LOWER SECONDARY
Religious Education
STUDENT’S BOOK 1

Lower Secondary Religious Education is a new three-level series covering the six major religions in the Caribbean: Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Rastafarianism and Revivalism.

This book introduces the concept of religion and why Religious Education is important. It also explores religious rites of passage and how people express their religion through food, clothing and art.

Key features:
• Covers every topic from the point of view of the six major religions examined, enabling students to develop a balanced view and range of perspectives
• ‘In the Caribbean’ sections provide real-life examples within the region that students will be able to relate to
• ‘Did you know?’ and ‘What do you think?’ segments to give students the opportunity to share their thoughts and knowledge in a structured and safe environment
• End-of-chapter review and assessment questions not only test understanding but also stimulate analysis of topics and critical thinking

This course has been written through a close collaboration between experienced Caribbean teachers and religious education experts:
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STUDENT’S BOOK 1
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At one time or another, each one of us will have asked – or been asked – the following questions: ‘What are the origins of the world?’ ‘Are humans alone in the universe?’ ‘What is the meaning of human life?’ ‘Why is there suffering in the world?’ ‘What happens to us after we die?’ ‘How can we live a happy, fulfilling life?’

Across the world, billions of people believe that religion provides adequate answers to these questions. This chapter explores this by introducing you to the key characteristics of religion and the importance of religious education.

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- what religion is and why it is an important part of many people’s lives
- why people of faith need to worship
- what religious education is
- why religious education is important
- why it is important to learn about other people’s religious beliefs
- the nature of religion.

What is religion?

For thousands of years, people all over the world have been looking for answers to the questions mentioned above. These are known as ultimate questions. We ask these questions for many reasons:

- we feel a deep sense that there is more to life than our own physical selves
- we feel that there may be an all-powerful, supernatural force watching over us
- we feel part of a ‘bigger picture’ beyond the physical world
- we have had a personal, spiritual experience that makes us believe there is something ‘out there’ in the universe.
For many people, religion offers an explanation for our existence and the purpose of life, and helps us make sense of our spirituality (Figure 1.1).

One way of looking at religion, therefore, is to see it as a system of belief and worship of one or more divine beings. It can also describe any system that fills people’s lives with purpose and to which people devote themselves.

World religions

There are many religions in the world. Some centre on the belief in and worship of one, unique God; they are called monotheistic faiths and include Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Other religions believe in the existence of more than one deity; they are called polytheistic faiths, for example Hinduism.

Not all religions involve a God or gods. Buddhism follows the teachings of a spiritual leader, rather than belief in or worship of a deity.

Today, more than 80 per cent of the world’s population – that’s nearly 6 billion people – identify themselves with a religious group or faith. The three religions with the most followers across the world are Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.

Religions in the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, Christianity is the dominant religion, with 83 per cent of the total population calling themselves Christians. Other major religious groups across the region include Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, the Rastafari Movement and Revivalism (Figure 1.2). Throughout this course, you will discover much more about these six religions.
Section 1: Introducing religion

Why religion is important

Even though we do not all share the same beliefs, thoughts and actions, religion is important in our lives as individuals and in society. It affects the ways in which we think and act.

Answering the ultimate questions in life

Many people see religion as a form of security because it provides answers to the big questions in life (can you remember some from the beginning of this chapter?). Each religion has its own beliefs about those questions – usually based on the teachings from sacred writings or holy books that followers accept as true. In this way, all religions have a philosophical dimension. As you continue with this course, you will learn more about what each of the major world religions believes about these issues.

Shaping our identity and way of living

Religion affects the way we live and gives us a sense of identity. For many people, religious belief starts with the way they were brought up. For example, children born into Christian families will be raised according to the teachings and values of the Bible. They will attend Sunday school from a young age, and learn to pray, read the Bible and sing hymns. They will make friends with others from the same church community. Their Christian upbringing will influence their behaviour, the decisions they make and the events they celebrate in their lives.

A moral compass to guide our conscience

Every human being, whether they follow a religion or not, has a conscience – a sense of what is right and wrong. A person’s conscience influences their dealings with other people as well as their interaction with the world around them. Most religions have rules or guidelines on how their followers should live. For example, Christians follow the Ten Commandments, which include rules such as ‘honour your father and your mother’ and ‘you shall not steal’ (see Exodus 20:1-17). For Muslims, Shari’a law governs both their public and private lives. Religious rules or laws encourage us to treat each other well and to care for our surroundings, and they protect us from harm and wrongdoing.
The importance of worship

Have you ever looked at something beautiful, like a garden full of exotic flowers in bloom, or experienced something powerful like a thunderstorm, and felt a sense of wonder and awe?

Throughout history, people have been amazed by these, and many other, wonders of nature. They are convinced that the universe – and everything in it – is something that could only have been designed and made by a divine Creator. This belief generates a feeling of awe and humility within some people, who then feel an overwhelming need to acknowledge God’s creation by worshipping him.

Worship is therefore an essential part of religion because it allows believers to express their love of, respect for and devotion to one or more deities. It also allows them to recognise that there is a bigger power than them at work in the world. However, it is also a time for believers to ask favours from their God or gods. For example, some people ask God to help them get through a personal challenge in their lives, such as overcoming an illness or a difficult situation at school or work; others may ask for good weather or peace for the world (Figure 1.3). Through worship, believers show gratitude to their gods for the good and bad things that have happened in their lives.

Figure 1.3 Worship includes praying.

DID YOU KNOW?
The word ‘worship’ has the same root as the word ‘worth’ – God is ‘worthy’ of praise.

Religion and the ancient Romans

Throughout history, people have felt the need to worship. The word ‘religion’ comes from the Latin word religio, which is to do with a sense of obligation and reverence to the gods. For the ancient Romans, religion was about developing trust between the gods and humans. Through rituals and acts of worship, they hoped to please their gods, so that the gods would help in overcoming unknown forces that were beyond human control.

Different ways of worship

There are many ways in which people worship God. Typically, worship includes:
- praying
- reading of sacred texts or holy books
- paying homage through making an offering (money or other material goods) and physical acts of praise and adoration (bowing, clapping hands, singing)
- exhortation (where religious leaders preach important religious principles to their congregation).
Worship can take place any time and anywhere, though every religion has its own set of special times and places dedicated for worship. For example:

- Christians attend church every Sunday (Sabbath)
- Jews observe Shabbat (Jewish holy day) in a synagogue and at home from sunset on Friday to Saturday evening
- Muslims pray five times a day in a mosque or at home.

Inside many holy places you will usually see visual images and symbols, or religious iconography, which help people focus during worship. Incense and music also help to add meaning to people’s worship, as well as creating an aura (Figure 1.4).

People who lead religious services often wear some kind of ceremonial dress as a symbolic reminder of their devotion to their God and responsibility towards their fellow believers. It is not always necessary to worship in public; people can also worship alone or in their home with their family.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING**

1. What is ‘spirituality’ mean?
2. Name three reasons why religion is important.
3. Why do people worship?
4. What does ‘paying homage’ mean?
5. As well as our our personal lives, what else does religion influence?

**What is religious education?**

Even though not everyone shares the same religious beliefs, we all try to make sense of life and its ups and downs. Religious education (RE) is part of the school curriculum because it is a subject designed to help us better understand ourselves and the world we live in through learning about religion and its relevance in our own lives.

**Learning about religion**

In RE, you will discover why and how people past and present have searched for the meaning and purpose of life, and the role religion plays in fulfilling this search. You will find out about some of the major world religions: what they are, their histories, beliefs, values and practices.