristics of the African Traditional Religion.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

As discussed earlier, the object of worship is supposed to one which is God the Creator. Religion therefore is supposed to also be one. We only talk of difference in religions as a result of different times of revelation, different places of revelation, varying reactions to revelations, individualities and myriads of objects of worship, rituals, belief systems, practices and good number of other things.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit and some previous ones, we have been able to resolve the issue of singularity or plurality of religions. The different expressions and reflections of religion gives the evidence that we can talk of world religions, and also for the fact that there is one God, one cosmos, one race of humanity, one revelation and one faith there is also one religion in the world.

There are 12 classical world religions and of which five have been identified as the 'big five'. The size of each of the religion is based on the number of adherent and the space the occupied in the universe.

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## MODULE 3

Unit 1	Practices and Rituals in African Traditional Religion
Unit 2	Functions of Religion
Unit 3	Impact of Religion in the Life of a Society
Unit 4	Relationship of Humanity with Religion

### UNIT 1 PRACTICES AND RITUALS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

#### CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
	3.1 Practices and Rituals in African Religions
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignments
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The practices and rituals of the African Traditional religionists will be dealt with in this unit. This will take us through the prayer methods, the different rituals, divination, duality of gods, the ethical value, religious offices, the priest, the healers, the rainmakers. It would also touch the issues of magic, witchcraft, sorcery, secret societies and mythology.

#### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- explain the different practices and rituals of the African Traditional Religions
- discuss the different religious place that we have in Africa
- identify the different roles being played by the priests, rainmakers, healers, and other adherents of the religions.

#### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

##### 3.1 Practices and Rituals in African Religions

Usually, all African traditional religions are considered to be similar and are often described as not unlike traditional religions in most cultures

(e.g., Indian, Greek, etc.). Often, God is worshiped through consultation or communion with lesser deities and ancestral spirits. The deities and spirits are honored through libation, sacrifice (of animals, vegetables, or precious metals) and in some cases human beings. The will of God is sought by the believer also through consultation of oracular deities, or divination. In many African Traditional Religions, there is a belief in a cyclical nature of reality. The living stands between their ancestors and the unborn. Like various other traditional religions, African Traditional Religions embrace natural phenomena-ebb and tide, waxing and waning moon, rain and drought-and the rhythmic pattern of agriculture. These religions are also not static, not even within their consciousness of natural rhythms. They incorporate the ever-changing actual experience. For example, Sango, the Yoruba god of lightning, assumes responsibility for modern electrical processes. However, in truth, the commonalities of African religions are as follows:

- Belief in a Supreme Being or creator which is referred to by a myriad of names in various languages.
- No writing scripture (holy texts are oral).
- Correspondence with the higher being in times of great need (i.e. natural calamities, unexplained deaths).
- Having a devout connection with their ancestors.

### **Divination**

One of the most traditional methods of telling fortunes in Africa is called casting (or throwing) the bones. Because Africa is a large continent with many tribes and cultures, there is not one single technique. Not all of the ‘bones’ are actually bones, small objects may include cowry shells, stones, strips of leather, or flat pieces of wood. In general, most casting or throwing methods are performed on the ground and they fall into one of two categories: Casting marked bones, flat pieces of wood, shells, or leather strips and numerically counting up how that fall - either according to their markings or whether they do or do not touch one another – with mathematically-based readings delivered as memorised results based on the chosen criteria. Casting a special set of symbolic bones or any array of selected symbolic articles - as, for instance, using a bird’s wing bone to symbolise travel, a round stone to symbolise a pregnant womb, and a bird foot to symbolise feeling.

In African society, many people seek out diviners on a regular basis. There are no prohibitions against the practice. Those who tell fortunes for a living are also sought out for their wisdom as counselors and for their knowledge of herbal medicine.

Most indigenous African religions have a dualistic concept of the person. In the Igbo language, a person is said to be composed of a body and a soul. In the Yoruba language, however, there seems to be a tripartite concept: in addition to body and soul, there is said to exist a 'spirit' or an '*ori*, an independent entity that mediates or otherwise interacts between the body and the soul. Some religious systems have a specific devil-like figure who is believed to be the opposite of god.

## **Virtue and Vice**

Virtue in African Traditional Religion is often connected with the communal aspect of life. Examples include social behaviours such as the respect for parents and elders, appropriately raising children, providing hospitality and being honest, trustworthy and courageous.

In some African Traditional Religions, morality is associated with obedience or disobedience to God regarding the way a person or a community lives. For the Kikuyu, according to Mbiti, God, acting through the lesser deities, is believed to speak to and be capable of guiding the virtuous person as one's 'conscience', but so could the devil and the messengers. In indigenous African religions, such as the Azande religion, a person is said to have a good or bad conscience depending on whether he does the bidding of the God or the Devil.

## **Priest**

African indigenous religions, like most indigenous religions, do not have a named and known founder, or a sacred scripture. Often, such religions are oral traditions.

In some societies, there are intermediaries between individuals or whole communities and specific deities. Various called Dibia, Babalawo, etc., the priest usually presides at the altar of a particular deity.

Practice of medicine is an important part of indigenous religion. Priests are reputed to have professional knowledge of illness (pathology), surgery, and pharmacology (roots, barks, leaves and herbs). Some of them are also reputed to diagnose and treat mental and psychological problems.

The role of a traditional healer is broader in some respects than that of a contemporary medical doctor. He advises in all sphere of life, including physical, psychological, spiritual, moral and legal matters. He also understands the significance of ancestral spirits and the reality of witches.

They are believed to be capable of bringing about or stopping rain, by manipulating the environment meteorologically. For example, by burning particular kinds of woods or attempting to influence movement of clouds. The holy places and headquarters of religious activities are human made places (altars, shrines, temples, tombs), very often sacred space is located in nature (trees, groves, rocks, hills, mountains, caves, etc).

These are some of the important centers of religious life: Nri-Igbo, Ile-Ife, Oyo, Dahomey, Benin City, Ouidah, Nsukka, Akan, Kanem-Bornu, Mali and Igbo-Ukwu.

### **Liturgy and Rituals**

Rituals often occur according to the life cycle of the year. There are herding and hunting rituals as well as those marking the rhythm of agriculture and of human life. There are craft rituals, such as in smithing. There are rituals on building new homes, on the assumption of leadership, and so on.

Each deity has its own rituals, including choice objects of sacrifice; preference for male or female priest-officer; time of day, week, month, or year to make required sacrifice; or specific costumes for priest and supplicant on ritual occasions.

Some deities are perpetual patrons of specific trades and guilds. For example, in Haitian Voodoo, Ogun (Ogun among the Yorubas of Nigeria), the deity of metal, is patron of all professions that use metals as primary material of craft.

The living often honour ancestors by pouring a libation (paying homage), and thus giving them the first 'taste' of a drink before the living consume it.

### **Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery**

These are important, different but related, parts of beliefs about interactions between the natural and the supernatural, seen and unseen, worlds. Magicians, witches, shamans and sorcerers are said to have the skills to bring about or manipulate the relations between the two worlds. Abuse of this ability is widely condemned. Magic, witchcraft, and sorcery are parts of many indigenous religions.

## Secret Societies

They are important part of indigenous religion. Among traditional secret societies are hunting societies whose members are taught not only the physical methods, but also respect for the spiritual aspect of the hunt and use of honourable magical means to obtain important co-operation from the animal hunted.

Members are supposed to have been initiated into, and thus have access to, occultic powers hidden to non-members. Well known secret societies are Egbo, Nsibidi, Ngbe, Mau Mau, Ogboni, Sangboto, and so on.

Some spirits and deities are believed to ‘mount’ some of their priests during special rituals. The possessed goes into a trance-like state, sometimes accompanied by speaking in ‘tongues’ i.e. uttering messages from the spirit that need to be interpreted to the audience. Possession is usually induced by drumming and dancing.

Many indigenous religions, like most religions, have elaborate stories that explain how the world was created, how culture and civilisation came about, or what happens when a person dies. Other mythologies are meant to explain or enforce social conventions on issues relating to age, gender, class, or religious rituals. Myths are popular methods of education: they communicate religious knowledge and morality while amusing or frightening those who hear or read them. Examples of religions with elaborate mythologies include the native religion of the Yoruba people.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Explain the reasons for the different rituals in the African Traditional Religions and the roles of the officials of the religions.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Africans, as other peoples around the world, have belief in the Supreme Being that is given different names, in different places and other deities. They believe in ancestral worship and magic, witchcraft and herbalism. They act according to their faith. Through this the gods are appeased, the result of which brings solutions to their aspirations. Those who act contrary to the order of the gods may incur the wrath of the gods. Majority of their beliefs and practices are henotheistic in nature, that is, each clan gave allegiance to the community’s own god while still accepting that other gods exist. Evil was seen as being caused by petty or demonic spirits that dwell among human beings.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Right from the onset of this unit, issues relating to the practices and rituals of the African Traditional Religions has been treated. We also discuss the different places of religious worship. The personalities involved are also explained together with their influence on the life of the community.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you considered to be the major activities of the adherents of the African Traditional Religions?
2. Of what influence is the life of the Healers, Magicians, secret societies and rainmakers in the life of the African Traditional Religionists?
3. Compare the tenets and practices of a typical Yoruba Traditional Religionists with the African Traditional worshipper of in the Afro Asiatic traditions.

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## **UNIT 2      FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Functions of Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The function of any system to the positive or negative development of a society will determine its importance and relevance to that society. The place of religion in the simple, preliterate society is quite definite; as a complex, it fits into the whole social organisation and functions dominantly in every part of it. In societies like ours, however, its place is less clear and more complex. With the diversity of religious viewpoints, there are differences of opinion as to the essential features of religion and there are different opinions as to the essential functions of religion.

Nevertheless, for most of the population of heterogeneous advanced societies, though for the less religious portion, religion does perform certain modal individual and social functions.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- identify and explain the major inner or indirect functions of religion
- discuss the outer or direct function of religion
- identify and explain the different functions of religion in a society.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Functions of Religion**

There are differences of opinion as to the essential features of religion and its functions in a society. Religion performs certain modal

individual and societal functions. There are the inner and outer or indirect or direct functions of religion.

Although the inner functions of religion are not of direct significance in social organisation, they have important indirect consequences. If the inner functions of religion are performed, the individual is a composed, ordered, motivated, and emotionally secure associate; he is not greatly frustrated, and he is not anomic; he is better fitted to perform his social life among his fellows. There are several closely related inner functions.

Religion is the means of inducing, formulating, expressing, implementing, and perpetuating man's deepest experience in religions. Man is first religious; the instrumentalities follow. Religion seeks to satisfy human needs of great pertinence. The significant things in it, at the higher religious levels are the inner emotional, mental, and spiritual occurrences that fill the pressing human needs of self-preservation, self-pacification and self-completion. The chief experience is the sensing of communion and in the higher religions, of a harmonious relationship with the supernatural power. Related to this is the fact that most of the higher religions define for the individual his place in the universe and give him a feeling that he is relatively secure in an ordered, dependable universe. Man has the experience of being helpfully allied with what he cannot fully understand; he is a coordinate part of all of the mysterious energy and being and movement. The universe is a safe and permanent home.

A number of religions also satisfy for many, the need of being linked with the ultimate and eternal. Death is not permanent defeat and disappearance; man has a second chance. He is not lost in the abyss of endless time; he has experience of spiritual fulfillment by inviting man into the highest realm of the spirit. Religion can summate, epitomise, relate, and conserve all the highest ideals and value in ethical, aesthetic, and religions of man formed in his culture.

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, and, as Lippman puts it, "mobilising all man's scattered energies in one triumphant sense of his own infinite importance."



At the same time that religion binds the individual helpfully to the supernatural and gives him cosmic peace and a sense of supreme fulfillment, it also has great therapeutic value for him. It gives him aid, comfort, even solace, in meeting mundane life situations where his own unassisted practical knowledge and skill are felt by him to be inadequate. He is confronted with the recurrent crises, such as great natural catastrophes and the great transitions of life in marriage, incurable disease, widowhood, old age, the certainty of death. He has to cope with frustration and other emotional disturbance and anomie. His religious beliefs provide him with plausible explanations for many conditions which cause him great concern and his religious faith makes possible fortitude, equanimity and consolation, enabling him to endure colossal misfortune, fear, frustration, uncertainty, suffering, evil, and danger. 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 secrets 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 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 services for which there is no other institution.

In addition to the functions of religion within man, there have always been the outer social functions for the community and society. The two have never been separable. Religion is vitally necessary in both societal maintenance and regulation.

The value-system of a community or society is always correlated with, and to a degree dependent upon, a more or less shared system of religious beliefs and convictions. The religion supports, re-enforces, reaffirms, and maintains the fundamental values. In some societies, religious bodies officially sanction a universalistic ethic which is reflective of our common religion. Even the atheists the freewheelers, marginal religionists and so-on have the values of religious civilisation internalised in them. Furthermore, religion tends to integrate the whole range of values from the highest or ultimate values of God to the

intermediary and subordinate values; for example, marriage as a sacrament and much law-breaking as sinful. Occasionally, the state as a divine instrument places certain values at least beyond questioning and tampering.

Closely related to this function is the fact that the religious system provides a body of ultimate ends for the society which is compatible with the supreme eternal ends. This sometimes leads to a conception of an over-all social plan with a meaning interpretable in terms of ultimate ends; for example, a plan that fulfills the will of God, which advances the Kingdom of God, which involves social life as part of the grand design. This explains some group ends and provides a justification of their primacy. It gives social guidance and direction and makes for programs of social action. Religion gives meaning to much social endeavours. There is no society so secularised as to be completely without religiously inspired transcendental ends.

Religion integrates and unifies. Some of the oldest and most persistent and most cohesive forms of social groupings have grown out of religion. These groups 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 beliefs of a religion also reflecting the values are expressed in creeds, dogmas, and doctrines. A religious group cannot exist without a collective creed, and the more extensive the creed, the more unified and strong is the group. The creed unifies and socialises men by attaching them completely to an identical body of doctrine.

The religious symbolism, and especially the closely related rites and worship forms, constitute a powerful bond for the members of the particular faith. The religion, in fact, is an expression of the unity of the group, small or large. The common codes, for religious action as such and in their ethical aspects for everyday moral behaviour, bind the devotees together. These are ways of jointly participating in significantly symbolised, standardised and ordered religiously sanctified behaviour. 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". His view is that every religion pertains to a community, and conversely, every community is in one aspect a religious unit. This is brought out in the common religious ethos that prevails even in the denominationally diverse audiences at many secular semi-public and public occasions in the United States; and it is evidenced in the prayers offered, in the frequent religious allusions, and in the confirmation of points on religious grounds.

The unifying effect of religion is also brought out in the fact that historically peoples have clung together as more or less cohesive cultural units, with religion as the dominant bond, even though spatially dispersed and not politically organised. The Jews for 2500 years have been a prime example, though the adherents of any world or inter people religion are cases in point. It might be pointed out that the integrating function of religion, for good or ill, has often supported or been identified with other groupings political, nationality, language, class, racial, sociability and even economic.

Religion usually exercises a stabilising-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. 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.

At the same time religion exercises a conserving influence, it also energises 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, mobilising energies and inducing sacrifices; for example, the crusades, mission efforts, just wars. 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 in social control, enforcing what men 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.

It should also be noted that religion if not properly handled can cost hatred even war among the people of a community. At times it may lead to broken homes, political instability and destruction of lives and property.

Religion to be able to perform positive functions within a society, the different adherents must imbibe the true teaching of the religions, which preaches unity and peaceful co-existence.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Explain the inner and outer functions of religion to an individual or group in a society.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Religion performs a lot of functions within a community. It functions directly or indirectly in the life of human being. It serves as a great control on the life of man and his activities within his environment. It also acts as a powerful aid in enforcing what man should or should not do.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Religion has direct and indirect functions in a society. It is the means of inducing, implementing and perpetuating man's deepest experience. It satisfies for many the need of being linked with the ultimate and eternal.

Furthermore, it binds the individual to the supernatural and gives him cosmic peace and a sense of supreme fulfillment and a great therapeutic value for him.

Religion undertakes on behalf of individual peace of mind and wellbeing services for which there is no other institution. It is vitally necessary in both societal maintenance and regulation. The value-system of a society is always correlated with and to a degree dependent upon, a more or less shared system of religious beliefs and convictions.

Religion integrates and unifies in such a way that most cohesive forms of social groupings have grown out of religious. It acts as a powerful aid in social control enforcing what man should or should not do.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Religion has dual functions in a society. List such functions and explain them briefly.
2. How has religion been able to maintain or disintegrate peace and order within a society?

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## **UNIT 3      IMPACT OF RELIGION IN THE LIFE OF A                  SOCIETY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Impact of Religion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we shall discuss the positive and negative impact of religion in the life of the individual member of a society and the society as whole.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVE**

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

- discuss the positive and negative effects of religion on a society in general and on the life of an individual in particular.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Impact of Religion**

Religion has its own impact on the life of man as a member of a society. This impact may be positive or negative depending on the perception of the people concerned.

On the positive side, it provides for intra and international connections. For example the issue of pilgrimage could be used to express this. When people from different parts of the world converge to worship at important centers, different ideas about the development in the world could be discussed by the pilgrims. They could probably use the pilgrimage to make connection in business activities with the resultant effect of which can transform the economic policy of the different nations involved. It could, also, serve as a unifying factor for different groups in the world and removing misunderstanding among them.

Religion regulates the life of man. This includes his ways of thinking, speech, dressing and relating to other people in his environment. Religious worship has a great impact on the health of the devotees through certain rituals of cleanliness and denial of certain worldly luxuries: such as eating, drinking and some sensual activities.

Equality of man is fostered in religion. In a true religion, man is equal before the Creator hence; there should be no discrimination of tribe and caste or sex. This should be demonstrated in thought, speech and actions.

Religion changes or influences the creed of a society and in the other way round, the society had great impact on the tenet and practice of a religion. For instance, the conception of Israel as a sacred nation by some people is attributed to Ezekiel of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. He is also responsible for instilling a profound belief in the coming of a Messiah. He was the first Hebrew Prophet to consider the ultimate consequences of the withdrawal of God's spirit from the children of Israel. He saw the exile and the destruction of the Temple as the inevitable punishment for those who disobey God. This stand of Ezekiel has shaped the creed and practice of Judaism.

The present day Christianity was informed by the efforts of Paul or the efforts of the Roman Empire in reshaping the teachings of Jesus Christ at the council of Nicea in Constantinople in the year 325 A.D.

In the same vein, tasawwuf was established in the way we have it today through the efforts of some sufis and this has caused a lot of ideas about whom a Muslim should be when talking about the spirituality in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was able to change the ways of life of the Jahiliyyah Arabs within a period of 23 years through the message of the Holy Qur'an.

The point we are making is that the impact of religion on the life of a society is enormous vis-à-vis the impact of man on the religion of man.

Religious groups affect the life of man through the provision of some social amenities within the society. Such as educational institutions, health care centers and so on.

The dressing code of a people is sometimes controlled by the prescriptions of certain religion. Some are to be in white especially during religious services, males are made to plate their hairs just as females, some others are forbidden to use jewelries or to wear shoes or slippers as a way of life. This is one of the impacts of religion on man.

Different governments enjoy the obedience of their people through the prescriptions of their religions, that they should obey people in the position of authority over them.

Conversely, religions through their adherents have caused a lot of panic and destructions to man and property in this world. The crusaders, the Christian warriors, launched eight different attacks on the Muslims to recover their Holy place, Jerusalem, from them which had been conquered by the Muslims at the time of Khalīfa Umar. The religious motive is considered to be the chief moving force of the crusaders. They were actuated by a greater objective of establishing the superiority of Christianity over Islam and the domination of Christian Europe over Muslim Asia. It was a struggle of Christianity with Islam. Even, there was, also, conflict between the two divisions of Christianity – the Roman Church and the Greek Church. The Christian territories of the Eastern Mediterranean belonged to the Greek Church system and the Christian of the Western Mediterranean countries to the Roman church organisation.

There were differences and discord between these two churches for centuries. The Roman church wanted to impose its system and control over the Greek Church. In the 11th century the Roman church Christians waged war against the Eastern Church and Islam. There were so many other causes than religion in the waging of the crusade, such as the Pope intention to establish his supremacy over the Christian world and used the crusade as a means to attain the end, the social development of feudalism, under the influence of the church, the commercial and economic factor, political and so on.

The crusade caused a lot of ill-treatment of people and massacre of both Christians and Muslims as well as the destruction of libraries, college and manufactory of the place.

Jihadist on the other hand fought wars to defend themselves, their religions and property. They were able to conquer many lands in Asia, Europe and Africa.

The current terrorism acts in the world had its foundation from what has just been discussed above about crusade and jihād. So, religion has produced negative impact on the people.

It can, therefore, be said that though religion has been having positive impacts on the life of man in his environment, it has also contributed to ritual killings, broken homes, underdevelopment, discrimination, injustice, insecurity, unhealthy rivalry and fatalism.



Considering the trends of any religion in the world, one is convinced that what religion stands for is peace and tranquility among different societies but the ignorance and the excesses of the adherents brought the negative impact on the world system. This observation is in line with the submission of Blaise Pascal that “man never do evil completely and cheerfully as when they do it with religious conviction”.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Find out the major impacts of religion on the world system of the current century.
- ii. Assess the major causes misunderstanding in the world today.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Religion could form a formidable asset to world development if the adherents could abide by the teaching of religion on justice, love, goodness, selfless service, charity, and the avoidance of evil, indency and rebellions.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have been able to identify and discuss some of the positive and negative impacts of religion in the life of man in the past and present times. We have, also, predicted a better future for man if religion is allowed to play its role, the way it should. Mankind is the major factor in this affair. They caused the crusades, the jihad and the terrorism that is in vogue currently in the world. They are the best solution for the world peace.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Religion influences the life of man according to some, while some others say that it is the man that dictates what religion will do.
2. Examine those statements and come out with an agreeable stand on them.
3. Consider the impacts of crusaders, jihad and terrorism on the world system.

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## **UNIT 4      RELATIONSHIP OF HUMANITY WITH RELIGION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Relationship of Humanity with Religion
  - 3.2 Man and His Social Environment
  - 3.3 Humanity Lies in the Spiritual Aspect of Man
  - 3.4 Man between being a Slave of his Passions and being a  
Servant of God
  - 3.5 Reason for Sending all Prophets
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we are going to discuss the relationship between humanity and religion. The man as a human being within his social and spiritual environment would be study. His adaption to his environment through the power of making the right choice and his being a slave of passion or of God will, also will be examined. This will lead us to why religion or reasons why prophets are sent.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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

- explain the relationship of humanity with religion
- explain the quality of man and how he is able to adapt himself to his intellectual and spiritual environments
- discuss reasons why there is need for religion or why prophets are sent by God to the world.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Relationship of Humanity with Religion**

Religion is the state of harmony that results when man's entire life, both as an individual and as a member of society, corresponds with the real conditions-first of human nature; and secondly of the world around us.

This is a rather abstract way of putting it; but it can be shown that all systems of religion aim in spirit at the ordering human life in a true way, so as to make it accord with man's own nature and the facts of the universe. The Holy Quran says:

*So set your face towards the pure religion the (Islam).  
Allah's creation with which He has created mankind in  
the nature that fits him (Qur'an 30:30).*

At birth man has no conscious knowledge about himself or about the environment around him; nevertheless, he is not an alien but fitted for the world into which he is born. To begin with, his body is made up of the same elements as exist in nature: the building blocks that make up the mineral, vegetable and animal elements of the earth also constitute the sperm and the egg which, when they are joined, marked the first moment of his earthly life. And yet, how the inanimate matter is converted into living forms defeats all our inquiries: it is a direct gift of the Creator. Man is thus a 'child of nature' and aware of himself as a creature of the Creators' making. That awareness distinguishes the second aspect, the 'heavenly' side, of human being beside the merely 'natural' aspect.

### **3.2 Man and His Social Environment**

A human child is, typically, born into a welcoming environment, and knows the embrace of parents and a wider family of relatives. Moreover, the baby is immediately provided with the most perfect nourishment, exactly adapted to its needs in the form of the mother's milk. The world, as the child grows, will be experienced as an environment fully ordered-with sight and sounds, with heat and light and rainfall, with an infinite diversity of plants, fruits and animals-to enable, exercise and enlarge all the faculties of sense and feeling and intellect that the Creator has created in the child. Likewise, the body in which the child's life is held functions without his conscious effort or decision brain, heart, lungs, stomach, senses, limbs, and so on. All this, minutely arranged and coordinated, is the gift of the Creator, the apparatus that He gives when He gives life to a human being, to support and nurture that life. Very little of what man has is his own doing-if he was left to manage only his own body, unaided by the Creator, he could not do it and so could not survive.

The one who created the universe and subjected it to man's stewardship is also the one who created man. It behooves us, then, to consider what our responsibility is, considering all that we have been given, to reflect on how we will answer for ourselves and for what we

have in our care. Human responsibility before the Creator is voluntary, whereas every other creature carries out its particular duties without reflection but also without defect in its duties.

### **Relative Impotence and Vulnerability of Man**

Because the apparent efficiency of modern technology obscures it from us, we need to remind ourselves of the relative importance and vulnerability of man. Man cannot create so much as a leaf or a fly; though he is free to tamper with God's creation to the extent he wills, man has no dominion over even the operation of his body, let alone over the world as a whole. He cannot prevent himself from getting hungry and thirsty; he has no part in determining his parents, or his time and place of birth, nor his physique or physical structure, nor does he know when and where he will die. We affirm that man needs to use the natural world to sustain and enlarge his life. The one who subjected nature to man has also created in man the necessary means to use nature, namely his intellectual faculties. By exercising his intellect man obtains some knowledge of the orderly operations of natural phenomena; the uniformity and reliability of these phenomena enable him to formulate 'laws'. Such 'laws' are our imperfect, human intimations of the supreme laws according to which the Supreme Being has created what He has created.

Peace, rest, harmony, the healthy working of the human organism, is the end of all modes of Religion. Religion is simply a state of general harmony, within and without-in the inmost spirit, between man and his fellows, between man and the earth.

How idle, therefore, are debates whether religion is a needful thing, a good thing, a thing that wise men in the future perhaps will not trouble about. Not to trouble about religion is to be indifferent whether human life is in harmony with its true nature and real conditions-which is the state of a savage, and the lawless wild man.

This is the meaning of the profound aphorism: "Man grows more and more religious". In spite of appearances and of our habit of thinking that religion implies fiction and detachment from earth and life, man does grow more and more in harmony with his own nature and human nature, and so he does grow more religious. Hence religion simply means development on the true lines of the real facts-in other words, progress on the basis of order.

This capacity for religious unity and union is essentially a human thing, and a social attribute.

### 3.3 Humanity Lies in the Spiritual Aspect of Man

Humanity, that is the quality or the being fully identified as human, does not come from man's natural, material aspects but from the immaterial and spiritual. His spirit and intellect do not originate in his physical structure. When he dies, he is reduced to something that will decompose into the earth. He no longer has senses, even though, for a short time, his body is still there. This means that it is the spiritual part of him that uses the body. It is life that gives the body meaning. The relation between man's body and spirit can be understood somewhat by analogy with a factory and electrical power. It is of no value how complex, sophisticated and excellent a factory is unless there is electrical power to put it into operation, without which it is no more than a piece of mechanical junk. We do not therefore mean to imply that the spirit is everything by itself, that the body is 'junk'; on the contrary, spirit needs matter or a corporeal form to express its powers and functions.

Just as the future life of a fruit tree is encapsulated in its seed, and the worth of the tree is in the worth of the fruit it yields, so too the life history of man is also recorded, and his life is worthwhile in proportion to his good deeds and virtues. Again, just as the tree increases by means of the seed in its fruit, so too does man prosper by his good deeds, all of whose weight and consequence will become known to him. This world is the field where man scatters his deeds to be harvested in the next. So the All-Majestic, All-Powerful, All-Wise Creator, Who brings man into existence from non-existence, and who brings him to life by breathing the 'spirit' into the body that he fashioned from the 'clay of nature', will quicken him again after his decomposition in the earth. This is as easy for Him as bringing day after night, spring after winter, and making what looks, at the end of autumn, like dry wood, yield grapes the following summer.

The glorious peculiarities of man amongst all living things are this: He unites in himself all these tendencies:

1. That the development of his own nature coincides with the nature of his fellow men.
2. That co-operation with his fellows is the true development of his own nature.
3. That the joint development of the individual and the race coincides with the true adaptation of man in the world.
4. That the continuity of life possessed by the race multiplies the life of the individual indefinitely.

Hence material, intellectual, and moral progress all coincide, and tend to the same result when they are in harmony. Again, individual

development and social development alike coincide, and mutually strengthen each other. The highest activity is equivalent to perfect peace. Further, the most complete unselfishness is the true way to the highest peace.

In other words, happiness and duty are synonymous, and, relatively, in the long run, prosperity and virtue are synonymous. All alike mean life for humanity. Life for humanity is at once:-

1. The grandest field for the intellect.
2. The most practical sphere for the energies, and
3. The purest satisfaction of the feelings.

It is also the surest mode in which man adjusts himself to the physical pressure of external nature and the only way in which he can prolong his life beyond the few years of his own precarious existence.

Herein, then, are realised all the dreams of the older faiths, in which the instinctive genius of mankind grouped after the truth in ways so strange and diverse. They have all struggled to find someone grand solution of life, so that Man and the universe might be brought under one government. And hitherto they have struggled in vain. But there is a way in which the order of the world around us and the order of Man's life do coincide. To make these two correspond is the only way in which man can escape perpetual death, remorse, and confusion. Attachment, reverence and love, are the only feelings which in the end can give us peace.

Though no creator crush the lawless and rebellious man and condemn him to hell, he is beating himself to pieces against the hell of an irresistible destiny.

### **Powers of Man**

Man has, in addition to the faculties and means we have mentioned, three principal drives or kinds of energy. These are the desires, anger and intellect. He desires or lusts after the opposite sex; he desires and loves his children, and worldly possessions such as houses, money, and cars.

His anger is directed at what opposes him, and by means of it he also defends himself against all antagonistic forces. His intellect enables him to make 'right' decisions. These powers in man are not restrained by the Creator; rather, man is required to seek perfection by disciplining himself against misuse of them. It is this struggle for discipline which determines his 'humanity'. Otherwise, there would be no purpose for

him in the universe, seeing that all other creatures leaves relatively untroubled lives without causing any organised disorder in nature.

### **The Intellectual and Spiritual Growth of Man**

Man is the creature who matures spiritually and intellectually; the other creatures have no freedom of will and so do not evolve or mature in this way, their whole lives being wholly determined within nature. Only man has freedom of will which he must apply to his energies in order to keep them within the correct limits. If he does not recognise any limits to his desire he may, for instance, usurp the property of others, seek illicit sexual relations, and so on. If, again, he does not recognise limits to the use of intellect, he may exploit it to deceive others. That is why man's powers must be held in check: his intellect must be exercised with 'wisdom', and his desire and anger restrained by lawfulness and moderation. We should remember too that man is a social being: if he does not restrain himself, certainly wrongdoing, injustice, exploitation, disorder, and revolutions will occur in the society. Life simply means the continuous adjustment of the organism to its conditions. If religion has to gather up and organise man's life it must deal equally with all parts of man's nature and as there are certainly three sides to these: thought, activities and feeling.

Religion must have three distinct functions for action and feeling are so entirely different in kind, that nothing which appeals to one can appeal to other in the same way. Thought may exist without activities and without feeling. We may have feeling without thought and activity without feeling.

Any scheme which is to harmonise human nature must deal with all three, and in a different set of appliances. Thus any harmony of man's nature implies all these three things: a creed, a code of conduct and a cult of worship. Nothing can be called really religion which omits any one of these three, or which gives specially to one a larger place, and starves the rest.

In their origin all forms of religion that are worthy of the name have in some sort professed to deal with all these-belief, conduct, worship. Moses, Confucius, the early medieval church and prophet Muhammad did not shrink from dealing with all that a man could know, or do, or feel, on all topics, all occasions of life alike. It may have been done in a narrow, absolute and hard way; but these various forms of religion professed to cover life.

But what is lawful and right; what is moderate and wise? Who will decide the criteria, and how will these criteria be accepted by people?



This is where the essential problem of human life lies.

### **The Changeable and Unchangeable Aspects of Creation and Man's Life**

It is rare for even two or three people to agree on the truth of even a single subject. If the rich and powerful decide what the truth is then their 'truth' will exclude or disadvantage the poor and vice versa. Nor if the truth is truth can it be decided by majority vote: for the truth as truth will be compelling no matter how many or how few people vote for it. The truth is, and can only be determined by the truth, that is, by God who has created man and the universe. What falls to man to do is discover that truth and abide by it.

No one doubts that there are some varieties that are universally recognised: such as honesty, generosity, altruism, truthfulness, helpfulness, compassion, and so on. These are essentially reflections of man's true nature. Created by the One, Who is All Wise, All-Generous, All-Compassionate, every man has an innate inclination towards these virtues and it is the God-revealed religion which confirms and establishes these truths, showing the straight path out of man's psychological and social problems. This religion was revealed through God-chosen men revered as 'prophets'.

While constant change is observed in nature, there is an underlying aspect of permanence in everything. For instance, a seed germinates under the earth and grows into a tree, without the laws of germination and growth changing. Likewise, human beings, no matter the changes in clothes, houses, vehicles and so on, in the material or form of their lives, have remained unchanged in respect of the essential purposes they serve and their impact on our lives and environment. We all share as human beings, certain general conditions of life and value; we are all born, mature, marry, have children and face death; we all possess some degree of will and common desires; we share also certain values - we all know the meaning of honesty, kindness, justice, courage, and so on. All the Prophets, peace be upon them all, sent by God were therefore sent from first to last, with the same message. This message, whether preached by the prophets Moses, Jesus or Muhammad (peace be upon them all) is based upon the Absolute Oneness and Absolute Transcendence of God: He does not beget, nor is begotten, being Eternally Self-existent. Each created being naturally depends on its Creator; only the Creator Himself is Self-Existent, unique, single, nor composite, not subject to change, not contained by time or space. Belief in such a divine being constitutes the primary foundation of the divine religion, as preached by all prophets.

The other pillars of divine religion are belief in the resurrection, in all the prophets without distinction, in the angels, the divine scriptures, and the divine destiny which embraces human free-will. Through sincere faith and worship and by adhering to the pristine teachings of the prophets, mankind can obtain the highest degree of elevation, even be worthy of heaven. Certainly there is no other escape from the snares of the worldly life, or from the oppressive ignorance of false, man-made systems, or the tyranny of self-appointed priestly authority.

### **3.4 Man between being a Slave of his Passions and being a Servant of God**

Man, when he does not employ his free will in the right way, to discipline his energies, can be too obedient a slave to his passions. They will incite him to wrong his fellow human beings in order to satisfy his desires. Since the divine religion does not allow such wrongdoing, those whose desires lead them from the straight path seek to corrupt the religion in order to shape it to their whims and fancies. This results in disorder, oppression, unending conflicts and destruction on the earth. God wills mercy for his creation, not oppression or injustice. He wills that human beings should live in peace and, accordingly, that justice should prevail amongst them. It is a fact of history that the followers of prophets who preceded the prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, split into opposing factions, with the result that the religion was corrupted to serve the local cultural preference (or the interest) of one or another sect.

The Israelites deviated from the straight path. They broke with the original Torah and finally gave in to their materialistic desires. The followers of Jesus, after the first generation, followed the footsteps of the earlier people. They split up into many factions. There were at one time as many as 30 Gospels. One faction allied itself to the Roman Empire and so was able to prevail, more or less, over the others. The Nicene council imposed the Christian creed throughout the Empire, and eventually a 'canon' of accepted texts was established as a new 'scripture'. Christianity deified Jesus and the Holy Spirit, thus introducing a mysterious, irrational trinity into the pure teachings of Jesus. Having deified Jesus, some of the irrational ores of his followers, following their own reason, found themselves obliged to deify Mary, the mother of Jesus also. These dogmas were combined with other beliefs such as blood atonement and original sin.

### **3.5 The Reason for Sending all Prophets**

The reason for sending all the previous prophets including Moses and Jesus one after the other was that the religion needed to be returned to

its original purity after the introduction of innovations and deviations by its adherents. For this reason the prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, was sent after Jesus. He came with the same pillars of faith, and God revealed to him the Qur'an which contains eternal principles for man's individual and collective life. Because, by divine decree, the Qur'an is, above all scriptures, preserved absolutely and permanently Prophet Mohammad is the last of the messengers. No other is needed by mankind and, by God, no other will be sent. Unlike any other religion, Islam honours the religious experience of mankind before Islam, because Islam confirms and completes what is true in the religions before it. This is expressed by our saying that, for example, the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was Muslim. This is why Islamic civilisation was, from the outset, tolerant, plural, inclusive-regarding the whole of mankind as its proper constituency - and why, with the rarest exceptions, has always remained so. There is but one religion which recognises as a part of its own system of beliefs that other religions exist.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Examine man as a social and spiritual being. How would his nature help his religious life within the society?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Humanity and religion could be said to be a thing that is being described from two sides. Religion or humanity is to make life easy for mankind. It is the state of harmony that results when man's life both as an individual and as a member of society, corresponds with the real conditions of human nature; and of the world around us. All systems of religion aim at the ordering of life in a true way, so as to make it accord with man's own nature and the fact of the universe.

The strength and weakness of man have been responsible for laxity and excess which religion has come to check or why prophets of God are sent to humanity. The main reason, therefore, is that religion must be returned to its initial pure state after its corruption by mankind.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

From the onset in this unit, we have treated the position of religion and its relationship with humanity. Man's nature and position in the universe are discussed. It is discovered that humanity lies in the spiritual aspect of man. The principal drives or power of man are the desires, anger and intellects. These powers are not restrained by God but man is required to seek perfection by discipline himself against their misuse.

Man is to discover the truth and abide by it. Everyone has an inclination towards virtues. It is religion which confirms and establishes these truths, showing the straight path out of man's psychological and social problems. Religion was revealed through God's prophets. Man possesses some degree of will and common desires and shares certain values. Prophets and messengers of God are sent by God with the same message. Religion does not allow wrong doings because the evil-deed result in disorder, oppression or injustice that is usually caused by the corruption of religion to serve the interest of one culture or the other. To return religion into its original purity, prophets were sent from God to mankind with the message of reformation of the innovations and deviations of the adherents.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Define: (a) Humanity and (b) Religion.
2. Discuss why prophets are sent to mankind
3. Man and his environment, of what relationship are they to religion?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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