


	People	Beliefs	Community	Places of worship	Festivals	Scriptures
<p>Christianity</p> 	<p>One of the largest world religions. Founded in Palestine but found mostly in Europe, USA and parts of Africa. The cross is the major symbol, representing the death of Jesus by crucifixion.</p>	<p>The life and teachings of Jesus from Palestine in 1st century. Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God. The New Testament tells of his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. This allows followers to find forgiveness of sins and salvation. Christians try to live by the teachings of Jesus in love and service to others.</p>	<p>3 main groupings: (Roman) Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. The Catholic Church is a worldwide structure with headquarters in the Vatican in Rome. RC led by the Pope. Orthodox churches are found mostly in southern and eastern Europe. Led by a Patriarch. Protestants are diverse in practices and beliefs with hundreds of denominations worldwide.</p>	<p>Churches - some are very simple and others are ornate and elaborately decorated. Styles vary within traditions e.g. Gothic architecture, Romanesque, Circular. Worship is often led by ordained clergy, but in some Protestant denominations it is mostly led by lay people. Sunday is the Lord's Day as it recalls the resurrection of Jesus. Many attend Mass or worship on Sundays.</p>	<p>Easter is the most important festival, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. Many attend a Vigil Mass or dawn service and exchange symbols of new life (e.g. Easter eggs). The lunar calendar determines the date of Easter so it is a moveable feast. Christmas is another important feast, marking the birth of Jesus Christ. Many attend Midnight Mass or communion services, with carols or special festive music. People exchange gifts and share a special meal on Christmas Day.</p>	<p>The Bible: consists of the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) and the New Testament, recalling the life, death, resurrection and teachings of Jesus and the early Church. Many early Christian converts contributed to the writing of the New Testament. The Bible is seen as God's divinely inspired Word for humankind but there are different views on how it should be interpreted. It is proclaimed aloud during Sunday/public worship and prayed silently in private devotion.</p>

Judaism



A relatively small World Religion, with 15 – 18 million Jews worldwide. One of the oldest practicing religions, about one third of Jews live in Israel, with the remainder dispersed throughout the world. Symbols in Judaism include the menorah (7 branch candlestick) found in synagogues and sometimes in homes, and the Star of David which appears on the Israeli flag.

A monotheistic religion. The one God has made a covenant / promise with Jews who have been chosen to take the lead in remaining faithful to Him. God / Yahweh has given guidance for life in the Torah / Law, which includes the Ten Commandments. Work is not permitted on the Sabbath Day (Friday dusk to Saturday nightfall) and certain foods must be kosher / pure (animal must be ritually killed in a certain way)

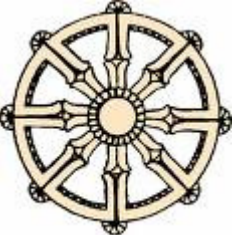
There are various traditions within Judaism, including Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, Liberal and Progressive. These groups have varying styles and practice. Jewish people have lived in Ireland since the mid 17th century. From the mid 19th century the community grew and peaked after World War II. With emigration to Israel and other factors, numbers are now in their hundreds here.


The synagogue is the central place of communal worship for Jews. The Torah is given central importance here. The Torah scrolls are stored in a special place called the Holy Ark and are ritually taken out for reading during the synagogue services. Most of the service is in Hebrew. Jews also pray together at home. They have a special meal on Friday evenings to mark the beginning of Sabbath.

Important Jewish festivals include Rosh Hashannah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). These are times of reflection and occur around September each year. Pesach / Passover is the most popular festival, marking the deliverance under Moses of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, around 1200 BCE. In September 2004 the Jewish year 5764 (traditionally dating from the beginning of mankind) began.

The Torah / Law (the five books of Moses) are the most important Hebrew scriptures. A passage from the Torah is read in the synagogue each Sabbath. Other parts of the sacred text contain histories and stories of Jewish leaders and prophets and many other writings, including the Psalms (Hebrew poems). The Talmud is also considered sacred writings in Judaism and contains later material on ethical conduct. The Scriptures are read in Hebrew, the ancient language of Judaism.

<p style="text-align: center;">Islam</p> 	<p>With about one billion followers, Islam is one of the largest World Religions and is the fastest growing. It began in the 7th century CE in Saudi Arabia and spread quickly throughout the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe. Islam means ‘submission’ to God / Allah. A Muslim is one who submits, a follower of Islam. A common symbol of Islam is the Crescent Moon, which can be seen on the national flags of some Muslim countries.</p>	<p>The Five Pillars of Islam govern Muslim behaviour:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creed / Shahada – reciting the monotheistic statement of faith – <i>There is no God but God / Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger.</i> 2. Salat – prayer five times a day. 3. Zakat – giving alms / money to the needs of the poor. 4. Sawm – fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan. 5. Hajj – pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during your lifetime (if physically and financially able). 	<p>There are two main communities of Muslims:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sunni Muslims follow the customs & traditions of the ‘sunna’ or the code of behaviour demonstrated by the prophet Muhammad. 2. Shi’a Muslims comprise about 10% of the Muslim population. They give more significance to the leadership of the Imams / spiritual leaders. 	<p>A mosque is the main place of communal worship for Muslims, although they pray at home, work and other places. Muslims usually attend Friday Prayers at the mosque. In the mosque Muslims face the direction of Mecca while they are praying and they recite sections of the Qur’an. Men and women usually pray in separate parts of the mosque. Mosques are also centres of learning, study and community gathering. Children often attend classes there to learn Arabic.</p>	<p>Eid-ul-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice) is the major Muslim festival, celebrated by those who remain at home during the pilgrimage in Mecca. It marks Abraham’s readiness to sacrifice his son and God’s mercy in providing an alternative. After the fasting of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate a three day festival called Eid –ul – Fitr to thank Allah for help during the fast. It is an exciting festival especially for children involving feasting, family visits and exchange of cards and gifts.</p>	<p>The Sacred Text is the Qur’an. It is regarded as God’s Word, communicated to the Prophet Muhammad through a revelation from the Angel Gabriel. The Qur’an is revered by Muslims and they often recite parts of it aloud. Many learn long passages of the Qur’an and some commit the entire Qur’an to memory. Some characters in the Qur’an are common to Islam, Christianity and Judaism, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mary and others.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Buddhism</p> 	<p>Founded in 6th Century BCE in India by Siddhartha Guatama (The Buddha / enlightened one). 300 million Buddhists worldwide, mostly in countries east of India, belonging to many Buddhist traditions. The Dalai Lama is a famous Buddhist (exiled leader of Tibetan Buddhist tradition)</p>	<p>Teachings of the Buddha are known as the Dharma. The Four Noble Truths teach that followers can become free of suffering and reach Nirvana, true peace. This is achieved through a code called the Eightfold Path which emphasizes wisdom, morality and meditation. Most Buddhists don't believe in a personal creator god. The Buddha was not concerned with questioning the existence of God.</p>	<p>Mahayana Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese 'Pure Land' Buddhism and 'Zen' in Japan) is prominent in North & East Asia. Theravada Buddhism is prominent in South East Asia. There are small communities of different Buddhist traditions in Ireland. A community of Buddhist nuns or monks is known as a sangha.</p>	<p>There are different types of Buddhist shrines and temples. 'Stupas' are usually dome or bell shaped. 'Pagodas' (usual in China & Japan) are towers with odd number of tiers. All Buddhist temples have an image of the Buddha. Buddhists go to shrines to meet with others and meditate together and to pay their respects to the Buddha.</p>	<p>Most popular festival is 'Wesak', celebrating the Buddha's birth, death & enlightenment. Lamps are lit. There are processions & firework displays. Statues of the Buddha are specially decorated. In Tibetan Buddhism it is called 'Saga Dawa'. The lunar calendar determines Buddhist festivals. Most of the important occasions coincide with the full moon.</p>	<p>Main scriptures are called the 'Tipitakas' (the 3 baskets) which date from 1st century BCE. These writings summarise the teachings of the Buddha and offer guidance / rules on ways of life – especially for Buddhist monks. Most ordinary Buddhists also respect a collection of sayings of the Buddha, the 'Dhammapada' (the Path of Truth).</p>
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<p>Hinduism</p> 	<p>The world's oldest living religion, originating in India about 5,000 years ago. There are about 800 million Hindus worldwide, most of whom live in India. There is no founder of Hinduism and it is not a single unified religion. The most familiar symbol in Hinduism is the lettering for the word 'Om' in the ancient Sanskrit language. 'Om' is used as a basis of meditation.</p>	<p>There are diverse beliefs in Hinduism. Most believe in a Supreme God or Universal Being (Brahman), known in many different forms. There are various gods within Hinduism, such as Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Shiva (the Destroyer). Hindus believe in reincarnation – the cycle of birth, death, rebirth – which they hope to escape in order to achieve union with Brahman. This is achieved by meditation, spiritual knowledge, good deeds and devotion.</p>	<p>There are many different traditions within Hinduism in India and it continues to develop. The West has been influenced by certain Hindu traditions such as Krishna Consciousness / the Hare Krishna Movement – ISKCON. About 1,000 Hindus live in Northern Ireland. There is a Hare Krishna temple in Dunmurry.</p>	<p>Puja, or Hindu worship, occurs in temples known as 'mandirs', which are usually dedicated to a specific god. Worship may involve singing hymns, ringing bells, burning incense and reading of scriptures by priests. Worship also occurs in the home at roadside shrines. Many Hindus worship by going on pilgrimage to the shrine of a favourite god or to the most sacred river, the Ganges, at Varanasi in India.</p>	<p>The festival of lights called 'Diwali' marks the new year in some areas of India. Its theme is light and darkness. The goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, is believed to visit homes that are illuminated by lamps. A joyful spring festival called 'Holi' is also celebrated. This is dedicated to Lord Krishna. Bonfires are lit and children throw coloured water and powder at each other. In the evening people visit friends and exchange sweets and greetings.</p>	<p>Sanskrit is the ancient language of many Hindu writings and sacred texts. The Vedas are the oldest sacred writings. Of these the 'Rig Veda' is the oldest and the most sacred. The 'Upanishads' (lessons) date from around 600 BCE and explain the concept of reincarnation. Epic spiritual poems also exist in Hinduism, including the Bhagavad-gita (the Song of God) and the Ramayana.</p>
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