

APPENDIX 1. The Nine Elements of a Religion

Beliefs are articles of faith that are thought by followers to be deeply true or evident. Beliefs explain fundamental questions about life and the universe and are maintained without conclusive scientific proof. They are also called worldviews. The central beliefs of Christianity are contained in the Creed (e.g. that Jesus Christ is the Son of God).

Religious beliefs give rise in turn to the following elements.

Stories and Myths relate in imaginative detail a belief, including those conveyed by historical writings, legends, parables and folklore. Myths are stories told to explain the origins of the universe and people, e.g. the Creation stories in Genesis; they contain religious truths rather than scientific or historical facts.

Sacred Texts are collections of oral and written literature in which the essential parts of the religious tradition are recorded, e.g. the Christian Bible, the Islamic Koran and the Jewish Torah.

Ethics is the study of deciding what is right or wrong based on the ideals or specific attributes of a perfect world from which come all morality, laws, norms and ideas about what followers ought to do; these are synthesised into specific advice or lists of qualities, values or laws that would bring about the ideal world. Examples include the Ten Commandments in Christianity and the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism.

Rituals are religious or other formal ceremonies that offer symbolic meaning through a series of actions, sayings, prayers or contemplative practices and that are performed according to a prescribed order. Through rituals followers publicly demonstrate their beliefs. Examples include the Catholic Eucharist and circumcision for Jews.

Symbols are signs, objects, people, actions or places that acquire a special meaning or power and can even be held to be sacred. They express the significant beliefs and ethics of a religion. Examples include the Christian crucifix / cross or the Muslim crescent.

Social Structures comprise the established model to which a community conforms including its leadership and organisational structures. Examples include ordained and lay people in Christianity and the Hindu caste system.

Spiritual Experiences are life events that can be had in religious and non-religious contexts and to which religious or spiritual meaning is attached; they include certain sacred practices that facilitate access to ultimate reality (divinity) and affirm beliefs for followers. Examples include various pilgrimages such as Camino de Santiago for Catholics and the Hajj for Muslims

Spaces / Places and Times help create the sacred experiences of the other elements. Each tradition has spaces or places that are considered important for followers individually and collectively to get close to the ultimate reality. Sacred times (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly) are also often linked into moments of profound meaning and help form the rhythm of life for followers. Examples include Lourdes or Fatima (places) for Catholics and Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles (times) for Jews.

Adapted from "Religion and Society: Units 1 - 4 for VCE" Nelson Publishing p.32