

SPOTLIGHT

QCE

UNITS
1 and 2

Study of Religion

• Howard Clark •

S

Science Press

Acknowledgement of Land

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land where I research and write this book. I pay my respect to the Wallumattagul People and to the Elders both past, present and emerging. I remember that under the concrete and asphalt, houses and buildings, this land is, was and always will be sacred to Indigenous people.

Howard Clark

Acknowledgement

The author particularly acknowledges Islay Clark for her support and patience.

© Science Press 2019
First published 2019

Science Press
Unit 7, 23-31 Bowden Street
Alexandria NSW 2015 Australia
Tel: +61 2 9020 1840 Fax: +61 2 9020 1842
sales@sciencepress.com.au
www.sciencepress.com.au

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Science Press. ABN 98 000 073 861

Contents

| | | | |
|---|----|--|-----|
| Acknowledgment of Land | ii | Chapter 3 Religion and Life Cycle Rituals | 63 |
| Words to Watch | iv | | |
| Introduction | v | 3.1 Life cycle rituals | 64 |
| Objectives | vi | 3.2 Core beliefs demonstrated in life cycle rituals | 72 |
| Chapter 1 Sacred Texts and Religious Writings | 1 | 3.3 Life cycle rituals, insiders and outsiders | 74 |
| 1.1 Sacred texts belonging to religious traditions | 2 | 3.4 Theory of life cycle rituals | 76 |
| 1.2 Ritual, moral codes and relationships | 15 | 3.5 Changes in life cycle rituals | 78 |
| 1.3 Literary styles in sacred texts | 18 | 3.6 Collecting and presenting information from sources | 81 |
| 1.4 Responding to sacred texts | 22 | 3.7 Religion and life cycle rituals summary | 82 |
| 1.5 Sacred texts and ultimate questions | 25 | 3.8 Religion and life cycle rituals sample questions | 82 |
| 1.6 Collecting and presenting information from sources | 29 | Chapter 4 Religion and Calendrical Rituals | 85 |
| 1.7 Sacred texts and religious writings summary | 30 | 4.1 Calendrical rituals | 86 |
| 1.8 Sacred texts and religious writings sample questions | 30 | 4.2 Sacred text timing of calendrical rituals | 101 |
| Chapter 2 Sacred Texts and Abrahamic Traditions | 33 | 4.3 Pilgrimages | 104 |
| 2.1 Jewish background | 34 | 4.4 Theory of calendrical rituals | 110 |
| 2.2 Christian background | 38 | 4.5 Collecting and presenting information from sources | 112 |
| 2.3 Islamic background | 46 | 4.6 Religion and calendrical rituals summary | 113 |
| 2.4 Comparing the accounts in the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam | 51 | 4.7 Religion and calendrical rituals sample questions | 113 |
| 2.5 Textual authority | 55 | Answers | 115 |
| 2.6 Revelation and interpretation in the sacred texts | 58 | Glossary | 125 |
| 2.7 Collecting and presenting information from sources | 60 | Index | 133 |
| 2.8 Sacred texts and Abrahamic traditions summary | 61 | | |
| 2.9 Sacred texts and Abrahamic writings sample questions | 61 | | |

Words to Watch

account, account for State reasons for, report on, give an account of, narrate a series of events or transactions.

analyse Interpret data to reach conclusions.

annotate Add brief notes to a diagram or graph.

apply Put to use in a particular situation.

assess Make a judgement about the value of something.

calculate Find a numerical answer.

clarify Make clear or plain.

classify Arrange into classes, groups or categories.

comment Give a judgement based on a given statement or result of a calculation.

compare Estimate, measure or note how things are similar or different.

construct Represent or develop in graphical form.

contrast Show how things are different or opposite.

create Originate or bring into existence.

deduce Reach a conclusion from given information.

define Give the precise meaning of a word, phrase or physical quantity.

demonstrate Show by example.

derive Manipulate a mathematical relationship(s) to give a new equation or relationship.

describe Give a detailed account.

design Produce a plan, simulation or model.

determine Find the only possible answer.

discuss Talk or write about a topic, taking into account different issues or ideas.

distinguish Give differences between two or more different items.

draw Represent by means of pencil lines.

estimate Find an approximate value for an unknown quantity.

evaluate Assess the implications and limitations.

examine Inquire into.

explain Make something clear or easy to understand.

extract Choose relevant and/or appropriate details.

extrapolate Infer from what is known.

hypothesise Suggest an explanation for a group of facts or phenomena.

identify Recognise and name.

interpret Draw meaning from.

investigate Plan, inquire into and draw conclusions about.

justify Support an argument or conclusion.

label Add labels to a diagram.

list Give a sequence of names or other brief answers.

measure Find a value for a quantity.

outline Give a brief account or summary.

plan Use strategies to develop a series of steps or processes.

predict Give an expected result.

propose Put forward a plan or suggestion for consideration or action.

recall Present remembered ideas, facts or experiences.

relate Tell or report about happenings, events or circumstances.

represent Use words, images or symbols to convey meaning.

select Choose in preference to another or others.

sequence Arrange in order.

show Give the steps in a calculation or derivation.

sketch Make a quick, rough drawing of something.

solve Work out the answer to a problem.

state Give a specific name, value or other brief answer.

suggest Put forward an idea for consideration.

summarise Give a brief statement of the main points.

synthesise Combine various elements to make a whole.

Introduction

Across Australia, religious and spiritual beliefs take on many forms. Some are based on writings thousands of years old and are known worldwide. Others are being developed in specific areas now, in the 21st century and are unknown to the author but will have followers in your area when you read this book. Some religions are well known with places of worship and revered leader and famous holy writings. Others are faith journeys of a single person. This book attempts to present some of the ideas to support your learning within the framework of the Queensland Certificate of Education Study of Religion syllabus.

The course includes four units, each with two topics of study. These have been presented in eight discrete chapters, the first four of which are in this book.

The Study of Religion course and therefore this book, focuses on your investigation and study of religious traditions and helps you learn how religion influences people's lives. Regardless of your personal belief, religion has also influenced your life through our laws, ethical understandings and various festivals and holidays. This is because religious beliefs and practices influence the social, cultural and political lives of individual people and whole nations.

The subject matter of religion is both serious and interesting, as it deals with the quest to find meaning within and beyond ordinary life. This quest is common to all of humanity. Due to the different characters and emphases of the religious traditions, there is no single way of presenting them all absolutely equally; yet, every effort has been made to present them all with equal respect and sympathy.

Please note that every person has a biased view of most of these topics. You, the reader, need to be aware of that and determine your own responses to questions of faith and the extension of that faith into human responses, based on all the evidence that you collect. Do not be afraid to critically analyse what you read, hear and see and be prepared to justify your exam responses with valid evidence and supporting information.

Finally, study of religion is current and topical: belief and religion in our society is subject to critical scrutiny and debate, sometimes not as logically critiqued as you have been trained. You should keep up to date through regular scrutiny of the media in various forms – both print and electronic – for all of the different aspects of the course.



Objectives

On completion of this course you should be able to:

- Describe the characteristics of religion and religious traditions.
When describing the characteristics of religion and religious traditions, you should identify and account for the distinguishing features of religion and religious traditions.
- Demonstrate an understanding of religious traditions.
When demonstrating an understanding of religious traditions, you should explain the ways in which religion is expressed in the lives of adherents.
- Distinguish between religious traditions.
When distinguishing between religious traditions, you should determine the distinct characteristics and differences evident within and across religious traditions, and the ways in which individuals interpret and live the tradition.
- Analyse perspectives about religious expressions within traditions.
When analysing perspectives about religious expressions within traditions, you should identify, examine and consider religious characteristics to ascertain a range of views, and provide reasons for such views.
- Consider and organise information about religion.
When considering and organising information about religion, you should interpret information from sources and decide on the validity of these sources.
- Evaluate and draw conclusions about the significance of religion for individuals and its influence on people, society and culture.
When evaluating and drawing conclusions about the significance of religion for individuals and its influence on people, society and culture, you should make judgements about the importance of religion for adherents and the ways religion influences people, society and culture.
- Create responses that communicate meaning to suit purpose.
When creating responses that communicate meaning to suit purpose, you should convey ideas or arguments using your understandings of religion and religious traditions. You should use genre and language conventions, and recognised conventions of referencing.

Chapter 1

SACRED TEXTS AND RELIGIOUS WRITINGS

Never lose a holy curiosity.

Albert Einstein

Across Australia and the world, religious and spiritual beliefs take on many forms. Some are based on writings thousands of years old which are known worldwide. Others are being developed in specific areas now, in the 21st century and are unknown to the author but will have followers in your area when you read this book. Some religions are well known in many countries with places of worship and revered leaders. Others are faith journeys of a single person.

Most formal religions have a set of writings or organised beliefs which have been collected and written down or a library of art, music and stories which present the basic creation or origin story, the fundamental beliefs and the social and personal ethical expectations of believers. These sacred texts are different for every belief but they also hold some fundamental similarities which connect all of us to each other. These writings, from whatever source, form part of the story of us and our culture; of you and of me. This is regardless of, or in spite of one's personal belief or spiritual journey.



Figure 1.1 'Messiah' An oratorio composed in 1741 by George Frideric Handel, using a scriptural text by Charles Jennens from the Christian holy writings: the Bible. From St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, Ireland.

1.1 Sacred texts belonging to religious traditions

The sacred texts and religious writings are important for all adherents and believers and for the world religions. Some of the most important are summarised in the table below. These texts are sacred because they enable transcendent opportunities in the lives of adherents, that is, they enable the connection between human life on Earth and, depending on the belief, eternal life and the spiritual realm. In the case of the Western religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, that connection is between eternal life with God and humanity with its one life on Earth. In the Eastern religions of Buddhism and Hinduism, it connects the spiritual nature of the Universe or the divine with the life we live at the moment or over many moments through reincarnation.

Table 1.1 Religious holy texts summary.

| Religion/spiritual tradition | Sacred texts/holy writings |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Australian Indigenous spiritualities | Oral stories, art, dance and song. |
| Buddhism | Tripitaka/Pali canon, Tibetan Book of the Dead and Mahayana Sutra. |
| Christianity | Bible including Old and New Testament. |
| Hinduism | Books of Knowledge/Vedas and Upanishads. |
| Islam | Qur'an and hadith. |
| Judaism | Bible (Tanakh) includes Torah/Law books, writings, poetry and stories of the prophets. |

Texts of Australian Indigenous people

The sacred texts of the Indigenous spiritualities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, are not written books but the people's responses to a spiritual relationship with the land. Australian Indigenous peoples have a strong and long, perhaps 60 000 years, connection to the spiritual world through the land and this connection is expressed through their 'sacred texts' of oral stories, art, dance and song.

Australian Aboriginal spiritualities have an oral tradition supported by song and dance and art. All of it is related to the land. As the Indigenous people spread across Australia, the traditions developed and became infused with the new environments they encountered and the associated development of understanding and relationship with nature. Survival required an understanding of the environment and a relationship with the land and nature. This understanding encouraged explanation and meaning and the stories of the creation time, one aspect of Dreamtime, developed into the Dreaming concepts we recognise today.

The belief systems of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders are significantly different, the former arising from the Dreaming, while those of the latter group arise out of the Tagia. The Dreaming refers to all that is known and understood by Aboriginal people. It is the central spiritual concept because it determines not only beliefs and values but also relationships with other people and the overall environment. Aborigines are able to understand Creation in a continuing and living sense by virtue of the Dreaming.



Figure 1.2 Aboriginal Art presenting aspects of the Dreamtime From Noongar Country, or New Norcia, Western Australia.

Aboriginal people believe they are related to the natural world and this relationship provides the advantages of life and survival in the environment. It also imposes the responsibilities of preservation and education. Responsibilities include conservation of natural and social environment by providing a law to be obeyed and cultural mores and taboos to be followed and passed on from initiated elders to the next generation. Traditionally the beliefs of Indigenous Australians were shaped by a profound understanding of country and their place within it. These beliefs were imbedded in a body of knowledge transmitted through storytelling. These stories provided accounts of Creation and explained the natural order of all living and non-living things.

The art, dance and stories of the Dreaming are sacred because they tell about important aspects of spirituality and law. Dreaming stories contain a wealth of important information.

Sometimes they tell about creation of the Earth or the community. Sometimes they describe a lesson about the law or morality. They explain how to hunt and gather food, how the landscape evolved, how to make tools, where clays and ochres were found and how to use them in ceremonies.

These stories explain the location and purpose of sacred places, connect a place with a particular creation ancestor and set down what knowledge is secret and what may be shared. Other stories explain the place or history of the tribe and its relationships with land, individuals and other tribes. Not only do they teach individuals and the community about the spiritual nature of life and the place of the Dreamtime, they describe and explain why certain activities take place, what is good and bad behaviour and why the relationship between the land and the people and between individual people exists in the first place. In the re-creation of the Dreamtime, the stories make the transcendent connection between the world of the spirits and the non-spiritual world of people, animals and today's life. The land is that connecting place. The stories of Dreaming activities and spiritual figures renders such activities and entities into reality.

Dreaming stories establish the actions that are necessary to guarantee continued balance in the natural world. Songs, art, stories and ceremonies brought the people closer to the creation ancestor by bringing that creation ancestor to life. The Dreaming is not over, it continues for all time. All of these aspects of worship: song, dance, storytelling, art are not just characteristics of the Dreaming, they are the Dreaming. They are the sacred texts of Indigenous spirituality.



Figure 1.3 Ochre pits on Western Arrernte land Included in West MacDonnell National Park, Northern Territory.



Figure 1.4 Split Rock, Quinkan On Lamalama Country in Queensland is a natural gallery of art showing aspects of the Dreaming for the Indigenous peoples.

Dreaming permeates every aspect of music, both song and dance, storytelling, artwork exemplified by paintings and craft or artefact manufacture, food gathering and hunting activities within a complex framework of kinship or family totem relationships. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritualities did not traditionally use written words and writings as understood in our modern society. Information and ideas were passed from elder to student, person to person and generation to generation by a complex combination of different forms of information technology.

Many religious traditions use oral stories to support the beliefs and activities of the tradition. Indigenous communities and individuals use oral stories, the land, art, and dance as more than representative of their life – they are their life. The oral stories, art, and dance of Dreaming activities and spiritual figures are important because re-creation of the world takes place as each story is told and retold. The land is the embodiment of Dreaming and vital to the spirituality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples.

If the ceremonies cannot take place or the sacred ceremonial site is destroyed, or the connection to the land is broken then the stories, art, dances and songs cannot be correctly passed down through the generations and the Dreaming will cease to be. Land is the place of spirits and land is where humans connect to the spirit world and the Dreaming world of the ancestors. The land is integral to not just connecting with the Dreaming but being part of the Dreaming.

Even though the text is not in written literary form, that does not make the ‘text’ any less valid. The opposite is true. The ‘text’ is more valid to Indigenous peoples because it is part of life. It produces the whole of life experience of the individual and the community.

Recent historical interactions with non-Indigenous people and the effects of the Stolen Generations, Mabo and Wik High Court decisions and Native Title legislation have had major and long lasting effects on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals as they attempt to relate to their spiritual connections with the Dreaming, land and each other.



Figure 1.5 Kaurareg Nation welcome sign Horn Island, Torres Strait, Queensland.

Texts of Buddhism

The term ‘sacred’ relates to making the transcendent connection between the reality of life and the spiritual realm. Buddhist sacred texts, and in particular the words and teachings of the Buddha, are sacred for Buddhists because they guide Buddhist transcendent behaviour, are believed to determine the level of reincarnation and ultimately the reaching of the spiritual concept of nirvana.

The three main texts: Tripitaka (Pali canon), Mahayana sutras (Mahayana set of writings) and Tibetan Book of the Dead are each important and sacred for the different communities or schools of Buddhism. The term sutra means ‘set of writing’ and there are many such texts in the Buddhist canon. Another well known sutra is called the Heart Sutra.

The most widely used text, the Pali canon is also called the Tripitaka which means three baskets. This is because there are three main sections in this collection of scriptures from the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Theravada is one of the main schools or denominations of Buddhism, mainly found in South-East Asia and Sri Lanka. The Tripitaka contains the words of Buddha, some of his sermons and also the teachings of his disciples. The First Buddhist Council, held shortly after Buddha’s death, put the teachings of the Tripitaka together but they were not written down for some hundreds of years.



Figure 1.6 Buddhist holy text, Tripitaka On stone tablets in Kuthodaw Pagoda, Mandalay, Myanmar.

Theravada Buddhism is also known as the doctrine or tradition of the elders and has a primary focus on meditation and concentration and the monastic life. Individuals can gain merit on their way to nirvana by supporting the monastery. Mahayana Buddhism is another school of Buddhism and is sometimes called 'Greater Vehicle' or Northern Buddhism and was more inclusive of everyday Buddhists who gained their own merit outside the monastery. It includes Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism. The concept of bodhisattva is important to Mahayana Buddhism. A bodhisattva is someone who has reached enlightenment and now helps those who have not yet gained that level. Sometimes they are referred to as Buddhist saints.

The Mahayana sutras guide Mahayana Buddhist behaviour. These sutras are included in the canon for Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists and are believed by many to be directly from the teachings of the Buddha but others believe they were written by monks about 500 years after the Buddha lived. They give extra teachings and rules of conduct.

A third major branch of Buddhism developed much later in about 800 CE. It is called Vajrayana or Diamond Vehicle and is also referred to as Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is also included in the canon for Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists who follow the Mahayana school of Buddhism. The Tibetan Book of the Dead presents a commentary on death and subsequent transitional states after death and rebirth. It is through these texts that individuals and communities learn about, connect with and experience the spiritual. This form spread into Tibet and the Himalayan regions. When Buddhism disappeared as a dominant religious force, from India, Vajrayana Buddhism remained isolated in the Himalayas and parts of Mongolia and developed its own particular style of belief and worship.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that saying the mantra or prayer: *Om Mani Padme Hum* out loud or in one's mind, invokes the compassion of Chenrezig, a bodhisattva type of spiritual being. The prayer is often carved or painted on material or objects and placed where people can see them. Spinning the written form of the mantra around in a prayer wheel is also believed to send the prayer to heaven by its movement. Similarly, prayer flags send the prayer by their moving in the wind.

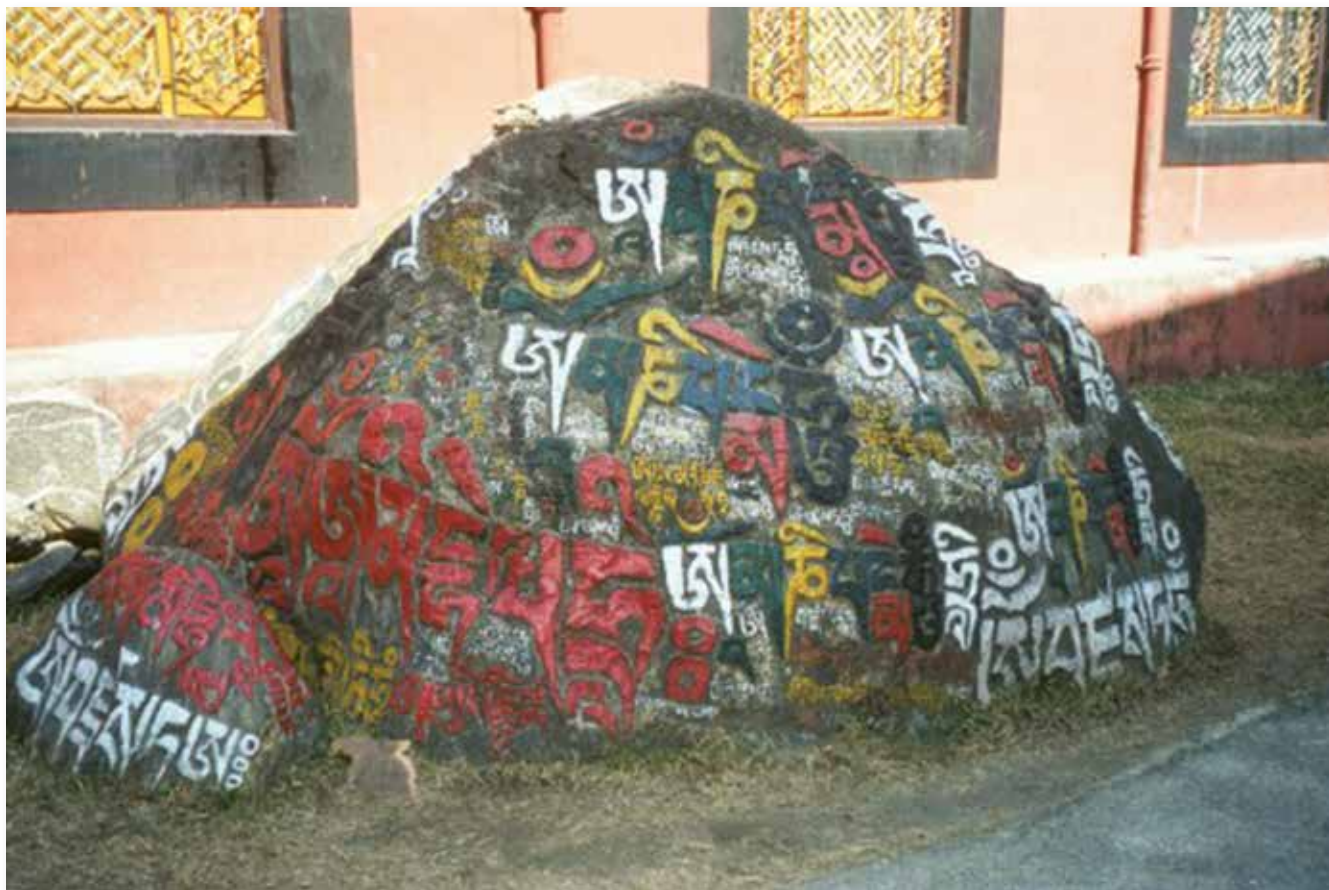


Figure 1.7 Tibetan Buddhist text The chant *Om Mani Padme Hum* painted on a stone in Pokhara, Nepal.

Om Mani Padme Hum

Buddhist Mantra

After Buddha's death, councils were held to resolve some concerns that related to doctrine or belief. The First Buddhist Council in 483 BCE established a canon or collection of the Buddha's sermons called the basket of discourses or Vinaya Pitaka. The Third Buddhist Council in 250 BCE held during the reign of Emperor Asoka, produced the concluding material for the Pali canon. The Fourth Buddhist Council (29 BCE and 100 CE) consisted of two councils. The first was held so that scribes could write down the Tripitaka for the first time. The second part of the Council made commentaries on the canon. The Tripitaka sections are Vinaya Pitaka, monastic code, Sutra Pitaka, Buddha's teachings and Abhidharma Pitaka, or philosophical writings.

Each school of Buddhism prefers a different set of sacred texts but the fundamental beliefs of suffering and impermanence in life coupled with the concepts around the understanding of karma are constant between schools. Approaches to life and the behaviours of communities and individuals relating ways to reach nirvana are developed in the different sacred texts.

Table 1.2 Buddhist holy texts summary.

| Buddhist school/denomination | Main sacred texts/holy writings | Main population centres |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Theravada | Tripitaka/Pali canon | Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand |
| Mahayana | Mahayana sutras | China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Taiwan |
| Vajrayana/Tibetan | Mahayana sutras, Tibetan Book of the Dead | Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia, Tibet |

Texts of Christianity

The term 'Bible' is used by both Christians and Jews to describe a collection of holy writings. The Bible used by Christians consists of Hebrew writings collated into the Old Testament and post Jesus writings collated into the New Testament. The New Testament includes four gospels or books of good news about Jesus and is used by Christians to learn about the life and teachings of Jesus. Each of the two collections includes books by different authors written at different times in different genres for different types of readers.

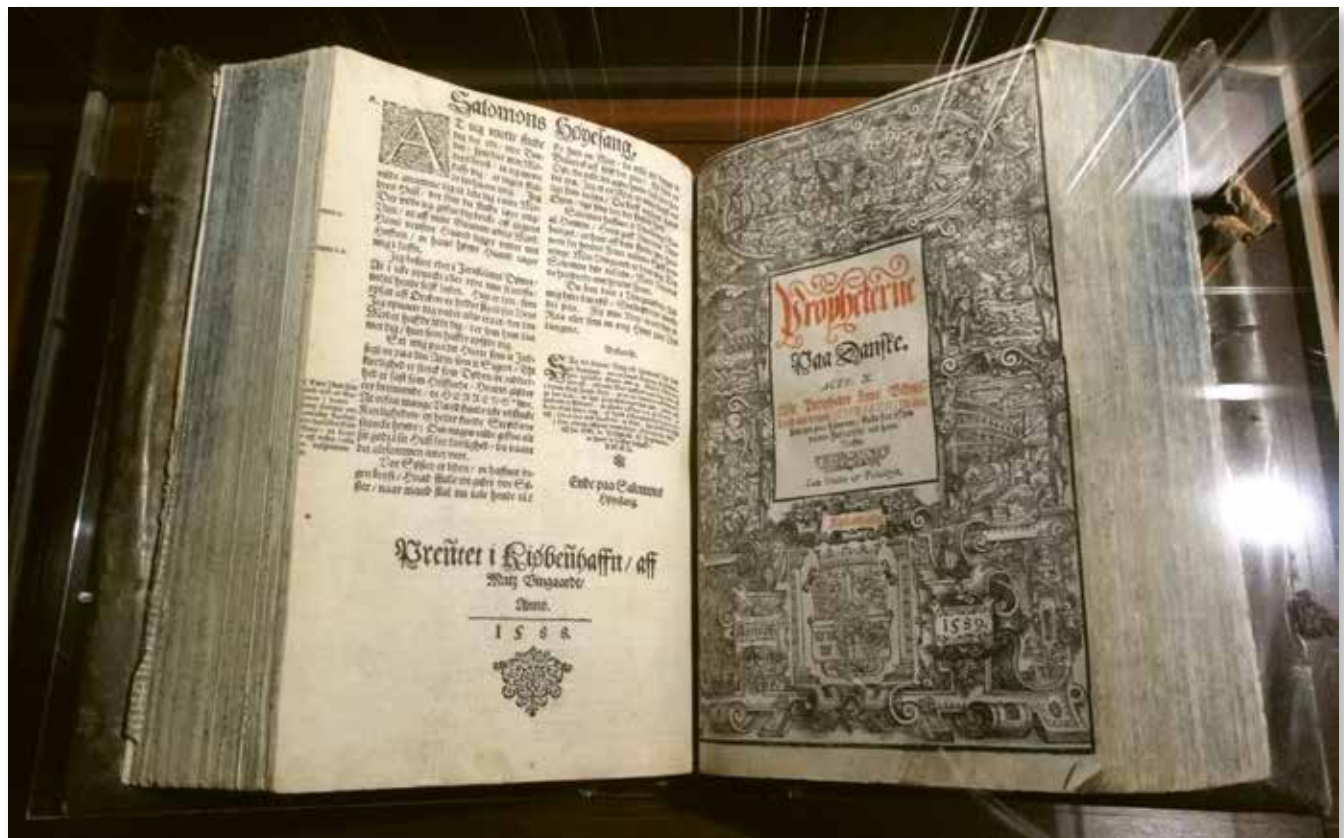


Figure 1.8 Historic 1588 Bible On display in St John's Church, Bergen, Norway.

The Old Testament books which are translations of the Jewish Bible were written from about 1000 BCE. In 1546 the Christian Church's Council of Trent confirmed the addition of a collection of other writings called the Apocrypha to make a total of 46 books. The Jewish Bible, also known as the Tanakh (or TaNaK), includes the Torah (Laws of Moses), Nevim (prophets) and Ketuvim (writings). It was mainly written in Hebrew, with some parts written in Aramaic (a Hebrew variant). The Old Testament for Christians includes the same books from the Hebrew Bible but they are presented in a different order. The order of books is different from that in the Jewish Bible to deliberately present the books as leading to the coming of the Messiah or Christ which, according to Christians, is Jesus.



Figure 1.9 Crossing the Red Sea Moses leading his people from Egypt on an art installation as part of an outdoor Bible walk near Europe Bridge over the Rhine River on the border between France and Germany.

The Old Testament deals primarily with the relationship or covenant between God and the nation of Israel and it is divided into five sections: (i) The Pentateuch deals with the creation of this covenant. These are the first five books of Jewish law. They are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. (ii) The history of the Jewish people and their time as a great nation and under control of neighbouring empires.

The list includes: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings and Esther. (iii) The books of poetry include the well known books of Proverbs, Psalms and Song of Solomon and display an artistic appreciation of many facets of God. (iv) Major Prophets such as Isaiah and Daniel. (v) The Minor Prophets (Amos to Zephaniah) complete the list. The prophetic books present God's call to Israel to be obedient and follow the Torah or Law, to redevelop spiritual fidelity and repent from unfaithfulness and idolatry. These ideas are expressed through God's representatives on Earth, the prophets.

The New Testament books were written between about 50 CE and 125 CE. At the 1546 Council of Trent, the Catholic Church affirmed the full list of 27 as a closed canon. The New Testament section of the Bible includes four Gospels understood to be written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, along with a book of early church history called Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke and a number of letters, many of which were written by the Apostle Paul.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word ... I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, [and] decided to write an orderly account for you ... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

From Luke 1:1-4

The last book, of apocalyptic writing, is the Revelation of St John and its authorship like some of the letters is still under question. There are other gospels, for example by Mary, Judas and Thomas not accepted into the canon. Christians use the four canonical Gospels as the basis for information about Jesus, God, belief and behaviour.

The books of the Bible are sacred and relate to making the connection between the reality of life on Earth and the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. The authority of the Bible is in the authority of God both in the words written by the various authors and in the received text; that is God speaking through the text of the canon to the reader. There are a few Christians who believe in the literal truth of the Bible but most believe in the truth of the overarching message of God's love and grace to humanity.

The word, therefore is God's message through the life and inspired written record of Jesus and because of this the New Testament has greater authority with Christians than the Old. Reading, listening to, and reflecting on the text is a transcendent experience for Christians and a way to better understand God. Christians believe God works through the writer, the editor/s and reader and the actual words are simply the vehicle to aid in understanding God. Christians' lives are influenced by the text informing their beliefs, actions and attitudes to not only personal behaviour but political involvement, environmental responses and attitudes to social mores and opinions.

Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God and part of the Trinitarian God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His life and teachings are described in the four Gospels and are expounded upon by the letters in the New Testament. Christians want to follow Jesus' example and teachings. Many communities believe that post-death spiritual life in heaven with God is based on belief in Jesus. Others focus on following the behaviour instructions of Jesus and participate in social justice and community advocacy. The Old Testament is important because it gives an historical account of God working through the people of Israel and as a prophecy for the coming and importance of Jesus. As the word of God, the Bible plays an integral part in public and private worship. The text can be used to teach, guide and console and many Christians meditate or study a portion of the canon to help determine their response to a particular issue. Most churches use a common lectionary to cover and use all of the Old and New Testaments where the canon is divided into years A, B and C and so repeated every three years.

Texts of Hinduism

The sacred texts of Hinduism are Sruti (heard) or Smriti (remembered). The Sruti scriptures such as the Vedas are believed to be from the divine and therefore Hindus accept their importance and follow their teachings for both belief and practice. Sections of the text are often memorised by devotees. Smriti texts were written to explain Sruti scriptures and make them more useful. Some Smriti texts include the writings on history, mythology, law and behaviour and philosophy. All texts guide and inform individual and group behaviour leading to levels of reincarnation and ultimately moksha. The teachings of the Vedas explain how the soul (Atman) can be united with the ultimate truth or creator God called Brahman and this is an important component of these sacred writings. This is done by contemplation or mediation and the doctrine of karma which is the cumulative effects of the good and bad actions of an individual in their life or lives.

The human body is the temple of God.
The sacred flame of your inner shrine
is constantly bright.
The experience of unity is the fulfillment
of human endeavours.
The mysteries of life are revealed.

Rigveda

Table 1.3 Christian holy texts summary.

| Section of the Bible | Groups of books |
|----------------------|--|
| Old Testament books | <p>Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.</p> <p>History: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.</p> <p>Poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.</p> <p>Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.</p> |
| New Testament books | <p>Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.</p> <p>History: Acts of Apostles.</p> <p>Letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude.</p> <p>Visionary: Revelation.</p> |

It is in this presentation of the reality of God that gives the Vedas their authority in the traditional unorganised belief community called Hinduism. The Smriti texts are very important for orthodox or devout Hindus because they are the spiritual, transcendent foundation guide for personal behaviour and social interrelationships. They also help believers determine the level of reincarnation and ultimately the reaching of moksha. As well as advising and recommending on appropriate behaviour, the texts also discuss consequences for failure.

The Vedas, also called the Books of Knowledge, are the most important and oldest surviving Hindu texts. They contain hymns, prayers, poems, incantations and rituals from Ancient India and they were originally transmitted orally. The Vedas were written in Sanskrit and originated in the period 1500 to 1000 BCE. The four Vedas are Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. The Rigveda alone has over 1000 hymns on the mythology of Hindu gods. Two other Vedas: Samaveda, knowledge of chants and Yajurveda, knowledge of rites used for sacrifices, date from about 300 BCE.



Figure 1.10 Hindu epic hero Arjuna portrayed on a statue in Gianyar, Bali.

For many devotees the discussion of hypothetical situations, particularly those presented in the epic stories of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, allow a better understanding of the appropriateness of behaviour in different circumstances.

Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have made an impact in India and South-East Asia, where the sacred stories are included even within the Buddhist tradition. Continuous reading of the Ramayana and expressing the story in dance, drama and art is considered an act of merit for future lives.

The Bhagavad Gita, is a transcendent dialogue between the God Krishna and the human hero Arjuna. The story, set on the battlefield before the final war between the forces of good and evil, is an ancient text. This sacred text of many Hindus gives examples and teaching on how humans should live and contains Hindu core beliefs. It is part of the Mahabharata.

The Upanishads or teachings are a collection of early Hindu texts that are also used and revered to give insight and guidance for life. They include post Vedic writings about the concepts of the ultimate reality and purpose of the soul. They also cover the nature of spiritual progress, living as an ascetic, rejecting material things and giving up family life for the purpose of spiritual fulfilment. These writings are also held to be historically important to Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs.



Figure 1.11 Hindu epic spiritual creatures guard the Royal Palace Bangkok, Thailand.

Karma is the concept found in the eastern religions of Buddhism and Hinduism which explains the whole idea of cause and effect. In summary, it is all that an individual has done during their life (or many past lives) and is still doing in their current life. The effects of these deeds create the present and future experiences for the individual. In effect it focuses responsibility on the individual for their future success and failure. The word comes from either the Sanskrit word *kri* (karma) to do or to deed, or the Pali language *kamma* meaning action or effect. Over time the idea has developed as a major belief. The term itself can be traced back to the early Upanishads, from about 1500 BCE.

Table 1.4 Hindu holy texts summary.

| Hindu text | Specific text | Description |
|------------|---|--|
| Vedas | Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. | Books or writings of knowledge. The Vedas contain hymns, incantations, and rituals from the ancient Vedic civilisations. |
| Upanishads | Upanishads – final part of the Vedas. | They are presented in the form of a question/answer or dialogue between a teacher and student and the topics extend from the earlier parts of the Vedas. |
| Epics | Ramayana. | Tells of the banishment of Rama from his kingdom, the abduction of his wife by a demon and her rescue and his return to the throne. |
| | Mahabharata, including Bhagavad Gita. | Tells the story of an 18 day war between two families. The God Krishna supported one family because their argument was correct and their cause was just. |

Texts of Islam

Muslims accept and believe in four books which describe Allah's revelation to prophets through history and extended to the people. Of them: Abrahamic scrolls, Psalms, Gospels and Qur'an, the final, complete and unchanged writing is the Qur'an as dictated to Muhammad. Many Muslims learn by memory the Qur'an in Arabic to connect directly with Allah and understand how to get to paradise. Muslims understand the will of Allah from the Qur'an and so this text informs their beliefs and actions, relationships and practices, politics and business. The holiness and oneness of Allah is expressed in the Qur'an through terms and words of greatness and separateness and judgement and mercy. Muslims use the Qur'an as the final word of God to humanity and believe it was verbally revealed by recitation to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel on a number of different occasions over about 23 years. Muslims therefore regard the Qur'an as not only sacred but also Muhammad's most important miracle and proof of his importance. It gives information about God to humanity and presents rules and guidance for life.



Figure 1.12 Historic handwritten Qur'an On a special stand, in West Nusa Tenggara State Museum, Mataram, Indonesia.

Answers

Chapter 1 Sacred Texts and Religious Writings

1. Complete the following table.

| Religion/spiritual tradition | Sacred texts/holy writings |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Australian Indigenous spiritualities | Art |
| Christianity | Bible |
| Hinduism | Books of Knowledge/Vedas and Upanishads |
| Australian Indigenous spiritualities | Dance and song |
| Islam | Hadith |
| Buddhism | Mahayana sutras |
| Christianity | New Testament |
| Christianity | Old Testament |
| Australian Indigenous spiritualities | Oral stories |
| Buddhism | Pali canon |
| Islam | Qur'an |
| Judaism | Tanakh |
| Buddhism | Tibetan Book of the Dead |
| Judaism | Torah/Law |
| Buddhism | Tripitaka |
| Hinduism | Vedas |
| Hinduism | Upanishads |

2. The following names/terms are associated with the holy texts of the world's main religious traditions. Match each term with the correct tradition.

| Name or term associated with writings | Religious tradition |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Abraham | Judaism |
| Acts of the Apostles | Christianity |
| Hadith | Islam |
| Mahabharata | Hinduism |
| Mark | Christianity |
| Matthew | Christianity |
| Meditation | Buddhism |
| Mitzvot | Judaism |
| Old Testament | Christianity |
| Om Mani Padme Hum | Buddhism |
| Pali canon | Buddhism |

| Name or term associated with writings | Religious tradition |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Paul | Christianity |
| Peter | Christianity |
| Pitaka | Buddhism |
| Prayer flags | Buddhism |
| Qur'an | Islam |
| Ramayana | Hinduism |
| Salat | Islam |
| Shahada | Islam |
| Smriti | Hinduism |
| Sruti | Hinduism |
| Surah | Islam |
| Sutra | Buddhism |
| Talmud | Judaism |
| Tanakh | Judaism |
| Torah | Judaism |
| Upanishads | Hinduism |
| Vedas | Hinduism |

3. The rock paintings shown in Figure 1.32 were painted by the Indigenous people of Quinkan, North Queensland. Explain the meaning of art, as well as what the oral stories, dance and the land mean for the tradition, community and individuals of Australian Aboriginal spiritualities.

Individuals from Indigenous communities use art as a way of relating to the Dreamtime or the spiritual world, and also to allow individuals and groups to connect to each other through art and ceremony to the past and future. The artwork (in this case) showing representations of people, animals and spiritual beings, brings these beings into reality and connects them to the individuals and communities who paint the art and see and learn from the art down through the years. Art, along with stories, dances and songs support and reinforce the relationship that Indigenous people have with the land. This relationship is more than just a connection, or a representation, the land is the place of the Dreaming and is the connection that the people have with each other and the natural world. The artwork shown on the rock and in the ochre creates the spirit world.

4. Buddhism is famous for meditation and a sense of serenity. Outline how such a characteristic can be obtained from the Buddhist holy writings.

The Pali canon or Tripitaka is the main Theravada Buddhist text. The word Tripitaka can be translated as the three baskets. The sections are the Vinaya Pitaka, or monastic code; the Sutta Pitaka, the teachings of the Buddha and the Abhidharma Pitaka, or philosophical writings. The Tripitaka is important because not only does it contain the complete teachings of the Buddha including doctrinal statements on nirvana, samsara and the nature of existence and suffering but it includes rules of monastic life or conduct of the sangha and explains how the schools of Buddhism have extended from that to determine their own positions on the nature of being. Another writing, the Dhammapada is also known as Buddha's teaching or doctrine and it is found in the Sutta Pitaka. Other sutras or writings include the Lotus Sutra and Heart Sutra and these are widely known in Mahayana Buddhism. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is the Mahayana text that is best known outside Buddhist society.

Each of these writings supports the Buddhist ideal of overcoming suffering by trying to understand that everything is temporary and our life as we know it is not the reality of the soul or spiritual essence of life. These texts include writings that guide and teach humanity to overcome the suffering in life which occurs through the desire for more. They teach a sense of acceptance of what happens to us, of belonging to a greater community and connecting to all living things and a sense of wanting to live in peace and harmony with all. The texts give such guidance through behavioural instructions, spiritual guidance, instructions in the ways of compassion and answers to the frequently asked questions of humanity.

5. Young people often ask: Is the Bible true? Research and explain how it is true for Christians.

The Bible is not a single text. It is a collection of writings by different authors (and sometimes committees of authors) who wrote at different times of history. They also wrote in different styles and for different audiences and understandings of life. The earliest books or parts of books could have written about 8000 BCE and the latest New Testament book was written about 100 CE. The Bible is true in that it exists but to argue that each word was written as a true factual account of something happening (like a video of a car accident) is a simplistic and naive way of looking at these writings. The Bible is a most important history of life written to both describe and explain and to teach. Much of the Bible is deliberately made up. The poems and songs try to describe and praise God. Even the so-called history books of Genesis are written to try and explain how we got to where we are now. They are deliberately written as mythical stories and legends.

For Christians, the New Testament written between about 55 CE and 100 CE tells the story of an itinerant preacher and teacher called Jesus who lived in Palestine and was killed by the Romans. He taught about love and forgiveness and was a social activist who inspired many people to write about him and since then, millions of people try and follow his teachings and example. If we ask about what Jesus was reported as saying, every record tells a slightly different version. If we ask what Jesus taught, then he taught about God's love and forgiveness and grace and how humans should love each other as they love God. Other writings in the New Testament by Paul and other writers support the teachings of Jesus and try to guide others by their written sermons and descriptions of how to love life. Paul's Letter to the Church at Corinth for example, includes a very important statement about how to love each other (see 1 Corinthians 13).

6. Research and explain how Hindus can gain meaning from a long epic poem with mythical creatures like Aruna and his younger brother Garuda shown in Figure 1.33.

The Bhagavad Gita, is a transcendent dialogue between the God Krishna and the human hero Aruna. The story, set on the battlefield before the final war between the forces of good and evil, is an ancient text and is a main sacred text of many Hindus as it gives examples and teaching on how humans should live. It contains Hindu core beliefs and it is part of the Mahabharata.

Hindus and all humans can guide their own behaviour by using examples of people they class as heroes. Sometime these heroes are sporting heroes or local heroes who change society for the better. It is important to choose heroes wisely as history includes many heroes who have failed to live up to society's expectations. In the Hindu epic poems Aruna goes to war but he learns, over time and through the trials and tribulations of the long war, about ethics, morality and how to live a good life. Hindus use the hero status of Aruna to guide their own lives through the difficulties of life. The God Krishna, one of the thousands of manifestations of Hinduism's one supreme God, supports Aruna in his difficulties and from this Hindus learn about maintaining a connection with the spiritual, with God.

7. Research and explain how the Qur'an influences the lives of people within the religious tradition of Islam.

Muslims accept and believe in four books which describe Allah's revelation to prophets throughout history and extended to the people. Of the Abrahamic scrolls, Psalms, Gospels and Qur'an, the final, complete and unchanged writing is the Qur'an as dictated to Muhammad and many learn the Qur'an in Arabic by memory to connect directly with Allah and understand how to get to paradise. Muslims understand the will of Allah from the Qur'an and so this text informs their beliefs and actions, relationships and practices, politics and business. The holiness and oneness of Allah is expressed in the Qur'an through terms and words of greatness and separateness and judgement and mercy.

The Qur'an deals with the principles of belief and the hadith describes how to live out those principles by presenting Muhammad as an example of God's message lived. The hadith also gives Muslims answers to questions about life after death, heaven, hell, Day of Judgement and guides them on how to perform prayers, go on pilgrimage and give zakat correctly.

The principal ethical teachings in Islam are based on love of Allah coupled with an awareness of, or consciousness called taqwa related to submission to Allah. Striving to find the best way to live and respond to the will of Allah by using the Qur'an and then the hadith and sunnah as sources for ethical guidance leads to a sense of kinship or Ummah. The basic principle of Shariah is to see the will of Allah carried out on Earth the same as in heaven. Muslims believe they can learn of and know God's will by studying the revealed scriptures in the Qur'an. Because the basic purpose of the will of God is to create compassion, tolerance and kindness by supporting generosity and justice, it is against any behaviour which is considered cruel, selfish or exploitative. The Shariah rules are believed to support this purpose.