

Adult Catechism for September 28, 2015

What Catholics should Know about World Religions

Part 1: Scripture Readings:

Luke 9:49-50: 49 John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.”

Romans 2: 14-16 When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

1 Corinthians 10: 14-22 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? . . . I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Part 2: Can Someone Have Belief in More Than One Religion?” Fr. Edward McIlmail, a Roman Catholic priest, states that: “Christianity makes more sense: There is one, uncreated God who created everything else . . . I think a person who is serious about religion won’t, by nature, try to follow different faiths at once. The various faiths often contradict one another, sometimes on very basic issues. So even intellectually, following different religions doesn’t make much sense. Besides, God, understood as the Absolute Being, has no equal. As to whether various religions are based on different experiences of God — that is a good question. Various religions (aside from the Catholic faith, which I believe authoritatively can interpret Revelation) have sparks of the truth.”

And quoting from *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2, the Vatican II document on non-Christian religions, Fr. McIlmail adds: “Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing ‘ways,’ comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed,

she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself." So Fr. McIlmail concludes that "Note that phrase about other religions that "often reflect a ray of that Truth" – meaning, a ray of the truth that is God himself. So, in a limited sense, yes, we could say that other religions might reflect various experiences of God."

Part 3: A Brief Summary of the Major World Religions

1. **The Bahá'í Faith:** Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God who is the source of all creation. God is transcendent and unknowable. However, He has sent, and will continue to send, great prophets to humanity, through which the Holy Spirit has revealed the "Word of God." The prophets God has sent include Adam, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, The Bab, and Baha'u'llah. The Bahá'ís believe in an essential unity of the great religions of the world. Every person has an immortal soul. Unlike everything else in creation, it is not subject to decomposition. At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spirit world. The latter is viewed as a "a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe-- and not some physically remote or removed place." They believe that there will eventually be a single world government, to be led by Bahá'ís, and based on the Baha'i administrative framework. This would have the world governed by a theocracy -- a form of government that has had a poor track record on human rights in the past. Bahá'ís have no clergy, sacraments or rituals. The Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel, is the global governing body; its functions were set out by Baha'u'llah. It is an all-male body. Members pray each day, observe 9 holy days, fast 19 days a year, work to abolish prejudice, regard work as a form of worship, make at least one pilgrimage, if they are able, to the Shrine of the Bab and the houses in which Baha'u'llah lived, which are situated near the Bahá'í world headquarters. Bahá'ís do not consume alcohol. The Bahá'í Faith states that it currently has about 6 million members worldwide.

2. **Buddhism:** Buddhism currently has about 376 million followers and is generally listed as the world's fourth largest religion after Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It was founded in Northern India by Siddhartha Gautama (circa 563 to 460 BCE) and has spread into much of the far East. It is making major inroads into North America. Buddhism shares with Hinduism belief in karma, dharma, and reincarnation: Karma is the sum total of an individual's actions of body, speech and mind -- good, bad and neutral -- taken in their current and previous lives. Dharma, in Buddhism, refers to two items: The teachings of the Buddha; a person's path to enlightenment, and The fundamental principles that order the universe. Reincarnation is the rebirth of a living being after death into a new body that is either a human, animal or a supernatural being. In contrast to Christianity, classical Buddhism does not involve the recognition or worship of deities. It also does not teach the existence of the human soul. Buddhism teaches that humans are trapped in a repetitive cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Each successive rebirth may be into a better, a worse life, or a similar life, depending upon the person's Karma -- the sins and merits that have accumulated during their present and previous lives. One's goal is to escape from this cycle and reach Nirvana. Once this is attained, the mind experiences complete

freedom, liberation and non-attachment. Suffering ends because desire and craving -- the causes of suffering -- are no more.

3. **Christianity**: Christianity is the largest religion in the world, with a little over 2 billion members. It is significantly larger than the second largest religion: Islam, which has about 1.6 billion members. About one third of the world's population currently identifies themselves as Christian. There are currently on the order of 30,000 Christian faith groups in the world. Many regard themselves as being the only true descendents from "The Way" as the early Christian movement was originally called. Unfortunately, many present-day denominations have wildly differing understandings of the early history of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Jesus formally ordained his twelve disciples who became the first bishops. Peter was the first pope. The bishops then ordained priests, some of whom were later consecrated as other bishops. This has continued to the present day in an unbroken "Apostolic Succession." They regard the pope in Rome as being infallible under certain conditions. Almost all Christian denominations believe in the following tenets: 1.The authority of Scripture., 2.The Trinity, 3.Man is a physical and spiritual being adversely affected by sin., 4.Christ is fully God and fully man who was sent to save humanity., 5.The church is God's ordained institution headed by Christ.

4. **Confucianism**: Confucianism is an Eastern religion/philosophy. It originated in China but has spread to Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam. Most people who adhere to the teachings of Confucius follow Chinese traditional religion, which is a blending of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional local practices and beliefs. Followers of Chinese Traditional religion make up about 6% of the world's population -- roughly the same as the number of Buddhists and followers of native Indigenous religions. Thus, an estimated 350 million followers worldwide follow some form of Confucianism. Confucian ethical teachings include the following values: Li: includes ritual, propriety, etiquette, etc; Hsiao: love within the family: love of parents for their children and of children for their parents; Yi: righteousness; Xin: honesty and trustworthiness; Jen: benevolence, humaneness towards others; the highest Confucian virtue; Chung: loyalty to the state, etc. Relationships are central to Confucianism. Particular duties arise from one's particular situation in relation to others. Social harmony -- the great goal of Confucianism -- therefore results in part from every individual knowing his or her place in the social order, and playing his or her part well.

5. **Hinduism**: Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organized religion. It consists of "thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in India since 1500 BCE." Because of the wide variety of Hindu traditions, freedom of belief and practice are notable features of Hinduism. Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic religions. They recognize a single deity, and view other Gods and Goddesses as manifestations or aspects of that supreme God. Hinduism has grown to become the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. It claims about 950 million followers -- about 14% of the world's population. Hindus believe in the repetitious Transmigration of the Soul. This is the transfer of one's soul after death into another

body. This produces a continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth through their many lifetimes. It is called samsara. Karma is the accumulated sum of ones good and bad deeds. Karma determines how you will live your next life. Through pure acts, thoughts and devotion, one can be reborn at a higher level. Eventually, one can escape samsara and achieve enlightenment. Bad deeds can cause a person to be reborn as a lower level, or even as an animal. The unequal distribution of wealth, prestige, health, disability, suffering, etc. are thus seen as natural consequences for one's previous acts, both in this life and in previous lives. Meditation is often practiced, with Yoga being the most common. Other activities include daily devotions, public rituals, and puja, a ceremonial dinner for a God.

6. **Islam**: About 23% of all people on Earth follow Islam (1.57 billion). The religion is currently in a period of rapid growth. According the Muslims, God (Allah) is one and indivisible. They believe in a strict monotheism. "Allah" means God in Arabic. Jesus is very highly respected as the second-last prophet; second only to Muhammad in importance. As with Christianity, Adam is believed to have been tempted by Satan and disobeyed God. However, God forgave him for his sins. Muslims have no concept of original sin. Adam is considered a prophet. The Qur'an is God's word and final revelation, dictated by angel Gabriel to Muhammad. He passed it on in oral form. All babies are a born in a pure state of submission to Allah. Once they reach puberty, his/her account of deeds is opened in Paradise. To attain paradise, at death, their good deeds (helping others, testifying to the truth of God, leading a virtuous life)... must outweigh their evil deeds. Muslims who sincerely repent and submit to God return to a state of sinlessness.

7. **Jainism** traces its roots to a succession of 24 Jinas ("those who overcome", or conqueror) in ancient East India. Each Jina has "conquered love and hate, pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion, and has thereby freed `his' soul from the karmas obscuring knowledge, perception, truth, and ability..." Jainism contains many elements that are somewhat similar to parts of Hinduism and Buddhism. The world's almost 4 million Jains are almost entirely located in India. People who practice Jainism believe that everyone is bound within the universe by one's karma -- the accumulated evil deeds that one has done. (The Jainist definition of karma differs from the Hindu and Buddhist meaning. To a follower of Jainism, all karma is bad. To Hindus and Buddhists, karma can result from a good or a bad deed.) Moksha (liberation from an endless succession of lives through reincarnation) is achieved by enlightenment, which can be attained only through asceticism. Jains are recommended to pass through four stages during their lifetime: Brahmacharya-ashrama: the life of a student; Gruhasth-ashrama: family life; Vanaprasth-ashrama: family and social services; Sanyast-ashrama: life as a monk; a period of renunciation.

8. **Judaism** is an Abrahamic religion -- a faith which recognizes Abraham as a Patriarch. Others include Christianity Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. There are currently about 18 million Jews throughout the world. They are mainly concentrated in North America (about 7 million) and Israel (about 4.5 million). By virtue of their religion Jews have always been, and will always be, a minority. In a pagan world where everybody worshipped many Gods, Jews worshipped only

one. Since Jews did not choose this historical fate, they felt they were chosen by God to play an important role in the spiritual development of humanity. Jews were redeemed from Egypt not as individuals but as a community/people. The covenant at Sinai was with the whole people not just with the believers. The Jewish religion is mostly the outgrowth of events that happened to the people, not the result of the spiritual insights of one or more individuals. When non-Jews become Jewish they join the Jewish people i.e. "your people shall be my people" precedes "your God shall be my God" (Ruth 1:16). Jews have carefully kept the Saturday Sabbath for many millennia. Since the ancient Israelites defined sundown as the end of a day, the Sabbath runs from local sundown on Friday night until sundown on Saturday. According to Jewish teaching: Every person consists of a body and soul. The body eventually fades and returns to dust, while the immortal soul lives on for eternity. The person whose life was affiliated with the soul, whose focus was spirituality and love of G-d, doesn't die. He merely moves on to a different dimension where, unencumbered by physical needs and distractions, he is free to continue his pursuit of spirituality. Conversely, for the person who prioritized the desires and aspirations of the body, the departure of the soul brings "life" to a crashing halt—his life's focus is now forever gone.

9. **Shinto** is an ancient Japanese religion. Starting about 500 BCE (or earlier) it was originally "an amorphous mix of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism." Shinto does not have as fully developed a theology as do most other religions. It does not have its own moral code. Shintoists generally follow the code of Confucianism. Ancestors are deeply revered and worshipped. There are "Four Affirmations" in Shinto:

1. Tradition and the family: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.
2. Love of nature: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the Gods. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.
3. Physical cleanliness: Followers of Shinto take baths, wash their hands, and rinse out their mouth often.
4. "Matsuri": The worship and honor given to the Kami and ancestral spirits.

There are estimates that about 86% of Japanese adults follow a combination of Shinto and Buddhism; that would put the number of followers of Shinto at 107 million. Essentially all followers of Shinto are Japanese. It is difficult for a foreigner to embrace Shintoism. Unlike most other religions, there is no holy book to help a person learn about the religion. It is transmitted from generation to generation by experiencing the rituals together as a group.

10. **Sikhism** was founded by Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, (1469-1538). He received a vision to preach the way to enlightenment and God. He taught a strict monotheism, the brotherhood of humanity. He rejected idol worship, and the oppressive Hindu concept of caste. Various sources estimate that Sikhism has about 23 or 24 million followers, making it the fifth largest organized religion in the world. The goal of every Sikh is to build a close, loving relationship with God. Sikhs believe in a single, Formless God, with many names, who can be known through meditation. They believe in samsara (the repetitive cycle of birth, life and death), karma (the accumulated sum of one's good and bad deeds, and reincarnation the belief of a rebirth following death. These beliefs are similar to Hinduism. "Each individual has many

reincarnations, but being born a human means the soul is nearing the end of rebirth. God judges each soul at death and may either reincarnate the soul or, if pure enough, allow it to rest with him." Sikhs have rejected the caste system of the Hindu religion. They believe that everyone has equal status in the eyes of God.

11. **Taoism** is an Eastern religion/philosophy with perhaps 225 million followers. Although it is more accurately referred to as a philosophy, books on world religions inevitably include it with other religions from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism. Tao is the first-cause of the universe. It is a force that flows through all life. "The Tao surrounds everyone and therefore everyone must listen to find enlightenment." A believer's goal is to harmonize themselves with the Tao. Development of virtue is one's chief task. The Three Jewels to be sought are compassion, moderation and humility. A Taoist is kind to other individuals, in part because such an action tends to be reciprocated.

12. **Zoroastrianism** The religion was founded by Zarathushtra in Persia -- modern-day Iran. It may have been the world's first monotheistic faith. It was once the religion of the Persian empire, but has since been reduced in numbers to fewer than 200,000 today. They believe in an all powerful God Ahura Mazda who is the only deity worthy of being worshipped, and an evil spirit of violence and death, Angra Mainyu, who opposes Ahura Mazda. The resulting cosmic conflict involves the entire universe, including humanity who is required to choose which to follow. Evil, and the Spirit of Evil, will be completely destroyed at the end of time. Dualism will come to an end and Goodness will be all in all. After death, a person's urvan (soul) is allowed three days to meditate on his/her past life. The soul is then judged by a troika consisting of Mithra, Sraosha and Rashnu. If the good thoughts, words and deeds outweigh the bad, then the soul is taken into Heaven. Otherwise, the soul is led to Hell. The universe will go through a total of three eras: Creation; The present world where good and evil are mixed. People's good works are seen as gradually transforming the world towards its heavenly ideal; A final state after this renovation when good and evil will be separated. Eventually, everything will be purified. Even the occupants of hell will be released.