

World Religions

LCRE Section C



SLSS Religious Education Support

SECTION C

WORLD RELIGIONS

Aims

- 1. To identify religion as a living and evolving phenomenon and to examine some of the different types of religion.**
- 2. To explore at least two of the major living religious traditions and to compare and contrast elements of these.**
- 3. To examine some contemporary manifestations of religion in major traditions, minor traditions, and in new religious movements.**

Section C: World Religions

Part 1: The Phenomenon of Religion

Part 2: A Closer Look at the Major Living Traditions

Part 3: New Religious Movements

or

Part 4: Other Living Religions

(Baha'i Faith, Chinese Religion, Sikh Religion, African Traditional Religion) – study one + relationship with one major world religion

Topics in Section C

1.1 Religion as a world-wide phenomenon

1.2 Primal Religion

1.3 The Holy (HL)

2.1 The Vision of Salvation

2.2 The Community of Believers

2.3 A Celebrating Tradition

2.4 Challenges to the Tradition

2.5 Inter – Faith Dialogue

3.1 Cults and Sects

3.2 Some New Religious Movements (HL)

Students study either part three or part four

4.1 A Living Tradition (Study 1 of the following: Baha'i, Chinese religion, Sikh religion, African Traditional religion)

4.2 Traditions in Dialogue (HL)

Section C Part 2 A Closer Look at the Major Living Traditions

List A	List B
Christianity (any denomination) Judaism	Islam Buddhism Hinduism

2 religious traditions must be studied by all students, one from list A and one from list B

In addition, higher level students must undertake a study of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism

Teachers' Guidelines suggest that we begin with the **experience** and living reality of how the religion is practiced.

Then introduce particular concepts to be explored.

Compare and contrast as they emerge.

www.wcc-coe.org World Council of Churches – links to world religions.

www.tcd.ie/ise Irish School of Ecumenics Library (Tel: 01-2601144).

Topic 1.1 Religion as a world-wide phenomenon

Barrett (2001) identifies 10,000 distinct religions of which 150 have 1 million+ followers.

www.interfaithcalendar.org classifies families of religions e.g.

- Primal / tribal
- Ancient
- Theistic
- Non-theistic
- Monotheistic

www.adherents.com Identifies key characteristics in common among types of religions.

www.wadsworth.com on world-wide distribution of religion

Europe was traditionally Christian, but has witnessed huge changes in settlement patterns and secularisation.

Ireland: www.cso.ie Religious trends in Ireland, 1991, 2002, 2006.

www.logos.materdei.ie links to various religious traditions.

Topic 1.1 links with Section A Topic 3.1 The gods of the ancients (polytheism / monotheism / God in the 3 monotheistic traditions).

Also links with Section I Topic 1.1 Patterns of Change in religious belief.

Jeff Chu, 'O Father, Where art thou?', Time magazine, 16/6/2003 on European religious practice.

Eoin Cassidy, 'Measuring Ireland – discerning values & beliefs' (2002).

Topic 1.2 Primal Religion

Primal religions depended on land and nature. They date from 50,000 BCE.

Similarities:

- Pre-technological world view
- All-encompassing nature of religion
- Lack of rigid boundaries between the spiritual and secular dimensions of life
- Use of oral rather than written canon
- Enactment of myth in ritual

www.webcom.com/duane/seattle.html Chief Seattle's speech adapted to modern issues

Mana = The reason why things happen. The production of effects in the world by words/actions ritualised but whose power is not open to observation. Mana comes from kinship with the gods & famous ancestors. Tribal chiefs embody the mana of their people and land.

Tabu = Marked off. Preserves the power and holiness of mana. Power of particular people, places & objects. Certain things and activities are sacred & set aside for specific members of the groups and forbidden to others.

Totem = The person is a relative of mine. A natural entity (animal / plant etc) symbolising spiritual essence of an individual or a group. Clans that are named after animal species. Totem expresses membership of the same clan & connects the individual with their spiritual ancestry.

Shaman = Spiritual healer / leader, interpreter of natural phenomenon. Traditions of the people are committed to memory and handed down in songs, tales, dramas. The shaman inherited the gift from his ancestors. He is a mediator between humanity and the spirits which inhabit the cosmos.

Topic 1.3 The Holy (HL)

Links with Section G: Worship, Prayer and Ritual

Rudolf Otto describes the holy as that which is beyond rational / ethical conceptions. It is the experience of **mystery**, a sense of **otherness**, an acceptance that there is a reality that transcends the level of ordinary experience.

‘Holy’ comes from French & Latin origins, meaning ‘**to consecrate**’.

The holy / sacred elicits **respect** and **reverence** and evokes a sense of **awe & mystery**. The holy is encountered in certain places and times, objects and individuals.

The response to the holy is formalised in a variety of **rituals, practices and observances** e.g. use of light, water, oil, icons, beads, bread etc.

Part 2: A Closer Look at the Major Living Traditions

Two religious traditions must be studied by all students: one from list A and one from list B.

In addition, higher level students must undertake a study of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

List A	List B
Christianity (any denomination) Judaism	Islam Buddhism Hinduism

Topic 2.1 A Vision of Salvation

In the 2 traditions

Salvation =

- Freedom / safety from forces that are destructive.
- A sense of health and wholeness.
- Refers to this life or the afterlife.
- Either initiated by God or depends entirely on the actions of the individual.
- Relates to the question of human destiny – where is human life headed?

e.g. Gutierrez: A Theology of Liberation.

Consider image of God in the religions & anthropology (image of the human person).

Topic 2.2 The Community of Believers

In the 2 traditions

Suggestions: prepare a profile of a living community in your own area...interview a member of that community.

e.g. no. of members

How the community is organised

How the community is funded

Leadership in the community

Decision-making in the community

Role of women

Any connection with global / wider communities

How is authority understood & where does it come from?

Involvement in issues / attitudes to the world?

Nature & ordering of relationships between members?

Topic 2.3 A Celebrating Tradition

In the 2 traditions

Rites: part of human actions and the normal sphere of human activity, but they incorporate elements of symbolism & consecration – making holy / sacred, repetition and remembrance – which give the particular rite its meaning.

Rites of **initiation**: Baptism, Bar Mitzvah.

Marking and **celebration of time**: Past events are central to its story so they are recalled at particular seasons e.g. Passover Seder meal, Feast of Tabernacles.

Celebration of stages in the life cycle: Birth, entry to adulthood, marriage, illness, death & loss.

Michael Drumm, 'Passage to Pasch', 1998

<http://re-xs.ucsm.ack.uk/re/passage> compares rites of passage.

The Osborne Internet-Linked Encyclopaedia of World Religions.

Topic 2.4 Challenges to the Tradition

In the 2 traditions

- What challenges face this community?
- What are some of the future possibilities for this community?

The contemporary experience of the tradition – particular reference to the tradition in Ireland

New movements & developments in the expansion of the tradition.

Topic 2.5 Inter-Faith Dialogue

Began in 1893 with the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Inter-Faith gatherings at Assisi in 1986 & 2002.

www.multifaithnet.org

Discussion / exchange of ideas & opinions, especially between groups, with a view to resolving conflict or achieving agreement.

Key requirements is a sustained interest in how other religions express their experiences of the sacred.

Types of inter-faith dialogue (Eric Sharpe):

1. discursive - understanding the beliefs of others
2. human dialogue = the true meeting of minds and hearts of people through authentic engagement
3. secular dialogue – has a social and justice focus
4. interior dialogue – focus is on prayer and meditation.

Role of religious belief in 2 of the world's contemporary conflict situations.

www.religioustolerance.org and www.overcomingviolence.org

Part 3 New Religious Movements

Topic 3.1 Cults & Sects

Cult: from French 'culte' – rooted in Latin 'cultus' = worship / devotion to a person or thing.

Cults have characteristic ties:

- Use of psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate & retain its members.
- Secret initiation rites.
- Founder / leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, charismatic, messianic.
- Belief that the end justifies the means in order to elicit funds and recruit people.
- Formation of an elitist, totalitarian society e.g. The Solar Temple, Heaven's Gate groups – doomsday religious groups where members have been murdered or participated in mass suicide.

Sect: Latin 'secta' meaning 'organised church body'.

- A religious denomination.
- A dissenting religious group formed after a schism.
- A group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or leader.
- Divided from a larger body or movement.
- Minor differences in doctrine or practices.
- Teachings and practices are not considered unorthodox.

Topic 3.2 Some new religious movements (Overview of 2 NRMs) (HL)

New – alternatives to official institutional religion.

Religious – offer a religious vision of the world and respond to the fundamental questions of life.

www.esatclear.ie/~dialogueireland.ie

www.cesnur.org/default.htm (Centre for studies on new religions)

www.factnet.org/index.html

www.scientology.org

www.watchman.org

www.religioustolerance.org/cultmenu.htm

? Jehovah Witnesses

? New Age

Part 4 Other Living Religions

The Baha'i Faith, Chinese Religion, Sikh Religion, African Traditional Religion (Study 1)

Topic 4.1 A Living Tradition

Topic 4.2 Traditions in Dialogue (HL)

<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel> African Traditional Religion

www.sikhs.org/summary.htm and www.irishsikhcouncil.com **Sikh religion.** Guru Nanak = founder, 500 years ago in India. Monotheistic. Belief in a Supreme Creator God. Roots in Islam & Hinduism – attempt to reconcile differences between them.

Chinese Religion: Taoism & Confucianism: 6th century BCE. 5 million adherents each. Taoism based on teachings of the Two Te Ching book written by Lao tzu. The Tao = The Way. Avoid worldly distractions and live spontaneously.

Confucianims – Social, moral, political & religious teachings of Confucius, a 65th century Chinese philosopher. Importance of correct conduct in society – becoming good citizens. Rituals also important.

The Baha'i Faith:

www.bahai.ie

Baha'u'llah = Glory of God.

Most recent in a long line of prophets e.g. Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad.

Oneness of humanity: one race, a new order of peace & justice, an end to religious and racial prejudice.

5 main beliefs:

1. All people are equal.
2. There should be unity among religions.
3. Extremes of wealth and poverty should not exist.
4. All people should be educated.
5. There should be a harmonious relationship between religion and science.