



Religious Studies and Theology: Personal Reflection

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Religion is one of the most interesting courses I had ever taken in my entire learning experience. Unlike other courses that require specific approach to their guidelines and methods, this course has taught me that what you believe in is right as long as you have enough faith in that religion. Being a person interested in learning the life, I decided to take this course because I realized that it would expand my knowledge about my faith and culture as well as that of people of other religions. In addition, this course can help understand ethical decisions about life. It is worth noting that the interaction between religion and culture justifies one's faith. Apart from nourishing my personal interests, I realized that quality knowledge of religion can also reward professionally. Enabling one to comprehend the complexities of the world, the employers in the field of Theology and Religious Studies may accept me as a creative person due to my religion.

Religious traditions may be credited for human rights, toleration, social justice, and international peace (Heelas, 2012). Before taking this course, I had a negative perspective of Islam. I knew that the dealt with violence (jihad) and revenge. Upon taking the course, I realized some interesting things about that include the fact that most Arabs are Muslims but they do not constitute the majority of Muslim population. Moreover, Muslims believe that the name of God is Allah. Most importantly, Islam is not just a religion but a comprehensive way of life that incorporates all its aspects, such as physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, economic, and social (Erickson, 2013). It is also one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Muslim does not advocate the use of violence through jihad. They believe in protecting their fellow Muslims. Race or culture is not important for one to become Muslim. A person must only say "Shahadah", a simple statement that bears the witness to belief in One God. In addition, one must believe that Muhammad is the Prophet of God.



Being a Christian, it was very interesting to learn some facts about other faiths. One specific religion which has some differences from Christianity was the Islamic faith. It is a fascinating fact that there are many followers of this religion. With over 1.4 billion of Muslims, Islam is ranked fourth largest after Christianity and Judaism (Van der Leeuw, 2014). Unlike Christians, Muslims do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God although they recognize him as His prophet (Erickson, 2013). Muslims dress modestly with reverence for God. Their women are not more submissive as compared to those in Christianity and other faiths. Their holy book Quran borrows much information contained in the Christian holy book, the Bible, in the book of Hebrews. They use the lunar calendar and, consequently, their holidays move by 11 days as compared to the Christian calendar. They have two main holidays, which are Eid al-Adha that is at the completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca, and Eid al-Fitr, which is at the completion of Ramadan (Heelas, 2012). Ramadan to Muslims is “the ninth month of the lunar calendar (Erickson, 2013).” It is believed to be the time that Prophet Muhammad was given the Quran.

The Christian approach regarding vicarious atonement (Jesus died for the sins of human) is contradictory with the Islamic concept of personal responsibility (Erickson, 2013). Muslims are taught that on the judgment day, everyone shall be accountable for his own sins. Consequently, practicing Muslim is advised to be righteous while hoping and praying for God’s acceptance and grace (Van der Leeuw, 2014). There are five pillars in Islam that should be undertaken with precaution in order to be considered a true Muslim. These are:

- Belief in prophethood (Muhammad and his predecessor)
- Belief in Imams of God (Shiite belief)
- Belief in the day of Judgment

Another difference emanates from the pillars on which Islam is based:

- Shahadah, which is to declare a Muslim’s belief in God and the role of Muhammad
- Salat, that is to pray five times a day (dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening)



- Sawn, which is to fast from food, water, and other forms of pleasure during daylight time in the month of Ramadan
- Haj, which is to make pilgrimage to Mecca for atleast once in a Muslims life if it is physically and economically possible for him (Hood Jr & Spilka, 2013).

Islam resembles my religion in the following ways:

- Belief in only one real God. Muslims believe in the same one God as well as Christians do. Unlike other faiths, which have worship idol gods, Muslims and Christians worship one and only God despite the only difference in naming.
- Family-oriented values. Once born as a Christian, there are very high chances of remaining a Christian throughout one's life due to the culture that the parents instill in children. This is the same case with Islam. The family orientation then translates into community-oriented manner of life that can significantly cause conflicts between the two religions, as has always been witnessed (Hood Jr & Spilka, 2013).

Religion class has only broadened my knowledge of religion but has not significantly changed my views. Born and educated as a Christian, I believe I will live and die once. The class has helped me appreciate other religious beliefs as long as I am not interfering with them. As stated above, I had a negative perception of non-Christians: Muslims, Buddhists, Hindu, Judaists, etc. I considered Christianity as the only true religion and any other faith was bound to perish on the Judgment day. However, now I appreciate other religions. Probably, I could be Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Judaist if I had been born and raised by the parents from any of these faiths. It is important to know where and who raises you and what religion they instill in a person. Belief and faith are the most vital aspects of religion. I also learned that the power of the faith in which one is affiliated depends on the dedication of a person put in that religion. The common and basic things are faith and belief. In addition, a prayer is a practice in all the faiths



(Heelas, 2012). Praying sincerely to God for protection is always beneficial despite the religion and whether one is a Muslim or a Christian; it always depends on divine connection with God.

In conclusion, religious class was fascinating to me. It seems to evoke both the most beautiful and the ugliest sides of humanity. It touches every aspect of the human culture, allowing people to explore a part of their life they have never discovered before. On the other hand, religion is a significant force in the human experience. Religious agendas have caused conflicts as well as enhanced acts of terrorism and ethnic discrimination, displacing populations and crushing economies. Studying religion has, therefore, enabled me comprehend the complex and interdisciplinary field with direct relevance globally. I have become a totally different and complete person, especially after this course since I am now at a position to easily relate with other religions like being a part of them.



References

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