

SLSS Religious Education Support

Leaving Certificate Religious Education

Section C World Religions

Topic 2.1 A Vision of Salvation

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Compare and contrast the vision of salvation/liberation proposed
- Compile a profile of ‘the human person’ as presented in each tradition
- Describe how the transcendent and the human relate to one another, using examples from each tradition (H.L.)

Please note that the following article is background information only on this topic. It in no way constitutes a sample or exemplary answer on this topic.

The following notes have been adapted from ‘World Religions’ by Philip Barnes (Veritas, 2003)

Christianity

Vision of Salvation: Christianity

In Christianity salvation is a gift from God and is received by faith. Salvation is initiated by God who entered into the human condition through his Son Jesus Christ in order to redeem humanity from sin. ‘God so loved the world that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life’ (Jn 3:16).

The salvation story can be seen in the Old Testament and the Book of Genesis. In God’s created world Adam and Eve were given responsibility over creation in the Garden of Eden. They were answerable to God for their stewardship. The fall or sin of Adam brought about continued sin in others that still continues. We are, nonetheless, created for union with God. As St. Augustine put it ‘our hearts are wrestles until they rest in thee’. Karl Barth refers to humanity’s disobedience as ‘man’s journey into the far country’, a journey of alienation from God and all that is good.

The Old Testament also recounts God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendents. In this covenant God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation and thus all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. This covenant was reaffirmed to Moses. God promised to save the people of Israel and the people would obey God’s law and commandments. The law regulated all of life including the preparation and types of food (kosher), personal relationships, and worship and sacrifice.

In the Gospels Christians see Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. In Jesus God’s deliverance had arrived. Christ’s death and resurrection represented victory over sin and death. Christians today live in the in-between time from Christ’s victory to the time when his rule will become visible to all.

The Church in Christianity preaches the Good News of salvation for all who repent and believe. In the New Testament the vision of salvation involves membership of God's community. Christian freedom involves service to God. In the Church people who are struggling with sin are ministered to. Despite the earthly effort the Spirit is at work in the believer and this leads to glory.

The vision of salvation in Christianity encompasses past, present and future. Christ died to initiate salvation for sinful humanity. Christ's followers believe that they receive the benefits of Christ through the Church's ministry in proclaiming the Gospel. The gift of the Spirit in each believer is the assurance that Christ's salvation will end in victory in heaven.

Judaism

Vision of Salvation: Judaism

There is much diversity of opinion in Judaism as to what salvation is and how it is attained. Some Jewish people would not want to formulate a doctrine of salvation as they believe this would give the wrong impression of what was central to Judaism. What is central to Judaism is community and some Jews think that personal salvation would in some way diminish the importance of Judaism.

Judaism is a religion which embraces a variety of ideas and concepts and with salvation as with many other ideas there is much diversity of opinion. However there are certain ideas and beliefs on salvation which would seem to reflect the majority thinking on salvation.

Jews believe that each person is created in the image and likeness of God. Some Rabbis believe that the "likeness of God" indicates that man, like God, is aware of this place in creation. Most Jews would believe that man is made for union and fellowship with God. This is achieved through acts of daily life. Each act if done with the intention of sanctifying life and all creation glorifies God and helps humanity to achieve union with God. This concept is not unlike the idea in Religious Orders (and indeed in all Christianity) that praise or prayer can be expressed through acts of daily life.

Judaism holds that humanity was created with two impulses, the *Yetzer Tov* and the *Yetzer Ra*. The *Yetzer Tov* is the moral conscience and the *Yetzer Ra* is the selfish impulse. The *Yetzer Ra* is not a desire to do evil but rather the impulse to satisfy one's needs. This is not necessarily bad. For example the need to earn a living is not bad in itself. However the way in which it is done may be bad. A person who exploits others to make money is not listening to his *Yetzer Tov*. If he did he would not exploit others. The *Yetzer Tove* and the *Yetzer Ra* also gives people the ability to choose which path to follow in life. In other words they have freewill. Judaism does not have a doctrine of original sin. However with humanity making choices not consistent with God's will, the relationship between humanity and God has been weakened. This relationship can be restored on a personal and communal level by adherence to the laws of Judaism.

Festivals, Holy Days and the Sabbath help Jews to remember their relationship with God and their part in the Covenant with Him. When Jews speak about the Covenant they are referring to the Covenant made at Mount Sinai. This Covenant was made with the Jews. The Covenant with Noah is thought of as a covenant with all humanity. Involvement with their community helps Jews to keep the law and thus fulfill their commitment to God. While in Christianity there is an impulse to strive for a better relationship with God and be rewarded with union with God in

Heaven, this is not so for the Orthodox Jew. Judaism does not have a vision of what heaven will be like. For Jews, living their life according to the Torah is their ultimate concern. Many Jews believe that living one's life according to the Law is the right thing to do; to focus on reward and punishment is to diminish the good one does by spoiling it with motives of personal gain.

Judaism does not believe that God judges people on an absolute scale. Jews believe that God judges everyone according to their circumstance. Not every person wastes all their potential and not everyone uses every opportunity. Whatever good one does in this life means they can enjoy its effects in the World to Come.

Islam

Vision of Salvation: Islam

In Islam salvation is achieved by obeying God's will. Those who obey God's will be forgiven their transgressions if they repent. As with Christianity and Judaism people have the freewill to reject God or not. Allah offers guidance to followers who choose to listen and obey. If people follow the teaching of Islam they will be saved once that belief is accompanied by real commitment to and practice of Islamic teachings. For those who choose to follow Allah there is guidance given in the form of the Qur'an, the life of Muhammad, the lives of other prophets and the practice of the Five Pillars of Islam which are:

Shahada: There is only one God and Muhammad is His prophet

Salat: Daily prayer at fixed times

Zakat: Giving alms to charity

Hajj: Making a pilgrimage to Mecca.

By obeying the will of Allah, people will achieve peace and a place in Paradise. After death Muslims believe that two angels visit the grave of the deceased and question him/her on the principles by which they have lived. The time of the Final Judgement is known only to God. However there will be certain signs which will herald its coming. One of the signs will be the appearance of the Devil/Antichrist, who will be defeated by Jesus. Jesus will then verify the Islamic faith. The dead will be raised to face the Final Judgement. All will pass over an abyss of hell by the bridge of Sirat. From here the righteous will be rewarded with a place in Paradise while the wicked will be sent to Hell and excluded from God's grace and presence. There is a debate about this among Islamic scholars. Some hold that all who practice Islam will be given a place in Paradise. The general belief is that only those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will be given a place in Paradise.

There is a belief in predestination which comes about in the following way. There is freedom to follow the will of Allah or not. There is also the belief in the power of Allah and that He ordains all a person's actions. Ultimately God chooses which path a person will follow, the good or the evil path. Hence there is a belief in predestination. Belief in predestination gives Muslims great nerve in times of adversity or when everything seems to go wrong. The Muslim believes that his sufferings have come from Allah. His question of freewill and predestination has resulted in many debates in the many different schools of Islamic philosophical thought. What is clear and agreed by all the various schools of thought is that it is the sacred duty of each person to follow the will of Allah.

The omnipotence of Allah is central to Islam and has implications for the relationship between Allah and humanity. The greatest sin in Islam is that of *shirk* which is associating any other god with Allah. There is a distance between Allah and man which is impossible to bridge. There was never any question of Allah becoming man as this would limit His powers to that of human powers and abilities. There is also the belief in Allah as One. There is no belief in a

Trinitarian godhead. For these reasons Islam denies the divinity of Jesus. Jesus according to Islam was a teacher and a prophet. Muhammad was also a teacher and a prophet but in no sense is Muhammad considered divine. Only Allah is to be worshipped and prayer is the means whereby the will is brought into submission to the will of Allah. Prayer of petition does not play a major role in Islam. Prayer is about aligning our wills into agreement with God's will. Therefore prayer is to honour and obey God. There is very little emphasis on the concept of a personal relationship with God.

Sufism

The Sufi tradition is an ascetic tradition within Islam. Sufis renounce the world in order to know Allah and unlike mainstream Islam they emphasize the nearness of Allah. Sufis live a disciplined life of ascetic obedience, detachment from the world and the practice of devotions. The Sufis are, to some extent, looked upon with distrust by mainstream Islam. The Sufis focus on the closeness of Allah to man which is not part of conventional Islamic teaching. A personal relationship with Allah is not ordinary Islamic belief.

Hinduism

Vision of Salvation: Hinduism

Every Hindu's wish is to achieve Moksha which is best described firstly as the freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth and secondly freedom from ignorance. The cyclical process of death and rebirth is known as *samsara*. Karma when used in connection with *samsara* is the "law behind" *samsara*. The word *Karma* means *action, work or activity* and is the actions that one does in one's life and this influences the state one will be reborn into.

The belief in karma *samsara* is a belief in transmigration of the soul. This overcomes the problem of suffering in Hinduism. If one performs a deed it will be reflected in one's next incarnation. Similarly one's position in life is accounted for by one's actions in a previous life. The principle of karma is not unlike but not the same as "as you sow, so shall you reap". One of the great Hindu prayers is "My soul is identical with the Supreme Souls". The Supreme Soul is Paramatman or Brahman, which means the Great Absolute Principle behind the universe.

In order to help one, there are three paths which one can follow to achieve *jivanmukta* - the soul united with Brahman. These three paths are not mutually exclusive. People often follow various parts of the paths that they feel that in their circumstances or because of their personality will help them achieve *moksha*. The three paths are Karma Marga, Jnana Marga and Bhakti Marga.

Karma Marga

The Rig Vedas hold that this is the principal path to achieve *moksha*. This Path is also known as the Path of Right Action. This Right Action refers to the proper performance of worship to the gods including sacrifice and their associated rites.

Within the caste system the Brahmin or priestly caste rose to prominence. With this came a greater importance as a way of achieving *moksha*. Brahmins were the highest caste and because of their *karmasamsara* it was believed that they were closer to achieving *moksha* than other individuals. Brahmins were the only ones who could perform sacrifices so it was thought a sacrifice performed by some one nearer to achieving *moksha* would be propitious for the person wanting the sacrifice to be offered on their behalf and help them achieve a good rebirth. Later the idea of *dharma* (good acts) became more important and *dharma* includes moral, social, religious and commercial activities.

Jnan Marga

This is the path of knowledge. This is not intellectual knowledge or academic knowledge that knowledge which a person acquires through the experiencing of living according to the religious beliefs. It is also known as spiritual wisdom. Following this path often involves meditation. Following this path also requires practicing asceticism and the study of the sacred texts. Knowledge of the sacred texts is not regarded as the important aspect of this way but rather how the texts will help one achieve spiritual wisdom.

Bhakti Marga

This is the path of devotion, love and faith. Those who follow this path see Brahman as being an active being. Devotion to Brahman not only brings spiritual benefits but also bring benefits in life such as success in business. The Bhagavad Gita tells people to love and to devote themselves to the Lord Krishna who is a manifestation of Vishnu.. The idea of devotion in the Bhagavad Gita is best understood as fulfilling one's duties in life, knowing and understanding the upanishads and knowing the rituals of the rig Veda. This path can be one that encompasses all humanity as even if one is a lowly labourer one can still attain moksha through devotion to the Lord Krishna. Traditionally there were four stages in a man's life. Firstly he was a celibate student studying in an ashram. Then he became a householder with a family, but as soon as his first grandson was born he left the house. He then became a forest dweller devoting himself to religion. It was possible for his wife to accompany him if she desired and he agreed. Finally he became an ascetic with only a loin cloth, a staff and an alms bowl. He was totally devoted to his god. This is an ideal scheme of how a man would have lived. However it still exists in a modified form, in India especially, today

Buddhism

Vision of Salvation: Buddhism

Achieving salvation is important in Buddhism. For many Buddhists the goal of achieving a better rebirth is central to their commitment to Buddhism. After many rebirths one may become a member of the Sangha, thereby becoming more likely to achieve liberation. Ultimate salvation is a distant notion for most Buddhists, yet it can still affect their daily life.

Buddhism sees salvation as the overcoming of karma-samsara, a theme also found in Hinduism. Karma is the notion that all choices have effects, some good and some bad. The effects might just be on the person acting or on others. The decisions we make shapes our character and our future. Barnes (2003, p151) illustrates this by the phrase: 'sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny'. Buddhists are bound to the wheel of life as every act bears fruit. Actions performed in one life instigate another life. Samsara refers to the cycle of rebirth. This cycle can continue for all eternity, ending only when the person reaches salvation/nirvana. One may be reborn into six possible realms. The upper half includes the realms of the gods, titans and humans. The bottom half includes ghosts, animals and hell. It is difficult but desirable to be reborn as a human. The human state offers the best chance of being released from the cyclic existence. Human existence reminds people of the need for salvation and allows one to teach the Dharma.

In Theravada Buddhism there is no belief in an eternal soul passed on through many rebirths. Because of the Buddha's belief in the transience of all things it is believed that there is no permanent self or soul/anatta. The self is constantly changing. At rebirth it is the aggregate or energies that continue in a new form on earth. In Mahayana

Buddhism followers accept the existence of a substantial self/soul that endures over many generations. They share this belief in common with Hinduism.

The nearest concept to salvation in Buddhism is Nirvana (Ni and Vana). Ni is negative while vana means lusting or craving. It means 'the end of desire or craving'. Some scholars read nirvana to mean 'non-attachment'. Pure unattachment means that the cycle of rebirth is broken and salvation is achieved, thereby releasing the person from pain and suffering. The Buddha said that nirvana was like a flame being extinguished. In Theravada Buddhism, nirvana transcends human language since words cannot capture or describe it. In Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana refers to a heavenly realm / a land of bliss. Nirvana is a mystical identity with the One Supreme Spirit.

Nirvana is achieved by living by the Four Noble Truths and practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. Theravada Buddhists do not believe in a saviour god in order to achieve liberation. Even the gods are bound to the wheel of rebirth, as they also experience suffering. The Buddha does not intercede for followers. Each person must live morally and adhere to wisdom and concentration by him/herself. Only those who join the Sangha community have a real chance of nirvana. In Mahayana Buddhism the prospect of nirvana is open to all. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are committed to boundless love, acting to save followers from hell. In turn their followers worship them through dedications and supporting their temples and priests.

Religious Education Support Service

Leaving Certificate Religious Education

Section C World Religions

Topic 2.2 The Community of Believers

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Give an account of the place of community in each of the traditions
- Describe the organisation of people in the tradition
- Give an account of the structure and organisation at local and global levels
- Define ‘authority’, stating what it means and where it comes from in the traditions (H.L.)
- Describe how members of the tradition relate to and understand the world, and vice versa (H.L.)

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Christianity

The Community of Believers: Christianity

Community is a very important concept in Christianity. The Church in the New Testament is known as the People of God, and St. Paul referred to it as the Body of Christ (Eph 1:22). As Barnes (2003, p84) writes, ‘There are no solitary Christians in the New Testament’. Being a follower of Christ meant belonging to the community that was active in the service of Christ. St. Paul teaches that all Christians have a role to play, and gifts to be exercised, in this community. He writes in the letter to the Romans and in 1 Corinthians of the Gifts of the Spirit as given to each one in the Church. Working together these gifts build up the ‘common good’ and the Church. The Holy Spirit also permeates the Church, since it is a community of the Spirit. The Spirit guides the Church in worship and in service to others.

In the early Church we see the importance of the authority of experience. Christians could recount changed lives, renewed relationships, their experience of God. The early disciples could recount knowing Jesus and witnessing his words and actions during his public ministry. Their stories were circulated as an oral tradition and were used to teach and to worship. Some became the source of the Gospel material. The Council of Jerusalem was a meeting of Church leaders held to resolve disputes and to regulate religious beliefs and practices. One dispute arose around the issue of admitting gentiles into the early Church. Authority in the Church was from God but it became formalized and structured with time. The Gospels were written and the writings of early apostles and leaders were added in after the Gospels (e.g. Paul, James, John). These were then circulated among local churches, and the New Testament was formed. Ministry became more structured also in the Church. Charismatic leadership gave way in the second century to a structure of ministry consisting of deacons, elders and bishops. The Church engaged more with the Gentiles and

Roman ways of thinking. The term 'priest' replaced the term 'elder'. The priest was the leader of the local Christian community. The Bishop of Rome became the titular head of the Church on earth. The Roman Catholic Church was born. Most Christians still belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Barnes (2003, p86) states that 'The Roman Catholic church is a union of local churches (or dioceses) linked to each other by virtue of the fact that the bishop is in communion with the Bishop of Rome'. In each parish the priest represents the bishop and is appointed by him. The bishop is the kernel of unity in the diocese while the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) is the kernel of unity in the world wide Church. Until Vatican II the Church was hierarchical and centralized. It has since moved more towards national and regional bishops' conferences. Lay people have taken a more active role in the Church and local parish councils predominantly consist of lay people from the local parish.

Vatican I in 1870 declared the dogma of Papal Infallibility and the primacy of the Pope. Subsequent Popes tended to interpret these dogmas in an autocratic manner. Vatican II emphasised the Pope's infallibility in matters of faith and doctrine, while the entire body of bishops in the Church provide spiritual direction to the Church. This is known as the concept of collegiality. Therefore the Pope speaks infallibly when he speaks for and with the support of the bishops.

Authority is also sourced in the Scriptures which have been interpreted in the Church. The Church entrusts mediators, guardians and interpreters of the Scriptures with this authority. Those who present truth are under the discipline of the Church – a notion which does not sit easily with democracy.

The Protestant Churches look to the Christian Scriptures for guidance on all that is needed for salvation. The Catholic Church interprets Scripture in terms of 'an ongoing, developing tradition that uncovers and reveals new insights and truths' (p87). In Protestantism, authority lies in what the Scriptures teach. There is also far less regard for institutional hierarchy and organizational structure, with greater emphasis on the notion of the 'priesthood of all believers'. There are no levels of ministry and no priestly hierarchy or centralized teaching office. Individual decision-making is important in Protestantism and each must decide what the Scriptures teach. The 'priority of private judgment' implies that each person must believe and practice what is in keeping with the teaching and life of the early Church, according to the Christian Scriptures. Dissention and division in Protestantism has tended to centre on matters of Church order, ministry and discipline, the appropriateness of episcopacy, infant baptism and the monarch as symbolic head of the church. Such issues are not regarded by most as central to the Gospel. Uniformity and outward unity are not of the highest importance in the Protestant Churches, since the early Church was characterized in part by its looseness and diversity of Church authority. 'What is important is that individuals respond to the Gospel of Christ and endeavour to live by it in different and changing circumstances' (Barnes, p89).

Judaism

The Community of Believers: Judaism

A strong sense of community permeates the faith of Judaism. This bond is nurtured by the family and then reinforced by attendance at the synagogue and community celebrations of key events in the history of Judaism.

Jews believe that they were chosen by God as a community, not as individuals, and this is the reason for the importance of community in Judaism.

The family gathers every Sabbath and celebrates with a meal. There is an order and directions for how this meal is celebrated. Direction for celebrating a meal is known as a *seder*. Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends when three stars are visible in the sky on Saturday evening. The first meal of the Sabbath is the most important. Jews believe that no one should celebrate the Sabbath alone and members of a synagogue will often invite those who are alone to share the seder with them. Part of the seder is the blessing of wine and bread and sharing it. The Sabbath meal is never rushed and people will often sit around the table discussing the Sabbath readings and singing songs concerned with the Sabbath and Jewish life. The sharing of food and discussing what is common to all at the Sabbath table helps to reinforce the sense of belonging to a community.

This is just one instance of how the family is seen as practicing the concept of community. Other areas in which the family celebrate community are a male child entering into the Brith (Covenant). This takes place at home and is carried by the father or by a man designated by the father. All members of the family attend this celebration (if they can) as it is at this point that the child becomes a member of the community. When Jews sit Shiva (are in mourning) this takes place in the home; prayers are said nightly and people come to share the grief with the family and show the cohesion and unity of the community.

The second area of community is the synagogue. This community is locally based. People tend to live near their synagogue out of respect for the prohibition on travel on the Sabbath. Members of a synagogue elect their own Rabbi who is chosen for his understanding of the Law. The rabbi is a teacher of the Law though he does fulfil pastoral functions within the community but primarily he is a teacher of the Law. He may also be spokesman for the community. However there is no difference between a Rabbi and any other member of the community. The Rabbi does not mediate between God and the community or God and the individual. Decisions about the community are taken by the community not the rabbi alone. It is in the synagogue that the community comes together as one and celebrates their belief in the One God, Yahweh.

Remembering the key moments in Judaism is another way in which the community is strengthened. People come together to celebrate or remember times which have shaped the community. An example would be the celebration of the Pesach (The Passover). Here the family gathers and remember the escape from Egypt. Special foods are prepared and eaten to remind them of the time. The youngest person present asks four questions beginning with "Why is this night different from all other nights?". Using the food on the table and the customs of Pesach the oldest person present retells the story of the Exodus from Egypt. In this way all present are remind of the community to which they belong and how it has been shaped. Other holy days also serve to remind members of the the community of how it has been shaped.

Islam

The Community of Believers: Islam

A strong sense of community permeates the faith of Islam. The *Umma* (community of followers of Allah) was formed by the prophet Muhammad in Medina. The Umma was given the tasks of following the prophet's teaching and extending the rule of Allah to all peoples and tribes. Islam has no priesthood and no distinctions of status. During the hajj to Mecca all pilgrims wear a white garment, emphasizing this lack of distinction before Allah. Muslims are part of one family. The Qur'an (49:10) says that 'believers are naught else but brothers'. The oneness of God is reflected in the oneness of community. All are equal before Allah and there is no intermediary to intercede on behalf of followers. Community life is ordered by Allah's command. What Allah has revealed as good will always be so, and what Allah has revealed as bad will always be bad. Thus the Muslim community promotes virtue and detests vice. Justice is seen as the most important virtue. In the Hadith / sacred tradition, there is emphasis on speaking the word of justice to an unjust leader as one of the noblest acts of jihad / striving for God. The Umma cannot change God's law and must live by it. Islam has successfully instilled a sense of common religious identity among its followers and religious citizenship. This may be due to its uniformity of belief and common patterns of prayer and worship.

The Umma is ordered by the 'revealed law' – the Sharia of God. After Muhammad's death the Qur'an was given importance but also seen as important was the example of the Prophet and his teachings – the Hadith / sacred traditions of the Prophet. The principles of analogy and consensus were accepted in order to extend the applicability of God's law to new situations. The rules and regulations of the Sharia consist of the Qur'an, the Hadith, analogy and consensus. This regulates all aspects of a Muslim's life – personal and public – and all aspects of government in an Islamic state. The four schools of interpretation of Islamic law are called Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii and Hanbali.

Authority in Islam resides in the Sharia. No single spokesperson is empowered to articulate an official Islamic view comparable to that of the Papacy in Catholicism. Truth is found by going back to the original sources of Islam and by seeking consensus with other Muslims. There is no hierarchical system of authority. However, Islam is not without its schisms. One such division is between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Sunni Muslims comprise about 90% of the Muslim population. It defers to the authority and judgments of the traditional law schools. Shi's Islam is less unified and is associated more with charismatic leaders and reformers.

The division between Sunni and Shi'a Islam originate after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. It revolved around the issue of leadership of the community, and who was entitled to lead. When Muhammad died, Abu-Bakr was appointed as his successor / Caliph and was given the responsibility of ordering and leading the community. Abu-Bakr was a good friend of Muhammad's and an original convert from Mecca. Abu-Bakr was succeeded by Umar, and then Uthman, and then Ali. These four caliphs are referred to as the 'rightly guided'. Ali was Muhammad's adopted son and was married to the prophet's daughter. Some believed therefore that he was the rightful heir to Muhammad. His appointment was controversial. One of Uthman's kinsmen, Mu'awiya, opposed Ali in battle. The outcome was indecisive and arbitration was agreed upon. Some of Ali's followers abandoned him in protest at his agreement to enter arbitration. He was later murdered while at prayer, by a former supporter. Mu'awiya became Caliph but Ali's followers claimed that this was because Mu'awiya had agreed to revert the Chaliphate to the family of Ali at the end of his reign. However, Ali's son, Hasan, had already died before Ali. Mu'awiya appointed his own son, Yazid as heir and Caliph. Ali's second son, Husain, rebelled with a small group of supporters, but they were slaughtered by a larger force. Those who supported Ali's claim to become Caliph developed their own branch of Islam, away from Sunni power and influence. They formed Shi'a Islam and are known for their charismatic leaders who expound and interpret the Qur'an. It shares many beliefs in common with Sunni Islam e.g. The Five Pillars, but Shi'a Islam claims

to preserve different traditions of the practice and example of the prophet Muhammad. Shi'ites expect that a strong leader will emerge in Shi'a Islam who will restore the fortunes of the family of Ali.

Hinduism

The Community of Believers: Hinduism

The importance of community is shown in the way that Hindus live their lives; the authority of the community is of paramount importance and affects all areas of life, religious, social and commercial. There is autonomy for a person in how they practice their beliefs and in what they believe but there is virtually no autonomy with regard to how a person behaves and lives within the community and what they believe about the community. Hindu's daily life is ruled by a set of laws and norms which dictate what they eat, wear, what jobs they may do who they should marry and in what way they should worship. These laws and norms come mainly from the community. Until recently caste still played a major role in determining how people behaved.

Caste finds its origins in colour (varna which means colour in Sanskrit) and refers to colour of one's skin. Caste is not the same as class and must not be confused with class. There were four castes; Brahmin, the priestly caste; Kshatriya, the warrior caste; Vaishya, the merchant caste and Shudra the labourer caste. Within each caste there are sub-castes. One would only marry within one's sub caste and the children of that marriage would also be members of that caste. . It is not possible to join a caste; one is born into the caste. Traditionally one would not eat with a member of another caste. This is an example of the strict separation of people based on their caste. However it must not be thought that the castes were independent of each other. Castes performed services for other castes that were unable to perform those tasks. For example the labourer would do work for the priest how himself was not allowed to perform the task because of the rules of his caste. The priest would offer a sacrifice for the labourer because the labourer could not offer the sacrifice himself. There was a measure of interdependence. Although the caste system is not prevalent there are some places where it still exists and there are some traditions associated with caste which still are in existence.

There is no uniform standard authority in Hinduism. Authority comes from the Vedas and the associated commentaries and other material which has been attributed to the Vedas throughout succeeding generations..

The community recognises tradition as its authority as long as it is recognised that there are many traditions from which Hinduism draws. One community may behave in a certain way but another community may not, because they have both followed different traditions. This is acceptable within Hinduism. Within the community it is held that each person must follow their own way to discover the truth. A simple Hindu who follows a simple path to Brahman is just as important to the community as the ascetic who follows the way of the wandering holy man. The ascetic is revered because of his lifestyle and the belief that he is nearing moksha. Brahman is known by experience and there are as many ways to this experiential knowledge as there are people who practice Hinduism. People follow whichever path they wish as long as they respect the community in which they live.

Buddhism

The Community of Believers: Buddhism

The Sangha is the monastic community of Buddhist monks. The Sangha preserves and practices the teachings of the Buddha in addition to serving the laity through example and the teaching of morality. The laity supports the Sangha, thereby acquiring merit for themselves and enabling a better rebirth. The Buddha founded the Sangha and led them spiritually. As the Sangha grew in numbers, senior monks were allowed to confer ordination by the Buddha. The Sangha provides a context for the practice of Buddhism. If the teachings of the Buddha are obeyed there can be Nirvana for all. The Sangha provides the context for this faithful adherence.

There are separate religious orders for men and women in the Sangha. Within each there is a division between novices and those fully ordained. Those committed to the Sangha for life are called monks. It is a common practice for young men to enter the Sangha temporarily before they marry, thereby achieving merit and developing a spiritual discipline for later life. All novices must observe the Ten Precepts. These are negative prohibitions including not stealing, not killing, not committing sexual misconduct, not uttering falsehoods, not consuming drugs or alcohol, not eating certain foods, not dancing, not using perfumes or jewelry, not possessing money or living in luxury. Once fully ordained a monk must observe a further two hundred rules, most linked to the life of the Buddha.

Buddhist monks traditionally lived a life of austerity, poverty and sexual abstinence. Their possessions consisted of three robes, one girdle, and alms bowl, a razor, a needle and a water strainer. Initially they gathered for teaching and reflection during the rainy season. Permanent monastic settlements / *Viharas* were established within a few hundred years of the Buddha's death. A hierarchical structure emerged as did a division of labour. The abbot was the head of the monastery, based on his commitment and maturity in spiritual discernment. There is no centralized authority in Buddhism and monasteries are independent entities. Rules on poverty, begging and sexual abstinence have been loosened. Begging is now seen as a symbolic of humility.

Communal gatherings at the Sangha include regular recitation of the monastic code and confession ceremonies. Monks are involved in the religious life of the laity. They serve as specialists in ritual and they officiate at ceremonies. They give sermons, chant texts and participate in offerings. Some monks devote most of their time to individual meditation.

The teaching of the Buddha is the source of authority in Buddhism, in addition to the rules that regulate religious life. Buddhists speak of the authority of experience. Each person is expected to interpret the truth of the Buddha's life for him/herself. Obedience is to the truth and each Buddhist must decide what path to choose. Buddhism is democratic and experiential in contrast to the perceived dogmatism and authoritarianism of the monotheistic religions. Theravada / Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism are some of the most well known branches of Buddhism. Hinayana / 'Lesser Vehicle' focuses more on the individual than on society. Theravada Buddhism belongs to the Hinayana division. It is found mostly in Sri Lanka, South East Asia and Bangladesh. Followers of this tradition trace their origins to the senior monks of the first Sangha and use the Pali canon as their source of scriptures. Theravada Buddhists aspire to become an Arhants – the accomplished ascetics who attain nirvana through self-effort. This is open to men and women but requires a level of dedication and discipline available only through membership of the Sangha. Mahayana / 'Great Vehicle' Buddhism is about a 'great vehicle across the ocean of suffering'. The division of this tradition arose out of the interpretation of the Buddha's teaching. The Mahayana founders contested the completeness of the earliest sources of Buddhism on salvation by self-effort. They claimed that the Buddha made provision for prayer and for the transfer of merit from one person to another. In this tradition, Buddhism is about

worship and grace. Unlike the Theravada tradition where followers aspire to become arhant, in the Mahayana tradition followers aspire to become Bodhisattvas / enlightened heroes. These are ones that have taken a vow to reach Buddha-hood and foregoes entrance into nirvana in order to remain in the world as long as there are creatures to be saved. Salvation is open to men, women, monks and laity. Compassion and selfless love are the key motivations of this tradition. The Bodhisattva helps the unenlightened by example and reducing their suffering, by encouraging them and helping them and by teaching them the path of liberation. 'Mahayanists believe that the merit accrued by the bodhisattva's deferral of nirvana can be transferred to others, who may gain salvation as a result' (Barnes, p150).

Religious Education Support Service

Leaving Certificate Religious Education

Section C World Religions

Topic 2.3 A Celebrating Tradition

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Describe any rites of initiation associated with the traditions (or where none exist, another rite of significance)
- Describe how the tradition marks and celebrates time and or seasons, using examples
- Present key elements of the human life cycle and show how the tradition celebrates each

Please note that the following article is background information only on this topic. It in no way constitutes a sample or exemplary answer on this topic.

The following notes have been adapted from 'World Religions' by Philip Barnes (Veritas, 2003)

Christianity

Key moments in life are often marked by religious ceremonies, some of which are simple and others more complex. These moments include birth, transition to adulthood, marriage and death. Infant **Baptism** is a rite of initiation and a sacrament in the Eastern Orthodox Church, The Catholic Church and in most branches of Protestantism. Baptists believe that Baptism should be reserved for adults so that they can make a profession of faith in Christ. Instead, they hold an act of dedication to God for the infant. There are different theological perspectives on Baptism in the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Barnes (2003, p89) states that 'Catholics believe that baptism cleanses from original sin, whereas Protestants regard baptism as an outward symbol of the need for the infant to grow up to renounce sin and turn to Christ'. Baptism also confers Church membership.

In the early Christian Church the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were celebrated together at one ceremony, since most people joining the Church were adult converts to Christianity. In time increasing numbers of infants were added to the Church membership rather than adult converts. Therefore Baptism and **Confirmation** became separate rituals. Confirmation was the rite of initiation for young people who wished to affirm their own promises which had previously been made on their behalf by their parents. The Catholic Church teaches that the sacrament of Confirmation is a ratification of the gifts of grace already received at baptism. When the bishop lays his hands on the head of the person being confirmed this symbolises the pouring out of the gift of the Holy Spirit which will help the young person in their service to the Christian community. It reminds the person that it is not by his/her own powers that s/he lives the Christian life but by the grace that God imparts.

The Catholic Church teaches that **Marriage** is a sacrament whereas this is not so in the Protestant Churches, even though the Marriage ceremony is quite similar in all Christian Churches. It begins with an opening hymn followed by the priest / minister's address to the congregation reminding them of the meaning of marriage. The bride and groom exchange vows / promises to each other e.g. to love, cherish and honour the other. In some rites the groom

vows to provide for his wife and the bride vows obedience to her husband. Then the ring(s) are blessed by the priest / minister and placed on the third finger of the left hand with the words ‘with this ring, I thee wed’. The couple are pronounced husband and wife and the priest says ‘Whom God has joined together let no man put asunder’. The celebration of Mass follows in a Catholic Marriage ceremony.

Another significant moment in the life cycle is death. **Funeral rites** in Christianity are fairly simple. The community usually gather in the church to show their support to the family of the deceased and to pay their respects. They pray, sing hymns and recount the life and achievements of the deceased person. The celebration of Mass is part of the funeral service in the Catholic Church. The focus of the Mass is on life after death and God’s promise of salvation in the company of Christ for all who believe in him. The deceased is buried in a grave or else cremated. The priest / minister officiates, speaks the words of committal and commends the person to God.

Time and seasons:

The Christian Liturgical Year is divided into various seasons, festivals and times. It begins with Advent and includes Ordinary time, Lent, Good Friday and Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, and more Ordinary Time. Both private devotion and communal worship are important in Christianity. **Sunday** is the day for communal public worship. It is the first day of the week and it commemorates the day of Resurrection, the Lord’s Day. On Sunday, Christians gather to hear the Word of God, to hear preaching, to participate in the sacraments, to pray, to praise and to offer thanks. Within the Liturgical calendar some celebrations have a fixed date and are celebrated on that date each year, e.g. Christmas Day. Others are moveable festivals, such as Easter. Other festivals depend on Easter for their date, so they must move dates in correlation with Easter.

Advent (‘coming’) begins the Church’s liturgical year. It is a time for preparing for Christmas. It was first observed in the West in the time of Pope Gregory the Great (604 CE). The fourth Sunday before Christmas is the first Sunday of Advent. Usually an advent candle is lit in the church, representing the lighting of the way for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. Each Sunday in Advent hymns are sung and parts of the Bible are read to look forward to the coming of the Messiah. Another theme is the second coming of Christ in the future, as Lord of all creation, and how people need to be prepared to meet him.

The date for **Christmas** has pre-Christian origins. The pre-Christian Roman festival honouring the sun fell on 25th December, since this was around the time of the winter solstice when the days were long and dark, and they would give way to more light. As Romans began to convert to Christianity this date became the occasion for celebrating the birth of Christ, the Light of the World. Stories of the birth of Jesus are symbolised by Christians in the church – e.g. the crib and the holy family, the star of Bethlehem and the angels, the shepherds and the wise men. Special services are held on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day. Carols are sung to announce the birth of Jesus and its meaning in salvation history.

Lent refers to the lengthening of the days of spring after winter. It is a time for penance in the Christian life. Some people ‘give up something’ they like for Lent while others make a special effort to reach out in acts of kindness to others, or to attend Mass daily. The colour purple is often used in churches during Lent. Purple reminds us of mourning – anticipating the pain of Christ’s passion and crucifixion. Purple is also associated with royalty, reminding us of Christ’s resurrection and his sovereignty. Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday** and lasts for 40 days and six Sundays before Easter. Ash Wednesday is not observed in Orthodox Churches. Shrove Tuesday occurs immediately before Ash Wednesday. This is a day of penitence, a reminder to cleanse the soul before Lent, and a day too of celebration as the last chance to feast before the Lenten fast begins. Shrove Tuesday got its name from the old practice of Christian ‘shriving’. This meant that a person confessed their sins and received absolution. On

Ash Wednesday the sign of the cross is made on the forehead of Christians as a sign of penance. In the early Church people also wore sackcloth at this time as a sign of penance. Today, as the priest / minister places the ashes on the believer's forehead s/he invites the person to 'turn away from sin and believe the Gospel'. The symbol of the cross is also a reminder of baptism. The ash is often mixed with anointing oil – again a reminder of the anointing at baptism. Sometimes people wear the ashes on their foreheads all day whereas in other churches the ashes are washed off before leaving as a sign of being cleansed from sins.

The seven days preceding Easter are called **Holy Week**. Holy week marks the last days in the life of Jesus in Jerusalem. These days remind Christians of the most significant events in Christianity. The Sunday before Easter is called **Palm / Passion Sunday**. It reminds Christians of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem before he was crucified. Palm branches are blessed and carried in processions in many churches. In Roman Catholic and in some Anglican Churches believers hold small palm leaves or crosses made from palm leaves. These symbolise the palm leaves used by the people of Jerusalem to wave before Jesus as he arrived in Jerusalem, and also the cross on which Jesus died. Many people display the palm leaves in their homes afterwards to represent their faith.

The Thursday before Easter is called **Maundy Thursday**. Maundy comes from a Latin word meaning 'commandment'. Christ commanded his disciples at the last supper to love one another. Jesus washed his disciples' feet and inaugurated the Eucharist. In the Roman Catholic tradition Maundy / Holy Thursday is marked with a ceremony in which the priest washes the feet of 12 people to commemorate Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet as a sign of service. In Monastic times the Abbot would wash the feet of the monks. Also on Maundy Thursday there is a special '**Chrism Mass**' at which the holy oils used in baptism and other ceremonies are consecrated. **Good Friday** follows Holy Thursday. It commemorates Jesus' execution by crucifixion. After he died his body was removed from the cross and placed in a tomb that was sealed by a large stone and guarded by Roman soldiers. There is no Mass on Good Friday but ceremonies are held in churches. It is a day of solemn mourning in church. Christians meditate on the death of Jesus and what this means today in their faith. Some countries hold special Good Friday processions or re-enactments of the Crucifixion. The Good Friday services take place between noon and 3pm. Usually it takes the form of a meditation on the seven last words of Jesus on the cross. There are hymns, prayers and a short sermon.

Easter Day is the most important festival of the Christian year. Easter comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word '*Eostre*', meaning goddess of Spring. This joyous festival commemorates Jesus' resurrection and return from death after the Crucifixion. There is often a midnight vigil on the Saturday night to begin Easter. There may be spring flowers in the church as decoration. In the Catholic Church a paschal candle is lit and carried into the darkened church by the priest to symbolise the light of Christ's resurrection. The flame from the paschal candle is passed to all in the church and they light their candles from it. The church is soon filled with light. This paschal candle is usually marked with the wounds of Christ and the Alpha and Omega – the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. White vestments are worn by the priest. Readings from the Bible tell the story of the resurrection and the sermon will be about the new life in Christ.

Seven Sundays after Easter is the feast of **Pentecost**. It is also 10 days after the Feast of the **Ascension** of Christ. Pentecost marks the descent of the Holy Spirit onto the disciples and the beginning of the Christian Church. It is a joyful festival. Charismatic Churches celebrate the Spirit as the giver of gifts for ministry and the building up of the community. Pentecost was traditionally known as Whitsun, since early converts wore white robes for their baptism. Red vestments are worn by the clergy at Pentecost. This symbolises the flames of fire in which the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples.

Judaism

Key moments such as birth, the passage to adulthood, marriage and death are infused with religious meaning in Judaism. Therefore they are accompanied by religious rituals. To the Jews history is of particular importance since they believe that God revealed himself to them in and through their history and that God has directed historical events in order to fulfil his covenant promises to them. Themes of remembrance, celebration and hope are common in both the life of the individual Jew and in the history of the Jewish people. Traditions and rituals in Judaism provide a link with the continuity of the past and a purposeful future.

Jewish festivals are based upon the lunar calendar. The festival of **Sukkot** is based on the events of the agricultural year as a sign of God's kindness and provision for the Jews. Other festivals such as **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) are based on historical events. **Shabbat** is viewed as a festival, marking God's day of rest after his creation of the universe. Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends at sunset on Saturday. Devout Jews do not work on the Shabbat. The festival is celebrated by the family at home and it begins with a special service called a **Kiddush**. During this service the family read from the Torah, sing hymns and share a special meal. On Saturday morning the family attend the synagogue service. **Havdalah** is the ceremony that marks the end of Shabbat, distinguishing Shabbat from all other days. Havdalah does not create a division between the sacred and the profane. Rather it emphasises the special status of Shabbat by way of reminder that all days are holy.

Jewish festivals may be major or minor.

Minor festivals include:

- Channukah / **Hannukah** – commemorated the dedication of the Temple
- **Purim** – commemorates the events of the Book of Esther

Major festivals include:

- **Passover**
- **Shavout** – The Festival of Weeks
- **Sukkot** – Festival of Tabernacles
- **Simchat Torah** – Rejoicing in the law
- **Yom Kippur** – The Day of Atonement

The **Passover Festival (Pesach)** commemorates Jewish freedom from slavery in Egypt and their **exodus** from Egypt during the 13th century BCE. The Jews sprinkled the blood of a lamb on the lintels of their doors and the angel of death 'passed over' their homes. However, judgment was cast upon the Egyptians. This spring celebration occurs during the month of Nissan and lasts for eight days. Days 1,2,7, and 8 are full holidays while the middle four days are 'secular days of the holiday', which means that Jews are allowed to work on these four days. We know of evidence of the observance of Passover from the first millennium BCE. At the time of the first and second Temple Jews had to **sacrifice a lamb or pesah** on the evening of the 14th of Nissan, the day before the beginning of Passover. Many Jews travelled to Jerusalem to perform this ritual. After the destruction of the second Temple the sacrifice of the pesah ended. According to the Torah Jews must retell clearly the details of the Passover to their children. On the first two nights of Passover the Passover story is recalled during the **seder meal**. Reform Jews and those in Israel hold this meal only on the first night of Passover. The seder service is conducted according to the **Passover haggadah / narration**. The youngest child in the family asks four questions about the meaning of Passover near the start of the seder meal. Then the adults explain the history and symbolism of Passover. There are various rituals during the Passover service. Four glasses of **wine** are drunk during the meal, and four expressions of redemption are commemorated from the Book of Exodus. **Unleavened bread** (matzah) is eaten as a reminder of the

unleavened bread eaten by their ancestors during the Exodus as they left Egypt in a hurry. Another component of the meal is **harosset** (a mix of almonds, apples and wine). This reminds Jews of the mortar which their ancestors used to bind the bricks together. A cup of wine is left of the table for Elijah, the herald of the Messiah. The children leave the table to open the door to welcome Elijah. When they return the cup is empty, showing that Elijah has been in their home. Passover is the only festival for which the Torah states which foods are permitted and which are not. Leavened bread must not be consumed during the Passover festival. Preparations for Passover include a thorough cleansing of the home so that all leavened bread is removed. Prayer services are held in the synagogue throughout the festival of Passover.

Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement) is held on the tenth day of Tishre (September / October). It marks the culmination of Ten Days of Penitence which began on **Rosh Hashanah**. **Prayer and fasting** mark Yom Kippur as the most solemn day of the Jewish year. Even those who would not call themselves devout or religious usually observe Yom Kippur. Jews are not allowed to work during Yom Kippur. They must afflict their souls between the eve of the 9th and the eve of the 10th of Tishre.

5 key actions are forbidden:

1. Eating and drinking
2. Washing oneself for personal grooming
3. Wearing leather shoes
4. Anointing the body, and
5. Conjugal relations

These laws are outlined in the Jewish Scriptures. Punishment for infringement of these laws is believed to be destruction. Exemptions apply to pregnant women, children and those who are sick. Jews attend **five prayer services** on Yom Kippur. The first is called 'Kol Nidre', marking the beginning of the holiday. It is held on the evening of the 9th of Tishre. The next morning sees three services. The final service is called 'Neilat She'arim' – 'The Closing of the Gates'. A **shofar** is blown, probably to represent the joyous end of Yom Kippur. During Yom Kippur Jews observe **confession**, made silently to God. Yom Kippur services also include prayers seeking God's mercy and forgiveness. Extracts are read from the Jewish Scriptures. Leviticus 16 is read during the morning service. Isaiah 57:15-58 is read as well as Numbers 29:7-11. In the afternoon the following passages are recited: Leviticus 18 and the Book of Jonah and Micah 7:18-20.

In order to prepare for Yom Kippur some people engage in **ritual cleansing**. Some people **bless their children** on the eve of Yom Kippur. Some people light candles on Yom Kippur and say a blessing over them. A Jewish prayer called the 'Amidah' and some of the 'Shema' are read aloud.

A **child is initiated** into the Jewish community once they are **eight days** old. A special blessing is said for a girl and she is named by her father in the presence of the extended family. A boy must be **circumcised** in accordance with the Torah (Genesis 17:11-12). This ceremony is called the **Brit Milah** – 'the covenant of the cutting'. A **Mohel** must perform this procedure since he is specially trained. He also says a benediction over a glass of wine and then praises God in a second benediction. The father may offer five shekels in the synagogue as a symbolic gesture by way of dedicating the child to God.

The **transition to adulthood** is marked by the **Bar Mitzvah** for a boy and the **Bat Mitzvah** for a girl. To prepare for this day young people attend religious classes to learn about Jewish customs, history and the Hebrew language. On his thirteenth birthday a boy is said to be Bar Mitzvah (Son of the Law). A girl is Bat Mitzvah (Daughter of the Law) at the age of twelve (although her ceremony may be postponed until her 13th birthday). From here on the young person is recognised as an adult member of the Jewish community and is now responsible for **performing**

mitzvoh (keeping the commandments). An example of this is that a young boy is expected to fast on Yom Kippur once he is Bar Mitzvah. He may also be counted in the 'minyan', a quorum of ten which is required to hold a service. During the Bar / Bat Mitzvah ceremony the young person chants the blessings and reads a section of the Torah in Hebrew. Boys are given a **prayer shawl (tallit) and a prayer book (siddur)**. Sometimes a boy is given a **phylactery (tephellin)** to wear. The phylactery is a small box which contains passages from the Torah. It is worn on the forehead and arm during morning prayers.

Marriage is full of religious significance in Judaism. The Torah traces the origins of marriage back to **Adam and Eve**. One Jewish tradition sees God officiating at their marriage. In Judaism marriage is seen as God's intention for humans. Sex should be sanctified by marriage. One of the commandments / mitzvoh of the torah is to be fruitful and multiply. It was traditional in Judaism for marriages to be arranged by a 'shadchan' / matchmaker. The man who wished to marry paid a **bride piece** / sum of money to the father for his daughter. This act is sometimes symbolically remembered in modern marriages when the man pays a small sum to the father. A wedding is not permitted on days of fast or on the Shabbat. **White** was worn by brides traditionally to represent their purity. On the Shabbat before the wedding the groom is called upon to read the blessings over **the Torah**, in the '**aufruf**' ceremony. The wedding ceremony is usually conducted by the **rabbi**, but any prominent male Jew can officiate. Usually weddings take place in the synagogue but this is not required by Jewish law. The couple stand with the rabbi under the marriage **canopy / huppah** (can be a tallit shawl or a velvet cloth). It is upheld by four poles, held by friends. Orthodox Jewish brides circle the man seven times during the ceremony to represent her courting of the groom. The **marriage contract / Ketubah** is read aloud and signed at an Orthodox wedding. This protects the interests of the bride. Blessings are spoken followed by the singing of Psalms 100 and 150. It is customary for the **groom to break a glass to ward off evil spirits**. Friends and family engage in a celebration after the ceremony where they wish the couple a happy future and the blessing of children.

Death is also a time of religious significance. There are many Jewish customs surrounding the anticipation and aftermath of death. An observant Jew who is dying will **confess his sins and recite the Shema**. A close relative will remain in the room with the dying person. The body of a deceased person is removed to the funeral home by a member of its staff who recites prayers until the time of burial. The body must be buried as soon as possible. The service may be held in the **synagogue or funeral chapel**. The home is first prepared for **seven days of formal mourning called shivah**. **Mirrors within the home are covered** with paper or scouring powder. This allows the grieving family not to be concerned with their outward appearance and it also ensures that the spirit of one looking in the mirror will not be taken away by the deceased person. Also before the funeral service is the ceremony of the **tearing of the garment called 'keriah'**. The tears are not fully repaired. This symbolises how the loss of a loved one is never fully repaired. The funeral service is conducted by the **Rabbi** and the **Cantor**. The family sit in the front row of the synagogue or in a private area. Traditional prayers are sung followed by the Rabbi's eulogy. This honours the deceased. Mourners then proceed to the cemetery for the burial. The **casket is carried to the grave feet first**. This prevents the temptation for the soul of the deceased to look back. Prayers are said as the casket is lowered into the ground. Those gathered **symbolically cast dirt into the grave**. Then the family returns home. They **wash their hands before entering the home** in order to wash away the impurity of death. The seven day mourning period called shivah begins at this time. A **shivah candle** is lit in the home immediately as a mark of respect for the deceased. It burns throughout the seven days of mourning. Family and friends visit the home to support the family at this time. They sit on chairs that are close to the ground. The **uncomfortable chairs** remind them that mourning is uncomfortable. The shivah chairs also enable people to be close to the ground and close therefore to the deceased person. **Friends and family send platters of food to the shivah house** in order to remove the burden of cooking from the mourners. Three times on each of the seven days **the mourner's Kaddish / prayer recited for the dead, is said: morning, afternoon and evening**. At the end of the seven days of shivah the candle

is extinguished, the mirrors are uncovered and the mourning becomes less formal. For the year that follows a mourner or member of the congregation says the Kaddish each day. A small ceremony is held among family and friends when the headstone is unveiled.

Islam

Although the Qur'an does not require any formal ritual to celebrate the **birth of a child** to a family, tradition requires certain customs to be observed. Once the new baby has been washed and dressed the midwife carries the baby to the group of male relatives and friends that are gathered. The head of the family recites the 'call to prayer' in the right ear of the child (the 'adhan'). In the left ear he whispers the command to rise and worship (the 'iqamah'). Then the oldest and most respected member of the family (e.g. grandfather) places a small piece of sugar, honey or date in the baby's mouth, in keeping with the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. This gesture symbolises the making sweet / kind / obedient of the child. Finally, prayers are said for the child's good health and prosperity. Once the child is seven days old there is a ceremony called the 'Aqiqah'. The baby receives his / her name and a great feast is held. The head of the baby is shaved. Whatever the weight of the shaved hair, its equivalent in silver or gold is set aside for the needs of the poor. Then there is the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Two animals are sacrificed for a boy, or one for a girl. The meat is cooked and shared at the feast and some is set aside for the poor. The name is assigned to the child. This will often have religious connotations e.g. Abdullah = Servant of God. Male children are circumcised (Khitan) at this stage unless there are health problems. Once the child reaches the age of four he / she is taught to learn and recite this short passage from the Qur'an: 'In the name of God, The Compassionate, the Merciful'. This occasion is called 'bismillah' and it represents the child's formal initiation into Islamic education. This religious education continues in Islamic countries in day school. In non-Islamic countries it is conducted after normal school hours in a school attached to the mosque (a 'madrasah').

The mosque is not just a place of prayer and education in Islam but also represents a centre for the Islamic community. **Marriages** may be conducted in the mosque, but this is not required in the West. Marriages are usually arranged so that a suitable partner is found. The marriage ceremony is short, simple and straightforward. The bride is not necessarily required to attend. All she has to do is send two witnesses to attest to her agreement. The ceremony consists of readings from the Qur'an, the exchange of vows followed by prayers. There is no priesthood in Islam and the marriage (and funeral) ceremony can be conducted by any faithful member of the community.

Islamic religious education plays a key role in preserving its beliefs, customs and traditions. Special **food laws** must be obeyed. Meat must be Halal (animal must be ritually slaughtered) and alcohol is forbidden. The lunar calendar is followed and special festivals mark important religious occasions. The lunar calendar determines that festival dates are not fixed so festivals move around seasons. A festival is called an 'id' or an 'eid' meaning 'returning at regular intervals' in Arabic. **Minor festivals** include the following:

- Maulid-an-Nabi: the birthday of the prophet Muhammad
- Lailat-ul-Qadr: The Night of Power (celebrates the revelation of the first verses of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad), and
- Lailat-ul-Miraj: commemorates Muhammad's miraculous journey to Jerusalem and his ascent to the presence of God

Major festivals include:

- Eid-ul-Fitr and
- Eid-ul-Adha

Eid-ul-Fitr: This feast marks the end of the month of Ramadan. Muslims have fasted during the daylight hours during Ramadan. On the last night of the fast they may assemble outside to celebrate the arrival of the new moon, initiating great joy and celebration. Muslims exchange cards with friends and relations and decorate their homes. All will dress in their best clothes to attend the mosque the next morning. Here they will worship and pray to Allah. After the recitation of prayers the imam addresses the crowd gathered. They collect alms for the poor and families return home to the parental abode to celebrate the feast. Families go home after the mosque and exchange gifts, particularly with children, and hold a special meal. Many Muslims visit the cemetery in the afternoon to remember and visit the graves of loved ones.

Eid-ul-Adha: This is the climax of the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) and is one of the most important festivals in the Islamic calendar. It occurs two months after Ramadan has ended, during the month of Hajj. It marks the triumph of Ibrahim's / Abraham's faith over the devils' temptation, and his submission before God. Ibrahim dreamt that God had ordered him to sacrifice his only son, Ishmael. He told the dream to Ishmael, who asked his father to follow God's instruction. Father and son set out for Mina, the place of the proposed sacrifice. The devil tempted Ibrahim along the journey. He suggested that God would not command this action, that Hagar could not bear this tragedy, and that Ibrahim was losing his mind and should not trust this 'revelation' from God. However, Ibrahim resisted the devil's temptations. Just as Ibrahim was about to kill his son, God intervened. By way of reward for Ibrahim's faithfulness, God blessed Sarah (Ibrahim's wife) with a son – Isaac. Ishmael became the founder of the Arab tribes and nation. Isaac became the founder of the Jews.

This festival represents the submission of Muslims to God. All Muslims celebrate the festival – even those Muslims not on pilgrimage. It allows the extended family to gather and reflect on their religious commitment. Once again, a special meal is prepared and gifts are distributed. An animal is sacrificed (either a sheep, goat, cow or camel). The slaughter has traditionally been conducted by the father or senior family member. The animal's throat is cut with a sharp knife and the blood must drain from the animal. Then the meat may be called 'halal' which means 'permitted'. Prayers are said during the process. In non-Muslim countries the animals will usually be ritually slaughtered in an abattoir.

Hinduism

Religious ceremonies and rites mark important occasions in Hinduism, such as **birth**, marriage and death. When a child is born sacred mantras from the Hindu scriptures are whispered into his / her ear. He / she is given a small piece of gold dipped in honey to suck. The child's mother is separated after birth until she performs **ritual purification**. A symbolic mark is made on the child's forehead. On the twelfth day there is the **naming ceremony**. This is held with family and relations. The child's name is not disclosed before now, in case evil spirits gain influence over the child before ritual protection is assured through scarlet threads that are tied to the baby's body in the ceremony. The family give the child a piece of **gold** as a sign of good fortune. The Brahmin priest formally names the child and a party celebration ensues.

The **sacred thread ceremony** is held at adolescence. This confers the status of 'twice born' upon boys who are born into the higher classes. The age at which this ceremony is conducted varies from region to region. The ceremony marks the beginning of the student stage of life and the beginning of adulthood – the stage prior to marriage and family responsibilities. The individual can now **perform worship** / puja and offer sacrifice to the gods. He / she must also observe the rules of purity and class. This ceremony is seen as a type of spiritual birth. A sacred thread is placed over the left shoulder and falls under the right arms to the waist. **Mantras** are recited by the Brahmin priest during the ceremony. Traditionally a cow was given as a gift to the initiate. Now other **presents** are given as a token of support and affection.

Marriage also has religious significance in Hinduism. For a man it represents the beginning of the householder stage of life and the duty to raise and support his wife and family. The families of both the husband and wife are involved in the choosing process for a suitable partner, since marriage is seen as uniting two families as well as two individuals. Marriage ceremonies are often elaborate. Festivities and celebrations may be held over many days (although these last usually only one day in the West). Occasionally the couple do not meet until the day of their wedding. Usually when couples meet in advance of their wedding there are other people present. When one family agrees on a suitable marriage partner the priest is then consulted. He recommends whether or not the marriage should be conducted, based on his analysis of the couple's dates of birth and star signs. He will also suggest the dates on which the wedding should be conducted. The ceremony itself can be conducted either in a temple or in the bride's home. Vows are exchanged in the Sanskrit language, the priest says prayers and the couple walk up to seven times around a sacred fire or flame. Each time they do so they touch a stone on the ground. This symbolises commitment and firmness.

Religious duties are also performed by the eldest son of a deceased Hindu person. He leads the **funeral procession** in India and he lights the funeral pyre after he **whispers the sacred sound 'Aum' into the ear of the deceased**. This is believed to attune the deceased to the Spirit of the universe. After the body has been cremated the ashes may be spread on the river Ganges, the sacred river in Hinduism. Even when a Hindu person dies in the West and is cremated in the crematorium, their ashes are often taken to India for release on the river Ganges.

Hinduism is full of festivals in honour of the gods. **Festivals** are common occurrences. Many are confined to tribal or regional areas. Two religious calendars determine festival dates. Since the calendars have both lunar and solar elements there are no fixed dates on which these festivals occur. The most common Hindu festivals in India are the birthday of Lord Rama, the birthday of Lord Krishna, Holi and Divali.

Holi is a festival held in **springtime**. It marks the end of winter and the beginning of planting and new growth. It occurs on the day of a full moon in the month of Phalgun (between February and March according to the Western calendar). Various Hindu myths trace the origins of Holi. One story claims that a devout young man, Prahlad, had survived being placed on a burning bonfire on the orders of his evil father, Hiranyakashup. Another story recalls how the infant Krishna refused milk from the breast of the demon Putana. Holi lasts for three days in India. As part of the celebrations Hindus **sing and dance and squirt each other with coloured water**, or daub each other with paint. During the evening people visit the **Temple to worship** before decorated statues of Krishna and Radha. Worshippers sit on the Temple floor and sing hymns and songs / Bhajans while musicians play traditional Indian instruments. The climax of worship arrives when a **tray of lit candles is passed around** the crowd. The light represents purity and goodness. 'Arti' describes the worship of light in Hinduism. People **place coins on the tray** in offering to the gods. Then each person receives holy food (Prasad) that has been dedicated to the gods. This consists of fruit, nuts and almonds. After the Temple worship the people go outside to place offerings of food on a large bonfire. Once cooked the food can be retrieved and eaten.

The festival of lights is called **Diwali**, from the Sanskrit word 'Deepavali', which means 'a row or cluster of lights'. Diwali marks the beginning of the religious **New Year** in Hinduism. It occurs over five days in October / November. Hindus **light clay lamps** containing oil in their homes and may **float them in leaf cups** on the river. Light represents goodness and the victory of virtue. The goddess of success and fortune, Lakshmi, blesses the homes of those who celebrate Diwali. People exchange **gifts**. **Prayers** and requests are made to Lakshmi for the approaching year. People try to **mend any broken or damaged relationships** at this time.

India has many **temples and shrines**. Each home has a special area decorated with an image of a god / goddess. This may be human or animal. Women usually attend to the family shrine by offering prayer and worship there. Religious significance is attached to certain days of the month. The most significant days are **Purnima** (full moon) and **Amavasya** (new moon). Many Hindus **fast** at this time. Hindus are well known for their dedication to prayer and meditation. Most aspects of daily life for Hindus are connected to **various gods** and Hindus regard it as their duty to pray to them.

Buddhism

Buddhist communities mark many holy days throughout the year. Many of these holy days mark the birthdays of Bodhisattvas in the Mahayana tradition in addition to other dates of significance in Buddhism. During a festival day Buddhist lay people usually **attend the temple** or monastery, where they offer food to the monks and hear talks about the Dharma. In the afternoons they **distribute food to the poor** in order to gain merit. In the evening they participate in a **ceremony of circumambulation around a stupa** three times as a sign of respect to the Buddha, his Dhamma and the Sangha. Buddhists finish the celebration by **chanting the sacred scriptures and by meditating**.

Different branches of Buddhism mark various holy days. Most Buddhist follow the lunar calendar but the dates of Buddhist festivals vary from one country to another and even within traditions. Two important festivals are Vesak (Buddha's Day – celebrated by most Buddhists) and Poson (celebrated in Sri Lanka).

Vesak marks the **birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha**. It occurs on the day of the first full moon in May. The strongest theme is that of the Buddha's enlightenment. **Decorations** are put up and **lights are lit** in peoples'

homes and temples. Buddhists make offerings in front of images of the Buddha and they offer gifts of money and food to Buddhist priests. Many Buddhists attend the temple or monastery to hear sermons on the Buddha's life and his enlightenment. What is emphasised is the love and kindness of the Buddha and how he is a role model for Buddhists. Gifts are given to the poor and **caged birds are released**. There is a **sense of community** among those gathered as they vow to follow the teachings of the Buddha for another year. Sometimes Buddhists send **greeting cards** at this time, illustrated with scenes from the Buddha's life.

Theravada Buddhists celebrate the **festival of Posen**. This festival, held in Sri Lanka, marks the **coming of Buddhism** to the island in 250 BCE. In some towns religious processions are held. People process through the streets carrying a **cardboard image of Mahinda** (a monk who converted the island to Buddhism). Festivities include dancing, drumming and music, and large crowds gather to mark the occasion. The festival ends with a great display of **fireworks**.

In Theravada Buddhism the **birth** of a child is celebrated by a simple ceremony. Parents bring the baby to the temple to be named. A Buddhist monk **sprinkles the child with water and says a blessing**. A **wax candle** is burned and its wax falls into a bowl of pure water. This represents the **union of the four elements** (air, fire, wind and water). This symbol of unity represents the unity the child will achieve with all of life and nature as he / she grows and matures. Young men usually leave home for a while and **spend time living at the monastery** before fully embracing adult life. The purpose of this time apart is to afford time to prayer, reflection and meditation in advance of adult duties and responsibilities. It also means that the man gains merit. Some men may remain in the monastery and join the Sangha for life.

Religious rituals are also part of the **marriage ceremony**. A marriage can take place either in the temple or in the bride's home. A **special shrine is erected** in addition to an image of the Buddha, flowers and candles. Those gathered recite or chant passages from the Buddhist Scriptures. Then the couple light **candles, incense sticks and offer flowers** around the image of the Buddha. Then the couple recite the traditional marriage commitments. The ceremony finishes with the assembly reciting another passage from the Buddhist Scriptures as a blessing for the couple.

Funeral rites are elaborate occasions and infused with religious significance. **Monks** conduct funeral rites and memorial services and they chant verses to benefit the deceased. In Theravada Buddhism the body of the deceased is burned upon death. **Cremation** is commonplace, since the body of the Buddha was cremated. When a person is dying those gathered should try to fix his / her mind on the **Buddhist Scriptures** or support him / her in saying one of the names of the Buddha. It is not uncommon for **four syllables representing sacred words** to be written on paper and placed in the mouth of the dying person. It is hoped that such concentration on devout matters will benefit the deceased in his / her new existence. A **bathing ceremony** follows death. Water is poured over one hand of the deceased by relatives and friends. The body is then placed in a coffin and adorned with wreaths, incense and candles. A photograph of the deceased is often placed alongside and coloured lights are hung from the coffin. Cremations is the norm but this may be deferred for a week or so to allow distant relatives to travel to the funeral. When this happens a group / **chapter of monks calls to the house of the deceased each day to chant** from the Abhidharma (one of the most sacred writings in Buddhism). Food is offered to these monks by way of merit-making for the deceased. This food offering is called 'Matakabhatta' from mataka 'one who is dead'. While the body is present the spirit is believed to gain from the chants, the gifts offered and the sermons preached. Once cremated the spirit is cut off from this world. It is considered wise therefore to allow a number of religious services for the spirit of the deceased in order to improve the spirit's status in the next world.

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Section C World Religions

Topic 2.4 Challenges to the Tradition

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Report on the contemporary experience of the traditions, particularly in the Irish context
- Discuss possible future developments for the traditions (Higher Level)

Please note that the following article is background information only on this topic. It in no way constitutes a sample or exemplary answer on this topic.

The following notes have been adapted from 'World Religions' by Philip Barnes (Veritas, 2003)

Christianity

In order to make Christianity relevant to various cultures and peoples theologians speak of a process of '**inculturation**', whereby the Gospel is related to various local cultures. It is therefore difficult to speak in a general or universal way of challenges to the Christian tradition. The challenges to Christianity are different in Ireland, South Africa and in the Philippines. The Gospels do not provide a blueprint for all of life, thus exacerbating the difficulty. For example there is no specifically Christian economic policy. There are Christian principles which underpin various issues. Unlike Islamic Sharia law the Christian mandate does not describe any set of laws or statutes that should be publicly enforced. Christianity does not attempt to force its beliefs and practices on civil and legal authorities.

The Church must uphold principles of **truth and justice**. To fail to do so would mean an inevitable loss in credibility. The Church would lose the trust of the people if it put its own interests ahead of issues of social justice and the needs of the poor. The Church is called to be a **Church that serves**. That is one of the reasons why it has ministries. Various churches have formed large **bureaucratic wings** that appear on the outside to be unresponsiveness to the real needs of its members. Efforts to **preserve the social influence of the Church** can become more important than serving the Church and the world. In the past the Churches have certainly been guilty of **aligning themselves with the rich** over the poor, and with carrying out **persecutions** against those with whom they disagreed. They have also remained **silent in the face of oppression** against those outside their congregations since they feared losing social influence and privilege. It is always a challenge to the Churches to remain faithful to the messages they have received from God and to practice holiness and righteousness. Only in doing so will they convince the world that the Gospel is true and that the Kingdom of God is anticipated.

The Church must always decide whether to relate positively or negatively in relating to the world. Various challenges face the Church at different levels and from different sources. For example, to what extent can the Church endorse gay rights and equal rights for women? Should the Church bless **gay unions**? Should the Catholic Church rethink its policy of **excluding women from the priesthood**? Should priests be allowed to marry? The Churches must first know their own minds on these issues and be clear on their own beliefs and values. Paul warned against 'the world pressing you

(the Church) into its mould'. In responding to public interests and issues the **Churches must not compromise truth and holiness**. For some people issues such as gender equality and sexuality are part of the framework of social justice. How is the Church working towards a better life for **the poor and oppressed** in the world? Are the Churches guilty of over-concentrating on the spiritual needs of individuals to the neglect of challenging social and political structures which threaten human dignity?

Religious pluralism is also relevant in contemporary Christianity. Barnes asks 'Should there be greater co-operation between the different Churches and should they mutually recognise each other as equally valid expressions of authentic Christianity?' (2003, p98) Issues pertaining to '**wider ecumenism**' (the relationship between Christianity and other world religions) are also important. Is **salvation** only found in the Christian churches or do other religions mediate God's favour? Some people advocate a positive interpretation of other religions as fundamental to the cause of peace and harmony while others advocate 'respect for adherents of other religions alongside a traditional commitment to the exclusive truth of Christianity' (p98). The challenge of pluralism is to structure a response that is faithful to the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Judaism

One of the most important challenges to Judaism comes from practicing Jews within Judaism. That is the question of the **relationship** between the individual and God, the relationship between the community and God and the relationship between the individual and the community. This is a question which has been present in Jewish life since its beginning. Throughout time Jews have asked the same question and not yet come up with an answer that satisfies all members of the tradition. While this may appear to be a difficulty many Jews see this as a positive challenge and a continuing struggle for both the community and the individual. Many would say that this is demonstrating that Judaism is alive and being faithful to its roots in trying to understand these questions.

Another aspect of this challenge is the relationship between **practicing and non-practicing Jews**. A Jew is a person whose mother herself was a Jew. The religion is passed down through the matrilineal line. Many Jews believe that they are biologically related to Abraham and the other founders of Judaism. **Biological identity** plays a key role in Judaism in a way that does not affect other religions. However the question of how one whose mother was a Jew, yet does not practice their religion, relates to the community - is one that has caused much debate over the years. This question of **identity** is difficult. It raises questions about the relationship between **Judaism as a historical group** which claims a common ethnic ancestry and **Judaism as a religious community** dedicated to the service of God. Some people practice the religious aspects of their faith while others belong to more liberal synagogues in order to be associated with the social and political ideas of Judaism but do not practice their faith seriously. These members of communities who practice the **social aspect of Judaism** but not the religious ones are often referred to as **secular Jews**. To be a Jew, for them, means identifying with the Jewish community. People may convert to Judaism but it is a long process entailing much instruction over many years. Judaism is not a missionary religion and does not actively seek converts.

The size of the Jewish community in Ireland is relatively small. Many Jews have travelled abroad to avail of educational opportunities, employment or the allure of Israel. As a result the Irish Jewish community is small and finds it **difficult to preserve its distinct identity**. **Inter-religious marriage** is becoming more common, since there are fewer Jewish prospective partners available in Ireland. This often results in a weakening of the connection to Judaism. Jews are **assimilated into larger communities** and the Jewish population declines. Therefore assimilation is a challenge to Judaism. By assimilation we mean the process of integrating members of one community into another, generally larger, community usually with the loss of the features of the absorbed group, such as language, customs, and self-identity. This is a real fear for Jews living in small Jewish communities. It is extremely difficult to maintain a

separate Jewish identity with a small number of Jews. For example in the recent past in Dublin there were kosher shops and kosher butchers. These no longer exist and kosher food is now only available on a small scale in some supermarkets. Similar to this fear of losing one's identity is the legacy of the **Holocaust** which was the result of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism means attempting to destroy Judaism and all its traditions. Radical Jewish theologians call on Jews to renounce their faith as they ask how can belief in a Sovereign God be reconciled with the annihilation of six million Jews? The Christian Church has also been guilty of being complicit in anti-Semitism in its history. Other Jews respond to anti-Semitism by preserving the religious heritage of Judaism in an effort to defeat anti-Semitism.

Many Jews believe the only way to counteract this is to **support the state of Israel** in order to defeat the persecution of Jews which is still going on in various places. In Israel Judaism can be fully practiced both culturally and religiously and is therefore a repository of Judaism. Questions remain about **what sort of state Israel should become** – a religious state where Jewish traditions are protected by legislation or a liberal, pluralist democracy where everyone is afforded equal rights? And what of the Palestinians and those displaced by the creation of the state of Israel? As long as there is a source of knowledge for and of Judaism Jews believe that they can overcome anti-Semitism.

Islam

Islam currently enjoys a sense of confidence and vitality in the world. In examining the challenges to Islam it is important to remember that Islam is not only a **religion but a complete way of life**. Islam is at once **religious AND political**, affecting every part of a person's life. Islam is a religion that has a clear direction from Allah **to convert the world to Islam** and is therefore a missionary religion. To many its attraction lies in its clear religious message, its call to moral purity and its community of believers who offer encouragement and support. Many Muslims see Western society as morally and spiritually bankrupt. Many people however see Islam as offering an **alternative way in a world that is materialistic**, and to Muslims a world that has lost its way in terms of morals as witnessed by the high divorce rates, abortion and the 'self' as being all important - to the detriment of the community. This leads to difficulties as many of the countries are secular and while seeing the advantages of Islam it does find some aspects of the religion disquieting. For example many do not understand the place of women in Islamic society and see only the negative aspect. Others see polygamy as something to be opposed, without realising that polygamy is the exception and that many Islamic states demand an appearance in court to gain permission to take a second or third wife.

While many would like to see a return to a more moral society in the West they are troubled by the idea of an Islamic state. Yet for the Muslim there can be no other state but an Islamic one if one is to follow Allah. Only if **Sharia law** is present can a truly religious state exist which encourages its members to practice Islam and live a truly religious life. Under Sharia law the **state and its institutions support the teaching and practice of Islam**. Even private dimensions of life are subject to God's law and should therefore be governed by the state under Sharia law. This is viewed as a form of **totalitarianism** by many non-Islamic countries and non-Muslims. For them the notion of Sharia law contravenes the concept of liberal democracy. They oppose the notion that the state should enforce religious conformity on all subjects, and remove freedom of religion. It must be said however that there are Islamic states which are democratic and allow for individual freedom but these states are viewed with suspicion by many Muslims. They say that a state is Islamic or not: there is no halfway. It begs the question however, of **how the absolute truth of the Qur'an is to be maintained and interpreted in the modern world**. Muslims regard the Qur'an as the infallible and literal Word of God. It communicates God's wishes on all subjects on which it speaks: principles of justice and appropriate punishment, ordering of community life and economic relations and the behaviour appropriate to different roles. Some of the **prescriptions for action and behaviour conflict with modern sensibilities**, causing deep tension. Examples of this relate to particularly harsh **punishments** on those who transgress (e.g. stoning to death). Should Muslims have the right to renounce Islam and convert to a different religion without the fear of punishment or death?

Should liberal democracies take account of Muslim law and custom, permitting a man to marry up to four wives at once?

In many countries there is the difficulty of taking into account the Islamic point of view when dealing with matters of **law and morality**, where the Islamic community is a minority one. Within the Islamic community there is debate about the place of tradition. Some **fundamentalists** demand that one goes back to the Qur'an for rulings on any matter while others look for a way to reconcile the teachings with modern life. The difficulty for this group is to distinguish what can be revised and what is immutable. It is important to remember that 'fundamentalist' is a term that refers to those who go back to the origins for guidance and belief. (The term refers to American Protestants who contended for the 'fundamentals' of their faith). It has come however to have the modern meaning of extremism attached to it. Muslim fundamentalist refer back to the Qur'an in all matters. Other Muslims want a **reconciliation between Islam and modernity**. Where Muslims live as a **minority group** in a country certain challenges must be faced. For example, what provision is made to allow Muslim employees to attend the Mosque for Friday prayers? How are Muslim sensitivities dealt with in the spheres of education, health, welfare and the law? Philip Barnes says that the real challenge for Islam is to find a way that Islam challenges the secular world but does not present a threat to those who do not wish to become Muslims (p120).

Buddhism

Buddhism caters for a variety of forms and expressions and its individualistic quality has a certain appeal for many. Unlike the orthodoxy associated with monotheistic religions, Theravada Buddhism upholds an **agnostic attitude** about the nature of the divine and it does not speculate on metaphysical matters. It also places emphasis on the individual self and the need to overcome the self. This engagement with **individualism** sits well with the individualistic quality of culture in the West. Another attraction is its emphasis on **meditation and religious exercises**. Since these offer a sense of peace and calm there is a nature appeal here for people in modern society who feel pressurised by work and the many demands of personal and work-related relationships. Nevertheless, some of the original ascetic orientation of Buddhism has been abandoned in the West in an effort to make Buddhism attractive. Barnes points out that 'The teaching of Buddhism is often tailored to fit an audience more concerned with achieving balance and contentment in life than with renouncing all to achieve Nirvana' (2003, p160). It begs the question – In a post-Christian, pluralist society how can a proper monastic lifestyle be maintained by Western people who wish to be faithful to the teachings of the Buddha? If there is **no viable lay community of Buddhists to support** how can a community of Buddhist monks survive in a Western society?

It could be argued that a strong **position on social thought and social ethics has not developed** adequately in Buddhism. Social improvements may simply mask the true nature of suffering which is part of human life. The more involved we are with the world the more we are bound to the wheel of rebirth. Thus an '**other-worldly**' emphasis has emerged in Buddhism as lay religion declines, the result of which is described by Barnes: 'Buddhism has struggled to retain relevance to the social and political realities that confront contemporary Buddhists in South-East Asia. Those Buddhists who aspire to social justice and a new ethical order for society have had difficulty finding intellectual resources to support their liberal commitments' (2003, p160). In Western society people take for granted their fundamental liberties and abundance of material goods. Buddhism in this context is often affirmed as a means of curbing the acquisitive inclinations of the self and restraining excesses of material consumption. Buddhism in South-East Asia and the Far East is rather more removed from such concerns.

Hinduism

India has four main religions, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity and historically they have lived in reasonable harmony. When India gained independence from Britain in 1948 the Government of India established a **secular republic** in order to encourage and maintain the religious tolerance that existed in India and to reconcile various religious identities. This venture has been largely successful. Hinduism is known for its tolerant spirit. Overall, this has allowed Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians to **peacefully co-exist** (with the exception of Hindus in some rural areas who decide to convert to Christianity or Buddhism, which is seen as problematic). Hinduism is the religion of the vast majority of Indian people. Over the last decade some **tensions have emerged** between the different religious groups, especially between **Hindus and Muslims**. The tensions date back to the origins of the state and the division of the Indian sub-continent into **India and North and South Pakistan**. There were some incidents of religious strife at the time of the partition of India when Pakistan, an Islamic state, came into being. India adopted a secular constitution in an effort to curb religious tensions. There has been distrust between Hindus and Muslims since then. With the growing rise of **Islamic fundamentalism** the distrust has grown, and this had been exacerbated by the **political tensions within Pakistan**. This had led to a polarisation in politics based on religion. There is now a nationalist Hindu party in India. A secondary cause for the growth of the Hindu nationalist party is that a secular state does not reflect the religious ideals of the vast majority of the population and their voices, it may be argued, have not been heard on public policy.

Further difficulties for Hinduism are related to the **modernisation and secularisation** of India. Many Hindus look to the West which is more secularised than India and see the decline in moral behaviour. They see that hand-in-hand with secularisation is the **decline of religious influence**, a decline in standards of **public behaviour** and in **participation in civic life**. They do not want this to occur in India and therefore resist secularisation. Religion offers meaning and direction for people as it integrates them into communities of believers with shared values and moral commitments. 'The promiscuity, materialism and individualism of Western society are regarded by many Indian commentators as resulting from the disparagement of religion and therefore constitute a warning against any equivocation in the task of opposing secularisation within their own society' (Barnes, 2003, p140). Therefore people are encouraged to become more aligned with their religious heritage. But in India this leads to other difficulties. What type of Hinduism is best for twenty-first century India? A call for a return to traditional Hinduism would by its very nature mean a return to cast and varna and a restricted public role for women. This is not what most Hindus want so they are struggling to discern what sort of Hinduism is appropriate for India today.

Similar to this difficulty is the problem of Hindus in the diasporas. **How should Hindus live in the West?** Should they live as though they were in India or should they modify their traditions in order to integrate with the secular, post-Christian society in which they live? This is a very difficult decision. It is especially difficult for Hindus not born in India who only know how to live as Hindus in a non-Hindu society. Identity and religious authenticity are therefore important considerations for young Hindus growing up in Western society.

Religious Education Support Service

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Section C World Religions

Topic 2.5 Inter-Faith Dialogue

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Outline clearly what is meant by ‘inter-faith’ dialogue and give examples of its origins
- Name two contemporary conflicts where religious beliefs play a role and explain the nature of the relationship between religion and the conflict

Please note that the following article is background information only on this topic. It in no way constitutes a sample or exemplary answer on this topic.

The following notes have been adapted from ‘World Religions’ by Philip Barnes (Veritas, 2003)

Barnes defines dialogue as ‘a conversation between two or more people involving an exchange an exchange of ideas and opinions’ (2003, p162). He speaks of dialogue in terms of real and genuine respect for one another, reflective engagement between different parties and personal encounter. Inter-faith or inter-religious dialogue ‘describes conversations between adherents of different religions’ (2003, p162). It refers to personal encounters between adherents of different faith traditions. It goes beyond merely reading about the beliefs of another religion and requires that personal experience and conversation. In the past this engagement was missing since cultures and religions were relatively isolated from each other. Real listening to the stories and beliefs of other religions may have been missing, partly because there was traditionally a tendency for people to presume that the truth was contained within one’s own religion and there was no real need to listen attentively to others.

Eric Sharpe (1974) identifies four main types of inter-faith dialogue:

1. Discursive dialogue
2. Human dialogue
3. Secular dialogue
4. Interior dialogue

Discursive dialogue attempts to understand the religious beliefs of others. Understanding of other religions is gained through interaction and conversation with those who believe and practice different faiths. Human dialogue goes beyond acquiring knowledge about other religions and attempts to meet adherents as authentic human beings. In the mutual exchange between people there emerges a sense of our common shared identity as human beings and this identity transcends religious divisions. Secular dialogue sees people from various religions come together to cooperate in joint political and social programmes in order to promote justice and improve the human condition. Interior dialogue is about prayer and meditation and relies on mysticism and contemplative forms of spirituality. It attempts to go beyond religious differences to experience the divine reality that permeates the core of all religion. Herein lies the hope of reconciliation between different religions. Much of Sharpe’s thinking is influenced by the Jewish philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber (1878-1965). Buber talked about the ‘I-Thou’ relationship. Human relationships can, he claimed, become the vehicle for an encounter with the ‘eternal Thou’. Divine encounters can happen through authentic human encounters where there is reciprocity, openness and respect. Religious dialogues

therefore can occasion ‘an existential encounter with the divine’ (Barnes, 2003, p165). Inter-faith dialogue is often conditioned by theological commitments. Yet many who engage in inter-faith dialogue arrive at a different conclusion from which they started out since the nature of dialogue is to challenge prejudices and opinions. In and through meeting and reflecting on the religious testimony of adherents of other religions we clarify for ourselves what we actually believe in our own religion. Then we formulate an interpretation of the relationship between human spiritual conditions.

Origins of inter-faith dialogue: Inter-faith dialogue owes its origins to the ecumenical movement within the Protestant Churches in the early twentieth century and the establishment in **1948 of the World Council of Churches**. The International Missionary Council organised a number of international conferences to promote cooperation between different Protestant missionary bodies. Western notions of cultural superiority went into sharp decline after World War 1. As a result Christian claims to religious superiority would also become the target of much criticism and challenge. In **1928 at the Jerusalem Conference** the American W.E. Hocking advocated an imaginative alliance with non-Christian religions and desired that religions should cooperate in communicating the highest spiritual values to people. This was a new idea at that time. In 1938 however at the **Tambaran Conference in India** Hendrick Kraemer (*‘The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World’*) restated the traditional position that although other religions may be somewhat enlightened, they did not convey the grace of God which could only be found in Christ and in the Church. This notion was challenged in the 1960s by prominent churchmen and ecumenical theologians. The World Council of Churches (WCC) began to use the title ‘dialogue’ in attempting to adopt a more liberal approach to people of other religions. **Stanley Smartha** and others wrote of dialogue in terms of Christian approaches to non-Christian religions, urging the religions to work together for the good of humanity. Smartha spoke of the different religions as representing **different paths to God**, with each individual religion employing its own spirituality and integrity. Since the 1970s the influence of the WCC has declined in perceived relevance.

The position of the Catholic Church in relation to non-Christian faiths emerged in Vatican II’s *‘Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions’* [*Nostra Aetate*] in 1965. Significantly the document claimed on the one hand that the fullness of truth is contained in the Gospel of Christ as conveyed in the Church and on the other hand acknowledged that ‘The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in...[other] religions’. It referred to how ‘a ray of that truth which enlightens all men’ is found in other religions. It mentions ‘the spiritual and moral goods’ to be found in the major world religions. It was noted that the Jews possess ‘a common spiritual heritage’ with Christians and persecutions were condemned. In 1988 the Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue was formed out of the Secretariat for non-Christians in Rome. This would serve to emphasise the Council’s commitment to working with ‘all those of good will’.

Since Vatican II there has been significant theological interest and writing on the theme of inter-faith dialogue. The Jesuit theologian **Karl Rahner** writes of the **‘anonymous Christian’** meaning **a non-Christian who gains salvation through faith, hope and love by Christ’s grace**, mediated however imperfectly through his/her own religion which points towards its historical fulfillment in Christ. In other words, ‘there is no salvation outside God’s Church but there are those who are members of the Church in other religions who have yet to acknowledge their inclusion in it’ (Barnes, 2003, p169). Other Catholic theologians such as Raymundo Panikkar and Paul Knitter claim that different religions should be acknowledged as historically particular but genuine vehicles of God’s grace to humankind. For the Church to accept this interpretation would mean a radical reinterpretation of the significance attached to Christ. It is difficult to see how non-Christian churches can mediate salvation if they reject the affirmations that Jesus was God incarnate and that he died as a ransom for sin, creating the conditions for reconciliation between God and humankind.

Religion and Conflict:

1. Israel and the Palestinians and
2. Northern Ireland

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Old Testament describes how Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Under Joshua's leadership they conquered the tribes and city states of Canaan. King David conquered Jerusalem around 1,000 BCE and set up the Kingdom of Israel over much of Canaan. The Kingdom consisted of Judea in the south and Israel in the north after the death of David's son, Solomon. Jerusalem was the religious and political hub where Jews had sovereignty over the country up until the Jewish revolt of 133 CE. In that year the Romans drove the Jews out of Jerusalem and the area was renamed 'Palaestina'. This became Palestine and came to refer to the southern part of Syria. Practicing Jews either fled or were exiled from Palestine. Jewish communities remained in Galilee in Northern Palestine. Palestine was ruled by the Roman Empire until the third century CE followed by the Byzantine Empire. Christianity spread to Palestine. Some Jews converted to Christianity or to Roman paganism. In the sixth century Muslim Arab armies came from Arabia to conquer the Middle East, including Palestine. Muslim powers controlled the area until the early 1900s. rulers allowed Christians and Jews to practice their religions but some people converted to Islam. Jerusalem became holy to the Muslims as the site where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. They built the Al-Aqsa mosque on the site which had been regarded as the area of the Jewish temple. In 1897 the Zionist movement held a congress at Basle, under Theodore Herzl. Zionists wished to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine and they set up farm communities in Palestine. They also established the city of Tel Aviv. Palestine's Arab population was seeing a significant growth at this time. In 1914 the population of Palestine consisted of 615,000 Arabs (Muslim) and 85,000 – 100,000 Jews.

During World War I both Muslim Arabs from the Middle East and the Jews in Palestine went to the assistance of the Allies. Promises of independence were made to both groups. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 pledged Britain's support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine, with the proviso that the civil and religious rights of the existing Jewish communities should not be violated. The Arabs claimed later on that Palestine was part of the area promised to them, a claim denied by Britain. In 1920 Britain received a provisional mandate from the League of Nations over Palestine. The mandate encompassed territory both West and East of the Jordan. The British were to help the Jews build a national homeland and help create self-governing institutions. However the Arabs would not accept such institutions if they included Jews. No institutions were therefore created. After World War II the international community supported the idea of the establishment of a Jewish homeland to which Jews who had survived the Holocaust could emigrate. Jews began to return to Palestine and met with a hostile and violent reaction from the Arabs. The violence escalated and Britain was caught in between the rival factions. Britain returned the mandate to govern Palestine to the United Nations.

The UN Special Commission on Palestine recommended that Palestine should be divided into two states: one Arab, one Jewish. The Jews accepted the UN decision but it was rejected by the Arabs. The resolution saw the area split into two fairly equal portions with irregular borders but this became unworkable. Neither community tolerated the other as mutual antagonisms grew. In 1948 the Jews proclaimed the independent State of Israel. The British withdrew from Palestine. This was followed by a massive attack on Israel from neighbouring Arab nations. Fighting continued until 1949. At that stage Israel held territories beyond the UN plan. Barbed wire fences and no-man's land now divided Jordan and Israel. The Arabs would not sign a peace treaty with Israel. International recognition was not therefore afforded to the borders of Israel. Arab leaders formed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) which engaged in military action against Israel. In 1967 neighbouring Arab states pledged to destroy Israel. Israel launched an attack on Egypt, Jordan and Syria and won. A ceasefire was agreed on 11 June 1967. UN Resolution 242 sought permanent negotiations of a permanent peace between all parties and for Israel to withdraw from lands occupied in

1967. Israel sought peace with Egypt in the Camp David Agreement and the Peace Treaty of 1979. It also began to settle Jewish communities in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. In 1987 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip revolted (the Intifada). International media attention was focused on the area and on the plight of the Palestinians. In 1993 and 1995 Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Declaration of Principle and the Oslo Interim Agreement, in addition to a peace treaty with Jordan in 1994. Israeli troops withdrew from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1996. Palestinians took control of the area and set up a government. Yasser Arafat was its leader. Israel annexed key portions of the Palestinian areas but left the Jewish settlements in tact. In 2000 Palestinian violence erupted again and has continued ever since.

Nevertheless, for much of their history the Jews and Arabs have peacefully co-existed. The twentieth century conflict is fundamentally around the issue to their mutual claims on the same physical territory. There are legitimate claims and grievances on both sides of the conflict. But is the conflict truly religious? Religious Jews in Israel may exempt themselves from military service, but this is not an option for other Jews. Religious Jews are not directly involved in this conflict. Most Jews in Israel are secular Jews with little or no religious motivation or loyalty, suggesting an ambiguity in Jewish religious identity. Palestinian identity is generally clearer and religious. They claim to be Muslim and they receive much support from the Arab world for this reason. However, Islam is not a religion in the modern Western sense of the term. 'Islam is a total philosophy of life with very clear political implications. In fact some Western scholars have accused Islam of being a political ideology masquerading as religion' (Barnes, 2003, p176). Palestinians may argue that the conflict is religious since the religion of Islam embraces politics.

Despite years of peaceful co-existence, Jews and Arabs have been divided from the time of Abraham. Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Hagar (the maid servant of Sarah, Abraham's wife). The 'true heir' Isaac was later born to Sarah. Abraham became the father of the Jews and Ishmael was cast out of the household, to become the father of the Arabs. Modern Palestinians can trace their origins to the Philistines who were displaced when the Jews moved into the 'Promised Land' of Israel.

The Northern Ireland Conflict: On one side of this conflict is the Protestants (Unionists) who wish to preserve the status quo and the constitutional links with Britain. On the other side are the Catholics (Nationalists) who advocate links with the Republic of Ireland and the absorption of Northern Ireland into a united Ireland. Hardliners in both communities are called loyalists and republicans.

Many Nationalists opposed the establishment of Northern Ireland. Protestants feared Roman Rule in a united Ireland. Catholics would prefer to belong to a united Ireland where the Catholic Church enjoyed privileges and legislative protection. Some Catholics joined or supported the IRA while many resented the group. Protestants perceived Catholics to be disloyal and untrustworthy and firmly resolved to maintain domination. Legislation had an anti-Catholic flavour. The police force was quite hostile towards the Catholic population, local government electoral boundaries were gerrymandered and economic policies favoured Protestants. Catholics enjoyed State support for a confessional school system which gave rise to a Catholic middle class in the 1950s which eventually gave rise to the Civil Rights campaign of the 1960s.

The Civil rights Association was formed in 1967. It demanded reforms, especially an end to discrimination in the allocation of jobs and houses (which excluded Catholics). British troops were deployed in 1969 to establish order amid the growing unrest. Initially Catholics welcomed the RUC but the republican movement soon grew in the face of violence against the army. Internment was introduced in 1971. The Northern Ireland government was suspended by Westminster and direct rule was imposed until the 1990s. The IRA engaged in a bombing campaign from 1972,

killing both Protestants and Catholics. Loyalist paramilitary groups retaliated, killing Catholics. Attempts to construct a lasting peace settlement failed. The peace process culminated with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Is this a religious conflict? Clearly there has been sectarian violence on both sides. There has been religiously motivated violence and support for violence on both sides. Until the Disestablishment Act Catholics were forced to financially support the Protestant Church of Ireland as the state church. Laws discriminated clearly against Catholics. Protestants feared the extensive power and dominance of the Catholic Church in Ireland and resisted attempts to give control to the Catholic community in any form. However, the conflict might well be seen as an ethnic struggle between two political sides, with religion as just one difference between the two groups. Catholics and Protestants can peacefully co-exist in other contexts so why was Northern Ireland different? Clearly there was a political motivation for division. We can say that the conflict in Northern Ireland is religious in the sense that religion distinguishes the key players and that religious concerns are seen in disputes between the two sides of the conflict. Religion and politics have been inextricably inter-linked in the conflict over the years.