

The 6 dimensions of religion essay sample

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



1. Ninian Smart has established 6 dimensions or structures in a way to find a common ground between all world religions. These are classified into the thought, "mind", dimensions which are the experiential, mythical, and doctrinal dimension, and then the multi-sensory dimensions which are the ritual, ethical and social dimensions.

The experiential dimension is the religious experience. People come to know their religion, their God or the ultimate reality through experience. According to Smart, there are different types of religious experience. The numinous experience is having God or the subject as holy and very other than our human condition. On the other side, the mystical experience is having the subject be inside the object, the inner quest to experience ultimate reality. The there is the experience that is a combination of both. The Shaman experience is situating oneself into transit to connect with the spirit world. And the Panentheic experience where the individual feels unity with all of nature and the spiritual world, therefore find the spirit in everything around it.

In every religion, the religious people go through at least one of these experiences to come to know God or attain the ultimate reality. In Christianity a monk or nun may experience a combination of mystical and numinous, always starting numinous because of the basis of Christianity. The duality is obvious with constant worship but a close embrace develops creating unity in love and not in identity. In the same way while Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism one may also find a combination beginning with mystical y Theravada Buddhism it is mainly mystical finding that ultimate

reality is found within. There is no sense of worship and one must work for its own liberation by being quiet, peaceful and becoming detached.

The Mythic dimension is the religious myth. The word myth is not implying truth or false, it is a neutral term that means story of sacred or divine significance. This is also something that we may find in all religions, stories from the past that have been passed down through generations, and even written down to keep a more accurate account. Smart says there are universals and particulars that apply to myths. A myth may have its universal principles that can be applied to all myths or stories while each one has various particulars that only affect a certain myth in the culture. The Koran, for the Muslims, and the Vedas, for the Hindu people, are a compilation of the traditional myths of their religion. In general, there are myths of origins, of destruction, of activities between God and the people and of alienation, when people do things to be good with God. The Vedas is the Hindus primary text; it is a recollection from oral tradition recorded from what the Brahmin memorized. Muhammad's revelations for 23 years were finally formed into the Koran, or Qúran. Most religions have a recap of some kind that puts together the teachings or stories from their origins.

The Doctrinal dimension is the essential beliefs. The functions of doctrines are to order beliefs from the material supplied by tradition, relate beliefs to current knowledge in an attempt to come to terms with what we know now, to define the community and they are woven into schemes, each doctrine must be seen as a part of a whole and must have an organic unity to them. All religions have their essential beliefs, their doctrines which are found in

the texts and scriptures. Looking at the division of Buddhism one can find that the essential beliefs are very similar, their doctrines are even overlapping but since their rituals and their ethics and social views change from one to another they discern and separate.

The Ritual dimension is the recreation of events described in myths to make them real now, in a way replaying ancient drama and making the past present. This creates a path of communication between the God of Gods and humanity and it is true for all religions. It can be external expression such as sacrifices done in earlier customs to just singing, a wedding or a cross in Christianity or a pilgrimage to Mecca for the Muslims. It can also be internal expression which is done very much in Buddhism and Hinduism with meditation and personal connection with the Buddha, and the separation from the earth to find the ultimate truth.

The Ethical dimension is mainly about the customs and morals in a religion. Religion has a way of telling its people how to live a “ good” life to attain the ultimate goal. Ethics is shaped by customs and cultures but there are some common ethical problems and responses that are common in the world. Religious ethics are actions towards the God or ultimate reality which accepts moral truth. In the view of economic justice and the critique of materialism each religion may have their own ethics. Buddhism and Christianity find a middle way between what is needed and what is enough with what one should have. The Muslims say that what is equitable is not equal and Hinduism says everything is due to karma. Buddhism states that wealth is not the answer and one should find a mid-way between self

indulgence and self devotion. Daoism says to go with the flow and the restraints.

The Social dimension deals with society and to what extent religion reflects or creates society. Most religions rise out of chaos and chaotic times through a founder which then establishes laws which are then preserved and a polarity is created through time, the division of ideas when finally after time there is a call to return to tradition. The power religion has on society has been reduced by secularization of societies. The oppressed and the small, rural societies give more power to religion than the urban, bigger societies. In Islam, even though it is a large modern society, it is not completely developed and you can see that the church and state have not separated while in more developed, modern countries, the separation of church and state has started a long time ago.

“ There are recurrent patterns of inner consciousness into which according to context, people of differing religions and cultural traditions read different messages.” I think these dimensions fit perfectly into all the religions we have studied. There is an underlying sense of structure that all religions can be found to follow. The same way, that even though there are major differences among all these cultures, traditions, and beliefs, they are all categorized under being religions. Even within each religion differences have been found depending on the background, the custom and the culture it has been practiced. There are a lot of differences between a Christian in the United States and a Christian in Paraguay, but they are both Christians. All

religions are religions and the general ideas of rituals, doctrines, experiences, myths, and ethical and social values apply to all.

Inside each religion there are particular ideas and kinds of doctrines, rituals, etc. religious people who oppose to understand that it is not the obligation of everyone around the world to follow their same beliefs have to be able to see that essentially they all follow the same underlying ideals. All religions have a goal which they search for in life, " rules" which are to be followed in order to reach this goal, " someone" that began the religion. It is curious how all religions began from chaos, with what means? Maybe that is why it is said to be the opium of the masses. Religion controls, calms and grasps the masses. So, no matter what religion it is, if it has a doctrine, a belief, a ritual, experiences, myths, social and ethics, it will be opium for masses in crisis.

2. In the dimension of the " mind" we find problems of verifiability and truth arise one the study of religion comes into the picture. The academic study of religion and the religious people studying world religions encounter these problems while researching and studying.

a.) The academic study of religion has raised many questions of verifiability or truth. As people objectively study religions and the religious experience they find a relationship between faith and reason. Can they be compatible? Aquinas said that one could know of the existence of God by reason alone but in terms of the articles of faith or doctrines it has to be inspired by faith. I think of faith and reason as parallel lines that can never intersect. A person can live with both faith and reason as long as they don't interfere with each other. When trying to study religion academically it is most likely to be

mainly about reason taking to account that scholars are most likely to rely on reason than on faith. The revealed theology is the part of faith, learning about God through revelation where the natural theology is learning about God through reason.

Scholars will not always have the opportunity to learn about God and the religion through revealed theology which comes through faith, therefore their observations will be merely through reason. Another factor that affects the study of religions is the religious language where one discerns between facts and truths. Myths are told in a more trans-logical, subjective language which can be true but for scholars it is not a fact. These scholars try to find rational, objective language that can give them facts and when they find the myths that make up the religion written in such a non-rational language they can't take what is said for a fact therefore can't decide what is truth

b.) Religious people studying world religions make it difficult to decide what is verifiable even if believed it is true. When addressing the issue of faith and reason, these religious scholars are compromising their faith in trying to understand other religions since they have to accept the truth of these religions and look into depth for the origins finding many times similarities with their own religion and extreme differences as well. It is difficult for religious scholars to try to identify and describe world religions without faith in them since they will only try to use reason where it is not always an option. These religious scholars are influenced by faith and they learn about God in their own religion mainly through revealed theology while learning about other religions they might experience natural theology. Since most of

what is known from religions is what is written and it is written in religious language, only those within that culture, religion and tradition, sincerely understand it. Religious language is so greatly subjective and trans-empirical that it depends on the background of the person reading it to be able to understand and appreciate it how it was written to be understood.

3. Three readings that I will always remember are the account from Julian of Norwich, the reading of *The Sabbath* of Liz Harris, and the *Pilgrimage to Mecca* by Malcolm X. the experience Julian of Norwich has written about was very powerful to me. The idea that she actually went through all those stages mentally and physically and was thinking of the signs God was giving her to make the experience worthy of his presence and grant her wish and desires. I believe life is made of signs that one can grasp and manage depending on their own culture, background and beliefs. She took a moment of suffering and death and made it into the glorious moment of her life because of her belief and feeling for God. In *The Sabbath* accounts written by Liz Harris you learn a lot about traditional and personal beliefs and customs.

It gives you an insight to how different a person's life can be depending where and into what family they were born. It also gave me an idea of how strict and sacrificial their life can be. The excerpt from Malcolm X's biography, on the pilgrimage to Mecca I thought was very meaningful because it shows how such an experience can change a person's way of viewing life and of being thankful for life and recognizing that a person is such a small part of the world. It also gives you a feel that the world is not going down to flames although it may seem so. There are still, even today,

people that perform these rituals for the experience and the feeling of unity and brotherhood that is being lost in the world today.

4. As people get more knowledge of the realities of the world and the underlying truths of the church and the leaders, the once powerful faith that keeps religion alive, is becoming less and less powerful. Courses like this one opens your eyes to other religious thoughts and gets you thinking about what you really belief and will help you to make a better decision on religious thoughts depending on the strength of your faith. Personally this course was very interesting and was presented to me in just the right time, even though some thoughts have not been completely cleared yet. In the past year or so, I have been on an edge with religion, I have lost faith in the Catholic Church but I still believe in most of the ethical and social thoughts. With what I have been learning in modern history and in other courses in high school, such as philosophy and psychology, I began to question religion and the church a great deal.

With the entire issue of the Pope and his thoughts on gay people and gay marriage and what I've learned about the division of the catholic church in my country manipulating people and the government to get money, I really have tried to put aside my subjective thoughts based on my childhood and tried to make an objective observation that will help me explain what is going on with religions around the world. With this course I have gained a new perspective into eastern religions and found the idea of the cyclic time, the liberation and the idea of the natural law, very appealing.

I think that to some extent, if I had come from a different family, or can now find myself in a different family, I would love to try to pursue a religious life in Theravada Buddhism or something close to it. I hope that one day I can find a faith or at least have clear thoughts on religious beliefs because it is something that I question constantly. In the light of modernity I would consider myself a “ pluralist”. I am still attached to most of the doctrines, rituals and ethics of the religion I was baptized into, but I am truly tolerant and empathetic to most other religions. I am sure we don't know all there is to know about God and that the Catholic Church doesn't know everything there is to know and what is known is not always completely true.