

## RELIGION

Religion is a Belief in the existence of a supernatural ruling power, an omniscient and almighty creator and controller of the universe who has given Man a spiritual nature which continues to live after the death of the body.

Religion has been common to all men from the earliest times. In ancient times people worshipped gods and goddesses who represented the natural or outstanding factors in man's life: the earth, moon, sun, love, death or war. Even in the beliefs of people who had no outside contact with each other there were certain parallels, which seems to indicate that religion has always been something basic and innate in Man. In the philosophical sense, it has been a link between the finite and the infinite. Religion makes people realise the importance of the non-material element in short human life on earth.

Most religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism or Islam impose certain ethical norms on their believers and establish a strict code of moral behaviour. They promote such virtues as good will, justice, goodness, kindness, mercy, charity, sacrifice, sincerity, love, truth, peace and brotherhood so as to show people how they should live. Due to their unchanging principles, they help maintain the fundamental moral order in the world. If men obey certain commandments, they are rewarded by God but if their life is full of sloth, pride, malice or lust, they are punished (for example Catholics go to Hell after death). This high ethic discourages people from doing evil.

Religion not only indicates how Man should live but also offers a feeling of integrity and unity with other believers. As a member of a religious community, Man gains the sense of belonging and identity which is strengthened during religious ceremonies and festivals. Furthermore, religion offers great consolation for all the unhappy, poor or terminally ill people who suffer on earth. It prophesies a new world free from misery, want, and brings people joy and faith, and gives them a sense of belonging.

Religion has been a firm support not only in a spiritual or psychological sense, the Church has been the centre of social life through the centuries. In many countries it directed education, controlled universities and ran hospitals. Moreover, religious organisations have always been prominent in peace movements and in denouncing the use of war as an instrument in international policy. This seems to confirm the statement: "Ubi Deus, ibi pax". Where there is God, There is peace.

On the other hand, a diversity of religious beliefs, forms of worshipping God, rites and doctrines have been reasons for hateful divisions between Muslims and Christians, Catholics and Protestants, or Sikhs and Hindus. Holy wars, crusades, conflicts and the acts of terror in the name of religion have accompanied Man for centuries. This seems to reflect man's inability to understand the proper sense of religion which should be the basis for building a community embracing the whole of mankind. Unfortunately, improving the world and man's nature is not a task which religion is fulfilling very well, even if people do dream of Eden on earth, heaven and eternal life.

1. How would you define religion?
2. Why do you think people believe in God?
3. Are you a religious person?
4. Which are the major religions in the world?