

World Religions

Introduction – A Universal Human Experience

Ross Arnold, Summer 2015

World Religion Lectures

- **August 21 – *Introduction: A Universal Human Experience***
- August 28 – *Hinduism*
- September 4 – *Judaism*
- September 11 – *Religions of India (Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, etc.)*
- September 18 – *Religions of China & Japan (Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, etc.)*
- September 25 – *Christianity*
- October 2 – *Islam*
- October 9 – *Animism, New Age, Atheism, Secularism*

What is “Religion?”

- “Genuine religion is fundamentally a search for meaning beyond materialism... A World Religion tradition is a set of symbols and rituals, myths and stories, concepts and truth claims, which a historical community believes gives ultimate meaning to life, via its connection to a transcendent beyond the natural order.”

Joseph Runzo, *Global Philosophy of Religion*

- “In the broadest sense, religion means adherence to a set of beliefs or teachings about the deepest and most elusive things about life’s mysteries.”

John Renard, *The Handy Religion Answer Book*

What is “Religion?”

- “A religion is a belief in divine (superhuman or spiritual) being(s) and the practices (rituals), moral code (ethics) that result from that belief. Beliefs give religion its mind, rituals give religion its shape, and ethics give religion its heart.”

Marc Gellman & Thomas Hartman, *Religion for Dummies*

- “Religion is a system of communal beliefs and practices relative to superhuman beings.”

Miriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions

What is “Religion?”

- Religion is... “a relatively-bounded system of beliefs, symbols and practices that address the nature of existence...”

Peter Mandaville & Paul James

- Religion is... “the belief in spiritual beings (a belief which has existed in all known societies).”

Edward Burnett Tyler

- Religion is... “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things – that is, to things set apart and forbidden.”

Emile Durkheim

Different Perceptions About God

- Monotheism – one God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam.
- Polytheism – many gods: Hinduism, Shinto
- Pantheism – everything *is* god: Stoics; New Age
- Panentheism – all things exist *within* god: Native American; New Age
- Deism – God created, but either is not personal or is no longer present: Enlightenment thinkers
- Animism – all natural phenomena have souls: primitive religions
- Atheism – there is no god
- Agnosticism – I don't or can't know God
- Lazyism – “don't think about anything; can't be bothered about anything; where's my beer?”

WHY do religions exist?

“Religious beliefs and practices are found in all human groups and go back to the very beginnings of human culture.”

Pascal Boyer, Skeptical Inquirer

- To provide a set of ideas about how and why the world is put together as it is.
- As a means to help people deal with problems of human life that are significant, persistent and intolerable.
- As a respond to the seemingly inherent sense of there being something beyond the material world.
- To bind together a society and/or culture.
- As a means to transcendental meaning and purpose, and often a goal to aspire to after life.

Religion is a Universal Human Experience

- As noted, all human cultures have had *some* religion.
- A global 2015 poll found that 78% of the world's people identified themselves as “religious.” (11% self-identified as “convinced atheists.”)
- 92% of Americans believe in a personal God.
- In 2011 a 3-year Oxford University-based project, incorporating 40 different studies of various cultures world-wide, reported that “religion comes naturally, even instinctively, to human being.”

“We tend to see purpose in the world. We see agency. We think that something is there even if you can't see it. All this tends to build up a religious way of thinking.”

Dr. Roger Trigg, Oxford University

Are humans “hard-wired” to believe?

Neurotheology is a new branch of brain research which studies the relationship between the brain and religious experience.

Studies in Tibetan monks, Catholic nuns and Pentecostal Christians have all demonstrated that religious experiences have a measureable stimulating effect on *several* brain areas:

- The temporal lobes, which processes sensory input into meaning and emotions; the frontal lobe, right behind our foreheads, which helps focus attention in prayer and meditation; the parietal lobe, near the backs of our skulls, is involved in the feeling of becoming part of something greater than oneself; and the limbic system, deep in the center, which regulates emotions and is responsible for feelings of awe and joy.

Three Types of Religions

World Religions – those faiths which are historically transcultural and international.

Indigenous Religions – smaller, culture specific or nation-specific religious groups.

New Religious Movements – those faiths that are recently developed.

Ancient Religious Beginnings

- **223,000-100,000 BC**
 - Hominid graves represent earliest ceremonial rites.
- **33,000-25,000 BC**
 - 30,000-year-old Tsodilo place of worship in Botswana.
 - Oldest “Venus figurines” appear in graves.
- **25,000-21,000 BC**
 - Personal objects become common in graves.
- **9831-7370 BC**
 - Neolithic Revolution brings first cities, kingdoms and organized religion.
 - Gobleki Tepe is oldest confirmed place of worship.
 - Catalhoyuk develops as spiritual center of Anatolia.
 - Stonehenge begun.
- **3300-1300 BC**
 - Indus Valley Civilization, development of Indian religions.
 - Oldest surviving religious writing—Egyptian Pyramid Texts.



Today's World Religions by Date of Founding

	<u>Pop. (000s)</u>	<u>% of World</u>	<u>Founded (c.)</u>	<u>Where</u>
Hinduism	1,100,000	12.65%	4000-2500BC	Indus Valley
Judaism	14,000	0.20%	2000 BC	Palestine
Buddhism	488,000	5.29%	560-490 BC	India
Chinese Trad. ¹	394,000	5.54%	500 BC	China
Shinto	4,000	0.06%	500 BC	Japan
Jainism	4,200	0.06%	420 BC	India
Christianity	2,200,000	29.52%	30 AD	Palestine
Islam	1,600,000	21.09%	622 AD	Arabia
Sikhism	28,000	0.32%	1500 AD	India
Bah'aism	7,300	0.10%	1863 AD	Persia
Other ²	690,000	9.70%		
Non-relig. ³	1,100,000	15.46%		

¹ Includes Confucianism, Taoism, Shamanism

² Includes all other smaller religious affiliations identified

³ Includes secular, non-religious, agnostic and atheist

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World Religion Distribution Today



