

Understanding the Multifaith Classroom in a Secular Society

Teacher's Resource Kit

This kit may also be downloaded in PDF from:

http://www.nceis.unimelb.edu.au/resources/multifaith_classrooms.html

Prepared by the **National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia** from The University of Melbourne for the:

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About this Kit

This resource kit contains basic information about Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is neither a comprehensive review of all the three religions nor does it attempt to represent all the different ways of interpreting and practising them. The National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia has attempted to provide balanced information about these three religions, sourcing them from reputable sources and experts from the different faith traditions. As to educational theory and practice in the context of multifaith classrooms, NCEIS has only provided links to relevant bodies and experts as it does not claim expertise in the field.

2008 National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia

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The Programme

Programme

Understanding the multi-faith classroom in a secular society

Treetops Room, Melbourne Museum, Nicholson Street, Carlton

Monday, 18 August 2008

9:00 – 9:30am	Registration
9:30 – 10:00am	<p>Welcome Mr Gary Shaw Department of Education & Early Childhood Development</p> <p>Aims & Objectives and introduction of panel A/Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, The University of Melbourne</p>
10:00 – 11:30am	<p>Pillars of Faith and Traditions</p> <p>Chair: A/Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh</p> <p>Judaism – A/Professor Mark Baker, Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University</p> <p>Christianity – Professor Des Cahill, Chair Intercultural Studies, RMIT</p> <p>Islam – Professor Abdullah Saeed, Director, National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, The University of Melbourne</p>
11:30 – 12:00 noon	Questions & Answers
12:00 – 12:45pm	Lunch
12:45 – 1:15pm	<p>Faith & Creativity Chair: Ms Philippa Lovell Catholic Education Commission of Victoria</p> <p>Melbourne Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster Directed by Catherine Devine, St Monica's College</p>
1:15 – 2:45pm	<p>Rituals, 'fitting in' and strategies to build bridges Chair: Mr Gary Shaw Department of Education & Early Childhood Development</p> <p>Melanie Landau – Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University</p> <p>Rev. Rachel Kronberger – Uniting Church of Australia</p> <p>Anisa Buckley – National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, The University of Melbourne</p>
2:45 – 3:15pm	<p>Small group discussions over coffee: Dealing with faith in multicultural & multi-faith classrooms Chair: Professor Des Cahill</p>
3:15 – 3:30pm	Report to Plenary
3:30 – 4:00pm	<p>Wrap-up Professor Des Cahill</p>

Speakers

Assoc Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh

Associate Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh is Deputy Director of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS), at the University of Melbourne. He has a successful track record in research and community engagement, and has completed two major projects on the Challenges of Muslim Integration in Melbourne and Sydney, commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

A/Prof Akbarzadeh has an active interest in the social and political aspects of Muslim integration in Australia. He has published ten books (including a joint book with Abdullah Saeed on *Muslim Communities in Australia*), and 40 refereed papers and book chapters. In 2003 A/Prof Akbarzadeh produced a report for the Australian Research Council, (ARC) *Researching Islam in Australia*. He is also a regular media commentator on issues relating to Islam and the Middle East with opinion pieces in *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian Financial Review* and *Eureka Street*.

Assoc Professor Mark Baker

Mark Baker is Director of the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation and Associate Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. He completed his D.Phil at Oxford University and was twice a Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Before moving to Monash, he was a lecturer in Jewish history at the University of Melbourne and has taught widely in the field of Modern Jewish History, the Holocaust and Genocide, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and Terrorism in Modern Conflict.

He is the author of *The Fiftieth Gate* (HarperCollins, 1997), a personal book about memory of the Holocaust, which was the recipient of numerous prizes and is taught on the NSW curriculum for HSC English studies. For more than a decade he edited *Generation*, a quarterly journal of Australian Jewish thought, and is a regular columnist for the Jewish and wider media. He is currently writing an historical novel and researching in the area of sexuality during the Holocaust.

Ms Anisa Buckley

Anisa Buckley is a final year PhD Candidate in Islamic Studies at the Asia Institute at The University of Melbourne, and is a recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award scholarship. Previous qualifications include an MA (Islamic Studies) from the University of New England, Armidale, a Graduate Certificate in International Development from RMIT, and a B.Ed from The University of Sydney. The title of her MA thesis submitted in 2004 was 'Muslim Integration in the West: A Case Study on Australia'.

Anisa's PhD topic is on 'Muslim women and Islamic family law: the challenges of securing a 'complete' divorce in Australia and Britain'. Her research seeks to identify the extent to which Islamic religious authorities in Australia and Britain are effective in assisting Muslim women gain an Islamic divorce. Given that such Islamic procedures are not recognised by the civil legal system, Muslim women must often pursue divorce through two separate systems, the civil and the Islamic. The aim of her research is to identify how Muslim women make use of various avenues and methods to secure what she terms a 'complete' divorce, or in other words, reach a point at which they feel no barriers exist that prevent them from remarrying freely.

Professor Desmond Cahill

In 1993, Desmond Cahill became the first-ever Professor of Intercultural Studies in an Australian university in recognition of his expertise in cross-cultural communication, multicultural and international education, and anti-racist education, world population movements, the history and pattern of immigrant settlement, ethnic community development, bilingualism and biculturalism, ethnic minority youth, cultural diversity policy development and evaluation, globalization, and the interrelationship between religion and culture.

Professor Cahill is widely published with over 60 publications to date. Professor Cahill's publications and research projects have focused on the following cultural groups in Australia, namely, Argentina, British, Cambodian, Chilean, Dutch, Filipino, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Maltese, Polish, Turkish, Uruguayan, and Vietnamese and in the countries of Japan, Switzerland and Vietnam, and on the following religious groups: Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Taoist. He was for a time editor of Migration Monitor, Australian correspondent for Asian Migrant, editor of the Journal of Vietnamese Studies and is presently on the editorial board of the Asian and Pacific Migration Journal.

Professor Cahill has led major projects at the highest level of government, especially in the areas of immigrant and multicultural education, ethnic minority youth and religion and cultural diversity.

For many years, he was the cross-cultural trainer for the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs; for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, he has been a lecturer in the Public Diplomacy series for locally employed staff in Australian embassies across the world. He has been elected the President since 2000 of the Australian chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

He is heavily involved in cross-cultural research and the supervision of research students as well as making frequent appearances in the radio and media, especially on SBS Multicultural TV and radio

Rev Rachel Kronberger

Rachel has a background in Social Work, Australian History and Political Science, and was ordained as a Minister in the Uniting Church in Australia in 2002. Rachel is committed to dialogue, both in an interfaith context and between Christian churches. After five years as the Uniting Church minister in Coburg, Rachel is currently parenting full-time.

Melanie Landau

Melanie Landau has studied and taught Jewish texts in Australia, Israel and the US. She completed a Masters in Psychoanalytic Studies as well as a combined law degree, and is currently a Lecturer in Jewish Studies at Monash University.

Her research interests are in gender and the development of Jewish Law. She teaches Jewish Law and Reading Gender in Judaism at the Australian Centre for the Study of Jewish Civilisation. From 2000-2002 she was a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel School for Educational and Social Leadership in Jerusalem.

Melanie is the co-founder and facilitator of Darsheini, the community-learning programme of the Centre. She is also a mother of two children who is interested in the transformational capacity of individuals and groups as well as creating community across differences.

Philippa Lovell

Philippa has taught in Catholic schools both in Victoria and South Australia, mainly in the areas of senior English and Religious Education. She has held positions of responsibility as Year Level Coordinator at Aquinas College in Ringwood and Director of Students at Our Lady of Sion College in Box Hill.

Her work at the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne is in the area of Student Wellbeing, supporting primary and secondary schools to develop evidence-based frameworks around practices to promote quality relationships.

Some of the projects include MindMatters: a mental health resource, Values Education, Restorative Practices in Catholic school communities, Social – emotional learning, Schools as Core Social Centres and School Refusal and Absenteeism.

She represented Catholic Education on the National Values Education committee which provided consultation for the Good Practice Schools Project, Stages 1 and 2.

Professor Abdullah Saeed

Professor Saeed is the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne. He is also the Director of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies and the Director of the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne.

Professor Saeed is an active researcher, focusing on one of the most important issues in Islamic thought: the negotiation of text and context, ijihad and interpretation. He is a strong advocate of reform of Islamic thought and is frequently asked to present at events both nationally and

internationally. He also participates in training courses on Islamic issues to community leaders and government agencies in Australia and abroad. Of particular interest, given the current climate, is the promotion of inter-religious initiatives. He regularly engages with the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities at national and international symposia to enhance community understandings of Islam, Islamic thought and Muslim societies.

He has authored and edited numerous works, reaching the broader scholarly and general community. His recent publications include *The Qur'an: An Introduction*, Routledge, 2008; *Islamic Thought*, Routledge, 2006; *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, Routledge, 2006; *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia (editor)*, Oxford University Press, 2005; *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam (co-author)*, Ashgate, 2004.; *Islam in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, 2003. In addition to his strong research focus, Professor Saeed continues to teach Islamic studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and supervise postgraduate students.

Further information is available at: www.abdullahsaeed.org

Gary Shaw

Gary is an experienced educator, researcher and consultant with more than 30 years experience in Australian primary, secondary and tertiary education settings.

He is currently with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria managing a number of national projects in Victorian schools including the Values Education Forums Project, Civics & Citizenship Education and the Schools Constitutional Convention Programme.

From 2001 to 2004 Gary was as a Research Fellow at the Australian Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne where he was engaged in research related to school improvement, teacher professional development, student engagement, student attendance and student wellbeing.

Prior to this he managed student wellbeing projects and programmes for the Department of Education, particularly for drug education and students at risk of leaving school early. Gary has also worked in gender equity and violence prevention programmes for schools.

Religion in Australia

Information in this section was sourced from *Religion in Australia*, a document prepared by the National Council of Churches in Australia, 2006

Religion in Australia

Religion has been defined by the Australian High Court as “a complex of beliefs and practices which point to a set of values and an understanding of the meaning of existence”. Religion encompasses a wide range of cultural practices, rituals, institutions and belief systems framing life as a whole.

In Australia, religion is usually associated with belief in God (most commonly in Jewish, Christian or Islamic terms). Religion also includes an awareness of the sacred, supernatural or divine (e.g. Buddhism or Hinduism). Others seek a higher truth or social well-being in different ways (e.g. secular humanism or socialism). Sociologists tend to view religion as a social construction designed to give meaning to the causes, consequences and purpose of existence and to offer comfort in the face of life’s uncertainties.

The development of a multifaith Australia

Prior to European settlement, Indigenous Australians had their own religious or spiritual belief system embedded in a complex oral tradition based on ‘the Dreamtime’. The Dreamtime explains the origin of the land and its people; it embraces creation stories, present day reality and ancestral influence. This spiritual outlook continues to be reflected in Indigenous mythology, ceremonial life and artistic traditions.

European settlement in Australia brought with it chaplains of the Church of England (now the Anglican Church). Other churches arrived as transportation and immigration continued and by the early 19th century most Christian churches were represented including Roman Catholics, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist and Methodist denominations. Rivalry, notably between Irish Catholics and English Protestants, affected Australian life until the latter part of the 20th century. One consequence was the growth of a strongly secular strand in 19th century Australian life, rarely

anti-religious per se but highly suspicious of religion's institutional forms (as evidenced especially in the writings of Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson). Despite these rivalries, Christianity has remained the dominant religious tradition in Australia.

Jews first came to Australia as convicts aboard the First Fleet in 1788 and after World War II, many more arrived as refugees. The first evidence of Buddhist settlement dates to 1848 when, following the discovery of gold, Chinese miners arrived in their thousands. Immigration in the aftermath of the Vietnam War has also increased the numbers of Buddhists in Australia. Muslims and Hindus were brought to Australia throughout the 19th century for cotton and sugar plantation and as cameleers, divers and sailors. Muslim numbers have increased steadily in the wake of civil strife in Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan and due to immigration from Turkey, Egypt and the Middle East.

Changing religious affiliations

In 1901, 40 per cent of the Australian population identified themselves as Anglican, 23 per cent Catholic and 34 per cent 'other Christian'. Approximately 1 per cent identified as 'non-Christian'. The first census in 1911 showed 96 per cent of Australians identified themselves as Christian.

The change in the white Australia policy after the end of World War II led to a flow of migrants from different countries and to considerable diversification of religious affiliations in Australia. Orthodox Christians came from Greece and the Middle East, Catholics from Italy, Hungary, Poland and Vietnam. Alongside these, Pentecostal independent Chinese churches have emerged. Melbourne and Sydney today are unique in that churches of every Christian tradition – Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Pentecostal – are present.

The most striking changes over the last two census periods (1996 and 2001) have been the growth of Buddhist (79 per cent), Hindu (41.9 per cent) and Islamic (40.2 per cent) affiliations, though their total numbers remain small. It should be noted that religion is often used as an identifying label unrelated to religious practice (for example, people who identify as Jewish may not necessarily be practising Jews).

A growing number of Australians do not identify themselves as belonging to a religious institution (approximately 16 per cent state they have 'no religion'), although they may belong to humanist organisations or practise semi-religious activities (e.g. astrology).

Constitutional and legislative protection for religious practice

The Australian Constitution states that: "The Commonwealth of Australia shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth". This reflects a stronger separation of religion from the state than in most other Western nations, including the UK and USA.

The Racial Discrimination Act 1975, giving force to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, makes racial discrimination unlawful in Australia: "It is unlawful for a person to do any act involving a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of any human right or fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has

responsibility for investigating discrimination complaints based on religious (and other) grounds. State legislation provides further protection (e.g. the Victorian Government's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001) against the incitement of hatred against religious groups.

Religion and Australian society

Over the past half-century there has been a decline in formal religious affiliation. The Australian Community Survey (1998) revealed that while 10 per cent of respondents said that 'religion' was the single most important category for describing who they are and a further 11 per cent said that religion was 'extremely important' to their identity, 43 per cent said it was 'not important at all'. Other identifying markers, such as gender, occupation, income, education and nationality have greater importance than 'religion' according to this survey. This does not necessarily reflect a lack of personal spirituality, but may instead indicate suspicion of organised religion by Australians and less engagement with churches, synagogues and other religious bodies.

Three issues stand out today. First, despite the above findings and despite predictions of decline and disappearance, religion and spirituality have gained in prominence in Australia recently. Possible causes might include reactions to globalization, capitalism and free trade, cultural, ethnic and religious dispersals, the search for identity in a technological world, and increased mobility and communication.

Second, continuing terrorist attacks worldwide have led to some unattractive anti-Muslim reactions. After the September 11 2001 attacks, religious leaders reported abuse, physical assaults and hate mail against Muslim people. Within a fortnight of the attacks, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission received over fifty complaints of incidents, such as vandalism, women's *hijabs* being ripped off and Muslims being refused service at banks.

Third and on the positive side, there have been many efforts to strengthen relationships between different religious groupings. The Australian Council of Churches reshaped itself in 1994 as the National Council of Churches in Australia to include the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches. The Council of Christians and Jews is helping to improve inter-religious understanding and to sharpen awareness of anti-Semitism among Christian churches.

The establishment of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils has provided a forum for dialogue between the different streams of Islam and a public voice for Muslim communities. Other inter-faith organisations and networks such as the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews, the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the Australian Partnership of Ethnic and Religious Organizations and the Council for Multicultural Australia have also emerged. There is therefore a concerted effort being made to cross religious boundaries, and to encourage greater tolerance between religious communities.

Useful sources

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and the Australian Multicultural Foundation (2004). *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*.

http://www.amf.net.au/PDF/religionCulturalDiversity/Main_Report.pdf

Written by experts in the field, this report examines the relationship between religion and cultural diversity in Australia.

Jupp, J. (Ed.) (2001). *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Australian Nation, its People and their Origins*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

This landmark encyclopedia documents the history of Australian settlement, with discussion of religious and cultural diversity.

Mol, H. (1985). *The Faith of Australians*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

In this sociological study of religion, Hans Mol provides an overview of religious adherence in Australian society.

Porter, M. (1990). *Land of the Spirit? The Australian Religious Experience*, Geneva: WCC.

Written as a brief guide to religious belief in Australia.

Saeed, Abdullah, *Islam in Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003.

Provides a comprehensive overview of Islamic beliefs and practices and how Muslims practise Islam in Australia. Ideal for a general readership.

Saeed, A., & Akbarzadeh, S. (Eds) (2001). *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press.

This edited book explores the history of Muslim people in Australia, outlining current challenges for Muslims living in this country.

Thompson, R. (2002). *Religion in Australia: A History*, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Religion in Australia examines how religious beliefs and institutions have influenced Australian politics and social life.

National Council of Churches in Australia and its Faith & Unity Commission, and Social Justice Network – <http://www.ncca.org.au/>

Judaism

Information in this section contains excerpts from *Understanding Judaism*,
NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, April 2008.



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Judaism

There are different ways of looking at Judaism amongst Jews. The following is not a full account of Judaism, but some general notes that provide a basis for understanding the religion and its various interpretations.

Who are the Jewish People?

Jews are not a race; they come in all colours from the lightest to the darkest. The Jews are not just a nation, but they are one. They are not just a religion, but they are one. Jews resolve the question of definition by calling themselves a people.

Indeed, the Jewish people see themselves as a family, tracing their origins to the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, generally dated at about 1900 BCE (Before the Common Era).

Two thousand years later, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the present Jewish Dispersion began. There are now some 14 million Jews in the world, with about 120,000 living in Australia.

As they spread throughout the world, the Jewish people brought with them particular spiritual and ethical values, a body of inspired literature and a sense of continuing history – the religion known as Judaism.

Who is a Jew?

Orthodox Jewish law defines a Jew by the religion of the mother, not the father; i.e. if the mother is Jewish, the child is regarded as Jewish. Some Progressive communities also accept a child as Jewish if the father is Jewish and the child is raised as a Jew.

Judaism is not a proselytising religion, and Jews do not seek to convert others to Judaism as the Jewish religion accepts that there are many paths to God. However, it is possible to become Jewish through a lengthy process of conversion, which involves joining the Jewish people through a commitment to Jewish observance.

The Story of Judaism

Monotheism

Jews believe in a single God, without shape or form, who is both the creator and ruler of the universe and who prescribes a moral law for humanity. The concept has been described as ethical monotheism, since it joins a Divine concern for the perfection of humanity with the idea of a single omniscient God. It is a concept which has been adopted by Christianity and Islam with various modifications.

However, Judaism is more than a faith or a belief system. It might be described as a religious culture, originating in the historical narrative of the Jewish people. Thus, the monotheistic idea has its foundation in the biblical account of Abraham dedicating himself and his descendants to God. (Both Christianity and Islam describe themselves as Abrahamic faiths.)

Later, Abraham's grandson Jacob figuratively wrestles with an angel, symbolising the struggle of finite beings to comprehend the idea of an incorporeal, eternal and infinite God. Jacob is given the name Israel – “He who wrestles with God” – and Jacob's descendants become the “Children of Israel” and are promised a “Land of Israel”.

The Torah – the Moral Law

The next critical stage in the development of Judaism, the idea of a Divine moral code, follows the Exodus. After centuries as slaves in Egypt, the Jewish people receive the Law in the Sinai Desert. The principles are incorporated in the Five Books of Moses, known as the Torah, which are the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The 613 moral commandments which are set out in the Torah include the Ten Commandments.

The Temple

Some 400 years after the Exodus, in about 1000 BCE, Jewish life in the Land reached a peak of achievement with the kingdoms of David and Solomon, and the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism now celebrated festivals of national pilgrimage, and a liturgy comprising the inspired poetry of the Psalms was sung in a Temple administered by hereditary priests, scribes and musicians. (The name Cohen means 'priest', and the tribe of Levi are the descendants of the scribes and musicians.)

The Prophets

Judaism found another dimension as its spiritual leaders coped with the rise of the ruthless imperial powers of Assyria and Babylon, both centred in what is now Iraq. The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deported by the Assyrian conqueror in 722 BCE, and in 586 BCE the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. One response was the majestic

literature of the Prophets, thundering against immorality, visualising peace on earth and foreseeing the end of the conquering empires and the restoration of Zion.

The Hebrew Bible

When Cyrus of Persia permitted the rebuilding of the Temple and a return of Jewish leadership from exile in Babylon, Ezra established the public reading of the Torah, which still continues as a central part of the synagogue service. The 120 “Men of the Great Assembly” brought together the sacred literature which had been written during the preceding thousand years and began the task of establishing the canon of the Hebrew Bible (described by Christians as the Old Testament).

The Sages and the Sanhedrin

“If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” (Ethics of the Fathers 1.14)

This is one of the sayings of Hillel the Elder (c.60 BCE – c.10CE) included in the collection of aphorisms known as The Ethics of the Fathers. This is a tractate, or section, of the Talmud, and it comprises a few hundred wisdom sayings by 72 sages between the first century BCE and the second century CE. In about 20 BCE during the reign of Herod the Great, Hillel became President of the Sanhedrin, an assembly of 71 sages which operated both as a political assembly and as the superior court.

The Sanhedrin followed rules of evidence which ensured that leniency prevailed and that the death penalty was rarely, if ever, imposed. Sophisticated rules protected women's rights and prevented exploitation in property and financial transactions. The court was also opposed to the Herodian puppet kings and the Roman procurators who sold the right to collect the Roman taxes to 'tax-farmers' who used ruthless force to oppress the population with confiscatory taxation.

Rabbinic Judaism

In 70 CE the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Rome celebrated its victory by building the Arch of Titus, which still stands in the Forum. The centrepiece of the Arch depicts the legion in its triumphal procession in Rome, bearing the sacred objects of the Temple, including the golden candelabrum – the Menorah – which is described in the Book of Exodus.

As the ritual of Temple worship came to an end, it was replaced by the synagogue service, and an order of prayer was established by the sages, who came to be known as rabbis (literally, 'my teachers'). The rabbis also taught that in addition to the written law there is a supplementary Oral Law, equally divine in its origins, which is ascertained by a process of interpretation and which was eventually codified in the Talmud. The Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, writing in the first century CE, described those who supported the concept of the Oral Law as the Pharisees.

The Jewish Dispersion

Meanwhile, a second Jewish revolt was defeated by the Romans in 135 CE. The Roman historian Cassius Dio records that 580,000 Jewish soldiers were killed and over 900 villages and towns destroyed. The Emperor Hadrian decreed that the name Judea be replaced by the name Palestine, or more precisely 'Syria Palestina' or Philistine Syria. (In fact, the Philistines had ceased to exist 700 years earlier.) A temple to Jupiter was built in Jerusalem, which was renamed Aelia Capitolina, and the dispersion of the Jewish people as captives, slaves and refugees was accelerated.

Jewish communities appeared in the countries of dispersion, where the literature, philosophy and liturgy of Judaism have continued to develop.

Jewish Literature

The central point of Judaism is the Hebrew Bible, described by Christians as the Old Testament. In Hebrew it is described by the acronym Tanach, as it is divided into three sections: Torah (Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Books of the Prophets) and Ketuvim (Holy Writings).

It is not so much a religious text as a library of inspired literature, comprising a great storehouse of history, law and legend, poetry, philosophy and prophetic insight. Its books were written and collated over a period of nearly 1000 years, ending in about 200 BCE. The Hebrew Bible represents a significant Jewish contribution to human civilisation.

Torah is often translated as the 'Law' and also as 'teaching', and it provides Judaism's basic moral and ethical principles and its system of beliefs. Over time, the term Torah has come to stand for the teachings and traditions of Judaism as a whole.

The Torah gave rise to many commentaries and interpretations, and eventually, the codification of the Oral Law culminated at the beginning of the third century CE in the written compilation of the Mishnah (lit. 'repetition') in Galilee. The Mishnah is a collection in logical order of the legal and ritual rulings of the leading commentators, often differing and recorded side by side, and interspersed with history, legend and moral and religious philosophy. Further commentary on that Code continued during succeeding centuries in Galilee and in Babylon (with the Babylonian

commentary considered more authoritative), culminating in an edited combination of code and commentary known as the Talmud (Learning), a work of 63 volumes completed in the 6th century CE.

A Jewish literature of liturgical poetry and religious commentary has continued throughout the Dispersion, reaching great heights of achievement in medieval Spain, the Rhineland and later Eastern Europe. It continues as part of a living Jewish tradition.

The Ethical Teachings of Judaism

“God has shown you, O Man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Included in the moral principles set out in the commandments in the Torah are rules about justice, equality before the law, loving kindness, social welfare and the ideals of peace and political freedom. Some examples:

Leviticus 19.17

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Psalms 37:11

“The meek shall inherit the earth and delight in the abundance of peace”.

Leviticus 19.34

“The stranger that dwells with you shall be as one born among you, and you shall love him as thyself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

Exodus 23: 4-10

"Do not join your hand with the wicked to be a malicious witness. Do not follow a crowd to do evil; neither shall you testify in court to side with a multitude to pervert justice; neither shall you favour a poor man in his cause if it is not just.

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall

surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of him who hates you, fallen down under his burden, don't leave him. Help him with it.

Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.”

Deuteronomy 15.11

“For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you: You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.”

(Later traditions stipulate that the highest forms of charity are to give so that the recipient does not know the donor, and in such a manner as to assist the recipient to become self-reliant.)

The Torah also prescribes various specific duties to assist the poor. These include commandments not to harvest the corners of the field, or to pick the last fruit from the tree so that the poor should have a right to “glean” the remaining produce (e.g. Leviticus 23:22). A tithe, a tenth part of the produce, is also to be contributed for the benefit of “the widow and the orphan”.

The spirit of the biblical rules of the tithe and the gleaning continues in Sydney with the Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA), a central communal appeal for funds which are distributed to welfare agencies, old-age homes, day schools and a hospital and other communal institutions.

Throughout the biblical narrative there is a distrust of autocratic

government and an insistence that rulers must be subject to the law. Deuteronomy 17 prohibits kings from “multiplying” horses, wives, gold and silver. Verses 18-20 preserve the rule of law, which protects the liberty of the subject:

“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law ... That he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping ... these statutes and doing them, so that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren.”

The books of Kings and the Prophets are also full of examples of prophets standing up to kings and reminding them of their duties to God and to the people. See particularly the passage in 1 Samuel 8-10, where Samuel warns the people of the dangers of an autocratic monarchy.

Lifecycle Events

Birth

Circumcision of all male babies is the first Jewish rite of passage. It marks the entry of Jewish males into the Divine Covenant between God and the Jewish people. It is performed on the eighth day after birth, or later if the boy is not ready. A boy receives his name at the time of circumcision and the ceremony ends with a prayer that the child will progress to the Torah, the wedding canopy and good deeds. Jewish girls are given their name in the synagogue on the Sabbath following the birth and are welcomed into the community at home ceremonies, often held within the first month after birth.

Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah

(Son or daughter of the Commandment)

These events mark the passage from childhood to adulthood, when a person assumes responsibility for his or her actions. The barmitzvah (for boys) occurs at age 13, while the batmitzvah (for girls) occurs from age 12 to 13. At the Sabbath service the boy (or girl in Progressive and Conservative congregations) is called up as an adult to chant the weekly reading from the Torah and the Prophets in the traditional melody. The event is marked by ceremony and celebration.

Marriage

Jews regard marriage as essential for both the spiritual development of individuals and the bringing of children into the world. Weddings are held under a chuppah – an open canopy held up by four poles, symbolic of the home which the couple will make. At the conclusion of the ceremony the groom crushes a glass underfoot to symbolise the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the fragility of life. A Jewish marriage is sanctified by the placing of a ring on the bride's finger, the sharing of two cups of wine and the signing of a marriage contract protecting the rights of the wife under Jewish law.

Death and Mourning

The body is prepared for burial by voluntary members of the Chevra Kadisha (the Burial Society -literally, 'Holy Brotherhood'). They wash the body, wrap it in a plain linen shroud and place it in a simple wooden coffin. In death, rich and poor are treated alike. No profit may be made from funerals and any surplus is given to charity.

The first week of mourning is known as Shiva (Seven), when mourners do not leave their homes and prayers are recited. Other rituals of mourning include avoiding entertainment and the purchase of new items, as well as the daily recitation of Kaddish (a prayer in praise of God) in the case of the loss of a parent for a period of 11 months.

Jewish Worship

Observant Jews pray three times a day, although spontaneous prayer may be offered at any time. Although God accepts prayer in any language, Hebrew is the usual language of Jewish prayer. The Jewish communal place of worship is the synagogue, where prayer takes place facing Jerusalem. The Torah scrolls are the holiest objects in a synagogue and are kept in an alcove called the Ark. The spiritual leader of a synagogue or community is usually a rabbi (teacher).

What kind of Judaism?

Orthodox Judaism is distinguished by its maintenance of the traditional forms of worship in the Hebrew language and of the traditional observances as prescribed by the Law. The Orthodox view is that the biblical law may be developed and interpreted only by processes of reasoning which maintain respect for the Law's divine origin. Men and women sit separately in the synagogue, and men and married women keep their heads covered.

Chassidic Judaism ("ch" as in loch) is an Orthodox Jewish revivalist movement. It emphasises spiritual intensity and joy in Jewish worship, as well as Messianic expectation. Chassidim are sometimes differentiated from other Orthodox Jews by their wearing of distinctive clothing.

Progressive Judaism (also known as Reform or Liberal) believes in the religious autonomy of the individual. Reform Jews believe the Torah was written by human authors with Divine inspiration and that Judaism continues to evolve to adapt to changes in society. They therefore follow those rules and observances which they regard as having continuing relevance, but with a strong emphasis on the maintenance of Jewish tradition. In Progressive synagogues prayers are sometimes abridged, and some of the service is in English. Men and some women cover their heads during prayer. Men and women take part equally in synagogue services and in all rituals and sit together. Women as well as men are ordained as rabbis.

Conservative comes midway between Orthodoxy and Reform, intellectually liberal in matters of belief, but conservative in matters of religious practice. It combines a positive attitude to modern culture with acceptance of critical secular scholarship regarding Judaism's sacred texts and a commitment to Jewish observance. Conservative study of the holy texts is embedded in the belief that Judaism is constantly evolving to meet the contemporary needs of the Jewish people.

The Conservative service follows the traditional liturgy, and is mainly in Hebrew and similar to Orthodox services. However, as in Progressive Judaism, men and women sit together and share equally in synagogue services, prayers and rituals, and both men and women are ordained as rabbis.

Secular Jews are not committed to religious belief, yet identify as part of the Jewish people. Secular Jews accept Jewish values, ethics and concerns, as well as some rituals, as part of their cultural Jewish heritage, and many are affiliated to synagogues.

Mizrachim, Sephardim, Ashkenazim and others

The difference between the various Jewish traditions lies in the cultures developed in the countries in which they have lived. The Mizrachim are the descendants of those who lived in Babylon, Persia and Arabia. The Ashkenazi tradition originated in the Franco-German region in Western Europe and developed further in Eastern Europe and Russia. In contrast, the formative experience of the Sephardim originates in Spain, North Africa, Greece and Turkey.

Due to their different historical experiences, there are small variations in the liturgy, and in the customs and linguistic traditions of the various groups. Each has a distinctive pronunciation of Hebrew, with the Sephardi pronunciation being adopted in the modern spoken language of Israel. Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic have also developed as unique additional languages.

There are also a number of other distinctive Jewish communities throughout the world, such as the Ethiopian and Indian Jews, many of whom have settled in Israel.

Jewish Dietary Laws (*Kashrut*)

Observant Jews eat only kosher ('proper') foods, as defined in the biblical commandments. All plants are kosher, while kosher meat must come from a permitted animal, bird or fish.

Permitted animals must have split hooves and chew their cud, such as cows, sheep, goats and deer. Permitted birds include chicken, duck and turkey. Permitted fish must have fins and scales. Forbidden foods include pork and its products, birds of prey and shellfish. Also, milk and meat products may not be eaten together.

Animals are slaughtered by a specially trained person in a specific manner that is as pain-free and humane as possible. Kashrut also requires the preparation of food using kosher equipment and utensils, which must not be used for non-kosher food. Observant Jews will therefore not eat food prepared in restaurants or homes that are not kosher.

The Jewish Calendar

The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar year, consisting of 12 months of 29-30 days, with each month beginning with the new moon. An extra month is added every few years to adapt to the solar year and to keep the festivals, which often have seasonal aspects, in the appropriate season. Sabbaths and festivals begin at sunset, as each new day begins at sunset.

Shabbat (Sabbath) is a day of rest, lasting from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. 'Rest' is the subject of complex definitions, with absence of work as the central feature. Sabbath candles are lit before sunset at a family gathering in the home, and prayers of sanctification are recited over wine and bread. Sabbath services and celebrations are held in the synagogue. With prayer, song and study, the main features of Shabbat are menuchah (rest) and oneg (joy).

Rosh Hashana (New Year) is the anniversary of Creation when God reviews the world and examines the deeds of mankind. The shofar (a ram's horn) is blown as a call to spiritual wakefulness. Rosh Hashana is a two-day festival spent in prayer at the beginning of the month of Tishrei (which falls in September or October). The days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are known as The Days of Awe or the Ten Days of Penitence and are a time for personal resolutions and healing relationships.

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is a 25-hour fast and period of abstinence, largely spent in prayers for forgiveness of sins against

God and if there is an injured party who has been appeased – fellow humans. Prayer, repentance and charity lead to forgiveness from God, while restitution is also required to achieve forgiveness from other people. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

Succot (Tabernacles) falls at the conclusion of the fruit harvest in Israel and five days after Yom Kippur. It lasts seven days. The succah, a temporary structure often built of wood and branches, recalls the temporary shelters and the vulnerability of the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. The succah symbolises the fragility of life and the need for God's protection. Jews are meant to sleep or at least eat meals in the succah during the week of Succot.

Pesach (Passover) lasts eight days and marks the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On the first two nights of the festival a home ceremony called a Seder takes place with prayers and food which symbolise the bitterness of slavery and the sweetness of freedom, and the story of the exodus from Egypt is related. Matzah, unleavened bread (flour without yeast), is eaten on Pesach to recall the “bread of affliction” which was eaten in Egypt. Leavened bread or other leavened food may not be eaten during the eight days of the festival. Pesach falls in the month of Nissan, which corresponds to March or April.

Shavuot (Weeks) is the festival when Jews mark God's giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. It is an occasion for renewed dedication to the Torah. It falls seven weeks after Pesach. The period of 49 days between the festivals marks the

transition from slavery to the freedom to serve God. Shavuot falls in the month of Sivan, which coincides with May or June. **Yom Ha'atzmaut**, Israel's Independence Day, is observed as a festival, with the traditional Song of Praise reserved for festivals

Days of Mourning include the, **Fast of Av** on which the destruction of both Temples is remembered, and **Yom Ha'Shoah**, a day of remembrance for the victims of the Nazi Holocaust

Simchat Torah (Celebration of the Torah) is a time of rejoicing over the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah and the beginning of a new annual cycle.

Chanukah (Festival of Lights) is an eight-day festival marking the victory of Judah the Maccabee in the 2nd century BCE over the Hellenic oppressors who had conquered Judea and defiled the Temple in Jerusalem. Judah, in rededicating the Temple, found only one day's supply of sacred oil from which to light the Menorah. The miracle of Chanukah is that the oil burned for eight days, symbolising the survival of the monotheistic Jewish tradition against the onslaught of paganism. Hence Jews today light a chanukiah (candelabrum) every night for eight nights. Chanukah falls in Kislev (November or December).

Christianity

This section is written by Philip Hughes, based on materials on
Christianity in Philip Hughes and Sharon Bond's,
Australia's Religious Communities CD-Rom, Christian Research Association,
Melbourne, 2004.

Christianity

Every Christian denomination has its own perspectives on the history and nature of the Christian faith and its own interpretation of the person of Jesus. The following is not a full account of Christianity, but some general notes which provide a basis for understanding the various interpretations.

Historical Context

The history of Christianity begins in the context of Judaism in the land of Palestine. For centuries before Christianity emerged, Palestine had been controlled by one empire after another. Two thousand years ago, the Romans were in charge. It was in this context that Jesus was born some time between 6 and 4 BCE. Many Jewish people felt that if they were true to God and obeyed the Jewish laws and traditions scrupulously, God would send a leader who would throw out the Romans and would re-establish an independent kingdom. There were different ideas, however, about what form loyalty to God should take. For many people, loyalty meant maintaining the rituals in the temple in Jerusalem. For many it is maintaining 'purity' by scrupulously keeping the Jewish laws.

Jesus

Around 29 CE a man called Jesus began healing and teaching mainly in the northern area of Israel, known as Galilee. He gathered a small group of followers together and began preaching alongside Lake Galilee and in the surrounding areas. It was evident that his ideas were somewhat different from those of most of his

contemporaries. For example, there was common agreement that people who had skin diseases and maladies were impure and touching them caused others to become impure, but Jesus did not agree with this at all. He was compassionate towards these people and quite ready to touch them. There were many accounts of Jesus healing people.

What was important in life, Jesus said, was loving God and one's neighbour, and not about the letter of the law about purity. Loving one's neighbour meant going out of one's way to help others, especially the poor, the sick and people on the margins of society. Religious rituals had little significance if the heart was not right. Indeed, Jesus intimated that God could reign in the heart of individual people, and that was more important than political arrangements. Jesus said that what God required of people could be fulfilled in the context of every-day life. He did not demand that people became priests or ascetics. Jesus maintained that farmers and fishermen, tax collectors and carpenters could be just as acceptable to God as the priests who served in the Temple in Jerusalem. Many people appreciated Jesus' teaching and it seems that he became popular with many ordinary people, especially those who lived around Galilee. Many wondered whether he might be the future king which their traditions had promised, someone they called the 'Messiah' (or in Greek, 'Christ'). They imagined that the Messiah would organise them militarily and overthrow the Romans. But Jesus gave no hint that he would take a military approach. If he was the Messiah, he was certainly a very different sort of Messiah.

After Jesus had been teaching for approximately three years, he went to a festival in Jerusalem where he was warmly welcomed by many people. This reception added to the nervousness of some of the religious and political leaders who therefore decided to arrest him one night. After a brief trial that same night, Jesus was handed over to the Roman authorities with the request that they execute him, as they did with many political trouble-makers. The very next day, Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross, an execution practice of the Romans known as crucifixion, and was dead within hours.

According to the stories which were recorded by the followers of Jesus, two days after the crucifixion some of Jesus' followers went to the tomb where his body had been placed and found that the tomb was empty. Over the next few weeks, various groups of followers claimed that they had actually seen Jesus, had talked with him and had even touched him. But he had not been resuscitated: his body was now different, and he could suddenly appear to a whole group in a locked room, for example. His followers were sure that Jesus had been raised from death to a different form of existence (now referred to as the Resurrection), and that he was very much alive.

The Early Days of the Christian Communities

For the first few weeks, the followers of Jesus were confused about what they should do. But a few weeks after the crucifixion, traditions tell of an experience later referred to as Pentecost. A group of followers who had gathered in a room heard a sound like a strong wind blowing around in the house. They had a vision of fire touching each person there. They began to speak in strange languages. They understood this experience as the coming of a God into their lives in a new way and talked about this as the coming of God's Spirit.

The followers of Jesus were emboldened by this experience and began teaching that Jesus was a special messenger from God. In some ways, he had been like many of the other Jewish prophets. Yet he was greater than the prophets. They spoke of Jesus as God's Son. In Jesus, God had been present among them.

They began to form little groups of people who were committed to the way of Jesus in Palestine. Some travelled to Jews in other cities around the Roman Empire to tell them about Jesus. Many non-Jewish people became very interested in the new faith. This raised intense questions about whether such people should be admitted to these little groups of followers of Jesus without first becoming Jews. While there were strong arguments both ways, those who felt it was not necessary to become Jews in order to be accepted as a follower of Jesus won the argument.

One of the most prominent of the followers of Jesus was a man named Paul. He travelled widely through Asia Minor and Europe,

forming new groups of followers of Jesus wherever he went. Some of Paul's teaching remains for us in a series of letters that he wrote to these new groups of followers. He advised them about matters of organisation and ethical dilemmas they faced. Most importantly, however, he clarified matters of faith, pointing out to these groups what he thought was most important in their belief about God and about Jesus. Evident in Paul's letters is reflection on who Jesus was, why he had died and what his resurrection meant.

Developments in the Christian Churches

The Christian faith spread rapidly in the first three centuries throughout the Roman Empire, into Africa, through the Middle East and as far as India. From time to time, there was conflict between the local Roman officials and the Christian communities over the authority of the Roman Empire in its demand that the citizens worship the Emperor. Some Christians were martyred, but this only served to strengthen the early Christian communities. In 324 CE, the Emperor, Constantine, decided that Christianity should be accepted as an official religion of the Roman Empire. As a result, the relationship between the church leaders and the political leaders changed. They began meeting together, giving and taking advice from one another. One issue in the early Christian communities was how the community should be organised and what the appropriate forms of authority should be, particularly the comparative authority of the leaders of local Christian communities (known as 'churches') and that of wandering preachers and prophets. Gradually, the leaders (known as bishops) of some of the larger and more important Christian groups took responsibility for and developed authority over smaller groups. The bishop of the

church in Rome took a leading role and, in time, the title of 'pope' was exclusively used for him.

A collection of Jesus' sayings was made not long after Jesus died. The original collection has been lost, but parts of it have been copied into several other books which remain. Over the following decades, several followers of Jesus wrote down accounts of what Jesus did and what he had said, and particularly the stories of that last week when he went to Jerusalem. In all of these books, we find a profound wrestling with the question of who Jesus was. Many manuscripts about Jesus circulated through the early church and there was much discussion about which were authentic and which were not. The general measure of authenticity was understood to be those writings which had their origins in the first generation of Jesus' followers. Various collections of these manuscripts were made as early as 150 CE and were used in services of worship. In time, twenty-seven manuscripts were chosen and these became known as the 'New Testament'. Of these four, known as Gospels, in their own way tell the story of Jesus' ministry and particularly the last week of his life.

In the following centuries there was considerable debate about how best to express the Christian faith. Some of the issues were considered in large councils which brought together leaders of the Christian communities from Spain through to Persia. For example, a Council which met in Nicaea, in Asia Minor, in 325 CE, drew up what became known as the Nicene Creed as a statement of orthodox belief. The Nicene Creed continues to be recited in many churches today.

While councils resolved some differences, other divisions emerged. After the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), the 'Oriental Christian Churches' of Egypt, Syria and Armenia moved in their own directions. Some centuries later (around 1054 CE), another major split occurred between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches which had their headquarters in Constantinople. The early centuries of the second millennium saw the building of many great churches and cathedrals (a church associated with the bishop of a particular region). It was also a time in which many of the organisations of the church, particularly the monastic orders, grew in strength. These 'orders' were communities of men or women who devoted themselves to the work of the church, living voluntarily under a rule which organised their celibate lives around a daily pattern of prayer, manual work and study. In many places, the members of these monastic orders played significant roles as scholars and teachers and in caring for the sick.

In the 15th century, several reform movements, collectively known as the Reformation developed, mostly in northern Europe. Among the prominent leaders of these movements were Martin Luther, who founded the Lutheran Church and John Calvin who is seen as the founder of the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions. There were many other reformed movements which led to the formation of other Christian groups such as the Baptists. The desire to reform the church was supported by a number of northern European princes and kings as it gave them political independence. The Church of England became independent of the authority of the Catholic Church, but drew in only a limited way on the ideas of the Reformers.

The Catholic Church responded with what is referred to as the Counter-Reformation. At the Council of Trent (1545 - 63 CE) it reaffirmed its faith and sought to improve discipline and efficiency among the clergy. New orders were formed in which there was greater discipline and new commitment to the faith.

The end of the 15th century saw Europeans discover many parts of the world of which they had only the vaguest ideas or no knowledge at all. Following the explorers were the traders looking for new goods to plunder or to trade and the conquerors looking for land over which they might exert their power. Missionaries, bringing the Christian faith, followed close on the heels of the traders and soldiers.

In northern Europe, in the 19th century, some Christians particularly in England and the United States of America sought to develop churches which reflected the beliefs and structures of the early church. However, there were differences in opinion as to what were the beliefs and structures of the early church and the movement gave rise to several new denominations. Among these were the Brethren, the Christadelphians, the Churches of Christ, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists. In a different way, The Salvation Army sought a renewed sense of holiness expressed in service of the poor and disadvantaged.

Two new major Christian movements stand out as having particular significance in the 20th century: the Ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement. The Ecumenical movement saw increasing cooperation among many of the major Protestant denominations primarily through councils of churches in local communities and at

national level, and on a world scale, through the World Council of Churches. The Eastern Orthodox churches joined the World Council of Churches in the 1960s. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) brought great changes to the Catholic Church, including a new spirit of dialogue and cooperation with other Christian denominations.

The Pentecostal movement began in 1906 in America, but appeared in many countries within the following decade. It led to the formation of many new denominations. Growth was particularly rapid in the closing decades of the 20th century in South America, parts of Asia such as Korea, and in parts of the Western world.

At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 2 billion people, about one third of the world's population, living in every country around the globe identify with the Christian faith. While Christian churches in some parts of Europe are experiencing decline, in Asia, Africa, and South America the numbers of Christians continues to grow rapidly.

Beliefs and Practices

The earliest statement of Christian belief was very simple 'Jesus is Lord'. It was a statement recognising the authority of Jesus and acknowledging Jesus to be the one through whom God's authority was expressed. It was based on the belief that Jesus had been raised from death by God and had divine authority.

At the heart of the Christian faith, as in the Jewish faith, was belief in God. There was One God, not a multitude of gods, who had created the world and had created life. At the same time, there grew the conviction that God was present in the historical person of Jesus.

The practices of the early church involved gathering weekly for prayers, singing, talking and probably hearing the stories about Jesus and his followers. The community would regularly have a meal together. In the context of the meal, some bread was broken and some wine shared as a special act of remembrance of Jesus' death. In the sharing of the bread and wine, there was a special sense of the presence of God. Creeds as Basic Expressions of Faith
In time, the Christians began setting down their beliefs in the form of simple statements or creeds. One early creed of which there is written evidence from 390 CE, but which came from an earlier period, is known as the Apostles' Creed. There are some variations in its wording, but all versions have four elements referring to God in creation, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit and the church.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

This creed is still used in many churches as a basic statement of faith, particularly at times of baptism. However, the interpretations of it are many and various.

Most Christians, but not all, believe that God is 'Three in One' (referred to as the Trinity). In some mysterious way, God is the Creator, but is also Jesus and the Holy the Spirit. At the same time, Jesus was both God and fully human and that he suffered death, but was raised to life again. Jesus is now with God and has the full authority of God. Many Christians, but not all, believe that at some point in time, Jesus will appear again in such a way that his divine authority will be recognised.

Christians also believe that God in the form of the Holy Spirit is present in the life of Christians, and particularly in the Church. By the 'holy catholic Church' is meant the total body of the followers of Jesus. 'Catholic' in this context means 'universal', and thus it refers to all followers of Jesus Christ both past and present. The 'saints' mentioned in the creed refers to the followers of Jesus.

'Saint' is also a term used for people who have been seen as particularly close to God. Many Christian traditions regard Mary, the mother of Jesus, as pre-eminent among the saints. From earliest times, it has been asserted that she conceived through the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Jesus without losing her virginity. Some traditions believe that Mary, along with other saints, intercedes to God on behalf of human beings. Hence, in certain traditions, it has been common to pray to Mary and other saints. The creed concludes with the statement that human beings can be forgiven for their sin. Sin is usually taken as referring to a state of alienation from God revealed in evil acts and thoughts. Thus, the creed states that it is possible for that alienation from God to be overcome. Most Christians believe that there is life after death, and that if that alienation from God is overcome, people may experience a life with God which does not cease at death, often referred to as 'eternal life'.

Throughout history, there have been a lot of arguments about whether Christians can earn a relationship with God or 'eternal life' in some way. Most Christians have maintained that Christians cannot earn it. They can only accept what God offers as an expression of undeserved love to human beings. Nevertheless, different accounts have been given as to what such an acceptance of God's love means and how that acceptance is demonstrated. It is expressed in worship, in obedience to God's instructions, and also in love for other human beings: affirming others irrespective of ethnic background, social class and gender. At the same time, that love was respectful of other people, caring and compassionate, patient and forgiving. It was to be distinguished from the sexual love of passion, which had its place within marriage.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The initial acceptance of God's love is often seen as taken place in submission to baptism, involving a sprinkling with or immersion in water, usually within the context of a service of worship. Most, but not all churches, practise some form of baptism. In most churches, babies are baptised soon after birth, and it is affirmed that through baptism they become part of the body of God's people, the church. However, in some churches, such as Baptist and Pentecostal churches, baptism occurs only among adults and is the sign of that individual's personal commitment to be a follower of Jesus.

The on-going ritual in which God's love as demonstrated in the death of Jesus is celebrated is a symbolic meal of bread and wine or grape juice variously named the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Eucharist, or the Mass. In some Christian denominations, the ritual is seen as a sacrament of Christ's sacrifice. Sacraments are outward and visible signs of God's act of love and grace in the inner life of the individual. Hence, many Christians believe that God in Christ is very specially present in the sacrament. In other denominations, it is seen as a meal through which the death of Jesus is remembered.

Other sacraments, or rituals through which God impacts the lives of human beings, are celebrated in various Christian traditions. Many Christians celebrate seven sacraments: baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, anointing for illness and in preparation for death, and holy orders.

Prayer and Services of Worship

Most Christians believe that they are able to communicate with God in prayer. Thus, prayers to God form part of almost every service of worship and are an important part of the personal life of most Christians. However, the extent to which God is believed to intervene in the events and activities which occur varies from denomination to another, and even more, from one Christian to another. Some prayers are more formal, prepared beforehand or read from prayer books, expressing devotion towards God, seeking forgiveness for particular things that the person or group has done wrong, or seeking God's blessing. Other prayers are very informal, a conversation with God about daily life and events.

Most services of worship and the devotional lives of many Christians also involve reading the Bible. The authority of the Bible is variously understood. Some see it as the literal words of God to human beings, while other Christians believe that it is inspired by experiences of God, but must be read within the context of its time and the worldview of the various authors who contributed to it. Most denominations hold services of worship weekly, usually on a Sunday, although a few denominations hold them on a Saturday, and some hold them on various days of the week. In practice, expectations of attendance vary from one denomination to another, the ideal often being attendance at least once a week. Most services take place in a purpose-built building known as a church, but there are many Christian communities which meet in other buildings.

Annual Festivals

There are two major festivals which occur on an annual basis which are celebrated in most, but not all churches. Christmas, on 25th December, celebrates the birth of Jesus. There are usually special services at that time and special songs, called carols, are sung on these occasions. Easter is the time when Jesus' death is remembered. Other services may be held on other days of the week leading up to Easter, often called 'Holy Week'. There is usually a special service of worship on Good Friday (the Friday before Easter Day) remembering the death of Jesus and another special service on the following Sunday, known as Easter Day, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

The date of Easter is determined by the time of the Paschal Full Moon, and varies between 21st March and 25th April. The method of determining the date is a little different in the Western churches and the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. There are numerous other annual festivals celebrating other special occasions, such as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem prior to his death on Palm Sunday, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus fifty days after Jesus' death known as Pentecost or Whitsun.

What are the Christian Holy Days?

(Source: Joe Jenkins, *Christianity*, Oxford : Heinemann, 1995)

Western

1. Epiphany- 6 January: Epiphany comes from the word “revealing”. This feast day is older than Christmas and has been kept since the fourth century CE in the West, and third century CE in the East. It celebrates the revealing of Christ’s divinity. It is the last day of the Christmas period.
2. Ash Wednesday- February/ March: This day marks the beginning of Lent and during this service, held on Ash Wednesday as a reminder of our morality, Christians draw a cross of ashes on their foreheads.
3. Maundy Thursday- March/April: This is a special communion service that remembers the last evening Jesus spent with his disciples and the sacrifice he made by his death. In the UK, the Queen distributes ‘Maundy money’ – traditionally to poor people- in the memory of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-20)
4. Good Friday- March/April: This day is when Jesus died on the cross and is called ‘good’ because Christians believe that because Jesus died, they can gain forgiveness for their sins.
5. Easter Day- March/ April: This is a movable feast day that marks Jesus’ Resurrection and appearance to his mother Mary and his disciples.

6. Ascension Day- May/ June: This is the day when Christians remember Jesus' ascension into heaven.

7. Whit Sunday- May/ June: Christians celebrate Pentecost, the day when God sent his Holy Spirit to the apostles and the Christian Church was founded. It is a popular day for baptism, when a person is immersed in- or sprinkled with- water as a sign that they are cleansed from sin and have become a full member of the Church.

8. Advent Sunday- November/ December: This is the beginning of the Church's calendar year.

9. Christmas Day- 25 December: This holy day celebrates the birth of Jesus. Although no one knows when Christ was born, but by the middle of the fourth century CE Christians were celebrating his birth on the winter solstice which, according to the astronomy of the time, was 25 December.

Eastern

Orthodox Churches are linked with ancient Greek civilization and the word 'orthodox' ('right in opinion') emphasizes the strong links with worship and teachings of the first Christian centuries. The festivals of the Eastern Church include:

1. Lenten Monday- February/ March: This is the first day of the period of fasting and preparation for Easter. The Orthodox and

Western religious calendars disagree on the timing of Lent, mostly because there is no agreement on how to adjust the lunar calendar.

2. Easter Day/ Pascha- March/ April: The Christians celebrate the Resurrection of Christ.

3. Pentecost- May/June: This word comes from the Greek for 'fifty' and is the same feast as the Western Christians' Whitsun.

Islam

Information in this section is taken from Abdullah Saeed's,
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Islam

There are different ways of looking at Islam amongst Muslims. The following is not a full account of Islam, but some general notes that provide a basis for understanding the religion and its various interpretations.

Beginning of Islam

In the sixth and the early seventh centuries of the Common Era (CE), Mecca (in the country known today as Saudi Arabia) was a commercial town on the trade route between south and north Arabia. People of various religious backgrounds (Christians, Jews and pagans) used to pass through Mecca and a rich religious life existed there. Most Meccans were pagans who worshipped idols but who also believed in a higher god. There were also Christians and Jews living in Mecca and the surrounding regions. In fact, several Christian and Jewish communities existed in the south, west and north of Arabia. The Meccan people were aware of concepts such as God, prophets and scripture even before the Prophet Muhammad began to teach the religion of Islam.

Like the rest of Arabia, Meccan society was composed of clans and tribes, with one tribe in particular – the Quraysh – dominating. The clans were made up of various families; some were prominent in trade and others in political and religious affairs.

The most important place of religious significance was the Ka`ba, the cube-like building which stands today in the middle of the Sacred Mosque (al-Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca. It was visited by

Arabs from in and around Mecca as an important centre of pilgrimage. It is believed that the origins of the pilgrimage to the Ka`ba go back to the time of Abraham and his eldest son Ishmael. Muslims believe it was Abraham and Ishmael who built the Ka`ba.

The Meccans were Arabs. They loved their language, Arabic, particularly the art of poetry. Possessing an oral culture, the Meccans appreciated the power of language. The poet of a clan was its spokesperson, whose poetry would be learned and transmitted to others. During important trading and religious occasions, festivals were held in and around Mecca in which poetry recitations and competitions were held.

Prophet Muhammad, a native of Mecca, began to preach the religion called Islam in 610 CE. He taught that Islam's primary focus is acknowledging that there is only one God and that human beings have a duty to 'submit' to God's will. He also said that all prophets before him (such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus) taught the same thing.

Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca. His father was Abd Allah, a Meccan merchant who died before Muhammad's birth. His mother was Aminah, who died when Muhammad was just six years old, so Muhammad was orphaned at an early age. His grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, then took on the care of Muhammad, but he too died just two years later. From then on, Muhammad was brought up by his uncle, Abu Talib.

Muhammad was known for his honesty and hard work. In his early twenties, his reputation brought him to work for a very wealthy widowed Meccan businesswoman, whose name was Khadijah. Muhammad worked for Khadijah as a merchant in the caravan trade. Because of his integrity and honesty, she eventually proposed marriage to the young man. He accepted, and they were married for 25 years until Khadijah's death in 619 CE. Together, they had two sons and four daughters.

Prophet Muhammad's mission

Muhammad was a person who liked to reflect and meditate. When he was in his thirties he began to spend time alone, away from the busy life of Mecca. He would go to a nearby cave called Hira, just outside Mecca. It was there, in one of those times of reflection, that he received the first revelation from God.

One day, while in the cave, he heard a voice (of the angel Gabriel) addressing him, asking him to 'read' without saying exactly what to read. The voice asked him to read three times. Each time, Muhammad said, 'I cannot read'. The third time, the voice said:

Read in the name of your Lord, who has created – created Man [human being] out of a germ-cell. Read – for your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who has taught [Man] by the pen – taught Man what he did not know. (Qur'an 96:1-5.)

This short passage became the first revealed verses of the Qur'an, a collection of the revelations sent to Muhammad, and which Muslims believe is the word of God.

Muhammad was deeply disturbed by this experience. He hurried home to Khadijah who tried to calm him down and comfort him. Soon, however, Muhammad realised what his mission was and what his obligations were. He began to preach his message to his family and close friends and relatives. His wife was the first believer, followed by his children and some close relatives and friends. His teaching began to spread slowly, but the Meccan elite became alarmed at what they saw as a challenge to their influence.

Muhammad continued for thirteen years, preaching his message with little success. He had relatively few converts. Because of the persecution, he and his followers finally departed Mecca, leaving behind their homes, property and often their families, and settled in a town in the north called Yathrib, which became known as Medina or 'City of the Prophet'. There they established their first community in 622 CE, a date which also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Medina became the central place for Muslims, the capital of the first Islamic 'state'. For the next ten years in Medina, the Prophet continued to teach his message with great success. At the time of the Prophet's death, ten years later, in 632, Islam had spread to all corners of Arabia and a large part of the population had embraced the new religion. Within a hundred years of the death of the Prophet, Islam had reached modern-day Spain and southern France in the west, and the borders of China in the east. Over the next fourteen hundred years, Muslims founded a series of great empires and contributed greatly to world civilisation.

Key Beliefs of a Muslim

Most Muslims are born into a Muslim family and grow up as Muslims. Others convert to Islam from other religious traditions such as Christianity. A person becomes a Muslim simply by saying 'La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah' or 'there is no god except God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God' and believing it sincerely. Once a person becomes a Muslim, he or she is expected to follow Islam.

One God

The most fundamental belief of a Muslim is that there is only one God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of everything in the universe. There are no other gods besides God. All other beliefs and practices of Islam are based on this belief. The most frequently used name of God is Allah (which means 'the God' in Arabic). Muslims believe that God in Islam is not the God of Muslims only, but the God of all people, be they Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus or any other. Here are some Muslim beliefs about God:

- Nothing that exists in the universe is like God. We cannot imagine or represent God in any way (through art, for instance) because, however we imagine Him, He is always different.
- God has many beautiful names such as 'Loving', 'Merciful', 'Compassionate', 'Forgiving', 'Just', and 'Creator'. They all refer to the one and only God.

- God is not male or female. The pronoun 'He' is used because it has been the traditional way to refer to God. 'He' does not indicate any gender when we talk about God.
- God existed and will exist always. God has no beginning or end. God created time, and time began with the creation of the universe. When the end of the universe comes, it will be the end of time. But God will remain forever.
- All human beings can speak directly to God (for example through their prayers). No one needs an intermediary between God and him/herself.
- God also has full knowledge of everything that happens everywhere in the universe.

Prophets

Muslims believe that God sent prophets and messengers to all the peoples of the earth. No people were excluded from this, from Australian Aboriginal people to indigenous Americans and Europeans. Prophets and messengers were sent to teach people primarily about God and about treating others kindly, justly and fairly.

Muslims believe that God sent thousands of prophets to humanity before Prophet Muhammad. The first was Adam and the last was Muhammad, although the Muslim Holy Scripture, the Qur'an, mentions the names of only twenty-five prophets. All prophets came with a similar message: people have a duty to recognise the Creator and submit to His will. This submission is referred to as 'islam' in Arabic. Thus all prophets, including Adam, Abraham,

Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are 'submitters' to God and therefore called 'Muslims' (those who submit to God).

The last prophet, Muhammad, did not teach a new message as such. Like prophets before him, he taught the oneness of God and how to lead a righteous life.

Scriptures

Another important belief is that God provided certain instructions (through revelations) to various prophets in the past. Some of these revelations were preserved, written down and became 'holy scriptures'. Muslims believe that God gave scriptures to prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad. The Qur'an mentions the Gospel (*Injil*) of Jesus, the Psalms (*Zabur*) of David and the Torah (*Tawrat*) given to Moses. The basic message in these scriptures is the same: to believe in God and to live life according to His will. For Muslims, the final scripture is the Holy Qur'an, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims treat the Qur'an with great respect, as it is believed to be literally the word of God revealed in the Arabic language. It forms the basis of Islamic law, ethics and belief, and is recited by Muslims during prayers and all the important rituals and moments in life. Pages of the Qur'an are often decorated with beautiful calligraphy. Similarly, verses of the Qur'an may decorate the walls of mosques and places of residence. Because the Qur'an was first revealed as an oral recitation, Muslims try hard to recite the verses they learn in a beautiful and melodious voice. It is a great skill to be able to recite the Qur'an, and its sound has an evocative power.

Angels

Muslims also believe in beings called angels, although Muslims do not know what they look like, how many there are, or what their functions are, because they belong to the unseen world. The belief is each angel is given a function by God, and, unlike human beings, angels do not have the power to disobey God.

Only a few angels are mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Two of them are Gabriel (Jibril) and Michael (Mika'il). Gabriel is the angel who takes revelations (messages) from God to His prophets. He is believed to have conveyed the revelations of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad and, before that, announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Prophet Jesus. Michael is considered to have the responsibility for death.

Day of Judgement

Muslims believe that one day life as we know it will come to an end, and at some point the Day of Judgment will come. On that day each person will be accountable to God for his or her actions in this life. God will bring back to life all human beings and gather them for judgment, showing everything each person has done in his or her life. Those who lived on the whole a 'good' or moral life in line with God's instructions will be saved. Their reward will be eternal life in a place called Paradise. Those who lived a 'bad' life, or did not believe in God, or rejected His prophets' teachings, will be condemned. Their punishment will be life in Hell. People whose

bad deeds outweigh their good deeds will experience Hell for a certain period of time.

The most commonly used Arabic word for Paradise is *jannah* and the word for Hell is *jahannam*. We have no way of knowing what Paradise and Hell look like, or what it will be like there. The Qur'an gives some metaphors and descriptions in order to help people understand some basic things about life after death, but only God knows what it is like in reality.

God's timeless knowledge

Muslims also believe that God knows everything that happens in the universe. He has full knowledge of the past, present and future, although we cannot understand how. This means that good and bad things may happen for a reason that may be unclear at the time, so patience in the face of adversity is important. What may appear to be a bad thing, in fact, could be a good thing and vice versa.

The 'Five Pillars' of Islam

A Muslim is expected to perform certain duties. These are called the 'five pillars of Islam'. Throughout the Muslim world, these five duties are performed by practising Muslims. This is one of the areas of Islam that unify Muslims around the world.

The declaration of faith

Muslims must declare and accept that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. It is usually declared by saying: 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God' (in Arabic: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*).

Prayer (*salat*)

A Muslim is expected to pray at least five times a day. Each prayer involves recitation of parts of the Qur'an and certain movements such as standing and prostration. The prayers (*salat*) have names and are performed at certain times of the day:

<i>Fajr</i>	between dawn (first light) and sunrise
<i>Zuhr</i>	from noon until mid-afternoon
<i>Asr</i>	from mid-afternoon until sunset
<i>Maghrib</i>	from sunset until about an hour later
<i>Isha</i>	from an hour or so after sunset until dawn

When prayer time comes, a 'call to prayer' is usually made from the local mosque (a Muslim place of worship) which is heard in the neighbourhood in Muslim countries.

Muslims can pray anywhere, not just at the mosque. Any place that is clean – such as an office, a classroom or even a park – is suitable. Many Muslims go to the local mosque to pray, but in Australia because of work or the distance involved in going to a mosque, many pray at home or at work. Only on Friday (at noon) do Muslims have to pray in congregation in a mosque. This prayer must be performed in congregation whereas other daily prayers can be performed individually if a person wishes.

Before prayer, a Muslim is expected to wash his or her hands, face, arms and feet. This prepares the person to meet God in prayer in a clean and pure state. Under certain circumstances, he or she may have to take a shower or bath before praying. Clothes must be clean and cover the body. Men must be covered from at least the navel to knee, and women must be completely covered except for the face and hands. Muslims often use a prayer mat to make sure the place where they will pray is clean. Some prayer mats are beautifully decorated with pictures of the Ka`ba and geometrical patterns, while others are plain and simple pieces of cloth.

Worshippers face towards Mecca and commence praying. If there is more than one person, the prayer leader (*imam*) stands in front of the others who form rows behind him. Men and women form separate rows.

Praying consists of a number of actions and activities: standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting, recitation of the Qur'an, and supplication. Muslims all over the world generally follow one common format for the prayers.

Apart from the five daily prayers and the Friday prayers, there are two special prayers called *Eid* prayers that occur during the year. One is straight after the month of fasting (Ramadan) and the other during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims gather together in large numbers and pray the *Eid* prayers. Afterwards they share food and sometimes give each other presents. *Eid* is a very happy time for Muslims, when they visit relatives and friends, give charity and remember to thank God for all His blessings.

Charity (*zakat*)

Zakat is the payment of obligatory charity. Muslims must pay *zakat* if they have savings that have not gone below a certain amount for a whole year. This amount is equal to approximately eighty-five grams of gold. Today, the value of gold is translated into the local currency and the amount of *zakat* is two and a half percent of a person's average annual net savings.

The *zakat* that Muslims pay is given to the poor and needy, the disadvantaged in the community such as orphans, poor relatives, those struggling to repay their debts, students, and general welfare projects such as educational institutions, mosques and hospitals.

In addition to the annual *zakat*, Muslims are asked to make a small donation at the end of Ramadan, in order to allow the poor to

celebrate the end of fasting as well. Muslims also give voluntarily at other times. They are expected to be generous; stinginess is strongly discouraged.

Fasting (*sawm*)

Muslim adults are expected to fast during the month of Ramadan. This is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is either twenty-nine or thirty days long. They eat a light meal before dawn, then go without food or drink all day until sunset. At sunset, they break their fast.

Fasting involves abstaining from food, drink and sex during daylight hours from dawn to sunset. Ramadan is not just about food and drink. During fasting, Muslims are expected to avoid bad deeds, words and thoughts. They should spend time, where possible, in prayer and meditation, and help the disadvantaged in the community. Finally, fasting is a time to forgive others for things they have done to you and make amends for your own misdeeds towards other people.

Children are expected to fast when they reach religious maturity: this is the beginning of menstruation for girls, and the onset of puberty for boys. Although all adult Muslims are expected to fast in Ramadan, there are some exemptions. Those who are too old or sick or people on long journeys do not have to fast, nor do women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or menstruating. They can fast afterwards.

No matter where Ramadan is observed, normal life continues. Muslims still go to work or school even though they are fasting.

Pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*)

At least once in a lifetime, a Muslim who is physically and financially able is expected to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, called *hajj*. This takes place during the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

Today, nearly two million Muslims normally travel to Mecca to take part in this annual religious event. It takes about five days for the various *hajj* rituals to be completed in and around Mecca. Pilgrims spend their time praying, reflecting, supplicating and reciting the Qur'an. Many Muslims express feeling a spiritual renewal following *hajj*. During the pilgrimage, they also experience a sense of oneness with humanity, as pilgrims from all around the globe gather in peace and unity to worship God. *Hajj* is considered the great equaliser, as all men (rich and poor) for example, wear the same simple two pieces of plain cloth for the duration of *hajj*: billionaires and kings side by side with the poor and down-trodden.

Muslims believe that if their *hajj* is accepted by God, their previous misdeeds and sins are washed away and forgiven.

Main divisions within Islam

Like any other religious tradition, such as Christianity or Judaism, Islam has many groups and sub-groups. Some of these divisions are related to the theological school or legal school a person belongs to; others are related to how people try to find answers to contemporary problems; still others are related to how one should interpret religious teachings. Some divisions are political while others are theological or spiritual. Examples:

Sunnis and Shi`a

One of the most commonly understood differences among Muslims is related to a political issue of leadership, going back to the seventh century CE. Immediately after the death of the Prophet in 632, one of the first important problems Muslims had to face was who should be the successor to the Prophet and lead the Muslim community. Some Muslims argued that one of the family members of the Prophet should be the successor, in particular his cousin and son-in-law Ali. Those who followed this view came later to be known as Shi`a.

Other Muslims, who seemed to be in the majority, disagreed that the succession should be based on family ties. They argued that anyone who was capable of leading the Muslim community could become the successor and leader. They supported Abu Bakr, the Prophet's close friend, as his successor. Those who held this view were later known as Sunnis.

This division continues to this day. Over time, the Shi`a and Sunnis have developed their own theological and legal schools and their interpretations of various religious teachings.

Today, the vast majority of Muslims (about eighty-five percent) are Sunnis. The rest are Shi`a. The Shi`a live mainly in Iran, Iraq, India, Pakistan and Lebanon. Small communities of Shi`a exist throughout the world.

Different schools of law

There are five legal schools (schools of law) in Islam, which is another example of the diverse opinions held by Muslims. Most Muslims belong to one of these schools, although this is not compulsory.

The term 'legal school' refers to a particular way of interpreting or understanding Islamic teachings. For instance, a legal school says how a Muslim should perform the five daily prayers, or what rules must be followed in marriage and divorce, or who can have custody of the children when parents divorce. Since Islamic law covers many things, such as rituals, family law, contract law, criminal law, and many other areas of law, each legal school has its own position. Today, there are five main legal schools:

Hanafi	India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey
Shafi`i	Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt.
Maliki	North and West Africa
Hanbali	Arabia and the Persian Gulf
Ja`fari	Shi`a Muslims of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon

Milestones in a Muslim's life

Birth

When a child is born to Muslim parents, one of the first things done in many Muslim cultures is to make the 'call to prayer' in the right ear of the baby and the 'call to commence prayer' in the left ear. On the seventh day after birth, a naming ceremony called *aqiqa* is held. The child is given a name and the child's hair is shaved. Gifts and charity are given to the poor and disadvantaged in the community.

Circumcision of boys

Boys are circumcised early in their life. There is no particular age for this, and practices vary from culture to culture. Nevertheless, it is regarded as an occasion for celebration with presents, visits from family, and sharing of food. How this is celebrated varies from culture to culture.

Contrary to what many people believe, female circumcision is not an Islamic requirement or a common practice among Muslims. It does exist in some Muslim cultures but is unheard of in many Muslim cultures.

Puberty

Puberty for a boy is when he starts to produce semen and for a girl it is when she starts to have her periods. When children reach puberty, they are considered to have entered the adult world for religious purposes and are expected to perform the various rituals of Islam, such as the five daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan. In Islam, once a boy or girl reaches puberty, they are technically 'adults'. There are no celebratory rituals Muslim children are expected to perform on reaching puberty.

Marriage

Theoretically, puberty is also the time when marriage becomes permissible, but nowadays it is usually deferred until at least sixteen. In many Muslim societies, early marriage is common. Even in Australia, Muslims tend to marry earlier than the overall Australian population. This is the case for both males and females. However, a much larger number of Muslim females get married earlier than Muslim males. One reason for early marriage is that Islam strictly prohibits sex outside marriage, and marrying early helps prevent young adults from falling into illicit sexual relationships.

Death

There are no complicated or elaborate rites performed when a person is dying. When a Muslim is close to death, he or she is encouraged to utter the declaration of faith 'there is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God'. It is also common for

someone present to recite verses of the Qur'an and pray for the peaceful departure of the soul.

When the person dies, the body must be handled with care and respect. Burial should take place as early as possible, usually within twenty-four hours, unless there are reasons for a later burial. The person is expected to be buried in the town or city where he or she died.

Muslim Calendar and Holy Days

Like any other religion, Islam has its share of festivals, holidays and holy days. Most of these days are marked in the Islamic calendar. This is a lunar calendar, meaning that its days and months are related to the movement and phases of the moon, unlike the Gregorian calendar we use in Australia, which is based on the solar year. Australian Muslims often use both the Islamic calendar and the Gregorian calendar.

The Islamic calendar has twelve months. Each month is either twenty-nine or thirty days long. The Islamic calendar began with the migration of the Prophet Muhammad in 622 from Mecca to Medina, known as the *hijrah* (indicated by AH). Therefore the first year (or 1AH) in the Islamic calendar is equal to 622 in the Gregorian calendar.

Special days:

Two festivals (*Eid*)

- *Eid al-Fitr*: The first day of the month of Shawwal, which occurs immediately after the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting).
- *Eid al-Ad ha*: The tenth day of Dhu al-Hijjah. This occurs during the pilgrimage season, in the last month of the Islamic year.

Friday

On Friday, at noon, Muslims gather in the mosque for special congregational prayers. After the call to prayer, the imam gives a sermon. They then pray in congregation. In most Muslim countries, Friday is a holiday (part of the weekend).

Islamic New Year

This is the first of the month of Muharram (first month in Islamic calendar). In Muslim majority countries, it is a public holiday even if not a formal religious celebration.

Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad

The birthday of the Prophet, known as *mawlid al-nabi* is celebrated on the twelfth day of the month of Rabi` al-Awwal (the third month of Islamic calendar). While it is not a formal religious event, many Muslims mark this day in celebration of the special place that the Prophet Muhammad has in their hearts.

Month of Ramadan

Ramadan is the most sacred month of the year. Adult Muslims fast for the whole month, every day from dawn to sunset. They believe that it was in Ramadan that the Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation from God.

Sacred Places

Mecca

The most sacred place for Muslims is the Ka`ba in the sacred city of Mecca in modern day Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that the Ka`ba was built in time immemorial by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael as a place devoted for the worship of the one God. Mecca is where the Prophet Muhammad was born and lived, and began his mission. Muslims from all over the world gather there for their annual pilgrimage (*hajj*).

Medina

The second most sacred place for Muslims is Medina, the city of the Prophet, which is also in Saudi Arabia. The Mosque of the Prophet is in Medina. It is where the Prophet Muhammad and many of his immediate followers are buried. Only Muslims may visit Mecca and Medina.

Jerusalem

The third most sacred place in Islam is Jerusalem. It is believed to be where the Prophet Muhammad miraculously travelled in his famous Night Journey, and from where he ‘ascended’ to the heavens. There are several sacred monuments for Muslims in Jerusalem, such as the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque.

The Mosque (*masjid*)

One of the most important everyday places for Muslims is the mosque, where they perform their daily prayers as well as other important prayers such as the Friday and *Eid* prayers. A mosque can be anything, from a place to pray, to a simple building, to a large, highly decorated structure with a dome and a tall minaret. Although the notion of a mosque as a separate building has taken deep root in Muslim communities, it does not have to be a building. In fact, any clean place may be used as a mosque, including a park or the desert.

Other sacred places

There are places considered sacred by some Muslims but not others. For example, Karbala, in Iraq, is one of the holiest places for Shi`a Muslims. It is the place where the third Shi`a Imam, the Prophet's grandson, Husayn, was killed. Shi`a Muslims from around the world visit Karbala to commemorate the death of Husayn.

Throughout the Muslim world there are tombs and shrines of mystics and other prominent religious personalities. Many Muslims consider such places as sacred as well. This is despite the fact that there are Muslims who consider such tombs and shrines and visits to them as un-Islamic.

Sacred Texts

The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the holy scripture of Muslims. It is in Arabic language and is a compilation of revelations sent from God to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 CE. It has one hundred and fourteen chapters (*suras*) of unequal length. The longest *sura* has two hundred and eighty-six verses while the shortest has only three verses.

The main subjects that are dealt with in the Qur'an are:

- God's creation of the universe
- God and His message to human beings
- Ethical and moral issues, such as the evil of injustice and the need to help the needy and disadvantaged
- How Muslims should behave in certain circumstances
- Stories of past prophets such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and Jesus
- The problems and difficulties faced by the Prophet Muhammad and the first Muslim community
- Life after death, Paradise and Hell, and accountability in the life after death

Muslim beliefs about the Qur'an

- The Qur'an is *literally* the speech of God, not the words or opinions of Prophet Muhammad or any other human being.

- The Qur'an was compiled (or put together) soon after the death of the Prophet. This has prevented the Qur'an from being 'corrupted' or 'distorted'. Thus the Qur'an has remained unchanged for over fourteen hundred years.
- The Qur'an remains the Qur'an only if it is in Arabic. If it is translated into any other language, it is a translation of the meanings of the Qur'an, not the Qur'an itself.

Hadith

The second most sacred text and the source of Islamic ethics, beliefs and practices is the anecdotes that document what the Prophet Muhammad said and did. These are called the Hadith.

During the twenty-three years of the Prophet's mission (from 610 to 632), many of the things that the Prophet said and did were told and retold by Muslims and were later documented. These anecdotes are important in understanding what the Qur'an says on many issues.

Additional Resources

Please note: Web links provided in this section take you to a third party web site.
The NCEIS is not responsible for the content of these external sites.

Additional Resources

For additional resources on **Judaism**, **Christianity** and **Islam**, visit the resources area of the NCEIS website:

http://www.nceis.unimelb.edu.au/resources/multifaith_resources.html

This site includes the following links for the three Abrahamic religions:

- Educational resources for teachers
- Religious organisations
- Recommended sites and reading

Glossary

Religionfacts.com is a recommended site for glossaries on Judaism, Christianity and Islam:

Judaism: <http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/glossary.htm>

Christianity: <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/glossary.htm>

Islam: <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/glossary.htm>

Multifaith and Multicultural Classrooms

Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia

<http://www.jcma.org.au>

Of particular interest to teachers and school leaders will be:

- *The JCMA Secondary Schools Project*

This interfaith project seeks to increase understanding of similarities and respect for difference amongst school students, staff and parents.

- *Together for Humanity – Primary Schools Project*

This award-winning and innovative project has been delivered to 25,000 students in NSW and the Northern Territories, and is now available to Victorian schools. Students engage with Christian, Islamic and Jewish role models of living in harmony. Children are invited to join a team with people of all cultures and faiths working together for a better world – by doing 40 steps toward one million actions together.

- *School Excursions*

Arrange a school visit to a synagogue, church or mosque where you know you will be welcomed in a spirit of respect for difference and diversity, and where the presentation will be clear and appropriate for the age and curriculum requirements.

Making Multicultural Australia

<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/>

This is one of Australia's leading sources of quality educational resources on multiculturalism. The website contains information on teaching resources and strategies to understand and promote cultural diversity and tolerance. It contains

more than 3500 pages of articles, research, teacher guides, lesson plans, audio interviews, video clips and Australian multicultural artworks.

This site is developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training, University of Technology Sydney, and Office of the Board of Studies NSW, in partnership with the Queensland Government, Australian Multicultural Foundation, Migration Heritage Centre NSW and Australia Council for the Arts.

Multicultural Education – Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, Victorian Government

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/Programmes/multicultural/>

A useful website providing information, resources and strategies on dealing with diversity in education for school leaders, teachers and parents. It also contains details of upcoming events and programmes, as well as professional development and skills training programmes.

Curriculum Corporation

<http://www.curriculum.edu.au>

Curriculum Corporation is a major provider of curriculum materials and services in Australia, and specialists in educational project management at national and international levels.

Of particular interest to teaching in Multifaith classrooms is its hand in developing the Values Education for Australian Schools:

<http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/>

Centre for Dialogue, LaTrobe University

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/dialogue>

The Centre for Dialogue specialises in the theory and practice of dialogue in all its cultural, religious, political and economic dimensions. The Centre seeks to identify effective avenues and mechanisms that can promote international and national dialogue.

Of particular interest to teachers and school leaders will be:

- *Education Dialogue Project*

This Project promotes the use of dialogue in order to heighten intercultural awareness in Victorian secondary schools. It has helped build an educational programme that mitigates community conflict and tension, and promotes multicultural dialogue and co-operation. Commencing in 2004, the Project has entailed extensive consultations with academics and a range of community, ethnic and religious organisations. The Project has benefited from the guidance of an advisory committee comprising experts in education from across Victoria.

The Education Dialogue Project has stressed the importance of the following:

- the need to hold up to scrutiny traditions and worldviews in order to discover their basic ethical impulses, and their potential for adaptation;
- placing emphasis on engagement with, and not merely recognition of, the 'other';
- encouraging processes that invite open inquiry, taking risks when doing so, while maintaining equality/fairness;
- stressing both humility and mutual respect as essential aspects of one's disposition;
- discovering one's self through discovering the other;
- nurturing empathy and compassion through telling and listening to stories.

The Education Dialogue Project promotes intercultural awareness by:

- hosting training workshops that promote ideas integral to intercultural dialogue to secondary school teachers and other education professionals;

- collaborating with a select group of schools with a view to devising initiatives informed by the idea of intercultural dialogue.

For more information on this project please contact Dr. George Myconos (Education Projects Coordinator) at g.myconos@latrobe.edu.au

- *Leadership Training Programme for Young Muslims*

The programme, first run in 2007, involves workshops, seminars, lectures, field trips, debates, assignments and interviews with prominent decision makers in Australia. Participants are trained to develop the skills they need to engage confidently and creatively with all levels of government, business, academia, the professional world, the media, and religious and community organisations.

Multifaith Organisations

- Australian Council for Christians and Jews:
<http://ccjaustralia.org/en>

- Australian Intercultural Society:
<http://www.intercultural.org.au>

- National Council of Churches in Australia:
<http://www.ncca.org.au>

The NCCA is the founding member of:

- The Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO)
(Formerly Australian Partnership for Ethnic and Religious Organisations)

http://www.ncca.org.au/partnerships/community_partners/apro

- Australian Multicultural Foundation
<http://www.amf.net.au>
- Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations
http://www.columban.org.au/Our_works/Christian_Muslim_Relations/about_cmr.html
- Griffith University MultiFaith Centre
<http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/mfc>
- Parliament of the World's Religions
<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/>

About Us

NATIONAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES AUSTRALIA

Mission and vision

The National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies Australia (NCEIS) was established in 2007 with funding from the Australian Government to provide outstanding, higher education level programmes in Islamic studies. It is also intended to meet the learning needs of aspiring and existing Muslim community leaders, teachers and other professionals. NCEIS is expected to achieve a national and international profile among Islamic scholars and students, and to deliver multidisciplinary teaching, research and professional development programmes. NCEIS will also build a profile as a 'think tank' that comprises experts in the field and is able to provide advice to all levels of government.

Governance and leadership

NCEIS is headed by Professor Abdullah Saeed, the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, and Head of the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Melbourne is collaborating with Griffith University and the University of Western Sydney to deliver an undergraduate teaching programme from 2008, across three States. The NCEIS is supported by a Management Board and is advised on Muslim community needs by a National Consultative Committee (NCC), in turn advised by State-based consultative groups.

Academic staff

NCEIS academic staff members engage in leading research projects, and regularly produce and contribute to scholarly publications, international conferences, seminars, policy development and curriculum design. In addition, academic staff members bring international experience to their NCEIS roles from South and North East Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the UK and North America. They are also experienced in providing advice and training to local, State and Federal governments, private sector groups and university management.

The NCEIS staff includes: Prof Abdullah Saeed, Assoc Prof Shahram Akbarzadeh, Assoc Prof Adam Possamai, Dr Steven Drakeley, Dr Abdul-Samad Abdullah, Dr Muhammad Kamal, Dr Mohamad Abdalla, Assoc Prof Richard Pennell, Dr Benjamin MacQueen, Dr Halim Rane and Mr Eeqbal Hassim.

www.nceis.unimelb.edu.au

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