

Appendix 1

The Ten Characteristic Features of Religion: Examples

[2009.07.20] We have listed ten characteristic features of religion and discussed the COU in connection with each. Here, we provide illustrations from several religious traditions. These illustrations are by no means exhaustive even within any one tradition; they are merely samples.

(1) Religious worldviews presuppose¹ either supernatural dimensions² or ultimate experiences (or both) that transcend but also transform everyday life.³

Hinduism: Hinduism has become a broad label that includes several distinct and sometimes decentralized worldviews. Classical and medieval traditions have classified these in various ways. One refers to six major viewpoints, another to an absolute that is beyond all gods and goddesses, another to three major gods, another to various supreme deities (which integrate even more deities as incarnations, consorts, relatives, or even worshippers). Popular deities who are both transcendent (beyond nature) and immanent (within nature), such as Shiva and Vishnu/Krishna, fall into this category—that of devotional Hinduism. Nonetheless, a general structure holds most of these seemingly disparate worldviews together. On the cosmic level, the universe is periodically created, destroyed, and recreated. This cyclical orientation repeats itself at the individual level in connection with cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. The ultimate goal in most Hindu orientations is to escape from that cycle—that is, to attain liberation from it. Religious experiences transform ordinary life into a quest for liberation often by following a path or yoga, under the guidance of a guru. In some Hindu traditions, liberation occurs in this life. In others, it occurs only after death in a supreme heaven that is beyond the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth.

Islam: Like Judaism, Islam is radically monotheistic. Like Jews, who insist that Moses was an ordinary human being, Muslims insist that Muhammad was an ordinary human being. (And like Jews, Muslims have accused Christians of lapsing into polytheism with Trinitarian theology and especially its focus on a founder who was both human and divine). The worst sin, for Muslims, is idolatry—attributing divine powers to anyone but Allah. So complete is divine sovereignty, moreover, that nothing at all can happen that does not express divine free will. Although one Islamic movement in the eighth century championed rationality and human free will, Sunni Muslims eventually classified it as heresy; some Shia Muslims continue

that tradition. In this way, Sunni Muslims are somewhat different from both Christians and Jews, who emphasize human free will.

Buddhism: The Buddha's experience when meditating gave him fundamental insight into the human condition, an ultimate and transformative experience that ended forever his bondage within the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. He explained his experience in connection with four noble truths: life always involves suffering; desire is the cause of suffering; people can eliminate suffering; and they can do so by following an eight-fold path and thus cultivating appropriate states of mind. Despite Buddhism's emphasis on the personal quest for liberation, it has developed a pantheon that includes compassionate buddhas, bodhisattvas (those who are ready for liberation but turn back to help those who have yet to attain it), or local deities. Although Buddhists in some countries worship these beings as deities, they also deny their ultimate significance.

Judaism: The biblical tradition, which eventually produced rabbinic Judaism, is clearly theistic in both scripture and the many rabbinic commentaries on scripture (although scripture indicates that it took centuries for the Israelites to shift from polytheism to monotheism). God, a transcendent being, creates the cosmos and then intervenes in the world of daily life either to reward the righteous (through friendships, covenants, blessings, theophanies, and so forth) or to punish the unrighteous (usually through curses such as mortality, plagues, or periods of exile). This theology of "providence" is only one, however, of three ancient but continuing traditions. Another tradition focuses on holiness, a more diffuse experience that relies on immanence instead of transcendence. The cosmos is inherently sacred, from this point of view, but usually veiled by the profane. By following divine commandments in the Torah with the proper intention, however, Jews can lift that profane veil in specific temporal or spatial contexts and experience the sacred. Yet another tradition requires lengthy preparation—studying the Torah with a mystical mentor—and meditation.

Sikhism: Sikhs define their religion in connection with belief in God, the ten gurus, and scripture (the Guru Granth Sahib) along with the writings of gurus. Sikhs share with Hindus and Buddhists the goal of attaining enlightenment and thus liberation from the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. Sikhs think of God, Akal Purakh, in terms of both form and formlessness. He is a personal god, a divine guru, and an inner teacher. Sikhs try to experience him through meditation. They try to live in obedience to his commands, moreover, and thus to serve the community. After death, their souls live in the divine presence, never to be reincarnated.

Confucianism: This worldview became China's state cult in the third century. It focused mainly on daily life (albeit within the larger contexts of heaven, earth, and humankind). In fact, Confucian worldliness is so extreme that scholars have

debated its classification as a religion at all. We think that it is a religion, because it acknowledges the supernatural. Ancestors and a personified heaven influence the daily life of both families and the state (although Mao tried to destroy Confucianism and certainly succeed in connection with the state).

Christianity: Although Christianity is monotheistic, it has produced a much more complicated understanding of monotheism than either Islam or Judaism has. Almost from the beginning, Christian theologians argued about the status of Jesus. His disciples began to call him the messiah (Christ in Greek) and son of God, but those Jewish titles had several interpretations. Eventually, after considerable conflict, the early church defined Christ in its creeds as a divine and therefore eternal savior who had nonetheless taken human and therefore mortal flesh as Jesus of Nazareth; he was thus fully human and also fully divine. This was, and is, the sacred “mystery” that underlies Christian faith. Moreover, God is present to Christians as the Holy Spirit. All three “persons” of the trinity are of “one substance” with God the Father, however, which is why Christians can claim to be monotheistic. Gradually, in any case, many Christians lost interest in both the Father and the Spirit.

Daoism: Dao means both goal and path. For Daoist philosophers, the goal is nameless (despite its name), ineffable, invisible, silent, subtle, spontaneous, the source of both heaven and earth. Philosophically orientated Daoist texts say that those who seek the ineffable purify themselves by means of purgation or catharsis, renew their natural energy, tune in to the rhythm of nature, breathe properly, gaze inward through meditation, experience the microcosm within the cosmos, and so on. After overcoming the existential problems of life by meditating, their minds become as calm as still water. They regain simplicity, merge with the cosmos, and find themselves more vital and spontaneous than ever. As a result, they can sustain the pure energy of infants. Religiously oriented Daoist texts, on the other hand, resort also to alchemy, the islands of immortality, or the western paradise.

(2) Religious worldviews help people live with fundamental paradoxes of the human condition and respond to existential questions that emerge from it.

Christianity: Why is there death? According to scripture, death is a universal punishment for the disobedience of our primeval ancestors, Adam and Eve. That is a cognitive explanation but not an existential answer to an existential problem. Like many other religions, especially those of agrarian societies, Christianity provides one by asserting the paradoxical premise that life follows and therefore negates death. Plants live, die, and yet live again in the natural order; God lives, dies, and yet lives again in the divine order—a paradigm that Christians represent as the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. The point is that ordinary

people can participate in this divine “mystery” by living “in Christ.” But this paradoxical explanation entails additional paradoxes. The distinction between humanity and divinity would seem self-evident and immutable to anyone but an atheist (who considers the latter illusory). And yet it breaks down for Christians, who believe paradoxically that their savior is both fully human (Jesus of Nazareth) and fully divine (the Christ).

This is not simply an abstract theological doctrine, defined by the Nicene Creed, because of its link with closely related existential questions: Why is there evil? Why do innocent people suffer? Following St. Augustine, most Christians have believe that sin (a broad category that includes evil and suffering) is not a consequence of this or that misdeed but an inherent feature of the human condition as we know it in everyday life. All people, no matter how wise or saintly, are sinners and therefore need ultimate salvation. Otherwise, there would have been no need for either Christ or the church. Some Christians highlight the paradox, in fact, by referring to the disobedience of Adam and Eve as the “fortunate fall.” To be fully human, for Christians, is to participate in both the full humanity of Jesus and the full divinity of Christ (which is why Eastern Orthodox Christians refer to the “divinization” of repentant sinners after death).

Hinduism: Like other religions, Hinduism addresses the fundamental paradoxes of life that pose existential questions. One example is order versus chaos. The earliest Hindu scripture, the Veda, says that cosmic order requires both divine beings and human rituals. In dozens of stories, minor gods and demons threaten this structure until someone or something brings them under control. Later classical texts explore order to ensure not only just rule but also social (caste) structure. The latter acknowledges that society must integrate many occupations in order to ensure harmony but also that each person is responsible for sustaining social and cosmic order. The law of karma helps Hindus to explain paradoxes. Those who suffer unjustly in this life, for instance, will find their rewards in another life. As you act, says the law of karma, so you will be rewarded or punished either in this life or in another one.

Judaism: Jews agree with Christians about eternal life after death, although they disagree on the mechanism for attaining it and rely less heavily on paradox. The equivalent for Jews of living “in Christ” (and therefore participating in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection) is following the path of Torah (and therefore participating in the holy community’s destiny according to a covenant with God). Those who do so, albeit imperfectly (because no human attains perfection), can expect eternal life. Like Christians, though, Jews maintain two conflicting notions of what happens after death. According to one scenario, the immortal soul returns immediately to paradise. According to another scenario, body and soul wait until the end of history—that is, resurrection in a new cosmic order.

But Jews have explicitly acknowledged some paradoxes. God, for example, is neither male nor female (or both male and female). Like most other religions, Judaism acknowledges an ontological distinction between maleness and femaleness. Neither is adequate in itself, because neither men nor women can exist alone. To be fully human, therefore, is to bring maleness and femaleness together in the contexts of family and community. But this is not a metaphysical distinction, because God (despite anthropomorphic descriptions in scripture and elsewhere) is transcendent and therefore, paradoxically, neither male nor female—or both male and female. In the mystical tradition of Judaism (and the orthodox liturgical tradition that it influenced) divine imagery oscillates between male (God as the divine lover who pursues Israel) and female (God as the cosmic queen who becomes the bride of Israel on Friday night).

Buddhism: The Buddha's biography begins, in an important sense, when he first confronts the ultimate existential problem of human existence. Because an astrologer has warned the king that his son - Gautama, known later as the Buddha—will become either a monk or a prince, the king tries to prevent the former by keeping Gautama within the protected and privileged palace. One day, though, Gautama leaves the palace and sees for the first time a sick man, an old man, a dead man, and an ascetic man. His shock in all four cases inspires him to search for truth in the larger world. He finally realizes a universal existential truth: that life always involves suffering. This knowledge, enlightenment, leads him to teach others.

Daoism: Ultimately, sages commune with the ineffable by means of “inaction.” Paradoxically, that makes all action and the intuition of emptiness possible. In these ways, sages transcend the determinism of life and death.

(3) Religious worldviews rely on symbol systems that give coherence to both personal and communal life; apart from doing anything else, religion provides the symbolic glue that holds communities together.

Judaism: Conventional symbols such as the Star of David or the candelabrum, both used emblematically by the State of Israel, are of no great religious importance. Among Judaism's most important symbols, on the other hand, are the Sabbath (which we discuss below) and the Torah. At one level, the latter – with the definite article—refers to the first five biblical books: Genesis through Deuteronomy. At a deeper level—without the definite article—it includes the entire corpus of Jewish scripture: Torah, Prophets, and Writings. At a still deeper level, it includes all of the rabbinic commentaries on scripture—which God revealed to Moses orally and the rabbis transmitted orally at first but eventually wrote down—and thus to the Jewish religion as a whole. At the deepest level, however, Torah is a blueprint of the cosmos and thus the mind of God (which makes it the functional

equivalent of what Christians call the logos). Not only is every word sacred and thus of infinite revelatory power, but so is every letter—which is why adepts of kabbalah, mystical Judaism, meditate on these letters in various patterns.

Buddhism: Buddhists rely on several central symbols. One is the wheel. Like Hindus, they acknowledge both cosmic and personal cycles. The revolving wheel expresses this cyclic view of time. Some Tibetan paintings depict the wheel of life. Its outer rim has twelve sections, each of which depicts a stage of life. Holding the wheel is Yama, the god of death, who punishes misbehavior by inflicting old age, disease, and other misfortunes. After people die, he examines their life-long behaviors and sends them to appropriate heavens, hells, or rebirths. But the wheel expresses also the Buddha's teachings: his first sermon on the four noble truths and also, more generally, the wheel of dharma (law), which his teachings contain. The wheel gives rise to several analogies. Its hub, for instance, can represent moral discipline, the eight spokes wisdom, and the rim training in concentration. Or the eight spokes can represent the eight-fold path. Sometimes, the wheel is a metaphorical weapon, the discus that destroys ignorance. Buddhists use several symbols for enlightenment. One is the bodhi tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment. Another is his footprint, the trace of his mortal existence, which he transcended with his final enlightenment—that is, the final elimination of his body (and any future births) at the time of death. And still another is the stupa, the unadorned mound that represents his enlightenment as the extinction of all forms that characterize the human condition.

Daoism: Chinese landscape painting has incorporated many Daoist symbols. Explicitly, they merely depict nature. At a deeper level, implicitly, they look beyond nature. Cranes, peaches, bamboos, pines, plums, deer, hare, and tigers, for instance, represent longevity. A mountain path represents the way to the ineffable. Mountains, rocks, pine trees, distant placid water represent yin (permanence; maleness); winds, clouds, mists, mountain streams, and storms represent yang (change; femaleness). The balance of yin and yang represents harmony.

Sikhism: Sikh men wear turbans to symbolize their identity. In addition, those who belong to the Khalsa wear the five “Ks” (because the word for each symbol begins with a “K”): unshorn hair, comb, sword, steel bracelet, and short trousers.

Christianity: Unlike the conventional symbols for Judaism, the conventional symbol for Christianity has profound symbolic importance. The cross originated long before Christianity. Apart from anything else, it represents the union of opposites: up and down, vertical and horizontal, heaven and earth. In Roman times, however, people associated the cross with execution—which is why the early Christians avoided this reminder that the Romans had executed Jesus. Archaeologists found the first crucifix—Jesus dying or dead on the cross—at Santa

Sabina, a Roman church of the fifth century. Eventually, however, Christians began to see the cross not so much in connection with the death of Jesus as with the victory of Christ over death and therefore with Christian salvation. The Latin cross, with short crossbeams, has several variants. Most Protestants, for instance, use an abstracted version (without the body), and the Celtic cross superimposes a circle. The Russian cross has two additional crossbeams, small ones near the bottom. The Greek cross has arms of equal length; superimposed on it, very often, is the living and victorious Christ (with open eyes), not the dying or dead Jesus. The cross takes three-dimensional form, moreover, in church architecture (which we discuss below).

(4) Religious worldviews presuppose both sacred time (as distinct from profane,⁴ not secular, time) and sacred space (as distinct from profane, not secular, space).

Christianity: Even in secular states such as Canada, the calendar of official holidays includes Christian holy days—sacred times—such as Sunday (the Lord’s Day), Christmas, and Easter.

As for sacred space, every Canadian town has one or more churches (although some Christian communities, especially in big cities, have deconsecrated declining churches and sold them). According to the Catholic and Anglican traditions, every church has a nave and two shorter transepts that cross it at the chancel, or choir. According to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, which uses the Greek cross, cruciform symbolism is more elaborate. Above the crossing is a dome and surrounding it are four smaller domes or semi-domes. Inside, worshippers can “read” the architectural cross both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, they see it as a symbolic map; pilgrims can move from the profane periphery (leaving the “world” behind as they enter the western door) to the sacred centre (arriving at the eastern altar, which represents the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem); en route, they move along the walls from one site in the Holy Land to another. Vertically, the architectural cross represents a visual description of the sacred hierarchy: saints and martyrs near ground level, scenes from the life of Jesus higher up, apostles and evangelists higher still, prophets and angels near the top, and Christ at the very top.

Hinduism: Hindu festivals celebrate important events in the agricultural cycle. Holi, for instance, celebrates the arrival of spring with the throwing of red powder or water (a symbol of fertility). Pongal is a South Indian harvest festival; other regions have similar ones. In addition to these festivals (and sometimes in combination with them), are pan-Indian festivals. Diwali is the festival of lights, an auspicious time for new activities. Navaratri is a time to ask various goddesses for blessings. Deities such as Krishna, moreover, have birthdays. Temples (of village, regional, or pan-regional importance) hold festivals to mark episodes in divine “life stories” or special feats of divine power. Shivaishnava temples of South India, for

instance, celebrate festivals for the many incarnations of Vishnu as well as special events in the lives of sectarian saints and philosophers.

Hindus define sacred space in connection with features of the landscape such as mountains, caves, and bodies of water. Confluences of rivers and crossroads are sacred. Also sacred are temples, often constructed on the model of a human body, and places where saints once lived. One consummate expression of both sacred time and place is the Kumbha Mela, which celebrates a time when the gods and demons fought in the sky for the nectar of immortality. It occurs four times every twelve years and rotates among four sacred places with a very grand version after 144 years at Allahabad - that is, at the confluence of two great rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna. The last grand version, in 2002, was the largest gathering of people known to human history and included many Hindu holy men and women with their followers from all parts of India.

Judaism: Shabbat (the Sabbath), actually a vast collection of symbols, is the prototype for all Jewish festivals⁵ and thus for sacred time par excellence – what Abraham Joshua Heschel famously called “a palace in time.”⁶ At one level, Jews define shabbat primarily in terms of what they may not do according to rabbinic interpretations of biblical passages: work, write, light fires, venture more than a short distance from home, and so on. Outsiders have indeed accused Jews of submitting to the burdensome yoke of a divine slave-master. For Jews, however, it is precisely the absence of ordinary activities (the profane) that allows them the freedom to experience extraordinary joy (the sacred) within the carefully separated (sacred) realms of home or family and synagogue during this carefully separated (sacred) period from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. At a deeper level, shabbat is the seventh day and therefore refers to cosmic creation, when God “rested” and our primeval ancestors lived in Eden. But the intimate (rather than awesome) holiness that Jews experience on shabbat is not only a re-experience of the primeval paradise in Eden but also a per-experience of an eschatological paradise in the World to Come. At a still deeper level, shabbat is the venue for a mystical marriage between either God and Israel or the maleness and femaleness within God; husbands and wives celebrate this nuptial banquet by consummating their love and thus participating on a microcosmic level the cosmic dance. So closely linked with collective identity are the symbols of this holy day – the two candles, the wine, the braided loaf of bread on Friday night; the wine, the spices, and the braided candle on Saturday night – that, according to some rabbis, the Jewish people has not preserved shabbat so much as shabbat has preserved the Jewish people.

Traditional Jews orient themselves in space, too. Holiness increases as Jews move toward the sacred center: the Holy Land (much of which lies within the modern State of Israel), the holy city (Jerusalem), the holy temple (now in ruins), and the holy of holies at its center (once restricted to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement) within it. All over the world, Jews pray facing it (and often ask God to

restore it). Jewish liturgies refer often to the Holy Land and its agricultural products, its climate, even its dew. At the end of history, Jews believe, God will create a new cosmic order, one that will see the “ingathering” of exiles (those who now live outside the State of Israel but also those who live in the pre-messianic State of Israel) and restoration of the Holy Temple. Some Jews make pilgrimages to the tombs of famous rabbis, too, and not all of these are Israel. Some Hasidic communities ascribe so much holiness to their own leaders, moreover, that they focus much of their attention on the latter in Brooklyn even while living in the Holy City of Jerusalem. Even so, the State of Israel has reaffirmed the traditional sense of sacred space and greatly complicated the political scene as a result. Settlers on the West Bank, for instance, argue that Jews have a right to live anywhere in the Holy Land even if that means extending the borders of modern Israel.

Islam: Like all other religions, Islam distinguishes not only between sacred and profane (ordinary) time but also between sacred and profane (ordinary) space—although the Islamic separation is not quite as radical as the Jewish one (which forbids all forms of work, for instance, during holy days). Friday is in some ways equivalent to the Jewish Saturday or the Christian Sunday. It is the day par excellence, for instance, for public worship. Islamic festivals include Id al-Fitr (which concludes the sacred month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast daily from sunrise to sunset) and Id al-Adha (which commemorates Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael and occurs annually after pilgrims to Mecca descend from Mt. Arafat). Muslims recognize three additional sacred months, one of which is Muharram. In Shia countries such as Iran, the tenth day of Muharram has particular importance as the day of Hussein ibn Ali’s martyrdom (which prevented him, Muhammad’s grandson, from becoming the rightful caliph and thus began the Shia movement). In one way, however, Islam has fostered a much more radical break with profane time than most other religions have. Because Muslims use a lunar calendar, festivals do not occur in the same season every year and do not, therefore, have the agrarian connotations (planting festivals in the spring, for instance, and harvest festivals in the autumn) that are characteristic of the Jewish and Christian years.

As for sacred space, Islam has emphasized it more than either Judaism or Christianity by making the pilgrimage to Mecca one of its five “pillars.” Not only do Muslims face the direction of Mecca while praying, they must go there at least once.

(5) Religious worldviews find primary expression in forms such as myth, scripture, hagiography (sacred biographies), and ritual.

Hinduism: Hindus acknowledge two types of scripture: divinely revealed primary texts and humanly created secondary texts. The former include the Vedas. The latter include several genres such as the great epics, law books, collections of

myths, and devotional poems. In addition are the hagiographies of medieval and modern saints and gurus.

Hinduism has produced many ritual traditions, too. Found at pan-Indian, regional, and local levels, these include ancient Vedic rituals, especially rites of passage (major ones being birth, initiation into learning, marriage, and death) along with daily, monthly, and annual rituals at either home shrines or temples.

Buddhism: Buddhists have produced didactic stories not only about the Buddha's historical existence as Gautama (in the Pali Canon) but also stories about his previous lives (the Jataka tales). All branches of Buddhism have their own collections of scripture.

As Buddhism spread, it integrated or tolerated ritual traditions from various cultures into its monastic and lay traditions: Bon festivals in Tibet; spirit worship in Thailand, Cambodia, and Bali; ancestor worship in East Asia; and so on.

Judaism: Almost all Canadians are familiar with Jewish scripture, the Hebrew Bible, even if they know it only as the Christian "Old Testament." The latter contains stories in the literary genre known as myth (a word that, popular usage notwithstanding, has nothing to do with historical truth or falsity) in addition to legal codes, prophetic poetry, wisdom literature, and other genres. Almost as holy as scripture are the many authoritative rabbinic commentaries on scripture (some of which focus on legal matters, theological ones, or mystical ones).

Most Canadians are at least vaguely familiar with common Jewish rituals, moreover, such as the seder (an elaborate liturgical banquet that Jews attend on the first one or two nights of Passover). And every big Canadian city has at least one synagogue and Jewish cemetery.

Not many Canadians, not even all Canadian Jews, are aware of traditional Jewish hagiographies. Most of these are embedded in other texts, whether biblical or rabbinic, and Jews have carefully avoided the kind of hero-worship that might lead to idolatry.

Christianity: The New Testament is a Christian supplement to or commentary on the Jewish "Old Testament" and what Christians believe is the latter's fulfillment.

It is safe to say that almost all Canadians are familiar with Christian rituals such as baptism and communion, even if they know about these only from what they see in popular movies, on television, or at the occasional wedding or funeral.

Christian hagiographies, especially in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, provide source material for the many saints' days.

Islam: The Quran is a restoration of, not a supplement to, Jewish and Christian scriptures. It contains many very similar stories (referring to both Moses, for instance, and Jesus), although the details often differ. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his will in a consistent message to Jewish and Christian prophets but that

both Jews and Christians have distorted that message in their scriptures. The Quran is Allah's perfect revelation to his final prophet, Muhammad.

As for ritual, Islam is by no means lacking. Most Canadians are familiar with at least two of these: daily prayer five times a day (which has given rise to demands for prayer rooms at many universities) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (which involves a complex series of rituals such as counterclockwise circumambulation of the sacred Kaaba, stoning the Devil, and so forth).

Sikhism: Sikh scriptures include the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth. And hagiographies, Janam-sakhis, describe the lives of gurus such as Guru Nanak (1469-1539). Sikhs gather for congregational singing or reading of selections from the Guru Granth Sahib along with public talks in public places of worship, the gurdwaras. Families, too, sing or read selections during domestic worship.

(6) Religious worldviews find secondary expression in their interpretations and applications of primary ones; these secondary expressions include kinship, taboo, theology, philosophy, morality, law, the arts, and so on.

Islam: Most Canadians are by now familiar with the fact that Islam focuses heavily on religious law, mainly because conflicts between Islamic law and Canadian law have led to public debates over matters that range from head coverings to marriage, divorce, and custody. Unlike Jews, who have over the centuries generally adjusted to alien legal systems, some Muslims insist on the primacy of Islamic law and even argue that state law should recognize some aspects of Islamic law. Even so, Muslims have never interpreted Islam uniformly. Traditionally, in fact, they have recognized not one but four major schools of law, each of which dominates in one or more regions of the Islamic world. Sunni Muslims acknowledge all of their interpretations and rulings as legitimate.

Like Jews and Christians, moreover, Muslims have produced their own theologies and philosophies in order to answer questions—about God, say, or free will.

Hinduism: Like Judaism, Hinduism focuses on the family (“one is born a Hindu”), so marriage and kinship are extremely important. One Hindu goal is to marry and have children. Hindus have traditionally rejected exogamy in the sense of intermarriage between members of various castes and subcastes, although intermarriage between subcastes is now becoming common in cities. The hierarchy of castes and subcastes relies on the notion of pure versus impure, but even that is now changing.

Hindus have produced theological and philosophical systems, too. Among the most popular is Vedanta, which draws on the Upanishads, but finds implicit in them various ontological and metaphysical systems, including monism and theism.

One scriptural genre, the Dharmashastras, is a compilation of ethical and legal commentaries; they not only refer to general principles but also discuss specific topics. Like most other aspects of Hinduism, these texts are kaleidoscopic, collecting and classifying material from many times and places.

Buddhism: Because Buddhism is primarily a monastic tradition, its secondary expression consists largely of rules that govern monastic life: types of food, times for eating, types of medicine, negotiating disputes, relations between nuns and monks, and so forth. The proper social, ethical, and legal governance of lay life has generally followed local cultural patterns in India, China, and elsewhere. Secondary expressions also include philosophical works belonging to schools such as Abhidamma, Yogachara, Madhyamika, Chan (Zen), and Pure Land.

Judaism: Most Canadians are aware of at least one set of Jewish taboos: dietary laws that forbid the consumption of pigs and shellfish, for instance, or dairy and meat products at the same meal.

Unlike Christians, Jews have not characteristically produced systematic theologies (treatises on doctrinal matters, including doctrines that ancient officials embedded in creeds). Nonetheless, Maimonides and a few other luminaries have indeed done so, often relying on Aristotelian or other non-Jewish philosophical schools. But god-talk in general is another matter. Explorations of theological topics, often in narrative form, are very common in both biblical and rabbinic literature.

Similarly, traditional Jews seldom wrote independent treatises on ethics (although they do now). Nonetheless, Talmudic and other rabbinic sources make it clear that ethical considerations have always lain at the heart of Jewish law. Over many centuries in exile, Jewish law has adjusted to the requirements of alien legal systems, the general rule being that state law (usually secular) takes precedence over Jewish law when conflict arises. And conflict does erupt now and then over government meddling in matters such as divorce (forcing Jewish men to give their wives Jewish divorces), autopsies (which Jewish law forbids), and kosher meat (in countries that forbid the Jewish method of slaughter).

Christianity: We see no need here to establish the existence of Christian theologies, philosophies, and ethical codes; everyone in Canada knows at least something about these. It is worth noting here, though, that Christians give theology such high priority that they often fail to see the different priorities of other religions; some Jews and other non-Christians, moreover, try to de-emphasize their own theologies per se as a way of distinguishing themselves from Christians.

(7) Considering the primary and secondary features of religious worldviews together, it becomes clear that they are comprehensive or nearly comprehensive ways of life.

Christianity: At the moment, many people find it easy to assume that Christianity, especially mainstream Protestantism, is a matter of nothing more than going to church occasionally, believing specific doctrines, having a personal relationship with Jesus, or all three. In that case, Christianity would not be a comprehensive way of life (although it still would be for very traditional communities such as the Amish and Hutterites, for whom religious tradition governs even the clothing that they wear and the technologies that they reject). This is not due to any notion of secularity in Christian scriptures. Rather, it is because the modern and secular state has gradually taken over many aspects of daily life that were once either experienced in theological terms or governed by ecclesiastical law in Catholic, early Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox countries: education, charity, commerce, medical care, the arts, marriage, politics, and so on. Given the prevalence of Christianity in Canada, and given the prevalence of its reputation as nothing more than a set of sincerely held beliefs or doctrines, it is worth examining at least one way in which that reputation is false.

As a religion, Christianity is, or at least has traditionally been, a comprehensive way of life. Consider one aspect of it as a social system. In theory, Christians have rejected or at least trivialized the whole idea of kinship. In view of what will unite them in the Kingdom of God, after all, they are indifferent to all earthly social distinctions—including those of the family. “For I have come,” said Jesus, “to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me ...”⁷ And yet most Christians do marry and establish families. Every church acknowledges rules, moreover, that forbid marriage between parents and children, sisters and brothers, first cousins, and various other degrees of consanguinity. As for kinship in the sense of ethnicity, Christians have rejected that, too, in theory. According to St. Paul, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁸ And yet most Christians interpret that passage in connection with ultimate salvation, not daily life. For historical reasons, many churches have indeed carried strong (though not always explicit) ethnic associations. This is true not only of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy as the national religions of various countries or provinces (Spain, Ireland, Quebec, Greece, Russia) but also of Protestantism in connection with the location of early movements (the English origin of Anglican churches, the Scots origin of Presbyterian churches, the German or Scandinavian origins of Lutheran churches, the German origins of Mennonite churches) and various other Christian churches (the Armenians, Copts, Maronites, and so on).

Hinduism: Hindus often claim (as Jews do) that their own worldview is not a religion at all but a “way of life.” It communicates mainly through the constant

movements of pilgrims and saints. This creates a decentralized “civilizational” ethos rather than specific structures or common creeds. Hindu families and other groups have drawn from a vast array of the primary and secondary characteristics of religion to create a comprehensive way of life. Many Hindus even today, for instance, use a traditional system of medicine called Ayurveda, which means the knowledge or science of life. Not only does it contain medical information on eight topics (internal medicine; eye, ear, nose, mouth, and throat diseases; surgery; toxicology; psychology; pediatrics; rejuvenation therapies; and aphrodisiacs), it also integrates preventive medicine to ensure happiness and well-being (the absence of physical or mental ailments and the presence of pleasure, wealth, knowledge, and virtues). The purpose of life goes beyond this well-being to include the spiritual dimension (right thinking, right conduct, religious duties, and even auspicious acts, and ultimately the pursuit of liberation). Medical texts rely on the authority of scriptures, the gods, and the sages.

Confucianism: Focusing on the ethics and rituals of everyday life, Confucianism has become comprehensive by interacting with two other Chinese religions: Daoism, which focuses on nature, and Chinese Buddhism, which focuses on death and the afterlife. Because people have several affiliations, the result has been syncretism. As one saying has it, one can be “a Confucian by day, a Taoist by night.”

Islam: We have already discussed Islamic law. Like Jewish law, it governs every aspect of daily life and therefore today recognizes no realm as “secular.” But Islam is very unusual among religions in one way. Almost from the beginning, it took the form of a state, not a religious community within some larger political entity. Other religions have produced states, to be sure, but not during formative periods. It took persecuted Christians several centuries before their religion became reliably legal, let alone the state religion of imperial Rome. Although Jews had several states in ancient times, they lived without any state, often perilously, for two thousand years. Neither Christians nor Jews, therefore, have invested as much as Muslims have in the notion of statehood; the latter is not ultimately crucial to their identity as Christians or Jews (although it came close to that for elite Christians during the medieval period and is coming close to that now for many Jews in connection with the State of Israel). In view of its identification with states or empires, at any rate, Islam has always been a major political, economic, and military force. Even among the modern states with large Muslim populations, only Turkey is explicitly secular (and many Muslims there would like to change that).

Because Islam, like Judaism, is an aniconic tradition, the existence of Islamic art might seem surprising. And yet Islam has produced a magnificent artistic tradition. Although Muslims borrowed some architectural traditions—notably the Turks, who adopted the Byzantine church for their mosques—Muslims invented others. It was the Persian pointed arch, in fact, that evolved into the Gothic arch of

European architecture. But Muslims produced their own traditions of two-dimensional art as well. Much of it, to be sure, consists of abstract design—complex geometric or vegetal ornament, which could extend outward to infinity and thus represents both order and divinity—and calligraphic design. But the Persians produced a very rich tradition of illuminated manuscripts. Some paintings depicted scenes from pre-Islamic Persian history and literature. Others illustrated manuscripts on geography and the tales of travelers. Still others, however, depicted scenes from the life of Muhammad himself, hiding his face behind a veil and adding flames around his head to indicate holiness.

Judaism: Like Hindus and Confucians, Jews have always emphasized kinship as a principle of social organization. Not only do traditional Jews reject exogamy (marrying outside the community), they maintain the biblical lineages of priests and Levites. Jewish law governs not only kinship, of course, but all other aspects of the social system (such as marriage, divorce, and custody). In addition, however, it governs what secular people today would call the specifically religious system (ritual; prayer; purity and pollution; sacrifice; food production, preparation, and consumption; sexual practices; and so on), the economic system (commercial ethics), the political system (royal or rabbinic authority), and every other aspect of daily life (although some legal categories, such as sacrificial worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, exist now only in the form of study). At least in theory, not even the most trivial act of daily life is devoid of religious significance. To put it another way, even the simplest act in daily life can, assuming the proper conscious attitude, become a vehicle for the experience of holiness. Jews learn to recite blessings on a wide range of occasions from lighting candles to inaugurate holy days to eating fruit for the first time in a season. Some blessings are deeply engrained enough, however, to occur spontaneously: on seeing a rainbow in the sky, for instance, or on rising from bed in the morning. The advent of a Jewish state in modern times has created some problems, because not all Israeli Jews accept the legal authority of Israel's chief rabbis. Nonetheless, religious (Orthodox) political parties in Israel are often powerful enough to form coalition governments. At issue for them are often matters such as conversion to Judaism, marriage, and divorce. Jews everywhere, however, have set up religious courts to settle internal conflicts. As for external conflicts, most Canadian Jews, including Orthodox Jews, accept a traditional principle of diaspora life: that the law of the land takes precedence over Jewish law when conflict arises. But even in modern and secular contexts, being Jewish can be a way of life in connection with a civic religion that relies almost exclusively on collective memories of the Nazi holocaust and collective hopes for the State of Israel.

Of all the cultural systems that religion explores, Judaism has generally refrained from only one: the visual arts. One divine commandment, after all, forbids the creation of “graven images” (which, in the biblical period, probably referred to statues or reliefs that represented gods). Even so, some Jewish

communities—notably that of Dura-Europos, during the third century in what is now Syria—have produced elaborate Jewish iconographies. Moreover, Jews have enjoyed the representational arts of Greek, Roman, Christian, and other cultures. Sometimes, they used non-Jewish styles and employed non-Jewish artists to create Jewish ritual objects. In the twentieth century, liberal and secular Jews began to participate in the world of European art as painters. At no time, however, did Jews produce a distinctively Jewish style. This was partly because, without a state and subjected to frequent expulsions, Jews generally preferred not to invest heavily in material culture.

(8) Religious worldviews sustain groups (defined by birth or choice), not merely isolated individuals; every community has a public dimension, in other words, which involves at least some face-to-face encounters.

Christianity: Christianity has generally focused more attention than Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Confucianism on the individual (although none of these has ignored the individual). And yet almost all Christians have lived in communities and participated in public worship. Some Christian traditions have allowed hermitages for isolated anchorites, but anchorites have always been honored exceptions to the rule. And even they have always interacted with others: those who provide them with food, priests who administer the sacraments to them, disciples who come to venerate them or learn from them, and so on. In fact, all Christian traditions have relied heavily either on lay communities or on both lay and monastic communities. Even the most reclusive monks and nuns in their monasteries and convents, moreover, still interact with the larger world for both economic purposes (producing and selling agricultural or other products) and spiritual ones (such as praying for the world).

For Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians, those who live outside the church community have no access to the sacraments (which only priests can administer) and therefore no access to salvation. Protestants do focus more heavily on the individual – that is, everyone’s deeply personal decision to accept salvation by grace through faith. And most Protestants insist on the “priesthood of all believers.” This doctrine fosters individualism in relation to religious functionaries (even though Protestant churches have established clerical hierarchies, albeit of ministers rather than priests), but it fosters communalism, too, in relation to laypeople (who can perform rituals that only priests could perform in Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy).

Buddhism: In theory, Buddhists join communities—that is, monastic ones—by choice. In practice, many Buddhists are members of lay communities by birth. Even though Buddhism is mainly a monastic orientation, it acknowledges four types of community: monastic men, monastic women, lay men, and lay women. In addition, Buddhists define some communities in sectarian terms. South Asian

Buddhists have incorporated aspects of the caste system, moreover, but changed the hierarchy so that warriors rather than brahmins are on top. East Asian Buddhist monastic communities, moreover, have taken on many aspects of the Confucian family orientation.

Judaism: Although Jews sometimes present their religion both to outsiders and to themselves in overly communal terms (in order to distinguish it from their perception of Christianity), there is some truth to the claim that being a religious Jew means being a member of the Jewish people, the holy community of Israel, and not merely someone who believes in Jewish doctrines. This is at least partly because rabbinic Judaism is primarily about seeking holiness by following divine commandments that the Torah records and the rabbis interpret as Jewish law. And law, by definition, involves human interactions (but also human-divine interactions). For religious Jews, the “Jewish people” does not refer merely to ethnicity; it refers to all those (including converts from other ethnic groups) who seek holiness according to rabbinic interpretations of the Torah.

Not surprisingly, even ultimate salvation has a communal dimension: joining the ancestors, including the biblical founders, in paradise; re-uniting with all Jews in the Jerusalem of messianic times; and so forth. Most prayers refer to the community, moreover, not the individual. Jews confess their sins collectively as “we,” for instance, and ask God to forgive “us.” And even though Jews may pray alone at any time or place, Jewish law requires public worship three times a day and on all holy days. Mourning rites, too, involve the gradual reintegration of individual mourners—after seven days, after thirty days, after eleven months—into communal life.

Hinduism: Hindus are defined by birth in connection with caste, subcaste, and extended family. Customs and codes of behavior reinforce these categories. In addition, any Hindu can choose membership in a sect that focuses on a particular deity, philosophy, reform, or guru. Gradually, even a group of that kind tends to become endogamous—allowing marriage only with fellow members. But that tendency is now changing. Hinduism does acknowledge ascetics, who formally renounce social life and wander about, although they, too, tend to form groups that have their own codes of behavior, often as the branches of sects.

Islam: Like Judaism and some forms of Christianity, but especially Judaism, Islam focuses attention more heavily on the community or even the nation (one that originally took the form of a unified caliphate and even now transcends the boundaries of any modern Islamic state) than on the individual. Although Muslims, like Jews, can pray at any time or in any place, for instance, they must participate also in public worship at specified times and in specified places. As we say, moreover, Muslims must make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once and participate in collective rites there.

Sikhism: Sikhism has a strong communal base. Worship, for instance, involves congregational singing. Some Sikhs join the Khalsa, moreover, a special order.

(9) Religious worldviews claim sources of authority⁹ for these ways of life and thus for belonging to the group.¹⁰

Islam: For Muslims, the ultimate authority is divine revelation – which is to say, the Quran. But Muslims recognize additional sources of authority: traditions, customs, and words that Muslims attribute to Muhammad or the early Islamic community; analogy (that is, reason); and (consensus). These sources of authority are interpreted through commentaries.

Hinduism: Hindus recognize four kinds of authority: revealed scripture, remembered scripture, the behavior of good people, and conscience. Valid sources of knowledge include also the senses, inference, analogy, verbal testimony (scripture), and so forth. Hinduism has rich commentarial traditions to explicate meanings in sectarian terms, to explicate esoteric meanings, to seek scriptural consistency, or to introduce reforms.

Buddhism: In Buddhist philosophy, valid sources of knowledge can include personal experience, logic, and epistemology. Monastic rules—breaching four of these can lead to expulsion—and the senior monks or patriarch of lineages provide authority. Sometimes, as in Zen, a tension emerges between antinomianism and strict discipline.

Christianity: For Christians, as for Jews and Muslims, the ultimate source of authority is divine revelation—what Christians call the “Word made Flesh.”¹¹ By that, they do not refer merely to the words (in ancient or modern languages) of texts. They refer to the logos, the eternal mind of God (which is therefore the source of divine revelation in scripture). And by the logos, they refer in turn even more specifically to Christ (who lives eternally but briefly took human form in Jesus). But churches differ over the details. The Catholic Church acknowledges three sources of authority: scripture; the church’s tradition (apostolic teachings); and the church’s magisterium (the teaching authority of popes in consultation with other bishops). Catholics do not limit themselves, therefore, to the literal meaning of any scriptural passage. In addition, they acknowledge the need to interpret scripture “spiritually”—that is, allegorically, morally, and anagogically (in view of eternity). Following Martin Luther’s dictum, sola scriptura, most Protestants reject or at least minimize extra-biblical sources of authority. (Fundamentalists, whose collective identity relies on the claim of biblical “inerrancy,” tend to reject all but the most literal interpretations.) Many Protestants insist that every person is responsible for interpreting scripture and therefore accepting the gift of salvation.

Some rely on tradition but also reason (including modern biblical scholarship, inscriptions or other archeological artifacts, and so on). Even today, however, many mainstream Christians insist that Christ, no matter how they interpret that word, is their ultimate source of authority for every aspect of daily life—which is to say, one that ultimately supersedes all customs and even laws.¹² This is why some Christians have been able to sacrifice their lives to oppose the tyranny of modern totalitarian states.

Sikhism: The main source of authority for Sikhs includes the words of their ten gurus, with God as the ultimate one. Sikhs have no priests or other intermediaries.

Judaism: The ultimate authority for Jews is divine revelation. By that, they do not refer merely to the Hebrew words of scriptural texts (although mystically inclined Jews not only revere every word but meditate on every letter as a constituent element of the cosmos) but to Torah—that is, the eternal mind of God that these texts reveal through the tradition of rabbinic interpretation. According to rabbinic tradition, God revealed to Moses not only the written Torah but also an oral Torah—which is to say, all future rabbinic commentaries on the written Torah. The rabbis would eventually write down even those commentaries (which contain not only legal but also theological and homiletical material) in authoritative compilations such as the Talmud. Traditional Jews acknowledge not one but several layers of meaning: literal, homiletic, allegorical, mystical, and so on; every level is legitimate (unless it contradicts scripture or encourages people to abandon Jewish law), but some levels provide deeper insight than others do. At any rate, it is not enough for traditional Jews to interpret a scriptural passage directly and independently; the most authoritative interpretation is one that cites many rabbinic opinions (both contemporary and historical) and thus, even if only by analogy, represents a consensus of rabbinic opinion and continuity with tradition.

(10) Religious worldviews are successful enough to endure for a long time.¹³

Islam: Islam is young in relation to many other religions but hardly a “new religion.” In theological terms, its message is the same message that Allah sent to pre-Islamic communities through Jewish and Christian prophets. In historical terms, Islam began after the migration—hijra—of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) in 622, which is for Muslims the year 1 A.H.

Hinduism: Hinduism has evolved, with many adaptations and reforms, from at least the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. or even earlier. We know very little about the earlier Indus Valley civilization, because no one has deciphered the latter’s script (although archaeology has revealed some features life in the Indus Valley).

Sikhism: Sikhism originated in the fifteenth century with its first guru, Nanak, although Sikhs claim a primordial origin for their tradition.

Buddhism: The Buddha lived and taught in India during the fifth century B.C.E. but died out there by the thirteenth century. By that time, however, it had spread to many other regions.

Judaism and Christianity: Even though Jews like to think of their tradition as “old” (and it is old in relation to Christianity and Islam), biblical religion was actually an innovation in the ancient Near East. It originated after the rise of Sumer and Egypt and in reaction to other forms of Near Eastern religion. Rabbinic Judaism (which continued and reinterpreted biblical religion) originated in the seventh century B.C., after Nebuchadnezzar II deported the population of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C. There, in exile, Jews began to supplement the cult of animal sacrifice (activities that required a temple, which was no longer available) not only with prayer but also with reading and studying the Torah (activities that eventually characterized a new institution, the synagogue). But the exiles returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt their temple. And the sages still had to compete with rival religious leaders. Rabbinic Judaism came into its own, therefore, after Rome destroyed not only the second temple in A.D. 70 but also most rival forms of Judaism. This put rabbinic Judaism in direct competition with early Christianity. It could be argued that rabbinic Judaism has the same historical relation as Christianity does to biblical religion; both are commentaries, albeit with conflicting interpretations, of Hebrew scripture.

¹ We have described these characteristic features of religion as traditional religious sources describe them. The extent to which this or that member of a religious community believes in all of its doctrines, however, is another matter. We cannot enter anyone’s mind to find out. Even in an age of skepticism, however, we can at least say that not many members of a religious community actively oppose its doctrines. Some would like to believe in these doctrines but do not. Others would not even like to believe in them but nonetheless find reasons for belonging to the communities that espouse them. This accounts the widely observed phenomenon of Christians who join “mainline” denominations that maintain explicitly religious language in their liturgies, for instance, but reinterpret those liturgies in implicitly secular ways (in order to foster political activism, group therapy, ethnic continuity, and so on). If anything at all makes these individuals or communities still “religious,” it would be the historical contexts that they continue to affirm for one reason or another.

² The word “supernatural” refers to something beyond the natural order. It might refer to deities, ancestors, ghosts, and other beings, the true self, “non-duality,” omnipresent vitality, a power, “emptiness,” or simply the “unnamable.” We can distinguish the supernatural from the natural in various ways (such as immanence within it) or deny its existence (if the material realm is an

illusion). The pre-modern Chinese placed so much emphasis on family and daily life, for instance, that the supernatural—Heaven, Tao, or the ancestors—fell into the background (but did not completely disappear).

³ People can experience ineffable or transcendent experiences as eruptions into the everyday realm, or they can induce these by means of religious techniques. Although these are individual experiences, some people begin to teach others how to have these experiences. They often become the founders of new sects or even religions.

⁴ There is a profound difference between the secular and the profane, which we will discuss below. For the time being, it is enough to say that the profane is the other side of the sacred; neither can exist without the other. The secular, on the other hand, is characteristic of modernity and recognizes neither the sacred nor the profane.

⁵ For a detailed study of a much more elaborate variant, see Ruth Fredman Cernea, The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981].

⁶ See his classic, The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951).

⁷ Matthew 10: 35-37.

⁸ Galatians 3: 28.

⁹ Sources of authority include the ancestors, religious leaders, scriptures, laws, custom, consensus, perception, inference, and so forth. When examining the source of religious authority, it is important not to remain at the most general level such as “Christianity.” Sub-traditions such as Roman Catholicism make their own adjustments. Roman Catholics acknowledge three sources of authority: scripture and tradition (teachings handed down by successors of the Apostles), and the Church’s magisterium (papal interpretation of scripture and tradition). For Quakers, on the other hand, the “meeting” has authority because of guidance from individual experience and scripture (and thus from the Holy Spirit), although some meetings place more emphasis on scripture than experience.

¹⁰ A group with strong boundaries might require formal conversion and expulsion. One with weak boundaries might offer informal affiliation, thus allowing several identities (for example, “a Confucian by day, a Taoist by night”).

¹¹ John 1: 14.

¹² For a classic discussion of the various characteristic ways in which Christians have organized their communities, see H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 1952).

¹³ Most “world” religions have endured for centuries or millennia. Scholars classify “new religions” as either recently developed or recently imported (since the 1960s according to most

scholars). These are border phenomena, some falling into the religious category and others into the hybrid one.