

WORLD RELIGIONS

WEEK I RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY

Origin of Word 'religion'

Biblical use:

Old Testament – Amos 5:21: 'I hate, I despise your **religious** feast'.

New Testament – appears 5 times as:

treskeia (trace ki' a) (noun) meaning ceremonial observance, or

threskos (trace kos) (adj.) meaning ceremonious in worship, or pious, and

loudaismos (ee-oo-dah-is-mos') meaning Judaism or the Jewish faith (English word 'religion' is inserted but not in Greek)

English use:

Latin *religare* which is a combination of *re* (again) + *ligare* (to connect) = to connect again, signifying a reconnection with the divine. (i.e. the Fall)

What Motivates the Soul Toward Religion?

Why people do things: (1) it pays them to do so; (2) they fear to do otherwise; (3) they believe in doing them.

Common Characteristics of Religions

1. Most religions entail belief *in* the supernatural (spirits, gods, God), or belief in some other ultimate reality beyond and yet basic to ordinary human experience.
2. There is normally some distinction between sacred and profane (secular) objects, territory and time; between noumenal and phenomenal (reality and appearance) dimensions; or even between the realization that everything is ultimately an illusion and the mere appearances to the contrary.
3. Most religions encourage or require ritual acts around sacred objects.
4. Religions commonly promote a moral code or ethical principles.
5. Religions stimulate feelings.
6. Almost all religions encourage prayer and communication with the gods, or God.
7. Religions provide a worldview.
8. Religions require more or less total organization of life based upon a worldview, often entailing extensive personal commitment and sacrifice.
9. Religions are social organizations bound by the preceding characteristics.
10. Religions frequently promise an inner harmony or psychological state of peace and wellbeing.
11. Religions typically teach of a new age to come, or promise an afterlife.
12. Religions propagate themselves.
World = universe or cosmos?
Universe = all there is, including God.
Cosmos (Gk 'order') = the physical part of the universe (the earth, its inhabitants, and all heavenly bodies)

Views of cosmos in religions: Naturalistic, Theistic, Animistic

Religious Dimensions of Worldview Analysis

Religious Dimensions of the Christian Worldview

Experiential Dimension

'born again'-John 3:3; 'majestic in holiness, awesome in glory'-Ex. 15:11; 'so they may be one as we are one'-John 17:11

Mythic Dimension

Genesis 1-11; Acts 7; 'public reading of Scripture'- 1Tim. 4:13

Doctrinal Dimension

'teach them...write them...'-Deut. 6:6-9; 'sound doctrine'-1 Tim. 1:10, 4:16; Titus 1:9

Ethical Dimension

Sermon on the Mount: Matt. 5-7; Golden Rule: Luke 6:31

Ritual Dimension

'one sacrifice for sins'-Heb. 10:12; Communion-1 Cor. 11; 'Repent and be baptized'-Acts 2:38; 'pray continually'-1 Thes. 5:17;

Social Dimension

'the family of God'-1 Peter 4:17; 'Let us not give up meeting together...'-Heb. 10:25; Mustard Seed and Yeast-Matt. 13:31-33

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways is Christianity different from the world's religions?
2. What does the fact that the Bible does not use the term 'religion' tell us about God's primary concern for humanity?
3. What myths define Christianity?
4. Which religious dimension of a worldview is most important in the 21st century?
5. You are on a long train journey and you find out that the stranger sitting next to you claims to be a Christian, but does not go to church, does not read the Bible and does not pray. Can this person be a Christian? If not, what approach would you take to try to convince this person that maybe he or she is not a Christian, but needs to be?