

## WHAT IS RELIGION?

While religion is a pervasive force that drives human history, it defies clear definition. Religious ideas and practices permeate multiple dimensions of society and inform our root assumptions about the meaning and nature of the world. Indeed, it is hard to find a domain of our experience that is not in some fashion affected by religion(s) or opposition to it (them):

- our legal systems (separation of church and state, “right to life,” “the right to marriage act”),
- economics (Christmas shopping, banks closed on Sunday, Islamic lending practices, monk-garbed actor invoking the serenity you’d get from using a certain brand of tissues),
- food (Lent, keeping kosher, Hallal meat, vegetarianism),
- health (meditation to relieve stress or lower blood pressure, stem-cell research controversies, Christian Scientism),
- sex (whether and with whom to have it),
- education (parochial schools, home schooling, sectarian-funded colleges and universities),
- science (controversies over creationism, the flat earth, cloning),
- concepts of the body (containing or not containing a soul, 7 souls, yoga),
- concept of self (individuated, relational, free, pre-destined),
- concepts of death and after-life (heaven, reincarnation),
- politics (just or holy wars, religious monarchies, the Christian Right, truth and reconciliation, Engaged Buddhism, “faith-based initiatives”)
- environmental concerns (stewards of the earth, eco-philosophy),
- music (Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, Christian rock, Qawwali, Indian classical music),
- mass communication (televangelism, multiple expressions of “American civil religion”).