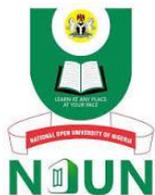


COURSE GUIDE

CRS 173 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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**MAIN
COURSE**

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MODULE 1

Unit 1	Etymology, Problems and Perspectives in the Study of Religion
Unit 2	Defining Religion: What Is Religion?
Unit 3	Common Characteristics or Features Of Religious Traditions
Unit 4	Approaches to The Study of Religion

UNIT 1 ETYMOLOGY, PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION**Unit Structure**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 Etymology of Religion
- 1.4 Problems in the Study of Religion
- 1.5 Perspectives in the Study of Religion
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources
- 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

1.1 Introduction

Hello dear student. I welcome you specially to this first discussion on the course CRS 173: Introduction to the Study of Religion. This course is foundational to all Christian Theology and Christian Religious Studies courses. This Unit marks the first discussion of the entire course. Religion is an aspect of human personality and is connected to all dimensions of human experience. Religion as a universal phenomenon with historical and contemporary relevance will be adequately introduced from an academic perspective. The course will definitely turn you into a young scholar of Christian Religious Studies and Theology, but before we proceed with this exciting theme, let's get our learning outcomes clear.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

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

- State the etymological origin of religion
- define religion
- examine some common characteristics or features of religion

- identify approaches to the study of religion

1.3 Etymology of Religion

It will be very helpful to let you know that religion as a word emerged from a particular geography, through specific individuals, at a particular time in history and with certain meanings. The Latin word, *religio* is connected to *relegere* which means to re-read; *reliquere* which means relinquish; or *religare* which means to relegate, to unite, to bind together. Religion as a word is of European origin from where it draws its meanings. Scholars have largely settled for two core meanings. They are one based on *religere* which entails to gather things together or to pass over the same ground repeatedly. By extension it is to observe the signs of divine communication. Alternatively, *religare* which has to do with binding together avails us an essential component of religion because religion binds people together in common practices and beliefs, drawing them together in a common enterprise of life. Lastly, *religio* speaks of the relationship dimension of religion. It can be rendered as a relationship between humans and some spiritual beings.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Did you observe that from the etymological roots of religion there are multiple meanings? Do you think this might be a problem for students of Christian Religious Studies?

1.4 Problems in the Study of Religion

It is good to tell you that people generally feel a sense of understanding of religion because every person has religious dimension as an expression of their personality. But I must let you know that this mindset often poses a challenge when people are exposed to the academic study of religion, which is both formal and structured endeavour. Individuals who attempt to explain religion largely do so based on personal feelings, experience or practice as their social or cultural background and the time they live in dictates to them. This reality makes the study of religion more complex and exciting than subjects like economics, political science, philosophy, and other fields of science. Yet, a core problem still remains the absence of a generally acceptable definition of religion remains.

The Nature of Religion

Religion cuts across many elements of human cultures and we can categorize these wide and diverse elements into the profane and sacred, the two realms or worlds that religion belongs to. It will be instructive to

mention that not all of these religious elements of culture are observable. Good examples may include the existence of spiritual beings, and a wide range of religious experiences such as mysticism, dreams, visions, healings and miracles that lack adequate human language to describe them. It is because of this that scholars and students of religion attempt to understand these elements alongside numerous others in clear, logical and precise way.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Do you know of any human experience of a religious nature that is difficult to explain? Reflect over it

Theoretical Explanations and Descriptions

Are you aware that in the past many scholars who try to describe and explain religion never paid attention to participation and experience of religion. They even sit in their houses and do guess work on various aspect of religion. As a result, their works were full of biases and reflect negative and one-sided views. In fact, they use few and limited examples to make general statements in their explanations and descriptions of religion. To further complicate their views of religion is the fact that most of these scholars were not experts in the discipline of religion, rather they were operating from such fields like economics, political science, psychology and economics.

Human Social Locations and Time-Space Contexts

Another problem in the study of religion is the dynamic nature of the discipline. As an element of human culture and society, religious ideas, ideals and practices are subject to change. So that, documented facts about a religious community may not be easily confirmed when we go and visit such places to observe their ways of life. Since change is the only constant thing in life, religions are also subject to change. Thus, time and space in relation to social contexts affect what we understand as religion.

Ideological Problems

You have to know that people always speak from somewhere. That is to say, there is always a context that capture a person's view be it social, political or other ideological that shape or influence a person view about religion. Atheist, agnostics, or theist views of religion are built on their ideological positions. So that, as a student, it is very important to know where a scholar is coming from ideologically in order to situate their views on religion.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

1. Mention and explain the problems associated with the study of religion (2 mins)

1.5 Perspectives in the Study of Religion

You should have learnt that religion as an element of culture is wide and diverse and as a result, different perspectives are adopted to fully understand its broad manifestations in individual life and human society. You may be wondering, what could be the perspectives in the study of Religion?

The answer is not farfetched, they are **among others Anthropological** (religion as bedrock of human relationship with the cultural environment), **Sociological** (mutual influence and impact of religion (especially religious groups) on social institutions), **Psychological** (role of emotions and feelings in the practice of religion), **Historical** (development of religions in time and space and the factors responsible for such changes), **Theological** (relationship between God and human beings and the assumptions of human beings about God), **Ethical** (evaluation of moral conducts in human social relations), **Philosophical** (rational or intellectual explanations of religious behaviours, ideas and religiosity), **and Phenomenological perspectives** (describing religious ideas as one observes them especially as they appear to the practitioners of religion).

I want you to note that the study of religion is a multidisciplinary field because it is engaged through various perspectives as we have mentioned above. It is from these perspectives that scholars attempt to define religion as we shall see in our next sub-heading. But before we begin to look at these definitions, I want you to address this question.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Identify and explain the different perspectives that scholars utilize in understanding religion

1.6 Summary

We have discussed in this Unit the etymology of religion, identified the problems in the study of religion and highlighted the perspectives in the study of Religion. We have learnt that *Relegere*, *religare* and *religio* are the three Latin words instrumental for our contemporary understanding

of religion. The nature of religion, theoretical explanation and description, human social locations and time-space contexts, and ideological problems were the four problems in the study of religion. We equally saw that a good number of perspectives are adopted by scholars to study religion. These perspectives include; anthropological, sociological, historical, psychological, theological, ethical, philosophical and phenomenological. In all of these, we saw that a particular definition of religion remains difficult.

1.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Berlin & New York: Cassell.

Matthews, W. (1998). *World Religions*. New York, Los Angeles & San Francisco: West Publishing Company.

Onibere, O. (1981). *Rudimentary Study of Religion*. Ile-Ife: Olasode Press.

Waardenburg, J. (1999). *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter.

1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Problems associated with the study of religion

- The nature of religion
- Theoretical explanations and descriptions
- Human social locations and time-space contexts
- Ideological problems

Answer to SAE 1

2. Different perspectives that scholars utilize in understanding religion

- Anthropological
- Sociological
- Psychological
- Historical
- Theological
- Ethical
- Philosophical
- Phenomenological

1.9 Glossary-

Bias- Influence in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgement.

UNIT 2 **DEFINING RELIGION: WHAT IS RELIGION?**

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 The Nature of Man
- 2.4 Types of Definition: Substantive and Functional Definitions
- 2.5 Characteristics Emphasized in Definition of Religion
- 2.7 Summary
- 2.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 2.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 2.10. Glossary

2.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, I hope you made very good use of your Unit 1 discussion materials. By now you should have observed that though religion is an interesting human and social phenomenon, it is associated with a number of challenges when we try to study it from an academic standpoint. In this unit, we shall look forward to deepening our understanding of the nature of man before clarifying substantive and functional types of definition of religion. In addition, we shall emphasize some characteristics found in definition of religion.

2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Mention different definitions of religion
- Identify scholars who provided definitions of religion
- Classify definitions of religion under different perspectives

2.3 The Nature of Man

You need to be aware of the age-long debate by scholars on whether religion is natural to man or not. Four different arguments can be used as evidence to understand the relationship between religion and human nature.

First is the view that many people in the world are not religious and some cultures are entirely secular with their people still living happy lives and such society functioning appropriately.

Secondly, religion generally is not fading away in the modern world despite the determined attempts by some powerful states like Russia, China and North Korea to repress and extinguish it.

Thirdly, when traditional forms of religious life fade away, the new and alternative forms that replace them still preoccupy themselves with the sacred, spiritual, transcendental and liturgical needs of man. In fact, superhuman powers, supernatural realities, and spiritual themes are connected to most popular films, fiction and television shows.

The fourth point is that the role of religion in our lives as individuals and societies depends on our personal and historical experiences and developments.

Activity 1

As an adult, what do you really think best defines man as a being?

If you look closely at these positions, you will see that it can be presented this way;

S/N	Negative Argument	Positive Argument
1	Humans are not by nature religious if we consider human nature to be compelled by some natural and irrepressible need, drive, instinct or desire to be religious.	Alternatively, human beings are naturally religious because of their complex set of innate features, capabilities, powers, limitations and tendencies to think, perceive, feel, imagine, desire and act religiously this is what predisposed them to religion when they are under the right condition.
2	Human beings are not by nature religious because not all human cultures have a functional need or intractable impulse to make religion one of its centrally defining features.	The natural religiousness of humanity is located in natural features latent within our humanity and subject to the complexities of interactions and stimulations that do bring these features to the surface.

From the table above, the argument on nonreligious people is that they possess the natural capacities and tendencies toward religion but that those capacities and tendencies have not been activated by environmental, experiential triggers or else have been activated but then neutralized or deactivated by some other social forces.

We need to acknowledge that there are some natural tendencies toward religion being grounded in human personhood. They are;

Religion springs from our universal human condition in relation to what we affirm as true. Simply put, all human knowing is built on believing.

Religion springs from the human capacity to recognize problems and our desire to solve them. The prospect of a helpful superhuman power that is present to human minds through culture, socialization, revelation, or some other means is appealed to help avert or resolve our problems of for an example, illness or death.

Our existential condition also lends itself to the tendency towards religion as beings with incredible capacities and severe limits. Even though as humans we are meaning-making and significance-seeking, yet we have difficulty creating satisfying meanings solely from within the horizon of the immanent world.

Another tendency is that as humans we unavoidably operate in relation to moral beliefs that are taken to arise not from our personal preferences and desires but from sources transcending them.

Religion has been the primary way that human cultures have answered life's questions. Yet, religion is not the only way for human beings to answer them and live functional, happy lives. Thus, we can conveniently say that religiosity is widespread, yet not universal, and though not inevitable, it is impossible to extinguish.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

1. Identify and discuss religion as natural to man?

2.4 Definition of Religion

You will agree with me that in this age of modernity and globalization, religion is growing in a sporadic manner. For instance, religion is developing many faces with a lot of intra- and inter-religious contacts across cultures and societies. Even Western societies are recognising the imposing influence of religion which bring about evangelism, revivalism, and fundamentalism that often lead to conflicts, crises and terrorism in different societies.

2.5 Types of Definition: Substantive and Functional Definitions

I want you to know of substantive and functional as the two types of definition of religion. Substantive definition talks about the essence of

religion. The essence of religion expresses the intrinsic quality of religion. It responds to the question what is religion? On the other hand, the functional dimension of definition is concerned with the role of religion in the life of an individual or society in general. It responds to the question of what does religion do?

I wish to let you know that both scholars of the enlightenment and modern sociologists have taken religion seriously. Religion has a central place in the theorizing about society such that religion was adequately acknowledged by pioneer founders and classical theorists of Sociology like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. We shall use the views of these two scholars to illustrate the functional definition of religion.

Max Weber focused on social change in society. In his theory of society, he saw religion as a source or agent of social change. Although Weber never attempted a definition of religion, because he was an agnostic who never concerned himself with private religious experience. It is helpful to note that Weber felt that a claim to religious experience is a revival of old gods which Christianity has earlier laid to rest. He sees religion squarely from the perspective of its function and social impact on society.

Emile Durkheim on the other hand, showed the role of religion as uniting or keeping a society together. Beliefs and practices regarding the sacred usually and functionally united people as a single moral community. Religion for Durkheim is responsible for providing social cohesion and solidarity among people in a society. As such, it gives a people collective identity and integrates a society. Durkheim arrived at his explanation from his detailed studies that cuts across primitive and modern societies. He was particular about religion's ability to provide the symbols required to interpret the world for the society.

It is good to mention to you that Durkheim's earlier works, he postulated that religion was a system of collective self-interpretation applicable only in traditional communities without a place in modern or enlightened societies. He felt that the complex division of labour in industrial society produced interdependence and solidarity thereby replacing religion. But in his later studies, he changed his position by agreeing that religion remains useful to the scientific and technological age because it possesses the power that kept the society together and the power that summoned it to greater fidelity to the ideal of society. His change of mind was due the realization that religion possessed something eternal.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

1. Identify and differentiate between the two types of definitions of religion

2.6 Characteristics Emphasized in Definition of Religion

You have gained some understanding on the types of definition of religion but that information will not be considered adequate if you do not acquaint yourself with some basic characteristics that scholars consider when religion is being defined. They include the following:

- **Feeling** - that is to say that religion is about human feelings and intuition
- **Ritual activity** – that religion is about performances of specific acts established by a religious community
- **Belief** – most people hold that religion is about belief in God or the supernatural
- **Monotheism** – that some religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are about a relationship with one omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient divine being who is the originator and controller of the universe including human affairs.
- **The Solitary Individual** – the fact that involvement of the individual in an intimate personal dialogue with himself or herself.
- **Social Valuation** – religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes are directed toward the expression of what a society of people holds to be of central importance.
- **Illusion** – It is seen as something that misinterprets reality with human responds to the universe portrayed as essentially immature and distorted.
- **Ultimate Reality and Value** – religion is seen as the true and ultimate measure of people's existence, the final test of life's meaning.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

1. mention and explain the characteristics emphasized in the definition of religion.

2.7 Summary

It is adequately clear that religion as a concept is difficult to define. We have discussed the nature of man, looked at the definition of religion especially substantive and functional as the two types of definitions of religion. These two types speak to the questions of what religion is and what religion does in the life of individuals and society in general.

Definitions irrespective of their type often contain some core features or characteristics such as feelings, ritual activity, belief, monotheism, solitary individual, social valuation, illusion, notion of ultimate reality and value. We are to build our capacity to analyse definitions of religion from these prisms.

2.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.

Goring, R. (ed.) (1992). *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Ware, Herefordshire: Wordsworth Reference.

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2.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Religion as natural to man

- It springs from our universal human condition
- It springs from human capacity to recognize problems and our desire to solve them
- Our existential condition lends itself towards religion humans have difficulty creating self-satisfying meanings
- As humans we operate in relation to moral beliefs that arise from sources transcending them

Answer to SAE 2

2. Two types of definition of religion

- Substantive
- Functional

Answer to SAE 3

3. Characteristics emphasized in the definition of religion

- Feeling
- Ritual activity
- Belief
- Monotheism
- The solitary individual
- Social valuation
- Illusion
- Ultimate reality and value

1.11 Glossary-

Intractable- Difficult to manage or resolve.

UNIT 3 COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OR FEATURES OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 Belief in the Supernatural: The Divine or Sacred
- 3.4 The Sacred and the Profane
- 3.5 Myth
- 3.6 Ritual Practices
- 3.7 Doctrine/Ethical Principles/Moral Codes
- 3.8 Life-After-Life
- 3.9 Propagation
- 3.10 Religious Experience/Expression
- 3.11 Summary
- 3.12 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 3.13 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 3.14. Glossary

3.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, I hope you are flowing with our discussion on the nature of man, the definition of religion, and the various characteristics that are emphasized when scholars define religion? With what we have achieved in Unit 2, the time is now ripe for use to identify the basic characteristics or features of religion.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss belief in the supernatural
- Distinguish between sacred and profane
- Define myth and explain its role in religion
- Mention the place of ritual practices in religion
- Identify scholars who provided definitions of religion
- Highlight the concept of life after life

3.3 Belief in the Supernatural

I hope you know that the people's religions in the ancient world through our contemporary time have always hold views about the existence of a supernatural being or beings. For example, the Babylonian Pantheon,

Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion have accounts of supernatural beliefs of many beings or one being.

3.4 The Sacred and the Profane

Religious traditions across the world always have a distinction between what is holy, other worldly and kept apart on the one hand and what is mundane and this worldly on the other hand. The sacred is that which pertains to the holy; either a place or material objects that are consecrated for holy purposes.

3.4 Myths

Myths are very important feature of religious traditions. They are understood as a religious narrative or story that describes in symbolic language the origin of basic elements and assumptions of a culture. They are concerned with the origin of the universe, the order of things and the place of man in them. Thus, myths are purposeful in the narrative. Let us consider three types of myths to drive home our point.

Cosmogenic Myths – These categories of myths narrate how the entire world came into existence. This is what we found in the Christian Bible book of Genesis of the world created from nothing. Some cultures conceive the world to have emerged from the lower worlds and others like the Polynesian myth hold that various layers of emergence are placed in a coconut shell which is similar to myths that depicts the world as emerging from egg.

Eschatological Myths – Eschatology is the other extreme of the world's origin. It speaks of the world's ending. Myths also exist that describe the end of the world or its destruction by the same divine being that created it. Such myths often capture the judgement meted to humans which will determine their eternity either in bliss or in perpetual torment. Some eschatological stories may present the end as a time of battle between the gods and will lead to the creation of new worlds. The origin of death is also captured by eschatological myths.

Culture Heroes Myths – Humans are not left out in mythical narratives in most cultures. There are stories of important individuals who contribute significantly to the betterment of their society and as a result their achievements are preserved as myths. The praiseworthy actions of such individuals stand as a lesson to others because of their discovery, deliverance they brought to or sacrifice they made on behalf of their people.

Activity 1

Find out about the myth of origin of your people. It will be very interesting to see if there are important heroic individuals that cannot be forgotten by your people

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

State the types of myths in society?

3.5 Ritual Practice

Rituals are patterned formal performances that demand repetitive and stereotypical actions that makes statements that are largely approved by custom and sanctioned by precedent. By their very nature, rituals as a characteristic of religion don't change easily like in other domains of society like politics, economics or recreational activities.

There are different types of rituals in society.

- **Initiation Rituals** – these are found in most cultures as it is marked by a transition from childhood through adolescence and leading the initiates into adulthood. It goes with a number of symbolic actions like separating the young from their parents and families, a test of their endurance and bravery, preparation for responsibility, and preparation for marriage life. The new status they enjoy resulting from their new knowledge and association with invisibles beings or powers makes them privilege adults.
- **Political Rituals** – Power and its use carry legitimacy when they enjoy or a accompanied by ritual performance. Coronations and installations are expressions of political rituals. Political rituals play the role of maintaining the status quo, ensure social differentiation and invest powers.
- **Life-cycle Rituals** – There are important rites of passages in most cultures of the world. By this we mean important stages of life that people must experience such as birth, puberty/adulthood, marriage and death. These significant transitions in the lives of individuals are accompanied by ritual performance to mark them.
- **Calendar Rituals** – You are aware that the world is ordered around times and seasons which determines order and provide meaning to societies. For instance, the celebration of new yam festival in African societies is an avenue to note the end of a farming season.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Discuss the different types of rituals in society?

3.6 Doctrine/Ethical Principle/Moral Codes

Do you know that the English word known as doctrine is derived from a Latin word *doctrina* which means teaching. Religious doctrines are often specifically formulated in the process of instructing new believers or initiates. As a belief system, doctrines form a central part of every religion. Even though the word is often used for a system as a whole like “Christian doctrines”, it refers appropriately to a particular item of belief as Islam doctrine of salvation, Christian doctrine of sin or the Buddhist doctrine of transmigration of the soul. In the past religious beliefs have been conceived to be a constant teaching that is not subject to change, but in recent times, their expressions have been modified to make such teachings more appealing to people of a particular age and culture. So that a particular religious doctrine can be presented in different ways with its truth still valid. It is very important to let you know that when a religious authority proposes one expression of a doctrine to the exclusion of other groups, it becomes a dogma.

3.7 Life-After-Life

Do you know that various religious traditions of the world have one conception or the other about life after life. The central view of most religions is that upon death of humans, they will move away from the physical realm to the spiritual one where life will continue forever. An essential component of this belief is the view that eternal judgement that will determine the part of eternity a person will belong to; paradise for good people or a place of destruction for the wicked.

3.8 Propagation

Religions are characterised by the propagation of their faith in order to win people to their fold. New believers or adherents are won into a faith tradition through this act of propagation. Since religion is about people, efforts are made to get people into the belief system to not only preserve it but also benefit from all that such a religion promises.

3.9 Religious Experience/Expression

Do you know that as humans we have experiences of different types? Such experiences are considered religious when they have something to do with a supernatural being, religious event, site or a mental state which is accompanied by a sense of awe and reverence. It is what Moses

experienced at the burning bush, it is what prophet Mohammed had when he encountered the angel Jibril, and what Saul the persecutor encountered on his way to Damascus. These experiences could come in broad daylight, trance, visions, or dreams.

Expression on the other hand, are attempts by religious individuals to communicate what they have experienced. So that, we cannot speak of any of them in isolation. A religious experience will lead to an expression and such expressions can lead other people to religious experience. Religions can hardly emerge or be reformed without such experiences that demand expression in the community of believers.

3.10 Summary

We have seen that belief in the supernatural is the core of most religious traditions. The belief in sacred and profane is what separate religion from all other realms of life; with the sacred understood as the holy or other-worldly, while the profane is the mundane things of this world. Myths are stories captured in symbolic language by a people about the origin of the world, the order of things in the universe and the place of man in them. Myths could be cosmogenic, eschatological, or about culture heroes. Rituals are repetitive and patterned formal performances performed by a community of believers prescribed by their custom and sanctioned by precedent. It could be an initiation ritual, political ritual, life-cycle ritual or a calendar ritual. Lastly, we saw that doctrines are belief systems about a particular teaching of a religious tradition.

3.12 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.

Goring, R. (ed.) (1992). *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Ware, Herefordshire: Wordsworth Reference.

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3.13 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Types of myths in society

- Cosmogenic Myths
- Eschatological Myths
- Culture Heroes Myths

Answer to SAE 2

2. Different types of rituals in society

- Initiation rituals
 - Political rituals
 - Life-cycle rituals
 - Calendar rituals

3.14. Glossary-

Precedent- An example that is used to justify similar occurrences at a later time.

Sanctioned- Conforming to recognized rules.

UNIT 4 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Historical Approach
- 4.4 Literary Approach
- 4.5 Comparative Approach
- 4.6 Psychological Approach
- 4.7 Philosophical Approach
- 4.8 Sociological Approach
- 4.9 Data and the Study of Religion
- 4.10 Summary
- 4.11 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 4.12 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 4.13 Glossary

4.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, I hope you made very good use of your Unit 3 discussion materials. By now you should have known that there are some common characteristics or features of religious traditions. In this Unit, we shall look forward getting acquainted with the basic approaches in the study of religion. Before we delve into them, let us take a moment to consider our learning outcomes in this unit.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- List the various approaches in the study of religion
- Discuss the various approaches in the study of religion
- Compare and contrast the various approaches to the study of religion
- Highlight the role of data in the approaches to the study of religion

4.3 Historical Approach

To know the origin, development and spread of a particular religion or the various religions of the world, we need to adopt the historical approach. With this approach, important personalities, events and periods are historically verified and narrated.

4.4 Literary Approach

For religions with documented records, written texts or sacred scriptures, literary approach is very relevant. It helps scholars to examine the thoughts and words in religious texts. It is useful in clarifying documented facts about origin, growth, doctrines, worship styles and expectations in a particular religious tradition.

4.5 Comparative Approach

In a situation when similar themes found in different religious traditions or in the same religious tradition but in different culture area is to be studied, comparative approach becomes very useful and inevitable. With the aid of comparative analysis, the objective, honest and unbiased analysis of similar features of religion is done on an equal ground.

4.6 Psychological Approach

Human behaviours that emanate from feelings and emotions associated with religious beliefs and practices are studied from a psychological approach. To fully understand the religious mind and the emotional needs of man as an individual person or a group, psychology is central to such ventures.

4.7 Philosophical Approach

The philosophical approach cannot be neglected in the study of religion. It is very useful in clarifying religious concepts, themes, languages and truth claims. Philosophy with its tools of rationality, logic, critical analysis and moral evaluation is resourceful in interrogating religion as belief systems.

4.8 Sociological Approach

Religion is about humans; their beliefs, practices, institutions, and behaviours. Religion exists in a social context and it is in-turn shapes and is been shaped by such context. As social beings, man is also a religious animal. Thus, sociological approach to the study of religion is very fundamental in Religious Studies because it highlights religion as one human and social activity that is found in all societies with influence for individual and group life. Social order or reality cannot fully be understood without a sociological approach to examining religion.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Discuss the approaches to the study of religion

4.9 Data and the Study of Religion

Data is about pieces of information that have not been processed or fully developed through appropriate analysis. In religious studies, data can broadly include a wide spectrum of elements ranging from ideas, ideals, feelings, man-made objects, natural and social phenomenon and performances. Virtually anything can fit the requirement of a religious data provided they are religious in nature or they have religious implications. Remember that the connection between the sacred and profane. A normal object, place and thing can become religious or have religious significance if there is a separation of such for religious purposes.

4.10 Summary

You have seen for yourself that religion is open to study from different approaches namely historical, literary, comparative, psychological, philosophical, sociological among others. Religious data cannot easily be classified because virtually all forms of information source can be useful in religious studies.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Explain the role of data in the study of religion

4.11 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

Aderibigbe, G. and Ayegboyin D. (1997). *Religion: Study and Practice*. Ijebu-Ode: Alamsek Ltd.

Hall, T. M, (ed.) (1978). *Introduction to the Study of Religion*. New York: Harper & Row.

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.

Hopfe, L. M. (1994). *Religions of the World* (6th Edition). New York/Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Toronto: Macmillan College Publishing Company.

Nigosian, S. A. (1994). *World Faiths*. (2nd Edition). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Waardenburg, Jacques. 1999. *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York.

4.12 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Approaches to the Study of Religion

- Historical
- Literary
- Comparative
- Psychological
- Philosophical
- Sociological

Answer to SAE 2

2. Data and the Study of Religion

- Virtually anything can fit the requirement of a religious data provided they are religious in nature or they have religious implications

4.13 Glossary

Profane- Violate the sacred character of a place or language.

Unbiased- Characterized by a lack of partiality.

MODULE 2

Unit 1	Religious Studies as An Academic Discipline
Unit 2	Requirements for The Study of Religion
Unit 3	Problems in The Study of Religion
Unit 4	Theories of Origin of Religion
Unit 5	Religious Pluralism

UNIT 1 RELIGIOUS STUDIES AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE**Unit Structure**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 Why Study Religion
- 1.4 What to study in religion: The scope and Areas of the Discipline
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 1.18 Glossary

1.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, I can imagine the kind of thoughts running through your mind, on what it means for religion to be an academic discipline. In addition to answering that question, in this unit, we shall go the extra mile to identify valid reason why religion is studied but before we go into them, let us take a little break and state the learning outcomes in this unit.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Highlight reasons why religion should be studied
- Identify and discuss areas of study in religion
- Determine your interest area in religious studies

1.3 Why Study Religion?

- It emancipates a person from ignorance
- It leads to acquisition of knowledge and information about human religious beliefs, practices, institutions and behaviour

- It transfers a good number of skills to learners like critical thinking, logical argument, fluent speaking, religious sensitivity, cultural awareness, empathy, community development, mediation, conflict management, diplomatic skills, international awareness, and global citizenship.
- It fundamentally leads to appreciation of God and fellow human beings.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Highlight reasons for the study of religion

1.4 What to Study in Religion: The Scope and Areas of the Discipline

You have to know that our emphasis in this programme is Christian Religious Studies. In this discipline of Religious Studies, a number of specializations exist. Let us consider the following;

Biblical Studies- It is the area of religious studies that preoccupies itself with the study of the sacred text of Christianity known as the Bible. It is made up of two parts; the Old Testament Studies and New Testament Studies. Biblical Studies demands three core activities. They are Language, Literature and theological evaluation or analysis. Knowledge of the relevant language (Hebrew or Greek), any of the books of the Bible and analyses of their theological themes.

Theological Studies- Generally, theology is that aspect of Christian religious studies that focuses on the study of God, doctrines, and dogmas. Areas in Theology include Systematic Theology, Dogmatic Theology, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Catholic Theology, Protestant Theology, Evangelical Theology, African Christian Theology and Islamic Theology.

Comparative Studies of Religion- It is the foundation upon which religious studies is built. In fact, at a time, the entire discipline was referred to as Comparative Religion. Divisions within Comparative Studies of Religion (CSR) include African Traditional; Religion, New Religious Movements, Islamic Religious Studies. Let us briefly explain these major aspects of CSR.

African Traditional Religion: This specialized area examines the various indigenous religious traditions in Africa and their manifestations in among the African Diaspora. Effort is made to systematically investigate their beliefs, practices, theology, values, and cultural expressions.

New Religious Movements: This aspect of the discipline is very interesting as it exposes learner to alternative, break-away and externally influenced religious groups. This category of movement is very important to study because of the addition or modification they bring about in society. Collectively, NRM highlight the organizational and behavioural tendencies in emerging and small groups. Also, they are products of dissatisfaction, change in society, competition or need for reform of old traditions. Hare Krishna, Jehovah Witness, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, are some notable

Islamic Religious Studies is Islam, the fastest growing and second largest religion in the world, after Christianity. Islam has been seen to be very important in the lives of Muslims in Islamic countries and domains where Muslims have a sizeable population. The religion is so vital to Muslim existence because it has practical relevance for every aspect of the Muslim life. So, its history, theology, mysticism, ethics, philosophy, law among others, are notable areas in Islamic Studies.

Historical Studies- Here, the history of Christianity or the Church is looked at. It is popularly called Church History or Ecclesiastical History. It is an aspect of social history, though sacred, it examines how the church through her teaching, activities, agents and mandate is imparting society.

Ethics, Morality and Social Issues-Remember that religion has behavioural dimension. As such, we cannot remove ethics in society from the Christian faith. Christian Ethics, Morality and Social and Cultural Issues are component part of this area. Apart from social, we also have economic, political, environmental, bio-medical issues in the study of Christian religious ethics.

Activity 1

With your knowledge of the various areas in religious studies, identify your area of choice and give reasons for your decision

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Identify and discuss areas of study in religion

1.5 Summary

From our discussions in this unit, we have seen reasons for the study of religion to include emancipation from ignorance, knowledge and

information acquisition, gaining of life, soft and transferrable skills, and appreciation of God and our fellow human beings. On the other hand, saw the major areas of study in Christian Religious Studies such as Biblical Studies, Theological Studies, Comparative Studies in Religion, Historical Studies and Ethics, Morality and Social Studies.

1.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.

Nigosian, S. A. (1994). *World Faiths*. (2nd Edition). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Onibere, O. (1981). *Rudimentary Study of Religion*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Olasode Press.

Waardenburg, J. (1999). *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter.

1.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Reasons for the Study of Religion

- It emancipates from ignorance
- It leads to acquisition of knowledge and information
- It transfers a good number of skills
- It fundamentally leads to appreciation of God and fellow human beings.

Answer to SAE 2

2. Areas of Study in Religion

- Biblical Studies
- Theological Studies
- Comparative Studies of Religion
- Historical Studies of Religion
- Ethics, Morality and Social Issues

1.11 Glossary-

Emancipate- Set free, or free from

UNIT 2 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 Personal or Human Requirements
- 2.4 Basic Material Requirements
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 2.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 2.8 Glossary

2.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, you have learnt about the specializations or fields in Christian Religious Studies in Unit 1. By now you should have observed that religion is a broad area of learning. In this Unit, we shall look at the personal or human and the material requirements needed for the meaningful study of religion. Let us address the demands of learning outcomes before this major task before us in this Unit.

2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Identify and discuss the human requirement for the study of religion
- List and explain the necessary material items needed for the study of religion

2.3 Personal or Human Requirements

It is appropriate to state at this point that the study of religion is a study of man, culture and society when well understood. As such, people who must engage in such academic field must meet up certain requirements.

Openness- There is need to come with the right mindset to the discipline of religion. On several occasions, we shall come across unpopular, strange or different views from members of a religious tradition we are not part of. Their actions may present itself as a shock to you and what you have learnt over the years. You are expected to pay attention to such actions.

Objectivity- We should not come with preconceived notions of other religions. You should not use the understanding of your religious tradition to judge others to avoid a usual barrier to understanding others.

Caution- The study of religion is essentially about people's belief systems and ways of life. Wisdom demands that we adequate effort is made to show sensitivity to people's beliefs and shared valued ways of life. People hold their religions so dear, we as students of their religion must show similar respect for their faiths in order to gain access to their heritage.

Carefulness- As a student of religion, you are to be empathetic to the traditions of others as religion has shaped the lives of many and conditioned their realities. When in contact with people of other religions, you are to be careful through observation and application of your knowledge of their likes and dislikes. For instance, you are not to insist on certain actions when you are amongst such people by not pulling of your shoes if the religious adherents demand that, or forbids any one from snapping photographs of some religious sites or objects.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Discuss personal or human requirements for the study of religion?

2.4 Basic Material Requirements

You should know that relevant **writing materials, tape recorder** and **video recorder** are very helpful in studying religion as a human and social activity. These three forms of materials are appropriate only in a limited sense. For example, writing material cannot not capture performances like dance, meditation, prayer or sacrifice postures adequately, even if they try to describe them. Also, tape recorders will help you far beyond what handwritten documentation can avail you.

Activity 1

How would you convince members of your community that the study of religion is a scientific subject that requires concrete materials to study?

2.5 Summary

We have seen human and material as the two categories of requirements essential for the study of religion. Openness, objectivity, cautious, and carefulness were identified as the necessary human requirements for the study of religion. On the other hand, appropriate writing materials, tape

recorder and video recorder are basic materials needed to study man's religious tradition.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Explain the basic materials required in studying religion?

2.6 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.

Hopfe, L. M. (1994). *Religions of the World* (6th Edition). New York/Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Toronto: Macmillan College Publishing Company.

Matthews, Warren. 1998. *World Religions*. West Publishing Company, New York, Los Angeles & San Francisco.

Onibere, O. (1981). *Rudimentary Study of Religion*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Olasode Press.

Waardenburg, J. (1999). *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter.

2.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Personal or human requirements for the study of religion?
 - Openness
 - Objectivity
 - Caution
 - Carefulness

Answer to SAE 2

2. Basic materials required in studying religion
 - Writing materials
 - Tape recorder
 - Video recorder

2.8 Glossary-

Preconceived notion- An opinion formed beforehand without adequate evidence.

UNIT 3 PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 The Nature of Religion
- 3.4 Personal Biases
- 3.5 Social Problems
- 3.6 Political Problems
- 3.7 Economic Problems
- 3.8 Summary
- 3.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 3.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 3.11 Glossary

3.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, you are welcome to unit 2 of our discussion. In unit 1, we were exposed to the human and material requirements for the study of religion. In this Unit, we shall give adequate attention to various problems that learners are confronted with when they study human religious belief systems. Before we begin to address them, let us consider our learning outcomes.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Identify problems faced when studying religion because of its nature
- Mention the obstacles that personal biases pose to the study of religion
- Discuss social issues involved in the study of religion
- Explain the political dimension to the study of religion
- Examine the economic challenges posed by the study of religion

3.3 The Nature of Religion

Religion as a belief system has so much to do with the supernatural, a realm that is beyond human understanding. Also, religion is a subjective issue that is restricted to peoples' beliefs and values. This makes it difficult for some form of scientific investigation into religion, especially at the level of verification of some religious facts. On the

other hand, other aspects of religion are open to verification especially when the behavioural outcomes from such beliefs impact human behaviours. Practices that are observable, institutions that are organized, and behaviours that emanate from religious beliefs and activities are also valid realities in religious studies. So that, while it may be difficult to study the supernatural realm, the human and social aspects of religion can be studied scientifically.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Identify the problem faced when studying religion because of its nature?

3.4 Personal Biases

You have to know that some students and scholars of religion hardly separate their bias from their academic study. A Christian studying Islam is often tempted to approach the various themes in Islam from a Christian orientation and vice versa. Easily, Muslim scholars of religion often criticise Christians as not being true monotheist for having three gods; God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The underlining religious logic or worldview that allows for certain practices are ignored or discarded by non-believing scholars and this affects the quality of study of religion.

3.5 Social Problems

Societal issues are often issues of religious concerns because religious systems are interested in man affairs. This sociological dimension of religion often makes it difficult to separate it from general social issues. In fact, social norms, values and laws, often draw legitimacy from religion thus making it perpetually difficult to demarcate them.

3.6 Political Problems

Religion and politics are intricately connected that scholarly generally see them as two sides of a coin. The distinction between political religion and religious politics continues to pose a confusion for students and scholar alike. For instance, Boko Haram terrorism and insurgency has kept learners wondering if it is a religious terrorism for political ends or a political violence towards religious ends.

3.7 Economic Problems

You have to know that people often conceive of economic from a monetary perspective. Thus, in the economics of research and knowledge industry, resources are often committed to non-religious or

secular fields with the assumption that they are the necessary areas that can impact the national and global economy. The misplacement of value and societal priorities have largely led to this situation of poor funding for religious researches despite their wide application and utility. It may be good to announce to you that this poor financing of religious researches is becoming a thing of old with global resurgence in religion as social, political and policy issue.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Identify problems faced when studying religion?

3.8 Summary

In this Unit of our discussion, we have identified some core problems facing the study of religion as a result of its nature characterised by focus on the supernatural realms and depicted by subjectivity. Personal biases, social issues, political dimension and economic challenges were also examined.

3.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

- Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.
- Goring, R. (ed.) (1992). *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Ware, Herefordshire: Wordsworth Reference.
- Onibere, O. (1981). *Rudimentary Study of Religion*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Olasode Press.
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3.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Problem faced when studying religion because of its nature?

- Religion has to do with the supernatural
- It is a subjective issue

Answer to SAE 2

2. Problems faced when studying religion

- Personal biases connote some students and scholars not separating the religious bias from their study
- Social problems are tied to religious concerns
- The demarcation between politics and religion is one challenge
- Economic resources are not well disbursed to pursue researchers in religion due to misplacement of value

3.12 Glossary-

Intricately- With elaboration

UNIT 4 THEORIES OF ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Classifying the Theories of the Origin of Religion
- 4.4 Historical Theories
- 4.5 Revelatory Theories
- 4.6 Anthropological Theories
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
(Note: SAEs should come after each main section/sub-section. At least 3 SAEs should be embedded within the unit)
- 4.10. Glossary

4.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, I hope you made the most from our Unit 3 discussion. By now you should have understood clearly that religious studies is associated with some problems as a branch of knowledge. In this Unit, we shall look theories of the origin of religion. Before we address them, let us consider our learning outcomes.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Mention different theories of religion
- Explain the various theories of religion
- Compare each theory of the origin of religion

4.3 Classifying the Theories of the Origin of Religion

We had early mentioned religious experience and religious expression in a previous Unit. These two concepts will be very helpful in showing us how theories of origin of religion are developed. You will recall that religious experience are the moments of awakening, great realization and encounters that individuals have with divine beings or other supernatural realities. Such encounters are usually so powerful that they can re-order the course of individual and collective history. More importantly, such experiences influences religious expressions.

On the other hand, religious expressions are operational through three aspects; theoretical, practical and sociological forms.

- **The Theoretical** captures the words, ideas like doctrines, myths, lore in religious traditions.
- **The Practical** is expressed through acts of worship, rite, prayer, mediation, and pilgrimage.
- **The Sociological** aspect expresses or captures religious groups, institutions, social relations within a faith tradition and between the religious tradition with the wider society structure.

Activity 1

Do you think there can be religious expressions in the absence of religious experiences? If your answer is yes, what conditions can give rise to that?

4.4 Historical Theories

We shall use the contributions from evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin and Euhemerism to reflect on historical theories of the origin of religion.

Darwinism - Charles Darwin is famous for his book on ‘the origin of the species’, a work on evolutionary biology. He postulated that everything in the world begin in a small or simpler form and gradually through the process of evolution, grew into something more complex or advanced over time. It is very good to know that Darwin was not alone on his mode of thinking, others in the humanities and social sciences drew inspiration from his work.

In the field of religion, Darwin’s evolutionary theory implies that religion developed from very simple structures and forms only to become complex through some historical forces. This view has influenced scholars of religion to engage in studies of indigenous societies to understand religious life of people in the past.

You have to know that this view is in opposition to creationism which holds that then universe and all things were created by God. Also, it has been criticized for not acknowledging that humans have revelation of divine beings as the origin of religion. In addition, this theory does not appreciate the fact that humans as cultural beings have what it takes to evolve rituals and symbols for society’s use. The forms that religions may take with respect to the object of worship was not also captured by this theory.

Euhemerism – This theory holds that the idea of God was evolved by humans from heroic stories of great individuals. Such that what people conceive as God is merely mortals raised to such rank because of their achievement. The personal history of a great king named Zeus who travelled round the world to setup worship of gods is one good example. This is because Zeus ended up building a temple for himself and a cult as Zeus Triphylis.

Another example was drawn from Egypt. The origin of religion was tied to some deified heroes from Egypt after their death. Some even attained such status while they were still alive.

In its criticism, this theory did not actually address the origin of religion as a faith tradition. Also, some religions have room for deified beings separated from gods or spirit, so this view is inadequate. In addition, the experiences both individual and group, that people have in various religions is not mentioned. Lastly, the differences between polytheism and monotheism were not accounted for.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Compare Darwinism and Euhemerism as evolutionary theories of religion's origin

4.5 Revelatory Theories

Do you know that the concept of revelation talks about self-disclosure of the divine? Yes, it is God revealing himself to humans. Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade and Emil Brunner are three scholars we shall consider their theological views of revelation as a theory of origin of religion.

Rudolf Otto

As a philosophical theologian and systematic theologian, Rudolf Otto was interested in explaining the experience of humans with the divine. He describes the divine as the numinous and observes that when humans encounter this numinous, they fear and tremble. He used the words *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* to capture this experience in Latin language. It means a terrifying mystery and a fascinating mystery. He further explained these side-effects of human experience of the divine. First, a human that encounters the divine feels a sense of self-abasement, inadequacy, and a feeling of awesomeness. On the second note, humans at the presence of the divine feel a sense of attraction like a magnetic force pulling them to such divine beings when individuals come in contact with them. The biblical story of Moses at the sight of the burning bush is a very good example of such experience. Thus, theory

by Otto is quite revealing of religion's essence, by showing the intrinsic qualities in the experience of divine beings.

Criticism

Unfortunately, the theory did not address the origin of religion. Secondly, the divine is depicted as fearful and inaccessible to human which is why people approach the divine through intermediaries.

Mircea Eliade

He identified humans as *homo religiosus* which means that man is a religious animal. Man for Eliade is motivated by the manifestation of divine beings. He drew his materials from archaic culture and discovered that many traditional people find meaning and value of their existence in some basic forms.

The divine reveals itself as different from other natural elements thereby making man to separate the sacred from the profane that is the divine and the everyday material things of this world. He further notes that the manifestation of the sacred is known as *hierophany*.

Activity 2

Compare *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and *hierophany*?

4.6 Anthropological Theories

Anthropology is the scientific study of man and his culture especially in primitive societies. We shall consider the anthropological views of three scholars on the origin of religion.

Edward Burnett Tylor (Animism)

It might interest you to know that animism is derived from a Latin word *anima* which means 'soul' or 'breath'. The term has come to be depicted as a belief in spiritual beings or the idea that everything in the world has a spirit in them. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, a British Anthropologist is one scholar who used this theory of animism to explain the origin of religion.

Tylor in his book on *Primitive Culture*, defined animism as general belief in spiritual beings found in all religions irrespective of their composition and level of development. He postulated that primitive people believe that spirits or souls are the cause of life in human beings. Tylor identifies soul as phantom which looks like vapour or shadows that is moveable from one person to another (transmigration). This movement of the soul can be from the dead to a living person, from and into plants, animals and lifeless objects. He attributed this phenomenon

by explaining it as the cause of sleep, dreams, trances, and death; the difference between a living and dead person; and the nature of the images people see in their dreams and trances.

Criticism

You will see that despite the simplicity of the views of Tylor, his theory of animism was heavily criticized by other anthropologists. For example, Robert R. Marett disagreed with Tylor's explanation because for him (Marett), primitive people could not have the intellectual ability to conceive of the workings of the soul. Marett suggested that religion should be more emotional and subject to guess work at its beginning.

Also, Marett rejected Tylor's view that all objects were regarded as being alive because they have a soul in them. Marett felt there should be a distinction by the primitive people between objects that have soul and the ones that don't.

In his final critique, Marett proposed the concept animatism or preanimism which means treating things that have life, feeling and a will of their own without separating the body of such objects and their soul, and this was an early stage that gave rise to Tylor's animism theory.

Emile Durkheim (Totemism)

The word *totem* is derived from the native North American language of Ojibwa. Totem is any plant or animal that a group of people considers to have a sacred relationship to. Totemism on the other hand, is a complex system of ideas, symbols, and practices based on a relationship between a group of people and any natural objects identified as their totem. Do you know that this practice is widespread globally? For example, it is found in America, Asia, Australia, and most African countries. In some countries within these continents, totems are regarded as a companion and helper to communities due to their supernatural powers. In turn, group of people in a relationship with such objects hold them in high regard to a point that they are venerated occasionally. It might interest you to note that some communities trace their ancestry to such objects and killing of such object are considered as taboo except for ritual purposes. Totems are largely considered symbols of a social group.

Emile Durkheim in his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* where he studied the Australian aborigines, showed that totems are very foundational to society because it serves as a source of collective representation and giving identity to a group of people.

Activity 2

What are the totems that are available in your clan and examine their social relevance.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Compare revelatory and anthropological theories of religion's origin?

Sir. James George Frazer (Magic)

Magic is derived from the ancient Persian word *magi*. A *magi* is a person that deals with the occult. Are you aware that magic as a religious concept is the art of influencing the course of event or gaining knowledge of supernatural means? Yes, it is essentially about man getting his will done through manipulation of natural elements. This phenomenon of magic is associated with alchemy, occultism, spiritism, superstition, and witchcraft. Anthropologists hold that magic is practiced in all known human cultures though it may come through different forms like fortune-telling, communication with the dead, astrology, and belief in lucky number and charms. Although society may be making progress in scientific and technological terms, the practice of magic hardly goes away rather it changes in expression and nomenclature over time. For example, alchemy serves as the foundation or earliest stage of modern-day medicine, while astrology led to modern day astronomy.

Categories of Magic

There are two basic types of magic. They are the **white or good magic** and the **black or evil magic**.

White or good magic- It entails the positive or beneficial use of magic for an individual or group. It is used to heal and nullify the effect of black magic. Astrology, hypnosis, and herbalism fall under this category.

Black or evil magic- it is invoked to kill or cause harm in general to an individual or a group. Witchcraft, sorcery and invocation of demons are manifestations of black magic.

Four Forms of Magical Practice

Sympathetic Magic- this form is based on symbolism and wish fulfilment. Here the desired effects are accomplished by imitation or by making use of associated objects. An object is used to cast a spell. The quality of an animal can be acquired by consuming such an animal or using an aspect of its body to get at certain ends.

Divination- it is the acquisition of secret knowledge by casting of lots, interpreting omens, interpreting the position of the stars and planets and inspired utterances by people in a state of trance.,

Thaumaturgy- This has to do with wonderworking that may come in the form of alchemy, witchcraft or sorcery.

Incantation- this has to do with the chanting of spells, verses, or formulas that contain the names of supernatural beings or of people who are to be helped or injured.

Frazer in one of his books, *The Golden Bough* where he studied ancient cults, rites, and myths and their Christian equivalent. Frazer holds that in the evolution of culture, society will go through three stages of magic to religion and finally move to science.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Mention the forms of magic?

4.7 Summary

We have considered seven categories of theories of religion's origin. Historical theories with focus on **Darwinism**, **Euhemerism**, revelatory theories based on **Rudolf Otto** and **Mircea Eliade** and anthropological theories derived from Animism by **Edward Burnett Tylor**, Totemism by **Emile Durkheim** and magic by **Sir James George Frazer**.

4.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources

- Connolly, P. (Ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell
- Goring, R. (Ed.) (1992). *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Herefordshire: Wordsworth Reference, Ware.
- Hopfe, L. M. (1994). *Religions of the World* (6th Edition). Toronto: Macmillan College Publishing Company.
- Matthews, W. (1998). *World Religions*. New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco: West Publishing Company.
- Waardenburg, J. (1999). *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.

4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs)

Answer to SAE 1

1. Compare Darwinism and Euhemerism
 - In the field of religion, Darwin's evolutionary theory implies that religion developed from very simple structures and forms only to become complex through some historical forces.
 - This theory holds that the idea of God was evolved by humans from heroic stories of great individuals.

Answer to SAE 2

2. Compare revelatory and anthropological theories of religion's origin

Revelatory Theories

- Rudolf Otto explained the experience of humans with the divine
- He describes the divine as the numinous and observes that when humans encounter this numinous, they fear and tremble.
- He used the words *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* to capture this experience.
- Mircea Eliade sees humans as *homo religiosus* which means that man is a religious animal.
- Man for Eliade is motivated by the manifestation of divine beings.
- Drawing materials from archaic cultures, he discovered that many traditional people find meaning and value of their existence in some basic forms.
- The divine reveals itself as different from other natural elements and he called it *hierophany*.

Anthropological Theories

- Edward B. Tylor's theory was built on animism
- Animism is derived from *anima* which means soul
- It is a belief in spiritual beings
- Primitive people believe that spirits or souls are the cause of life of humans
- The movement of the soul can be from dead to the living, from plants too, to animals and other lifeless objects
- Emile Durkheim talks about totems
- Totems are plants or animals that a group of people have a sacred relationship with.
- Totems are venerated occasionally because they are held in high regard
- Totems are very foundational to society because they serve as a source of collective representation and giving identity to a group of people
- James George Frazer sees magic as a religious concept and an act of influence nature or gaining knowledge of supernatural realities

- In magic, man gets his will through manipulation of natural elements
- It is associated with alchemy, occultism, spiritism, superstition, and witchcraft
- The practice of magic hardly goes away rather it changes in expression and nomenclature over time.

Answer to SAE 3**3. The forms of magic**

- Sympathetic magic
- Divination
- Thaumaturgy
- Incantation

4.10 Glossary-

Intrinsic- Belonging to a thing by its very nature

Australian aborigine- A Dark-skinned member of a race of people living in

UNIT 5 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Unit Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Learning Outcomes
- 5.3 Religious Pluralism, Diversity and Tolerance
- 5.4 The Pervasiveness of Religious Diversity
- 5.5 Religious Diversity and Justified Beliefs
- 5.6 Religious Diversity in Public Education
- 5.7 Summary
- 5.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 5.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 5.10. Glossary

5.1 Introduction

Hello dear student, I hope you made very good use of your Unit 4 discussions. We just finished with some theories of origin of religion. In this Unit, we shall look forward to religious pluralism, diversity and tolerance. Before we go into them, let us consider the learning outcome.

5.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Examine the concept of Religious Pluralism, Diversity and Tolerance
- Discuss conditions for the Existence of Religious Pluralism
- Highlight the Pervasiveness of Religious Diversity
- Discuss Religious Diversity and Justified Belief
- Explain Religious Diversity in Public Education

5.3 Religious Pluralism, Diversity and Tolerance

Religious pluralism is defined as respecting the otherness of others and accepting the given uniqueness endowed to each one of us. It is a policy that acknowledge the fact that different belief systems are practiced in a society. It is very important that we note that the twenty first century world is pluralistic, diverse and highly globalized. Different people are having contacts with people who do not come from their cultural background.

Religious toleration is the absence of religious persecution and does not necessarily preclude religious discrimination. Religious intolerance is the practice of keeping others from acting in accordance with their religious beliefs. Religious pluralism is sometimes used interchangeably with interfaith dialogue. While interfaith dialogue is a dialogue between members of different religions for the goal of reducing conflicts between their religions and to achieve agreed upon mutually desirable goals.

Activity 1

Which of these do you think best describes Nigeria. A. Pluralism, B. Diversity and C. Tolerance. What are the totems that are available in your

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Explain the nature of religious pluralism and diversity

5.4 Conditions for the Existence of Religious Pluralism

- Religious tolerance
- Relativism
- The energetic engagement with diversity
- The active seeking of understanding across lines of difference
- The encounter of commitments
- Based on dialogue

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Identify conditions for the existence of religious pluralism?

5.5 The Pervasiveness of Religious Diversity

Religious diversity exists most at the level of basic theistic systems. Different religions hold different views of God. Some conceive of God as a personal being, while others deny existence of God.

5.6 Religious Diversity and Justified Beliefs

All parties are not assessing the same body of evidence, as such it will be difficult to claim religious truth or compete over them. Religion pertains to a person's understanding and social reality; it is very impossible to adjudicate such as untrue. Every person is free to hold whatever religious view as they deem fit.

5.7 Religious Diversity in Public Education

Schools are places of learning with students drawn from various cultural backgrounds and faith traditions. In the Western world, there is a debate over the clothes, holidays and subjects taught with respect to indoctrination. Wearing of hijab, religion-based holidays and teaching of a particular faith tradition are matters that affect the constitution, human rights and policy on religious diversity of countries around the world.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Explain Religious Diversity in Public Education

5.8 Summary

We have considered religious pluralism as an important policy in our globalizing world. It demands a knowledge of difference and appreciation of others. Tolerance is demanded in in religiously plural and diverse societies. Religions are so diverse that there are internal differences within them and between them even as it concerns belief about God. Educational institutions also are faced with this issue of religious diversity as uniform, public holiday and curriculum taught captures this reality in Western societies.

5.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

- Arthur, C. (2000). *Religious Pluralism: A Metaphorical Approach*. The Davies Group Publishers.
- Basinger, D., (1991). "Divine Omniscience and the Soteriological Problem of Evil: Is the Type of Knowledge God Possesses Relevant?" *Religious Studies*, 28: 1–18.
- D'Costa, G. (1986). *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

5.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. The nature of religious pluralism and diversity
 - Religious pluralism is respecting the otherness of others and accepting the given uniqueness endowed to each one of us
 - It is a policy that acknowledges the fact that different belief systems are practiced in a society
 - Different people are having contacts with people who do not come from their cultural backgrounds.
 - It is very important that we note that the twenty first century world is pluralistic, diverse and highly globalized.

Answer to SAE 2

2. Conditions for the Existence of Religious Pluralism

- Religious tolerance
- Relativism
- The energetic engagement with diversity
- The active seeking of understanding across lines of difference
- The encounter of commitments
- Based on dialogue

Answer to SAE 3

3. Religious Diversity in Public Education

- Schools are places of learning with students drawn from various cultural backgrounds and faith traditions
- In the Western world, there is a debate over the clothes, holidays and subjects taught because of religious diversity.
- Wearing of hijab, observing religion-based holidays and teaching of a particular faith tradition are matters that affect the constitution, human rights and policy on religious diversity of countries

5.11 Glossary

Curriculum- An integrated course of academic studies

Globalization – Growth to a global or worldwide scale

MODULE 3

Unit 1	World Religious Traditions I
Unit 2	World Religious Traditions II
Unit 3	Structure of Religion
Unit 4	Religious Agencies and Specialists
Unit 5	Religion and Other Institutions
Unit 6	Functions of Religion

UNIT 1 WORLD RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS I**Unit Structure**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning Outcomes
- 1.3 Brief History of World Religious Traditions
- 1.4 Hinduism
- 1.5 Buddhism
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 1.9. Glossary

1.1 Introduction

Hello dear student! We have been looking at various issues around the phenomenon of religion so far. In this last Module we shall devote our attention to religious traditions in the world. Our focus will be on their historical background, creeds, tenets, social dimension, ethics, and specialists. Let us consider the learning outcomes of this Unit.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Mention the various religious traditions of the world
- Narrate the historical background of any religious tradition
- Explain the features of any religious tradition
- Compare various religious traditions
- Highlight the social dimensions of religious traditions
- Discuss the role of religious specialists

1.3 Brief History of World Religious Traditions

As a twenty first century global citizen, you are already aware that different people populate the world. The various people express diverse backgrounds, behaviour, attitudes, ideologies and religious inclinations. Religions of the world emerge from different geographies and culture areas but adherent of these religions are not restricted to their places of origin. They migrate with their beliefs and export it across the world. Also, some religions have a desire to spread their tradition to others through preaching. There are over ten thousand known religious traditions in the world, but a smaller number is identified as world religion because of their large followership and spread across the seven continents of the world. These religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

1.4 Hinduism

Do you know that Hinduism is one of the oldest religions of the world that originated from India? It is a religion of the Hindus. The word Hindu is derived from the river Sindhu or Indus around a geography referred to as Al-Hind. Europeans use the word Hinduism to describe the beliefs and practices of those living in India. But the Hindu themselves prefer the Sanskrit term *Sanatana Dharma* to call their religious tradition and the English equivalent of this term is “eternal tradition” or “eternal religion”.

Hinduism has moved beyond India, its country of origin. It can be found in Nepal, Bali, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, East Africa and South Africa. India. With over 110 million of followers in India and other parts of the world, Hinduism is the third largest religion after Christianity and Islam. It is good to observe that, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism all emerged from Hinduism.

Characteristics of Hinduism

Belief in Brahman: The Ultimate Reality- Brahman is the source of all things, it is the universal soul and the unchanging permanent reality. It is not a God and is referred to as ‘It’.

Belief in Reincarnation- Samsara is the belief in birth, death and rebirth. It is continuous movement from different life forms based on the Karma of a person. Karma is the balance between a person’s good and bad actions. It determines the life form that a person will take. For example, if a person has a negative karmic outcome such a person may return to the world as a tree or plant.

Belief in Karma- Karma is the law of cause and effect, action and reaction. It is the balance between a person's good and bad actions. It is the determinant of the life form that a person will take. Selfless actions, yoga (exercises that disciplines a person's body), purification practices and devotion are activities that can free a person from negative karma.

Belief in Yoga- It is the discipline of action and a way of achieving mastery over the mind and body by means of exercise. It aims to cut one from the passing world (*maya*) and concentrate on that which is not passing but real and eternal (Brahman). There are four types of Yoga. Karma Yoga (discipline action recommended by ones' caste), Jnana yoga (discipline of knowledge), Bhakti yoga (exclusivist devotion to divine beings) and Raja yoga (discipline of thought through breathing and posture). A well-balanced personality might well employ all four. These yogas are sometimes called *margas* (paths), suggesting that the same destination can be approached by more than one route, and indeed by more than one mode of travel.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Identify the characteristics of Hinduism?

1.5 Buddhism

Do you know that Buddhism is another world religion that emerged from India? Yes, it emerged from northeast India. Its founder was Siddhartha Gautama who later became the Buddha after his enlightenment. As a religion that grew out of the India sub-continent, it shares most of the beliefs in Hinduism but had a number of distinctions. For example, the Buddha rejected some aspects of the Brahmanic ideas and challenged the authority of priests, denied the truthfulness of the Vedic (Hindu scripture), and rejected the sacrificial cults tied to it.

Siddhartha, as a young prince, was born in 560 BC to a ruler from the Sakya clan. He was born into a family of luxury. He married early at the age 16 to a princess called Yasodara that bore him a son named Rahula. Faced with the existential problem of a sick man, an old beggar and a dead man. This led him to abandon his pleasures and comfort to seek for answers these problems. Through self-denial and discipline and later meditation, he attained Nirvana, a state of bliss and perfect peace. The religion has spread beyond the Indian sub-continent to countries like Thailand, China, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and America.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Discuss the factors that led to the emergence of Buddhism?

Features of Buddhism

The Four Noble Truths- The four noble truths in Buddhism are

- a) All of life is suffering
- b) The cause of suffering is desire or craving
- c) Suffering ceases when desire or craving ceases
- d) There is an eightfold path to Nirvana

The Eightfold Path- This is the path that leads to suppression of suffering or Nirvana. They are;

- a) Right view
- b) Right resolve
- c) Right speech
- d) Right action
- e) Right means of livelihood
- f) Right endeavour
- g) Right mindfulness
- h) Right concentration

The Tipitaka- It is the sacred texts of Buddhism that comprises of 31 books which are organized into three collections. They are; Vinaya Pitaka (basket of discipline), the Sutta Pitaka (basket of discourse) and Abhidhamma Pitaka (basket of ultimate doctrines)

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Discuss the features of Buddhism?

1.6 Summary

There are different religious traditions in the world that emerge from different geographies and culture areas. Hinduism and Buddhism are two religious traditions that emerged from India. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions with a very large followership. It is currently the third largest after Christianity and Islam. Hinduism has no founder unlike Buddhism that has Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) as its founder. The essence of Buddhism is Nirvana, four noble truths and eightfold paths are central to the religion.

1.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Huston S. (1965). *The Religions of Man*. New York: Harper & Row.

Electronic Source

Microsoft Encarta Premium 2006 edition

1.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Characteristics of Hinduism
 - Belief in Brahman
 - Belief in Reincarnation
 - Belief in Karma
 - Belief in Yoga

Answer to SAE 2

2. Factors that led to the emergence of Buddhism
 - Buddhism emerged from northeast India
 - Its founder was Siddhartha Gautama who later became the Buddha after his enlightenment
 - It shares most of the believes in Hinduism but had a number of distinctions.
 - Siddhartha was born into a family of luxury.
 - He married early at the age 16 to a princess called Yasodara that bore him a son named Rahula.
 - Faced with the existential problem of a sick man, an old beggar and a dead man.
 - This led him to abandon his pleasures and comfort to seek for answers these problems.
 - Through self-denial and discipline and later meditation, he attained Nirvana, a state of bliss and perfect peace.

Answer to SAE 3

3. Features of Buddhism
 - The Four Noble Truths
 - The Eightfold Path
 - Tipitaka

1.9 Glossary

Reincarnation- A second or new birth

UNIT 2 WORLD RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS II

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 Confucianism
- 2.4 Taoism
- 2.5 Islam
- 2.6 Judaism
- 2.7 Christianity
- 2.8 Summary
- 2.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 2.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 2.11. Glossary

Prohibition- Excluded from use

Compliance- Acting according to a certain accepted standard

2.1 Introduction

Hello dear students. Welcome to this unit where we shall be discussing more on the religious traditions of the world. We have previously looked at Hinduism and Buddhism. In this Unit, we shall consider Confucianism, Taoism, Islam and Christianity. Before we address them, let us take a moment to state out learning outcomes.

2.2 Learning Outcomes

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

- Mention various religious traditions of the world
- Narrate the historical background of any religious traditions
- Discuss features of any of these religions
- Compare each of these religions

2.3 Confucianism

The religion was founded by Confucius otherwise called Kongfuzi, a Chinese philosopher. He was born in the state of Lu. His original name is Kong Qui. He lost his father three years after his birth and was raised by his poor mother who managed to give him quality education. He married at the age of 19 and had a son and two daughters. With the

death of his mother in 527 BC, he went into a season of mourning and later started a teaching career which made him to move from one place to the other. His popularity increased as he was famous for his teaching methods of asking questions and concern for ancient traditions and customs.

In his days, there was widespread breakdown of law and order in China and that led him to focus his teachings on public morality and civic education. He focused more on the practical and ethical aspects of the people's lives, than the religious. He taught reverence for parents, the living and the dead. He called all individuals to take their duties to the seriously. After some time, his teachings became very popular in all of China to a point that at his death, a public tomb was erected for him and Emperors pay visit to his burial site.

Note that his teachings were contained in nine ancient Chinese works. The Writings can be divided into the **five classics** (*Wujing*) and the **four books** (*Sishu*). The Five Classics has the books of change, documents, poetry, rites and spring and autumn annals. The Four Books comprise of sayings of Confucius, Mencius and commentaries by followers. *Li* and *Ren* and two important teachings of Confucius. *Li* are rites that move the heart of men. *Ren* is understood as love, goodness, fellow-feeling or human-heartedness.

Confucius advocate for a society with rulers that cultivate moral perfection in order to set a good example to the people. A ruler must be benevolent or kind and honourable, while the followers must be respectful and obedient.

Activity 1

With the kind of problems currently faced by the Nigerian society, do you think there are new forms of religious traditions that are emerging to address such problems?

2.4 Taoism

Another Chinese religion is Taoism also known as Daoism. It emerged in the 4th century BC with philosophical and religious components. Laotzi is the founder of this religious tradition sometime AD 142 through a revelation in Sichuan Mountain. Daoism is a thriving creed interwoven with Chinese popular culture.

Taoism preached self-cultivation and withdrawal to private life. With focus on mysticism and contemplative exercises (just like yoga). The ideas of Tao were reduced to a religious formula and the common people in society were more disposed to this brand of the religion as

they approach it through magic and rituals in their attempt to harness power (Te). The focus on power by popular Taoist is that over death. This branch of the religion preoccupy itself with issues of immortality with well-established rituals related to death, incarnation, spells, charms, necromancy, spiritism, divination, and sorcery. Officiating priests and places of worship abound in this brand of the religion. These priests preoccupy themselves with solutions to human problems of diseases, sicknesses, and exorcism (freeing from evil spirits). The Tao Te Ching (the holy book of Tao) has its own magical powers that Taoist priest employ its powers to free people and places of evil spirits habitation. Such ceremonies (magical rites) are usually noisy.

2.5 Islam

Islam is derived from an Arabic word *islam* which means “surrender” or “submission” to the will of God”. A person who surrenders to God is called Muslim. To become a Muslim, one must make a specific recitation. This recitation or statement of faith is called ‘*shahadah*’. It goes this way, “*I witness that there is no god but God [Allah] and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God*”.

Are you aware that Muslims believe that Islam began with the practice of monotheism beginning from prophets Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa) and Jesus (Isa), even though it historically emerged in the 7th century with prophet Mohammed. Such that, the holy book of Islam, the Qur’an, sees Abraham as a Muslim. There is a popular view by Muslims that followers of these and other prophets have corrupted their original teachings and it is for such reason that God through an act of mercy had to send prophet Mohammed as the last and greatest of all Prophets with the final message for humanity.

Features of Islam

- **The Five Duties**
 - a) **Shahadah**- It is bearing witness to the unity and uniqueness of God and acknowledging Muhammad as His prophet
 - b) **Salat**- It Prayer five times a day and specific times
 - c) **Sawn**- It fasting during month of Ramadan
 - d) **Hajj**- It is going on pilgrimage to Mecca and the performance of certain rituals in and around the holy sites in Mecca.
 - e) **Zakat**- It requires all Muslims to pay certain amount of their earnings as alms to the poor and some other Muslims.

- **Other Obligatory Duties in Islam**
 - a) Eating of pork meat is prohibited
 - b) Consumption of alcohol is forbidden
 - c) Meat must be slaughtered in-line with approved ritual
 - d) Concerning the covering of head or face, some Muslims interpret the Qur'an to approve complete covering, while others disagree that the Qur'an does not require any such covering.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Enumerate the features of Islam

2.6 Judaism

It is an ethnic religion that belongs to the Jews. It originated from the land of Israel around the year C 1800 BC. The religious culture is carried with the Jews wherever they are found. The Jews are highly dispersed across the world especially due to invasion and conquest by different world powers. Most of the world's Jews are in North America, Israeli State, former Soviet Union, France and Britain among other European, Asia and very few of them reside in Africa.

Features of Judaism

- **Monotheism-** In Judaism, there is a strong belief in a single, transcendent God understood as the creator of the Universe and sustainer of the world.
- **Revealed Scripture (Torah)-** The Jewish scripture is known as Torah. The Torah is a revealed scripture that clearly captures God's commandments as it governs social relations and man's interaction with God.
- **Covenant-** Are you aware that the Jewish God entered into a relationship with the people of Israel at Sinai. The agreement captures the promise of God and the people's responsibility to enjoy such promises. For example, God promised to be their God and bless them, while on the part of the people they are to obey God's commandments. Natural events and human history have been interpreted by the Jews to be determined by their compliance with the covenant.
- **Rabbinic Tradition-** Contemporary Judaism is derived from the rabbinic movements of the first century in Palestine and Babylonia. The term Rabbinic Judaism is used to describe the religion from this period. A Rabbi is a teacher in the Aramaic and Hebrew languages. They are well renown for thorough study of

the Jewish scripture. The Torah as a revealed scripture to Moses on Mount Sinai, is considered to have two versions; the written and oral Torah. While the written version is read and studied, the oral version is transmitted by word of mouth from one teacher to his students. The written Torah is called Talmud because it is studied, while the Oral Torah is called Mishnah because it is learnt and memorized.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Discuss the features of Judaism?

2.7 Christianity

Christianity is the most populated religion of the world. It is found in all continents of the globe. It has Christ as its founder and began in Israel, Palestine in 33 AD. Like Judaism that it sprang out from, Christianity is a monotheistic religion with a God that is understood to be three persons in One; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Like the God of Judaism, the Christian God is the source of all creature and the universe that houses them.

Features of Christianity

Creeds- They are authoritative summaries of the major articles of faith. It is a common practice that when religions develop, their core doctrines are further explained to suit their experience. Regrettably, such explanations give rise to differences in opinion and new religious groups can emerge at such moments.

In Roman Catholic Christianity, the Apostolic Creed, Nicene and the Athanasian Creed are common, while Augsburg Confession is accepted by Lutherans.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Discuss Christianity and its features?

2.8 Summary

From our discussion so far, we can see that Confucianism is a Chinese religion that emerged at a time of disorder and lawlessness. The religion was founded by Kongfuzi, a Chinese Philosopher. The five classics and four books are central to the belief and practices in Confucianism.

Taoism on the other hand, can also be called Daoism. It is like the other side of Confucianism with created religious components.

Islam is third largest religion in the world. It is a monotheistic religion that has Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah. The five pillars are central to the teaching of Islam.

Judaism is an ethnic religion of the Jews. The Torah (scripture) and Talmud (oral traditions) are central to the religion.

Christianity is the largest religion in the world with following found across the seven continents. It is a monotheistic religion with three persons in one God. Different Christian groups have their own acceptable creed that determines their faith.

2.9 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Huston, S. (1965). *The Religions of Man*. New York: Harper & Row.

Electronic Source

Microsoft Encarta Premium 2006 edition.

2.10 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Features of Islam
 - Shahadah
 - Salat
 - Sawm
 - Hajj
 - Zakat

Answer to SAE 2

2. Features of Judaism
 - Monotheism
 - Revealed Scripture
 - Covenant
 - Rabbinic Tradition

Answer to SAE 3

3. Christianity and its features
 - Christianity is the most populated religion of the world
 - It has Christ as its founder and began in Israel, Palestine in 33 AD
 - Christianity is a monotheistic religion with a God that is understood to be three persons in One
 - Creeds are authoritative summaries of the major articles of faith
 - In Roman Catholic C the Apostolic Creed, Nicene and the Athanasian Creed are common
 - Augsburg Confession is accepted by Lutherans.

2.11. Glossary

Prohibited – Excluded from use

Compliance – Acting according to certain accepted standards

UNIT 3 STRUCTURE OF RELIGION

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Outcomes
- 3.3 The Structure of Religion
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 3.7 Glossary

3.1 Introduction

You have studied some world religions in our previous unit. In this unit, we shall consider the structure of religion. Before we go into that, let us state our learning outcomes.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss traditionalism as a structure of religion
- Define and explain myths and symbols
- Explain the concept of salvation
- Highlight the role of sacred places in religion

3.3 The Structure of Religion

Traditionalism- This aspect of religion speaks of the tendency to always look backwards to a perfect past in the history of a religious tradition. For religions that have scriptures, they often desire to return to the original texts as they reflect on the life and words of their founders. While those religions without scriptures or founders, their desire is to go back to their ancient ways of life as preserved by oral traditions. This backward-looking movement helps the religion to remain focused on its original intention for mankind, despite the changes in society. In fact, at times of reform, it is mainly to reconnect believers to such past but pure time in the history of a religious tradition.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Discuss traditionalism as a structure of religion?

Myths and Symbols- Myths are stories or fables that help a people understand the world and their place in it. It may interest you to note that myths are religious by nature. The origin of the world, the place of man in it and the expectations on social relations or human conducts are well captured by myths. Apart from nature, myths can also be about important individuals in the past that were very helpful to their community.

Symbols are not what they seem. They represent something other than themselves. They are very important in the religions of the world because they help to drive home some ideals and belief by making them more concrete.

Activity

When you look at the Nigerian Flag, do you sometimes wonder how that green and white colour represent the country and its peoples?

Concepts of Salvation- Man has always been in need of salvation. This is built on the grounds that man is inadequate and will always rely on some super-human or transcendental force to rescue him. Thus, every religion in the world offers one form of salvation or the other. The level of development of a society's culture often influences the area of religious salvation. So that, people have sought salvation from hunger, the natural forces, danger from the wild, diseases. Some more advanced religions seek salvation into economic prosperity and political power.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Explain the concept of salvation?

Sacred Places and Objects- I want you to know that one factor that distinguishes the phenomenon of religion from every other thing in the society is the **sacred** (things that are holy and separated) and **profane** (things that are normal or mundane that pertains to everyday things of this world). Sacred as the holy is what religion focuses on. This sacred could be associated with an object or a place. Worship places like Churches, Mosques, Temples, Shrines, Synagogues are considered sacred. Also, items such prayer materials, worship objects, sacrificial items, or beautification objects that serve religious purposes also enjoy sacred status.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Mention the functions of sacred places and objects?

3.4 Summary

We have considered in this unit the structure of religion. They include traditionalism, myths and symbols, concepts of salvation and sacred places and objects. Traditionalism speaks of religion's emphasis on the past glory days that makes them to withstand societal changes. Myths are important stories of the past that help to each people about the origin of the universe, the place of man in it and how people are to relate among themselves. Symbols on the other hand, are things that represent other things in the religious traditions of the world. They help to make difficult concepts or ideals simple for human comprehension. Salvation is a core function of religion no matter the level of development of a society's culture. Finally, sacred places and objects are found in religions. Sacred has to do with what is holy and separated. Examples are churches, mosques, temples, etc.

3.5 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Hopfe, L. M. (1994). *Religions of the World* (6th Edition). New York and Canada: Macmillan College Publishing Company.

Matthews, W. (1998). *World Religions*. New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco: West Publishing Company.

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3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Traditionalism as a structure of religion
 - This is a tendency to always look backwards to a perfect past in the history of a religious tradition
 - For religions that have scriptures, they often desire to return to the original texts as they reflect on the life and words of their founders
 - While those religions without scriptures or founders, their desire is to go back to their ancient ways of life.
 - This backward-looking movement helps the religion to remain focused on its original intention for mankind
 - It is mainly to reconnect believers to such past but pure time in the history of a religious tradition

Answer to SAE 2

2. Concept of salvation
 - Man has always been in need of salvation
 - Man is inadequate and will always rely on some super-human or transcendental force to rescue him
 - Every religion in the world offers one form of salvation or the other
 - Level of development of a society's culture often influences the area of religious salvation
 - People have sought salvation from hunger, the natural forces, danger from the wild, diseases
 - More advanced religions seek salvation into economic prosperity and political power.

Answer to SAE 3

3. Functions of sacred places and objects
 - Sacred as the holy is what religion focuses on
 - This sacred could be associated with an object or a place. Worship places like Churches, Mosques, Temples
 - Items such prayer materials, worship objects, sacrificial items, or beautification objects that serve religious purposes also enjoy sacred status.

3.7. Glossary

Transcendental – Existing outside of or not in accordance with nature

UNIT 4 RELIGIOUS AGENCIES AND SPECIALISTS

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Religious Agencies
- 4.4 Religious Agents
- 4.5 The Role of Religious Agents
- 4.6 Examples of Religious Agencies
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 4.10 Glossary

4.1 Introduction

Hello dear student! We have looked at the structure of religion in our previous unit. In this unit, we shall pay attention to religious agencies and religious agents. Before we engage these items, let us take a moment to state our learning outcome.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

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

- Explain religious agencies
- Define religious agents
- Highlight examples of religious agencies
- Discuss the role of religious agencies

4.3 Religious Agencies

Are you aware that faith-oriented groups are established to address various aspects of human, social and economic problems in the world. The welfare of humans is their purpose for establishment. Some restrict their services to only members of their religious group, while others allow all people to benefit from them. They cover areas like health, wealth creation and poverty eradication, education, food, security, peace, human rights, justice, humanitarian assistant, among others.

4.4 Religious Agents

Religious agents are individuals are a found within a religious agency. They are the persons that are instrumental for carrying out various

services to promote human welfare. These agents are not essentially clergies in their religion, even though they may be actors in service provision. But we must know that the majority of religious agents are made of committed adherents of their religion. They see is a a practical way to play out their religious convictions and values.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Define religious agencies?

4.5 The Role of Religious Agents

Social Development- One area that religious agencies contribute to human progress and well-being is social development. Here, religious agencies play the role of an ally or partner to government and other non-governmental; organization to improve the lives of people in society. Social amenities and basic needs are provided by religious agencies.

Refugee Settlement- At times of disasters or emergencies, religious agencies are very helpful to people that are passing through one pain or the other. Irrespective of the cause of the refugee crises, these faith-inspired agents advocate, mobilize, raise funds, and intervene by providing succor and care to people in difficult situations. Disasters like earthquakes, hurricane, flood, war, among other problems that lead to displacement and resettlement are addressed by faith-based organizations.

World Peace- You will agree with me that our world is continually faced with issues of conflict, violence and crimes of various degrees and costs to individuals and societies. Religious agencies are one major group that has committed with a high level of passion to seeking for ways to address the absence of peace in our world. They have their own notions of peace, they play effective role of peacemakers, peacebuilders and conflict resolution practitioners. Religious teachings are often tapped or employed to appeal to the hearts and minds of warring parties or disputants. In fact, they enjoy moral authority because of their connection to the sacred which makes them to challenge evil and speak truth to power. Their ability to operate at the grassroot and internationally, gives them practical relevance to the challenge of world peace.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Mention the roles of religious agencies in society?

4.6 Examples of Religious Agencies

World Council of Churches- The religious agency was founded in the year 2002 to assist the United Nations in confronting global social, environmental and conflict issues. The body seeks to maintain a close relationship between religious groups in general and the United Nations in particular.

International Red Cross Society- This is another religious agency that has a global presence. The body was established in the year 1864 at an international conference that held at Geneva, Switzerland. The group emerged as a response to the American Civil war and the Franco-German war. With presence in most countries of the world, the International Red Cross (the Christian) and Red Crescent (Islamic version) movement is committed to providing aid to civilians at times of war and other forms of disasters. It is the world's leading humanitarian organization.

Activity 1

Do you know of any religious agency in your state of resident? Reflect on how they are positively providing services to people.

4.7 Summary

We have seen in this unit that religions of the world are very much committed to the plight of people in society. They utilize faith-inspired agencies to address diverse challenges that people are passing through. Through social development, world peace and settlement of refugees, they continually impact the globe positive in favour of man.

4.8 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Albert, L. (2000). "Statement to the Millennium World Peace Summit" in Baha'i Topics, Baha'i International Community.

David, L. (2000). "Civil society and peacebuilding: The role of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone," available at cr@c-r.org

Stephanie J. N. (2005). "The Role of Religious Organizations in Refugee Assistance and Advocacy" being a seminar paper presented at the Centre for Comparative Immigration Studies, UCSD, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California.

Electronic Sources

Letter from the Chairman Office of Social Development & World Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, to Senators Joseph I. Lieberman and Rick Santorum, February 26, 2002, available at www.uscb.org.

4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Define religious agencies

These are groups that are established to address various aspects of human, social and economic problems in the world.

Answer to SAE 2

2. Roles of Religious Agents
 - Social development
 - Refugee settlement
 - World peace

4.10 Glossary

Faith-based Organizations- Charitable organizations or non-profits affiliated with areligious group or inspired by religious beliefs

Humanitarian Intervention- It is a means to prevent or stop a gross violation of human rights in a state, where such state is either incapable or unwilling to protect its own people or is actively prosecuting them.

UNIT 5 RELIGION AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Unit Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Learning Outcomes
- 5.3 Religion and Politics
- 5.4 Religion and Economy
- 5.5 Religion and Medicine
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 5.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 5.9. Glossary

5.1 Introduction

Hello dearest students! We have come a long way, making progress slowly but surely. In our previous unit, we considered religious agencies and religious agents. In this last unit of this course, we shall consider religion and other institutions of society. Before we consider the multiple relevance of religion to other social institutions of society, let us take a moment and state the learning outcomes.

5.2 Learning Outcomes

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

- Ascertain the relationship of religion on politics
- Evaluate the extent of religion's influence on the economy
- Explain the role of religion in medicine
- Trace the history of religion and its role in education

5.3 Religion and Politics

Religion and politics are two separate institutions with great influence on society. They have interfaced or mutually impacted themselves in the past and in our contemporary society. Different societies see the relationship between religion and society in different ways. Some hold that since they are different institutions with different functions, they should maintain their distinct roles.

Others hold that, there is no separation between both institutions as religion plays some political roles and politics involves a lot of religion. Most Western societies advocate for a separation of both spheres. Henry

VII, the King of England in the 16th century established a religious and political kingship when he established the church of England. The Pope is the religious head of all Catholics and the head of State of Vatican City.

The Muslim world and most of the African societies, still observe a close tie between both institutions. A political leader can also wield religious authority. In fact, kings as monarch are first chosen by the gods to represent his people before they are given the right to rule over them.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 1

Discuss the relationship between religion and politics?

5.4 Religion and Economy

Religion and economic institution also have close and mutually influencing ties. A classical Sociologist by name Max Weber showed in his major work that religion is instrumental for the economic values in society. He argued that religious teachings can make a people to be hardworking, economical, time conscious and rich. In fact, he felt the foundation of modern capitalism was built by protestant Christianity.

In Africa and other traditional societies, religious rituals and laws often guide and regulate economic activities. It is no out of place to find communities where sacrifices are made to one deity or the other for bountiful harvest. Even the forces of nature or natural elements are influenced for productive economy ventures.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Evaluate the extent of influence of religion on the economy?

5.5 Religion and Medicine

Religion and medicine have had an age-long relationship. First, medicine was practiced in the various religions of the world. In some cultures, especially in the Western world, there was an attempt to separate medicine from religion due to the advent of science. You know that even till this day that, healers, medicine men still operate in Africa. Traditional healers as they sometimes call them, are very active in providing healthcare to people in communities. The trend is that medicine grew out of religion in most societies. Among the Greeks and Africans, the story is the same.

Also, religious groups because of their interest in human wellbeing have continue to support modern medicine by building, equipping and training health workers. In the history of Christianity in Africa, especially in Nigeria, missionaries employed doctors, nurses and other health workers as part of their evangelical work. It is such that, the history of medicine in Nigeria cannot be written without due acknowledgement to religious groups.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Discuss the role of religion in medicine?

5.6 Religion and Education

Religion and education are two institutions that share so much in common. The desire to remove ignorance from humanity has made both religion and education to enlighten people. Religious thinkers have continually looked for ways to improve human knowledge. Great thinkers like Thomas Aquinas in the Christian tradition and countless others in the Muslim tradition exist.

Muslim and Christian missionaries utilized education as a strategy to win souls and equally improve humanity. A good number of schools were established by missionaries. Up till date, missionary good are found in Nigeria and sometimes people consider them very high in quality of teaching, learning and moral development.

Activity 1

Do you think education in Nigeria would have made any impact without the contributions of religious groups?

5.6 Summary

In this unit, we have seen the relationship between religion and some institutions of society. There is a very close relationship between religion and politics. They are two sides of a coin. Some society demand a separation of both spheres while others allow religion and politics to coexist. On another ground, religion is very influential on the economic life of a people. The work of Max Weber makes it very clear. Medicine as a practice has its origin in religion but due to the advent of science, it has grown to be a separate institution. That notwithstanding, religion still play health roles through faith-healers, trado-medicine and diviners. More importantly, religious groups are historically and contemporarily

committed to meeting the health needs of people. Education has been a tool of religious enhancement. Missionary activities in Nigeria have been marked by building of schools and general improvement of literacy.

5.7 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Aderibigbe, G. and Ayegboyin, D. (1997). *Religion: Study and Practice*. Ijebu-Ode:
Alamsek Press Ltd.

Davenport, E. (1951). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.
London: Allen & Unwin.

5.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Relationship between religion and politics
 - Religion and politics are two separate institutions with great influence on society
 - Different societies see the relationship between religion and society in different ways
 - Some hold that since they are different institutions with different functions, they should maintain their distinct roles
 - Others hold that there is no separation between both institutions as religion plays some political roles and politics involves a lot of religion
 - Most Western societies advocate for a separation of both spheres.
 - The Muslim world and most of the African societies, still observe a close tie between both institutions. A political leader can also wield religious authority.

Answer to SAE 2

2. Extent of influence of religion on the economy
 - Religion and economic institution also have close and mutually influential ties.
 - Max Weber in his work observe that religion is instrumental for the economic values of society
 - Religious teachings can make a people to be hardworking, economical, time conscious and rich
 - The foundation of modern capitalism was built by protestant Christianity.
 - **In Africa**, religious rituals and laws often guide and regulate economic activities

Answer to SAE 3

3. Role of religion in medicine
 - Medicine was practiced in the various religions of the world
 - Healers, medicine men still operate in Africa. Traditional healers as they sometimes call them, are very active in providing healthcare to people in communities
 - The trend is that medicine grew out of religion in most societies. Among the Greeks and Africans, the story is the same
 - In the history of Christianity in Africa, especially in Nigeria, missionaries employed doctors, nurses and other health workers as part of their evangelical work.
 - The history of medicine in Nigeria cannot be written without due acknowledgement to religious groups

5.9. Glossary

Monarch- A nation's ruler or head of state usually by hereditary rights

UNIT 6 FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

Unit Structure

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Learning Outcomes
- 6.3 Social Functions of Religion
- 6.4 The Psychological Functions of Religion
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)
- 6.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content
- 6.8. Glossary

6.1 Introduction

In our previous unit, we considered the relationship between religion and some social institutions of society. In this unit, we shall look into the functions of religion with special attention given to the social and psychological functions. But before we engage in this exciting task, let us take a moment to state the learning outcomes.

6.2 Learning Outcomes

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

- Mention and explain the social functions of religion
- Enumerate and discuss the psychological functions of religion.

6.3 Social Functions of Religion

Provide Support for Social Norms- For society to function properly there must be maintenance of social norms which serve as regulation of human lives. Standard of values that determines social actions or behaviours that a society considers right or wrong are derived from religion. Behaviour that society frown at or conducts that are praised are from the values that a religion holds dear. Here, social control of the society is a major duty of religion.

Provide Social Integration- Religion not only is a social phenomenon, it also integrates people socially. It serves as a uniting force and gives a people some common ground to look inward as they engage in common actions. As a shared practice, religion makes a community out of its adherents. The collective use of rituals is one major factor that has kept believers united.

Provide Stability- Religion serves as the anchor of society. It exhibits a stabilizing function for cultural in society. It is the presence of religion that makes human cultures resistant or very slow to change. It is the religious element of culture that ensures preservation of a people's ways of life. In the absence of this, social life will be not only difficult but equally impossible.

Provide Motivation- In one time or the other, people have been motivated by the faiths to engage in social actions and good works. Inspiration from religion has caused men and women to challenge evil in their land and in distant places. Such people have sacrificed all to make the world a better place. The world as we know it would have been a far worst place of pain and misery but for religiously motivated individuals and groups who take up one challenge or the other humanity's betterment.

Provide Interpretation of Important Life Cycles- There are four major stages that human life is marked by. They are birth, adulthood, marriage and death. Most societies attach great importance to these stages and perform elaborate rituals to celebrate them. Religion is not only interested in interpreting these stages, it also concerns itself with establishing the mode of celebration. Naming ceremonies, initiation rites top adulthood, marriage ceremonies or rites and burial rites are well informed by religion.

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 3

Discuss the social functions of religion?

6.4 The Psychological Functions of Religion

Religion Deals with Human Basic Worries- There are a number of existential problems that man is faced with in this world. Problems like death, suffering, fear, calamities, atrocities, displacement, and all manner of evil occurrences are issues that confront and human mind and saddens it. Do you know that religion in its psychological dimension addresses these problems? Yes, religion serves as a coping mechanism for people who are worried due to life's many challenges. Here, reasons are given for such experiences and compensation is provided by religion to enable the people survive such a challenge especially when there is no readily available solution.

Religion Makes the World Understandable- There is a sense of mystery that accompanies the human universe. Things are not certainly known nor well understood. It is here that religion helps man to

understand the world around him and making people feel relaxed, hopeful, and show courage as they go through the paths of life.

Provides Meaning and Purpose- Do you know that the life of man is for a purpose and all of existence has a meaning? Yes, religion through reference to transcendental realities or super-human beings, have articulated the will of God for man and present such as the purpose of life. Fearing God and keeping his commandments is one sure way to work in-line with the purpose of life from a Christian perspective.

Interpret Life-cycle Events: Birth, Adulthood, Marriage and Death- It is the individual level that the various rites of passages are experienced and influential on human conducts.

Religion Provides the Hope of Eternity- Since human existence is full of difficult problems, religion provides answers that can compensate people for their inadequacies. Death for an example, though painful and destructive of social relationships, is presented with immortality in the hereafter. Eternity in paradise is presented talked about as an enjoyable place.

Activity

Take a moment and considered what life would be like without religion?

Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE) 2

Discuss the psychological functions of religion?

6.5 Summary

In this unit, we have seen the functions of religion to society. Religion provides support for social norms, social integration, stability, motivation and interpretation of important life cycle are the social functions of religion. Also, dealing with basic worries, making the world understandable, providing meaning and purpose to life, interpreting life's cycle and providing hope of eternity are the five psychological functions of religion.

6.6 References/Further Readings/Web Resources (This will come at the end of each unit)

Connolly, P. (ed.) (1999). *Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London and New York: Cassell.

Goring, R. (ed.) (1992). *Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Ware Herefordshire: Wordsworth Reference.

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Nigosian, S. A. (1994). *World Faiths*. (2nd Edition). New York: St. Martin's Press.

6.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise(s) within the content

Answer to SAE 1

1. Social functions of religion
 - Provide support for social norms
 - Provide social integration
 - Provide stability
 - Provide motivation
 - Provide interpretation of important life-cycles

Answer to SAE 2

2. Psychological functions of religion
 - It deals with human basic needs
 - It makes the world understandable
 - It provides meaning and purpose
 - It interprets life-cycle events like birth, adulthood, marriage, and death
 - It provides the hope of eternity

6.8 Glossary

Atrocities- The quality of being shockingly cruel and inhumane.