

THE SOCIAL
CONTRIBUTION OF
RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS
IN OPEN SOCIETIES

RELIGIONS AS
SOCIOCULTURAL CAPITAL



Generalitat de Catalunya
Government of Catalonia
**Religious Diversity
Advisory Board**

DOCUMENT 2

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OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS
IN OPEN SOCIETIES

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CAPITAL

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY
ADVISORY BOARD

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Religious Diversity Advisory Board document 2
The Social Contribution of Religious Traditions in Open Societies.
Religions as Sociocultural Capital
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INTRODUCTION

The Religious Diversity Advisory Board has once again produced a document rich in reflections and knowledge, in which it describes the different religious faiths' contributions to the society in which we live. The conclusion is clear. Without the contributions in question, none of today's cultures would be as we know them, because, as the document states, "religions are every culture's transcendent core".

While the world's different cultures developed separately in the past, we are nowadays part of a diverse, high-tech, global society, one that sometimes appears to have turned its back on religion. It is therefore good to reflect on the process involved and appreciate the importance of the different religious traditions, which have brought us to where we are today and give our existence meaning and transcendence. Global society cannot become hostile to religion or forget about it because religious faiths are essential for billions of people. They are, always have been and will remain fundamental for humanity as a whole.

We must face all the changes taking place around us with humbleness born of the awareness that we are the heirs of and indebted to long-standing cultural and religious traditions. It is our duty to ensure that the new global culture is capable of not only passing on but also respecting and fostering this human legacy. Because, as the Board reminds us, in addition to their spiritual dimension and their crucial role in transmitting values, religions do vital work in relation to culture, society, economic activity, education, health and immigration, among other areas. In the 19th century it was said that God had died, and in the 20th he seemed to have been forgotten. The 21st century, however, is showing us that everything inherent to human beings inevitably reveals itself in the end, regardless of how hard people try to conceal it.

Globalisation and diversity generate opportunities, and we must all embrace the new scope for interaction and dialogue they entail. That is what the Religious Diversity Advisory Board has done and what it suggests we do. I would once again like to thank the Board for all the work it does and for its constant contribution to dialogue and knowledge.

Joana Ortega i Alemany

*Vice president of the Government of Catalonia
and governance and institutional relations minister*

1. OUR WORLD'S SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT AND CRISIS

The rapid development of societies across the world, the resulting interconnection, and the ever-greater local and global repercussion of economic activity have brought about a state of change and growth for which the term *crisis* is generally used. We often associate the situation in question with economic affairs and the social deficiencies and inequality it causes, which are all too evident in our society today.

The state of crisis, however, is not limited to the economy, and it is not only up to political and social institutions to solve it. The different religious traditions have historically contributed to improving different aspects of the societies of which they are part (rather than just of the specific cultural context in which they originated) and continue to do so in the present. Religions are thus a form of social capital, one that is often overlooked against a secular backdrop but which remains influential and effective in the development of different areas of society.

1.1. The multifaceted nature of the crisis and its consequences

While the economic aspect of the crisis is seemingly its most prominent, the crisis is not solely due to economic mismanagement. To a large extent, the economic crisis stems from an institutional crisis linked to political management and a reformulation of cultural identities; and, at a deeper level, from a crisis based on the values that are central to the way all human societies function.

The state of crisis is also affecting religion, which is often deemed subjective and confused with an eclectic selection of practices intended to provide emotional satisfaction. In other cases, the crisis in the religious sphere generates defensiveness and intransigence among elements of religious groups which prioritise protecting what they regard as the key aspects of their traditions over coexistence, dialogue and tolerance.

Given the multifaceted nature of the current situation, a broad understanding of our society's social and cultural structure is necessary, as is a rethink of the values behind civil society's management and each individual's personal choices.

1.2. The crisis as an opportunity

The current crisis offers an opportunity to rethink our society's bases, principles and objectives. That entails recognising society's existing values that generate positive responses both to the material deficiencies caused by the economic crisis and to the search for meaning inherent to every human being as an essential element of society.

Sources of such responses include the different religious traditions, which, over the centuries, have carried out social initiatives for the benefit of their followers, members of other faiths and civil society in general.

The crisis is also an opportunity to discover the social contribution made by the various religious traditions, with a view to appreciating its value and paving the way for collaboration for the good of our society.

2. RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AS PART OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL FABRIC OF SOCIETY

As already stated in another document,¹ Catalan society is characterised by its great diversity, including that of the religious kind. The followers of the different religions present in Catalonia actively participate in efforts to address the social and cultural issues that affect the territory, such as the aforementioned crisis.

2.1. The relationship between religious traditions and cultures

Behind each of the vast majority of the world's cultures, there is at least one spiritual and religious tradition acting as a source of inspiration. Such traditions express their intuitions and texts and the values and symbols that characterise them in a multifaceted way, through different cultural products that substantially enrich humankind's heritage, enhancing its complexity and beauty, and provide people with food for thought and aesthetic pleasure. In many cases, such cultural products cause an experience of transcendence, in that they prompt spiritual inquiry.

It can be said that religions are every culture's transcendent core. That has two implications. The first is that religions originate within cultures and share the language, symbols and values which surround them. The second is that religions arise to exceed the culture within which they originate, to cause it to grow and to take it beyond its boundaries. All religions have a prophetic nature. They establish a relationship of tense fertility with the community from which they emerge, simultaneously consecrating and questioning elements of its society and culture. Such questioning is part of the very root of religion, i.e. the "eschatological

¹See Government of Catalonia – Religious Diversity Advisory Board, *Religious Diversity in Open Societies. Criteria of Discernment*, Barcelona, Directorate-General for Religious Affairs, 2013.

reservation”, with ideas of absolute utopia being the basis for constantly telling society that “we aren’t there yet”.

Familiarity with the spiritual and religious traditions that invisibly nurture many cultures is absolutely essential to an in-depth knowledge of human cultural heritage. We thus feel that it is vital that they be treated with care and preserved as a general asset, now and in the future, so that they can continue to be a source of inspiration and creativity and to stimulate spiritual inquiry. Regardless of people’s positive or negative views of religious phenomena, religion is part of human culture.

2.2. The relationship between religious traditions and society

Throughout history, the different religious traditions have actively contributed to the formation of ties based on cohesion, collaboration and growth, not only among members of their own communities but also with other faith groups and with civil society in general. While the attitudes of religions’ followers have been a factor in past conflicts (and present-day conflicts in some parts of the world), there can be no denying that they have also contributed positively to the development of cultures and the improvement of welfare in society.

That contribution chiefly centres on the inner development of the individual members of each religious group. The development in question is a result of worship and spiritual growth that enables them to face crises (whether personal or collective) and achieve personal growth while observing values geared to personal equilibrium and completeness which their personal, family and social relationships reflect.

3. RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AS A SOCIOCULTURAL CONTRIBUTION

Like any other world view, every religious tradition has certain spiritual ideals that are intended to mould its followers to its nature. Values are the driving force behind the achievement of such objectives. Values compel people to take action, to do more than merely satisfy their own needs, to take up and commit to causes.

Religions' ideals or archetypes of human and social fulfilment prefigure certain values that, to one degree or another, become reference points for believers. In everyday life, however, the consequences of those values are not limited to religious communities. The values of each such community directly affect the society of which it is part. They alter it and shape its culture. The contribution made by religious traditions thus constitutes social capital. It is, in other words, a positive contribution that goes beyond the religious context to aid each society's human, material and cultural growth.

3.1. Religions, sociocultural contributions and development

As social capital, religious traditions generate not only personal but also collective values. They do so by prompting believers to act benevolently, compassionately and charitably.

Many of the social, health and education initiatives underway around the world are the fruit of that driving force. Throughout history, the values of compassion, solidarity, justice, charity and empathy have led thousands of people to establish places of refuge and means of easing suffering in the world to the greatest extent possible. The values religious traditions generate induce those who truly identify with them to take action and to carry out work that helps humanise the planet and transform human societies. That force for change, which stems from religious beliefs, results in the development and improvement of various aspects of societies.

3.2. Sociocultural contributions and the different religious traditions

The different cultural contexts in which the various religious traditions have evolved have influenced the way each of them conceives of human beings and their natural and social environment, as well as the ideals to which it aspires with regard to humans and human communities. Nonetheless, development and contact with other cultures over the centuries have led to the religious traditions expressing their ideals and putting them into practice in new ways, whether their situation be that of a diaspora, a minority or the predominant faith in a given territory.

Additionally, a number of tendencies have arisen within each religion based on different approaches to expressing its ideals in relation to its essential principles. The result is considerable diversity in terms of the meaning the various religions offer humankind.

In the context of the aforementioned development and diversity, the major religious traditions have certain fundamental characteristics that define their values and shape their social and cultural contributions to the territories in which they originated and those in which they have subsequently become established, and which are part of the multicultural tapestry of open societies.

There follows, for educational purposes, a summary of the main aspects of the social values advocated by the major religious traditions currently present in Catalonia. Our intention is not to cover the richness inherent to the traditions in question exhaustively, but rather to offer an insight into their main attributes and their specific contributions as social capital for a non-specialised readership.

3.2.1. The Hindu tradition

Hinduism is an extraordinarily diverse religion, and the different groups present in Catalonia reflect that heterogeneity. Hinduism originated in

around 2500 BC, making it the oldest of the religious traditions that exist today.

Unlike other religions, Hinduism has no single sacred book or text. Sacred Hindu literature comprises numerous texts written over a period of many centuries. Both their form and subject matter vary. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmanas and the Aranyakas are some of the most important of them. The said literature also includes a number of texts written by humans under divine inspiration. Among these texts, which are of great literary value and tend to be the most widely known in the west, are the Mahabharata (which includes a poem entitled *Bhagavad Gita*, regarded as a summary of Hindu mysticism), the Ramayana and the Puranas.

The Hindu tradition can be viewed as a way of life aimed at focusing attention on humankind's supreme duty, which is to achieve completeness. The teaching of a single reality (Brahman) has been one of Hinduism's key aspects ever since the Vedic period. The basis of that idea is that the human condition, while intrinsically related to the natural environment, has the potential to transcend the natural order. The spiritual principle that exists in every living being (*atman*) is a fragment of the omnipresent Brahman. The human self must recognise that spiritual principle and seek to attain liberation. This notion of unity is the cornerstone of non-violence and gives rise to values such as compassion and reconciliation.

A society that believes in a single fundamental reality cannot develop a fondness for mundane possessions or temporary pleasures. It must reinforce channels for dialogue and understanding between cultures, peoples and religions. On the basis of those principles, the Hindu tradition has a complex code of conduct geared to individuals' inner growth, the purpose of which is their liberation and subsequent union with the absolute. Hinduism's code of ethics is summarised in the 20 restraints (*yamas*) and observances (*niyamas*) contained in the books of the Vedas

and discussed throughout sacred Hindu literature. They underpin the behaviour of all members of society (including non-Hindus) and are of the essence for anyone looking to attain inner liberation.

The Hindu tradition identifies giving generously (*dana*) as one of the acts that not only help a believer achieve completeness but also contribute to society's improvement and the material and spiritual progress of the rest of humankind. Mahatma Gandhi's thinking influenced the understanding of this concept in the context of the contemporary world by highlighting its importance as an altruistic contribution made by a Hindu to enhance the wellbeing of others and of society in general, be it by donating material goods to help the most needy or by devoting time and effort to achieving a common good related to education, health or human groups' overall development.

The doctrine and practice of non-violence (*ahimsa*) is another Hindu concept developed by Gandhi which has had a significant social impact. According to this principle, the things that unite people are stronger than those that separate them, because everything comes from, is sustained by and returns to Brahman. Gandhi drew inspiration from the principle of non-violence when seeking India's independence from Britain.

3.2.2. The Buddhist tradition

Like Hinduism, Buddhism is characterised by great heterogeneity as far as its presence in Catalonia is concerned. It originated against the philosophical and cultural backdrop of Hinduism in the Indian subcontinent in the 6th century BC. It centres on the figure and teachings of Siddharta Gautama, known as Buddha, meaning the "enlightened one" or the "awakened one", who spent approximately 45 years preaching and setting an example. He proposed a path to liberation other than sacrifices and rituals, revolving around inner growth and the relinquishment of material objects and desires, which he deemed a source of suffering.

Buddha's doctrine expresses no views regarding the existence or otherwise of divinities and refrains from philosophical speculation. His teachings, which are brought together in a work called *Tripitaka*, stress that Buddhists should live their lives according to five fundamental precepts. Specifically, they must abstain from killing living beings, stealing, any form of sexual misconduct, lying and consuming substances that might cause intoxication.

Over the course of Buddhism's historical development through various branches and in different regions, Buddhist thinking has been synthesised with a number of Asian religious traditions.

Buddhism identifies compassion (*karuna*) as the fundamental virtue. Individuals achieve acceptance through a deepening of their awareness, and through acceptance they gain the generosity of spirit and the energy necessary to carry out the work that compassion requires of each human being. This Buddhist value has acquired a social aspect, with great importance being attributed to generosity and concern for others. The principle of generosity (*dana*) has a preminent status. Along with helping others and treating people fairly, acting generously is one of the ten practices necessary to achieve enlightenment. All the values and principles in question play a part in making the Buddhist ideal of social wellbeing a reality.

Buddhists' contribution to a fairer society is particularly evident in the movement called Engaged Buddhism, which promotes followers' inner growth and calls for compassion and generosity towards others in the form of education, material assistance and care for the environment.

3.2.3. The Taoist tradition

The religion of Taoism is present in Catalonia, particularly among the population of Chinese origin, albeit with a low level of institutionalisation. It is mainly practised in private. Together with Confucianism and Buddhism, it is one of the "three ways" of China's religious tradition.

The philosophical system of Taoism arose in China in around the 4th century BC. It is based on the *Daodejing* (“The Book of the Way and its Virtue”), a work written by the sage Lao Tse. Taoist thinking, which has undergone rich development, focuses on nature, the harmonious relationship between humankind and the cosmos, and achieving health and longevity through inner and outer purification.

Taoist ethics highlight the relationship between morally correct behaviour and physical and spiritual wellbeing. Virtue is connected to longevity, and Taoist masters are thus regarded as individuals who have perfected their moral qualities and enjoy a long life. For Taoists, ethical conduct is linked to the “three jewels of the Dao” (or the “three treasures of the Dao”), namely moderation, compassion and humility. Those values underpin a code of social ethics which involves ridding oneself of selfish desires and attaining harmony, particularly with the natural environment.

The Taoist tradition has contributed to awareness of environmental and feminist issues in particular. It assigns special value to women as a key element of human and spiritual growth.

3.2.4. The Jewish tradition

The history of western culture, and of the Catalan culture in particular, is linked to the development of Judaism. While other religious traditions have only very recently begun to be part of Catalonia’s cultural make-up, Judaism has always held that status and, furthermore, has contributed notably to shaping the territory’s history. Judaism can be said to be a way of life in which no separation between the religious and personal spheres is apparent.

There are different movements within Judaism, which are usually called Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism. All three of them have their roots in the figures of Abraham, the father

of the Jewish people, who lived in around 2000 BC; and Moses, who lived in around 1200 BC and received and promulgated the law of the Jews.

Judaism places great emphasis on the Torah as its written law, and the Mishna and the Talmud as compilations of its oral traditions. On the basis of the Torah and the Talmud, there are a total of 613 commandments (*mitsvot*) that all Orthodox Jews must obey in their day-to-day lives. There are a number of different interpretations of the scriptures in question within the Jewish world. Those interpretations have been part of Jewish life in diaspora for many centuries. Despite their variations, they have always been deeply ethical in nature.

Judaism holds that every human being has an inalienable dignity and that God wants humans to take part in his work, given that he made them in his image. God encourages humans to take an interest in the wellbeing of others, although they are free to choose whether or not to do so. According to Judaism, every individual symbolises God and is therefore worthy of love and consideration. That gives rise to a commitment and duty to enable people to develop their humanity through respect, honour, facilities for education, the enjoyment of free time, and opportunities to work and receive remuneration, to acquire a property and to establish a family, among many other things.

Judaism's social contribution is reflected in the central role of acts of charity (*tsedakah*) in Jewish communities' historical structure. With many communities living in diaspora, that has resulted in a close relationship between rich and poor Jews. Respecting and helping the poorest members of society is seen not only as a means of easing their situation with a view to fostering their economic independence, but also as a way of addressing the need to develop a compassionate, generous spirit on the basis of solidarity within communities. The spirit in question has inspired various social initiatives, including the establishment of orphanages, hospitals and

schools. It has also generated social cohesion, making it possible for many Jewish communities, such as the Hasidic Jews, to survive persecution and poverty.

Historical prejudices and different ideological tendencies have resulted in the Jewish people being associated with greed. However, the fact is that Jews' social action often goes unnoticed because they tend to be extremely discreet in public life due to centuries of persecution, discrimination and segregation. Their contribution to social development and different aspects of culture is clear evidence of a religious tradition that is highly aware and respectful of its roots. The value of that contribution lies in the establishment of the principles of personal dignity, which have significantly influenced the development of open societies.

3.2.5. The Christian tradition

Christianity has historically established stronger roots in Europe, and in Catalonia in particular, than any other religious tradition. It has pervaded and influenced Catalonia's past to such an extent that the territory's geographical, artistic and literary development has closely mirrored Christianity's cultural evolution.

The emergence of Christianity centred on the figure of Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples, who lived and died in the early part of the 1st century. The teachings of Jesus, along with details of his life and its meaning, are set out in the four gospels that, together with texts discussing the experiences and history of the first Christians, make up the New Testament.

Over the course of time and its geographic expansion, Christianity has split into various branches due to doctrinal, cultural and/or political differences. Those branches include the different eastern (Orthodox) churches, the various Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church, all of which are represented in Catalonia.

Christians hold that living virtuously and doing good are not merely ways of earning divine approval. One of Christianity's key principles is that God loves people unconditionally, just as they are. God's love (*agape*) is shown in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, whom Christians recognise as his son, sent to Earth as an example and redeemer.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus surpass the human condition, which, according to Christian tradition, had deteriorated from a state of harmony with God to one of sin, ignorance and estrangement from the Creator. Once humans recognise God's love for them, they can respond with gratitude and go on to do his will, which is expressed through his commandments (shared with the Jewish tradition) and the teachings and example of Jesus. Experiencing God's love in their lives causes Christians to love God and their fellow humans, and to carry out acts of charity that make Christian virtue and the divine gift that works through all believers evident.

The various branches of Christianity approach the importance of personal recognition of God's love in different ways. Some prioritise personal understanding of the word of God (the Bible and the New Testament, as in the case of many Protestant denominations), while others focus on the guidance of the tradition of the Church (as in the case of the Catholic Church and the eastern churches). In essence, however, all the Christian denominations accept the principle of loving others as oneself, and that such love is not the fruit of personal endeavour but of a God-given gift.

Eastern Christianity, which developed in many countries in the Middle East and eastern Europe in particular, attributes special importance to the liturgical aspect of Christian life as a model of the ideal of every believer's supernatural life which also alters the material world. The educational activity, charitable work and role in artistic development of Orthodox institutions and monasteries are clear examples of this Christian tradition's contribution to society.

Catholicism, the Christian tradition that has experienced the greatest expansion, stresses the importance of sacramental life (i.e. participation in the sacraments) and ethical conduct, which believers put into practice through good deeds and social action geared to a fairer society. Evidence of this branch of Christianity's involvement in society can be found in its various religious orders and numerous social initiatives.

Protestantism, which began to develop around the figures of Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) in the 16th century, is the most diverse branch of the Christian tradition. The first Protestant movements gave rise to various tendencies that prioritise different aspects of Christian life, such as the centrality of the Bible and of inner life and ethical living. The history of Protestantism is replete with examples of social initiatives. Radical Protestantism or Anabaptism identifies community life and the solidarity it entails as essential elements of Christian life. John Wesley (1703-1791) and Methodism called for social reform based on social action in which the movement for the abolition of slavery had its roots. The Salvation Army, which was founded by William Booth (1829-1912), undertakes social action intended to offer a specific response to poverty and ignorance. More generally, Protestantism has notably contributed to literacy and education, and promoted an austerity-based work ethic and balance in the use of material goods.

3.2.6. The Islamic tradition

Islamic communities have a high level of presence in Catalonia nowadays. The territory is home to Muslims of a wide range of origins, reflecting the diversity of Islam's followers around the world. Catalonia's Muslim population first became apparent in around the 1960s, since when it has grown constantly. There are now a number of Muslim

organisations and groups in the territory, many of which are highly active in its social and economic life.

Islam developed around the figure of the prophet Muhammad, who was born in Mecca in approximately 570 AD and promulgated the divine revelations he received from the angel Gabriel. The most fundamental aspect of those revelations consisted of submission to a single god, Allah, in contrast to Arab tribes' polytheistic practices back then. Muhammad also founded a community of believers, the *ummah*, which had a clear social orientation and put an end to the power of the local oligarchies of the time. Islam thus developed into a religion, a civilisation and a community (the *ummah*) with aspirations of becoming universal. Its cultural and religious influence is plain to see. Its number of followers (some 20% of whom are of Arab origin) makes it the second largest religion in the world.

The Qur'an, which is held to comprise the revelations gradually conveyed to Muhammad, is Islam's main text and primary source of teaching and inspiration. The second textual source (Hadith) to which Muslims look for guidance is a record of the traditions or sayings of Muhammad, as reported by companions of the prophet who witnessed his deeds and heard his words and put them down in writing.

According to Islam, the universe is governed by a cosmic order called *Sharia or divine law*. This concept should not be confused with the human laws and rules based on the different traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

Despite a backdrop of diversity, Islamic ethics are underpinned by certain common principles stemming from the Qur'an, in which particular emphasis is placed on acting justly (*'adl, qist, mizan*).

The principle of *zakat*, a tax that all Muslims must pay as a form of almsgiving, and the practice of being generous are central to the Islamic tradition's social contribution, prompting action that goes beyond personal

religious duty and contributes to the social wellbeing of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In the past, the Islamic civilisation has also expressed its concern for such wellbeing through social initiatives designed to combat slavery, poverty and ignorance. Over the course of Islam's expansion, however, the principle of contributing to social wellbeing was often undermined in the interests of protecting and legitimising authority. Nonetheless, practices involving social justice and solidarity were upheld by the working classes, including the numerous Sufi brotherhoods throughout the Islamic countries.

As of the 19th century, various Muslim activists and intellectuals reiterated the importance of social action and justice, and proposed substantial social reforms in their countries of origin. Those movements for change have progressively given rise to numerous political and independent social and cultural initiatives that contribute to social capital, be it that of countries with mainly Muslim populations or that of those in which immigrants from the Islamic world live.

3.2.7. The Sikh tradition

The Sikh religious tradition's presence in Catalonia, a consequence of the arrival of immigrants from north India, is a very recent development. The term *Sikh* means "student" or "apprentice". The Sikhs are disciples of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539), who founded the religion in the Indian region of the Punjab in the 15th century.

Nanak was the first of a succession of ten gurus or prophets whose lives spanned the 15th and the early 18th centuries and who collectively established the Sikh doctrine. Raised in the Hindu tradition in present-day Pakistan, where he witnessed tensions between Hindus and Muslims, he underwent a profound spiritual experience during which he received a divine revelation, the *Mul Mantra*, from the only god. He began spreading the message God had given him and spent 14 years travelling across much

of Asia, from Sri Lanka to Tibet, and from Mecca to Dhaka. He made no real enemies in the process, on which grounds his followers say he is the only prophet in history not to have encountered any kind of violent opposition. The nine gurus who succeeded him continued defining and spreading the Sikh religion. Sikhs believe that all ten gurus were inspired by a single divine spirit, the *Shabad Guru*.

Since the death of the tenth guru in 1708, Sikhism's supreme reference point has been the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the religion's sacred book, which is regarded as the community's eternal, infallible guru ("guide"). It basically consists of a collection of hymns and prayers composed by the ten gurus. In addition to setting out the Sikh doctrine, the sacred text is a guide for meditation. Sikhs believe that repeating its verses generates a vibration that induces a meditative state in believers.

The Sikh faith is based on belief in a single god, who is the creator of everything in the universe. Sikhs have a great many names for their god, the most common being Waheguru ("indescribable wisdom") and Sanam ("true identity"). No image of this god is possible, as it is inconceivable to Sikhs that a human could know and represent the divine physiognomy. They regard human existence as the last stage in a cycle of reincarnations, from which believers can be released by conducting themselves correctly in order to achieve *Jiwan Mukta* or "union with God". They believe that a person can attain such union in a single lifetime, regardless of their acts in previous lives, as long as their behaviour is in keeping with Sikh doctrine.

As the cornerstone of Sikhism's ethical principles, such behaviour can be summed up in three points. Firstly, an individual must forsake their ego and focus all their thoughts on God (*Naam Japna*), resulting in their conduct coming to reflect the divine virtues. Secondly, they must follow the Sikh tradition's religious practices, act honestly (*Dharam di Kirat Karni*) and emphasise the importance of doing legitimate work to make

a living. Thirdly, they must behave well, respecting the rules established by the Guru Granth Sahib.

Sikhism regards the material world as something real, where it is possible to perceive the presence and follow the precepts of God, rather than as an illusion to which only the bare minimum of attention should be paid. The religion holds that all people are part of a universal community (Vand Ke Chakna) and are thus duty-bound to share the fruits of their labour with others, especially the most needy. One way of doing so is to donate 10% of their income to their community. Another is the *langar*, involving a community preparing a meal for all its members and anyone else who wishes to join them, regardless of their religion, origin or social status.

The principle of equality has been promoted throughout the history of Sikhism. From its beginnings, the religion played a pioneering role in absolving widows of blame for their husband's death. Nowadays, it is expressed through gender equality (both men and women may perform religious ceremonies) and the rejection of any kind of caste or discrimination on the grounds of race or social status. It is also reflected in Sikhs' practice of praying daily for all humans, irrespective of their religious beliefs, rather than solely for members of their own community.

There are thought to be close to 27 million Sikhs worldwide at present, most of them living in the Punjab. Sikh groups all over the planet are characterised by their community-oriented outlook and socially active nature.

3.2.8. The Bahá'í tradition

The Bahá'í Faith is a religion that was founded in Persia in the 19th century by Mírzá Husayn-Alí (1817-1892), known as Bahá'u'lláh ("the glory of God") to his followers, who regard him as the most recent prophet or messenger of God. While other faiths proclaim themselves to

be the only true religion, Bahá'ís believe there to be basic unity between all religions and that humans have simply given God different names throughout history. They therefore recognise all of Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad as prophets or manifestations of God.

The history of the Bahá'í religion is linked to an earlier movement, Bábism, which was founded in Persia by Mírzá Alí Mohammad (1819-1850), better known as the Báb (“the gate”), who announced that he had been charged with making preparations for the arrival of the next messenger of God. Persia’s dominant Muslim clergy consequently persecuted him and his followers, and he was eventually publicly executed.

Bahá'u'lláh, who belonged to a wealthy family from Tehran, became a follower of Bábism in 1844 and engaged in work to help the poor. He was arrested and, together with his wife and three children, banished to Baghdad. While in exile, he began to undergo a profound spiritual experience that led him, in 1863, to declare himself the manifestation of God whom the Báb had announced. He subsequently devoted himself to spreading the Bahá'í Faith and wrote its book of laws, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* or “The Most Holy Book”. At the time of his death there were approximately 50,000 Bahá'ís in different Middle Eastern countries. Before dying, he appointed his eldest son, Abbás Effendi (1844-1921), as his successor. Regarded by many as the authorised interpreter of his father’s doctrine, Abbás Effendi travelled to Europe and North America to spread the Bahá'í Faith.

In addition to the tradition’s religious practices, the Bahá'í code of ethics promotes personal endeavour to help others and states that acts that benefit humankind have the same value as praying to and eulogising God. That explains Bahá'ís’ dedication to creating schools, clinics and agricultural training centres to aid the social development of communities. Their social commitment expanded in 1983, when the Universal House

of Justice (the movement's supreme legislative institution) urged them to promote initiatives compatible with their faith with the aim of contributing to the social and economic development of the regions in which they lived. As a result, the number of officially recognised altruistic Bahá'í organisations had increased from 129 to 1,482 by 1987, and the total is still rising today.

There are currently more than 5 million followers of the Bahá'í Faith in over 230 countries, encompassing all the planet's continents, and they are characterised by a high level of social commitment. There have been Bahá'ís in Catalonia for around 60 years, and they have administrative centres in Girona, Barcelona, Terrassa, Reus and Tarragona. The limited resources of Catalonia's Bahá'í community have not prevented it from undertaking a range of initiatives intended for the whole of society. In keeping with their beliefs, Bahá'ís work towards personal transformation and social improvement at the same time. Implementing various global programmes for all age groups locally, they offer training geared to social and personal change (including the promotion of social skills and knowledge), and seek to enhance understanding of spiritual matters. They thus effectively facilitate such change. The ongoing collective learning process involved takes place in interactive study groups, which carry out specific, small-scale, community-oriented activities in different Catalan municipalities.

4. THE SPECIFIC SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Our previous presentation of the main religious traditions represented in Catalonia and their value as social capital offers an insight into the principles that each of them advocates and promotes. A more precise picture of those principles can be painted by looking at seven specific areas, namely the arts, economic activity, education, health, immigration, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and spirituality.

4.1. The arts

All religious traditions are linked to a specific culture and a particular point in history, giving them an immanent quality that manifests itself in different aspects of the arts, such as literature, architecture, visual art and music.

Religious literature has a narrative character geared to explaining the meaning of things according to each religion's transcendent principles, in readily comprehensible language. The great works of religious literature (such as the Bible, the Qur'an and the *Bhagavad Gita*) thus constitute a literary legacy whose significance extends beyond religion. It has penetrated the different cultures to the extent of establishing reference points that, in some cases, directly influence the way a culture expresses itself. The major religious traditions' narratives have also marked the development of the language and literature of peoples, and have provided the structures of tales that, over time, have become ways of understanding human nature in all its richness and complexity. Religious literature's contribution thus exceeds its original pedagogical function. Such literature has become an expression of humans' capacity to give their existence meaning, an instrument for communicating through words and narratives.

Religious sites and artistic representation are also part of religious traditions' cultural contribution. Religions have always used architecture and art to generate a fitting atmosphere for worship and portray their transcendent realities. Within each religion, architecture and art also have a pedagogical function, in that they are used to convey particular ways of understanding both human beings and their relationship with the transcendent. Thanks to the patronage of religious institutions in the past, architecture and art have attained a state of sublime development, earning admiration even in non-religious circles. They are a reminder of humankind's ability to represent and recreate their environment, to produce objects of tremendous beauty and to create representations that go beyond pure description and/or imitation. They are thus historical records of religious culture and of humans' capacity for establishing order in and embellishing their environment.

The different religious traditions have also contributed to culture through music, which has been a fundamental part of their acts of worship and has featured in religious services in both its vocal and instrumental forms. Religious music is also an aspect of the most important moments of human life, such as birth, marriage and death. Religious music has frequently incorporated and been influenced by popular rhythms and forms, and, with the passage of time, acquired a non-religious nature and given rise to melodies and songs that are nowadays recognised as part of the cultural legacy of humankind, rather than solely of the religious tradition from which they originated.

Like other aspects of human creativity, music is an attempt to express feelings and realities that surpass the rational. It seeks to explain the meaning of things over and above their practical significance, and thus creates an atmosphere that enters the senses and touches the feelings of those who hear it. Religious music's melodies and songs remind us that humans are able to look beyond day-to-day life and confessionism.

Additionally, a religion's music not only introduces listeners to the feelings of that religion but also to those of a particular culture.

Through their literature, visual art and/or music, the different religious traditions have offered, and continue to offer, an interpretation of reality whose value is more than merely historical, one capable of taking the human senses and intellect beyond their perceptible limits through sites, images and sounds that bear witness to humankind's creativity in a sphere that promotes order in people's lives and emotions.

4.2. Economic activity

The different religious traditions have a multifaceted relationship with economic activity. On the one hand, the vast majority of religions regard material goods as an obstacle, in that they often distract believers from the transcendent objectives that are the focus of religious ideals. On the other hand, the restrained use of material resources is a necessity if humans are to survive, their needs are to be met, and each religion's inherent ideals of how society and communities ought to be are to be developed.

In any case, all religions agree that material goods should be used in moderation and that the realisation of their ideals would not be possible without the minimum level of resources required for physical survival.

With that in mind, and within the cultural context in which each of them has evolved, religions encourage their followers to promote a solidarity-based economy in which the most disadvantaged receive aid to survive and one person's material gains are used for the good of others. They also stress the need to share material goods as an internal exercise that accustoms people to caring for others and helps them use economic resources in moderation, thus establishing a form of co-responsibility.

The different religious traditions have put the principles in question into practice in various ways throughout their history. As a whole, however, they have generated an economic ethic based on sharing, as well

as a progressive view of work as part of believers' contribution to society and a means of teaching restraint in the use of earnings, where material gains are secondary to human and spiritual values.

The Hindu tradition's economic principles have varied over its long history. In general, however, a very specific community-based economic system has been central to Hindus' ideas about economic activity and power. Contemporary Hinduism's economic rationale was chiefly developed by Mahatma Gandhi on the basis of the principle of *swaraj* or self-sufficiency, as opposed to the consumerism and discrimination on the grounds of class present in certain regions of India. The same principle is also applied to humanising technological innovation and the rejection of technocracy.

Similarly, the Buddhist tradition generally sees the human desire to possess and dominate as an obstacle to moderation in the use of material resources. Buddhism accepts that aspect of human nature, but also emphasises that humans are capable of seeking personal growth that takes precedence over material goods and leads them to act with virtue. Knowledge of oneself and of the real value of objects, which is obtained through discipline and acts of generosity, is deemed fundamental. The aim is thus to harmonise personal interests and desires with the interests of society on the basis of compassion and altruism. This outlook results in Buddhists conceiving of economic activity not as the accumulation of material goods or as submission to the laws of supply and demand, but as the restrained use of resources to attain a state of frugal, balanced wellbeing characterised by a caring attitude towards human communities and the natural environment.

According to Taoism, which advocates the principle of "non-action" (*wu wei*), economic activity is not a consequence of state administration but of personal freedom geared to harmony between the spiritual and material worlds. The state's responsibility where economic management

is concerned consists of formulating and implementing laws to put an end to corruption and immorality, the idea being to make citizens more responsible for consonance between the markets and efforts to attain happiness. This economic philosophy entails a simple, well balanced life.

The Torah, Judaism's holy book, contains numerous prescriptions related to economic ethics, notably including pardoning debts and redistributing material resources in Jubilee years. Additionally, it views work as a means of subsistence. The Jewish tradition does not forbid the accumulation of goods, but it does highlight that assisting the most needy is a duty and that the richest members of society must use their resources to help their communities. Throughout its history, Judaism has engaged in rich reflection on coexistence, the relationship of responsibility between the rich and the poor, and the need to promote livelihood-oriented capacity building for individuals. The most characteristic expression of that community-mindedness is the communitarianism that took hold when the state of Israel was created. Revolving around communal settlements called *kibbutzim*, its aim was to ensure development based on cooperation. While originally conceived of as secular, the most important *kibbutzim* in present-day Israel are religious.

Christianity is the religion whose connection to the development of contemporary economic systems has been the closest. That is not because the doctrine of the religion's various traditions explicitly favours such development, but because it has taken place in a culturally Christian context. Christianity's different branches nowadays agree on the importance of using capital with restraint, responsibility towards the poorest members of society and the need for ethical economic development.

The Orthodox tradition does not have a specific economic doctrine, as it prioritises the transcendent and supernatural aspects of human reality. Nonetheless, plenty of Orthodox authors have identified the

basic principles of the denomination's angle on economic activity. One of them was the Russian theologian Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), who noted that neither the communist nor the capitalist system satisfies the human desire for transcendence, and that only true spiritual growth can bring people to use material goods in a reasonable way to aid human and spiritual development.

The Catholic tradition has formed a similar outlook in its social doctrine, although it stresses that its followers should actively participate in the fight for social justice and for economic ethics that prioritise people over capital. Additionally, it has highlighted human co-responsibility with regard to the fair distribution of opportunities and wealth. Against that backdrop, Catholic charitable initiatives abound and there is no shortage of proposals for alternative economic systems, such as the Economy of Communion, which advocates economic growth through business projects characterised by the fair distribution of income and proper payment for work.

Protestantism has historically championed ethics based on work and moderation as a testament to each believer's faith. The principles in question are the cornerstone of the various Protestant denominations' differing perspectives on economic activity. Of particular note is the Social Gospel movement, which developed in the USA and Canada during the 20th century. Its main concerns included the fight against poverty, the proactive defence of civil rights and social reform. Its spirit lives on in the efforts of many Protestant communities to promote justice and economic development based on personal and social responsibility. The Social Gospel movement itself was a consequence of different initiatives that, throughout the history of Protestantism, have underlined the importance of Christian social action, as Methodism continues to do in the present. Anabaptist Protestantism and the Mennonite groups in particular promote equitable, community-oriented economic development in

which luxuries, social distinctions and the hoarding of material goods have no part to play. In that respect, they set an example through their own communities.

Islam has developed its economic principles (*tabir al-mazil*) from various points of view over the course of its evolution as a civilisation. In the last few decades, an economic theory chiefly based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Islamic law (*sunna*) and aimed at rediscovering the economic principles of Islam and Islamic communities has been formed. In that regard, the altruistic connotations of economic management and the importance of Islam's systems for the redistribution of wealth (*zakat*) are key aspects of economic activity from an Islamic perspective. Those ideas have led to the institutionalisation of Islamic banking, which, as a banking management system, aims to put an end to usury and interest on loans and promotes administration conducive to the appropriate use of resources.

In keeping with its egalitarian principles, the Sikh tradition has historically played a part in the economic development of all the regions where Sikh communities can be found. That is particularly true in the case of the Punjab, where Sikh business models have been studied as examples of solidarity-based economies, especially in the agricultural sector. Sikhs' ideas about economic development are shaped by the need to earn an honest living (following the example of the tradition's gurus, who all worked to support themselves) and a positive perception of material realities, which are to be used to foster humankind's spiritual growth and social wellbeing through shared effort and an ethos of solidarity. The acquisition of material goods for subsistence is not frowned upon in itself, but the improper use of such goods is condemned, especially if detrimental to people, animals or plants.

The Bahá'í tradition regards economic development as a global challenge to be tackled with a view to aiding all humans' spiritual and

material growth. In that respect, it holds that humanity is experiencing a transition described as the passage from childhood to maturity. Economic and social development, which is realised through Bahá'ís' collective efforts locally and worldwide, is not promoted for the purpose of proselytism, which this tradition forbids, but with the aim of establishing structures that reflect humankind's maturity in community life, at the same time as fostering justice and inner growth through numerous coordinated initiatives.

Despite their diversity, religious traditions' outlooks on economic activity and management emphasise the importance of justice and of putting people before material goods and avaricious desires. Additionally, they call for (and often put into practice) austerity in the use of resources, in the interests of inner freedom that inspires compassion towards the most needy.

4.3. Education

Religious traditions have promoted education, particularly that of the religious variety, as an outstanding medium for the transmission of their values and principles, for the study of the meaning of their sacred texts in relation to people's lives, and for the realisation of their social ideals. Such study has provided insights into other areas of knowledge as ways of understanding the world and its diversity.

Religions' relationship with knowledge and its dissemination in societies is associated with the aim of gaining a more complete understanding of what are held to be absolute truths.

The major religious traditions have gradually institutionalised education centres over the years, establishing literacy centres and, subsequently, educational institutions whose focus is not limited to purely spiritual matters. Such centres are the only form of education available in some parts of the world. In the west, institutions of the kind in question

gave rise to schools and then universities, which gradually became part of the fabric of civil society.

With the process of industrialisation and the consequent transformation of cities due to migration from rural areas, educating youngsters and teaching them to read and write became vitally important. Religious institutions carried out notable work to that end, leading to progressive cooperation between civil authorities and religious bodies which continues today.

In the multicultural context of the present, the various religious traditions have different, enriching perspectives on knowledge and education. The Hindu tradition regards education as a somewhat informal, personalised process that takes place within families or local communities of believers, with didactic narratives and, recently, audiovisual resources playing a central role. Relationships between teachers and pupils are of great importance in this process, given that it is one of the first stages of a Hindu's life.

Ever since its beginnings, Buddhism has developed teaching techniques employed by its founder, including using analogies, educational examples, narratives and visual aids. Buddhist texts highlight the importance of teachers' pedagogical qualities, as well as of meditation and self-discipline as part of the learning process. In countries with a Buddhist tradition, the religion's monasteries have played a key role in educating young people and teaching them literacy skills. Buddhist teaching methods are currently attracting attention in educational circles worldwide.

Education is a formal requirement in the Jewish tradition, which has advocated basic training for its followers for two millennia. While such training has been essentially religious in nature, many Jewish communities have introduced diversified, high-quality education as they have developed, with emphasis on the importance of constant analysis of the principles of knowledge and their relationship with all human and religious knowledge.

Christianity has contributed in particular to the development of education and educational institutions in Europe. From monastic schools to cathedral schools and then universities, Christianity has played a part in individuals' all-round education for centuries. The Protestant Reformation was especially important as a factor in the spread of literacy to people of all social classes. The Protestants also particularly promoted scientific study at universities, separately from religious instruction.

Islam has also made a noteworthy contribution to the historical development of educational institutions, in keeping with the precept of seeking knowledge established in the Qur'an. That precept refers both to moral and social growth and to knowledge of humans and nature in the context of Islam. Muslim countries can point to many examples of institutions providing basic, religious, public and university education in their past.

In Sikhism, the concept of education (*vidiaa*) is linked to the Guru Granth Sahib, the religion's sacred text, according to which knowledge is vital to be able to distinguish between good and evil, and must be acquired with a view to passing it on so as to free others from the shackles of ignorance. With that in mind, Sikhs consider education to have a dual objective. On the one hand, it should enable individuals to realise all their potential. On the other hand, it should promote material and spiritual wellbeing with the aim of humankind acquiring the most profound values, under the guidance of a master (guru). Accordingly, Sikh communities foster not only literacy and general education for men and women alike (something exceptional in the period in which Sikhism became established), but also personalised education.

The Bahá'í Faith has always attributed great importance to education, particularly in the case of women and the poorest members of society. Bahá'ís consider simultaneous spiritual, moral and social development

crucial to achieving peace in the world. Given the religion's expansion in India, Africa and South America, all-round education has been a key aspect of its social undertakings. Bahá'ís provide such education through schools and training courses adapted to the specific needs of the regions in which they are taught, and through educational initiatives geared to global peace and harmony.

Be it through actual teaching or their role in the development of education systems, religious traditions continue to contribute significantly to education, which is one of every individual's fundamental rights in open societies. That may specifically involve promoting literacy, offering training in the principles of co-responsibility and/or facilitating an understanding of nature and society.

4.4. Health

The different religious traditions have a variety of perspectives on human reality, and on the subject of physical and moral suffering in particular. Nonetheless, they all agree on the following points:

Every human being experiences suffering, physical decline and certain death.

An individual's spiritual outlook can help make sense of such suffering and aid their recovery from ill health.

The sick should be cared for and treated.

Their common concern regarding pain and illness has led the different religions to undertake initiatives involving taking in, caring for and treating the sick. In many cases, those initiatives have given rise to institutions that help meet people's health-related needs and constitute a significant part of religions' contribution to social capital.

The eastern religious traditions have a more holistic concept of health, and view its physical, mental and spiritual aspects as a whole. They regard recovery from ill health as something that depends on the person affected,

and thus emphasise the importance of each individual's vital and spiritual characteristics.

Hinduism has drawn on its age-old tradition to develop Ayurvedic medicine as a way of life geared to increasing longevity. Its aim is to create a state of health that encompasses not only an individual's body but also their mind, behaviour and environment. It is a preventative approach in which caring for a patient is more important than curing them. Death, meanwhile, is considered to be part of a natural process and the opposite of birth rather than of life.

For Chinese religions, human health revolves around personal and social harmony and the environment. The Taoist tradition, which has a significant influence on Chinese popular medicine, conceives of each human being as a microcosm, and of the universe and its realities as something temporary and subject to decline. Life and its prolongation are therefore focal points for Taoism, hence the significance it attaches to leading a physically and morally harmonious lifestyle, based on healthy and ethically correct habits, in which virtue becomes a vehicle for life and longevity. That, in turn, explains why the figure of the doctor has acquired an aspect of spiritual importance in Chinese culture over the centuries, and why numerous masters who helped others achieve physical and moral equilibrium in the past are still remembered today.

The Buddhist tradition identifies the reality of suffering as an essential element of human life, and release from suffering as one of the aims of practising Buddhism. Buddhism is another religion with a holistic perspective on human health, which it conceptualises as a harmonious balance between body, mind, emotions and the spiritual dimension. Meditation and, in particular, acts of compassion play an important role in achieving a state of overall health which even extends to the body's immunity to disease. Those ideas in no way exclude the use of western medicine. Buddhism considers all means of staying healthy to be positive,

as long as spiritual and not just physical health is taken into account. Treating the sick with compassion thus has great value, as it not only affects the patient and their return to good health but also the inner growth of the person looking after them. It is therefore no surprise that Buddhism's history is replete with examples of social initiatives involving caring for the sick, the blind and the needy with the aim of improving their situation and aiding their physical and mental survival. It was in Buddhist countries that the first centres specialising in care and training for the blind were established, as part of the social transformation started by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC.

Western religions' approach to health and the treatment of illnesses is more closely linked to the evolution of contemporary medical science. Judaism has a long tradition of involvement with health and healing. As a result, its sacred literature includes numerous guidelines on practices and values related to medical ethics and caring for the sick. The texts of the Torah and the legal literature stemming from it (the Mishna, the Talmud, etc.) are imbued with the ethos of saving lives at any cost, which is also reflected in the works of the great Jewish authors, such as Moses Maimonides (1138-1204). These precedents have contributed to the consolidation of a practical, moral tradition centring on the sanctity of life and respect for the human body. That explains Judaism's great interest in medicine and the large number of Jews who, over the years, have devoted their lives to medicine and medical research wherever Jewish communities have sprung up. The many hospitals that have arisen from Jewish communities are testimony to that interest, which has also led Judaism's different tendencies to formulate progressive opinions on ethical issues related to health and medicine. Additionally, Judaism's emphasis on a healthy diet and personal hygiene represents a contribution to the development of public health. Civil society has gradually adopted the principles in question to prevent diseases and promote a better quality of life.

The different branches of Christianity share a number of principles that have historically formed the basis of the religion's health-related contribution. They include the belief that humans are made in God's image and likeness, which underpins the principle of each individual's inviolable dignity. Human life is thus deemed sacred, regardless of its quality. Accordingly, it is necessary to care for human life and health, as life is a gift from God. That duty not only applies on an individual level but also to society, given that God made humans social by nature and it is in communities that individuals develop and go about changing the world through good deeds and generosity.

Many examples of the ideal of caring for and treating the sick can be found in the Christian and biblical tradition, and they have been a source of inspiration for Christians' health-related initiatives. Both Jesus and the first Christian communities put that ideal into practice. It was later embodied in Catholic and Orthodox monasteries' centres for tending to the sick and, later still, in the religious orders whose members devoted themselves to caring for people in poor health, particularly those lacking basic material resources. The different Protestant denominations stress the importance of caring for the sick, of both their physical and spiritual healing, and of the shared responsibility of doctor and patient in the recovery process. Of particular note is the solidarity with the sick shown by Anabaptist communities, whose members not only look after ill individuals but also ensure that their family's needs are met.

The missionary activity of Christianity's different branches has paved the way for the presence of health services in many poor and/or remote areas, and for the subsequent creation of local hospitals and health worker training centres which, as has been the case in the west, have often become state-run facilities. Such initiatives have also helped to develop and support research centres with the aim of combating diseases,

as well as to promote campaigns through which research results are made available to the poorest members of society.

Muslim philosophers and doctors have also made a noteworthy contribution to the development of medicine and the health field, one that is particularly evident in the medieval context. It was in the Muslim world that the first hospital systems were established, often operating freely and altruistically. Various ways of treating previously incurable illnesses were established thanks to those hospitals, which also functioned as training centres for doctors and developed surgical instruments still in use today. Additionally, they introduced a hospital organisation system involving separate pavilions to avoid contagion, keeping and consulting medical records and the creation of pharmacies to prepare medicines. Various Muslim doctors, notably including Ibn Sina (980-1037), went further than just treating patients physically. They established the principles of a holistic form of medicine combining diagnosis, physical and psychological factors and a balanced diet.

The Sikh religion, which promotes vegetarianism, regards illness not as a simple lack of physical health but as a result of an individual sealing themselves within their ego and adopting a defensive posture towards the flow of nature. Due to its receptiveness to a holistic concept of health and the importance it attributes to altruistic work for others, Sikhism has always striven to see physical and spiritual treatment for the sick supersede popular health-related superstitions. The health care provided in Sikh hospitals and sanctuaries (particularly in Asia), the work that many of the religion's followers have carried out as doctors and nurses over the centuries, and Sikhs' open-minded attitude towards advances in medicine all add up to a notable contribution to the development of widely accessible holistic medicine.

The Bahá'í Faith also holds that true health goes beyond purely physical considerations. For an individual and their community to

be genuinely healthy, they must ensure their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing. Bahá'ís are aware of the importance of a balanced relationship between physical and spiritual life. As they see no incompatibility between their faith and scientific progress, they promote the development of medical technology and emphasise the need to train competent doctors and health workers.

The health arena is a rich mosaic, both culturally and socially. That richness, with the diversity it entails in terms of ideas about the reality of human health and pain, is a key part of religions' contribution to the social sphere, encompassing the progress of medical science, the creation of institutions that take in and treat the sick, and the development of the principles of public health. Above all, however, religious traditions constantly remind us of the great value of all aspects of life and health.

4.5. Immigration

The process of globalisation, with the immigration it entails, is one of the main factors in the growing religious diversity of present-day European societies. The development of different religious traditions alongside each territory's majority religion over the years has also contributed to that diversity. Catalonia has historically had Jewish and Protestant communities with strong cultural roots. A rise in the number of immigrants of different faiths has accentuated the territory's religious diversity, together with the cultural diversity with which it goes hand in hand.

Both communities of immigrants belonging to different religious traditions and those that are part of Catalonia's historical legacy endeavour to aid the integration of newcomers to the territory. They do so for various reasons, often based on each religion's inherent values of altruism and providing refuge. Such efforts to cater for immigrants' material and spiritual needs constitute a positive contribution to society in a number of ways.

Religions are sources of symbols, rituals and traditions that translate into beliefs, values and charitable acts. As such, they have certain common traits that not only transmit those beliefs and values but also create an identity around which people who, for whatever reason, have had to leave their place of origin and/or are part of a minority can come together.

As human organisations, communities of followers of a particular religious tradition satisfy certain spiritual needs and offer comfort in the form of a welcoming, familiar environment in the midst of a world that can seem hostile, especially to those just beginning to discover it.

Similarly, religious practices and the communities of believers who participate in them generate social networks through which newcomers can obtain information on housing, job opportunities and/or social services with a view to making a living and improving their situation.

Many organisations that have arisen from the different religious traditions go a step further. The institutionalisation of initiatives geared to the integration of immigrants makes it possible to offer social services, food, financial and legal assistance, language training, etc. Such initiatives are more than mere proselytism. They are essentially motivated by each religion's intrinsic ideals of justice and providing refuge.

As a whole, initiatives for aiding immigrants undertaken by members of the different religious traditions and the organisations they establish to that end deliver services expressly for dealing with newcomers' specific needs. At the same time, they activate a process of laying down roots in the host territory, which facilitates immigrants' integration into their new society and geographical surroundings. Furthermore, they perpetuate a transnational identity based on awareness of belonging to a community of believers that both extends beyond borders and is part of a new culture corresponding to the host territory.

Through their values and social action, religious organisations provide

mechanisms that make it possible for immigrants to integrate into a new society without any loss of identity or roots.

4.6. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue

While the different religious traditions have not been exempt from confrontations with and acts of intolerance towards one another in the past, efforts geared to mutual understanding and collaboration have been taking place since the 20th century. Today, that spirit is embodied by numerous initiatives and institutions which promote dialogue and unity, be it between members of a single religion (ecumenism) or between followers of different faiths (interreligious dialogue).

There are many initiatives in Catalonia which have done significant work ever since ecumenical and interreligious dialogue began, and have paved the way for understanding, tolerance, respect and, ultimately, cooperation on different levels between the ordinary members and leaders of the various religions involved.

The participation of Catalonia's religious traditions in initiatives geared to dialogue and collaboration is not aimed at establishing doctrinal unity that surpasses their differences, but rather at showing their common desire for peace, for mutual comprehension and acknowledgement, and for cooperation in the interests of a fairer, more human society. In that respect, the willingness of members of different faith groups to work together, regardless of their different beliefs, has led to many joint projects for helping the most needy and combating injustice and ignorance.

4.7. Spirituality

The different social initiatives and ethical principles described in this document leave no doubt as to religions' nature as social capital. However, it should be remembered that, first and foremost, religious traditions contribute to a fundamental human aspect, that of spirituality.

By *spirituality*, we do not mean the specific practices of a given religious tradition, nor do we mean ignoring material and practical realities in a show of selfish introversion and disdain for the contingencies facing people today. We are referring to the provision of meaning that surpasses the apparently utilitarian nature of people and their actions in such a way as to render them receptive to a more open and inclusive form of understanding conducive to discovering reality from an entirely new perspective, and as to fulfil the human desire for a meaningful life.

Humans' questions regarding meaning cannot be answered nor their longing for sense in their lives fulfilled by satisfying their material needs and improving social wellbeing, health care and education. Religions are sources of meaning for many people, but not for everyone. Every individual is free to accept or reject the meaning that each of the different religious traditions offers. Even if they choose to reject such offers, however, they should be capable of recognising that religions and their social and cultural action represent a search for meaning that is one of many possible meanings, religious and non-religious alike.

Part of religious traditions' contribution to open societies consists of offering a variety of options for people's lives. In open societies, such offers must be respected and responses to them ought not to be prejudged. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that such offers of meaning are not mutually exclusive, but rather different ways of encouraging people to live and work for a fairer, more inclusive society.

5. COLLABORATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

The previous sections of this document show the multifaceted nature of the social contributions made by religious traditions and their followers, painting a clear picture of the importance of religions where the development of open societies is concerned, and of the value of their work in the fields of the arts, economic activity, education, health, immigration, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and spirituality. In that regard, it can be said that religions often nurture and facilitate genuine public-spiritedness, developing citizens' ability to think critically, their commitment to their society and their willingness to work for the common good.

Contributions of the kind in question open the door to collaboration between state institutions and religious organisations. The role of the state, it is worth remembering, is not to promote spiritual values or to favour a particular religious tradition. Nonetheless, there is scope for the state and its institutions to cooperate with the different social initiatives for fostering human growth and protecting the most disadvantaged which followers of religious traditions have undertaken and supported in Catalonia over the years.

From the perspective of such collaboration, religious institutions are ideal vehicles for socialisation and social action for three main reasons:

Within the fabric of society, the different religious groups and their local congregations represent relatively homogeneous elements of unity that are highly willing to participate in initiatives, particularly those involving material solutions to specific local communities' inherent problems. It is often the case that such local communities have limited resources. However, the roots they have put down make it possible to reach citizens who are generally proactive in relation to social issues and

well disposed towards collaborating with institutions with a view to improving opportunities to develop and change their communities and social environment.

Each of the different groups that represent the religious traditions referred to in this document is a social system with recognised leaders, a regular meeting place, an organisational structure, the ability to work towards an ideal, and a social and human network used to participating in activities geared to cooperation and development. In many cases, individuals take part in social projects because people they know are involved rather than on their own initiative. In that respect, local religious groups are a means of establishing cooperative networks to act in society's interests.

Religious groups and their local and/or regional branches frequently run initiatives consistent with the principles of social action described in this document. Those initiatives are a result of their intrinsic social awareness and part of their social capital. Identifying such initiatives and developing possible mechanisms for collaboration with them and their work are vital tasks for governmental organisations in relation to fostering the contribution of religious groups to human and social growth in Catalonia.

6. CONCLUSION

This document is intended to be a reminder for civil society of how religions have contributed to their sociocultural environment over hundreds and even thousands of years. They have been both receptacles for and, thanks to their ability to mobilise people, driving forces behind civilisation. No aspect of the world's cultures would be as it is today without this legacy.

The objective of this document, however, is not to evoke bygone times for nostalgic purposes or to seek credit for past actions, but rather to call for religions to continue their sociocultural work in the present and the future. In a context with both global and local characteristics, as is the case of Catalonia, the presence of such a rich variety of religious traditions paves the way for them to carry on contributing to the arts, by generating multiple manifestations of beauty; to the field of economic activity, by creating charitable platforms and networks; to education, by teaching values; and to social cohesion, by promoting assistance for and hospitality towards immigrants and foreigners, all at the same time as continuing to provide personal and collective tools for inner development.

Additionally, there is a new area of activity and form of enrichment to be taken into account, that of interreligious dialogue. Now is not a time for historical competition between adversaries, nor for blinkered isolation. It is a time for consciously accepting that it is not only religions themselves that benefit from sharing their legacies, but also the civil societies in which they share them.

**THE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY
ADVISORY BOARD**

The Board's functions

The Religious Diversity Advisory Board's functions are established in article 62 of Decree 184/2013 of 25 June on the restructuring of the Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Governance and Institutional Relations:

The composition, functions and legal system of the Religious Diversity Advisory Board, which was established under Decree 326/2011 of 26 April as a collegial body to advise the ministry with jurisdiction over religious affairs on the implementation of policies on such affairs and related to the different churches, faiths and religious communities active in Catalonia, are as envisaged herein.

The functions of the Religious Diversity Advisory Board are to:

- a) Advise or report to the minister in charge of the Government of Catalonia's ministry with jurisdiction over religious affairs on any questions it is posed.*
- b) Propose such measures or approaches as it deems appropriate as far as relations with the different churches, faiths and religious communities active in Catalonia are concerned.*
- c) Provide, at the request of the minister in charge of the Government of Catalonia's ministry with jurisdiction over religious affairs, advice on and support in collaborative or cooperative relations involving the participation of the Government or Parliament of Catalonia in Spanish state institutions or international organisations.*

The Board's composition

The Religious Diversity Advisory Board was established in 2011, since when it has comprised 11 members and been chaired by Dr. Francesc Torralba i Roselló.

Francesc Torralba i Roselló

(Barcelona, 1967) Holder of a PhD in philosophy from the University of Barcelona and another in theology from the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia. He lectures in history of contemporary philosophy and philosophical anthropology at Ramon Llull University in Barcelona, where he is director of the Ethos Chair in applied ethics. He alternates his teaching activity with his work as a writer, and is also a member of a number of ethics committees. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI made him an adviser to the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Culture. He publishes in a range of specialised journals and regularly appears in the media. Over the course of his career he has received various awards for essays written in Catalan and has published more than 70 philosophy books on highly diverse topics. He is essentially interested in making profound yet clear philosophy accessible to the general public.

Maria Teresa Areces Piñol

(Lleida, 1956) Holder of a PhD in law from the University of Barcelona. She is currently professor of state ecclesiastical law and secretary general of the Faculty of Law and Economics at the University of Lleida, having previously been the Faculty's dean for 12 years. She is a former member of the Board of Governors of the Government of Catalonia's Institute for Autonomous Community Studies. She has focused her research on freedom of religion, family law, canon law, relations between

religious faiths and the public authorities, and conscientious objection. Her numerous publications notably include a book entitled *El principio de laicidad en las jurisprudencias española y francesa* [The Principle of Secularity in Spanish and French Case Law]. Her most recent published work is a book called *La prohibición del burka en Europa y en España* [The Prohibition of the Burka in Europe and Spain]. She has been Lleida's municipal comptroller.

Lena de Botton Fernández

(Barcelona, 1976) Holder of a PhD in sociology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. She is currently a lecturer in the Department of Sociological Theory, Philosophy of Law and Social Science Methodology at the University of Barcelona, as well as coordinator of the Interreligious Dialogue Group in the same university's Centre for Research into Theories and Practices for Overcoming Inequalities (CREA). Her lines of research revolve around immigration, cultural identity, female immigrants, interreligious dialogue and inclusive schools. Her work on Muslim women's contributions to international feminist discourse is of particular note.

Miquel Calsina Buscà

(Torroella de Montgrí, 1970) Lecturer at the Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations (Ramon Llull University), as well as on the interreligious, ecumenical and cultural dialogue master's degree programme taught at the Barcelona Institute of Religious Studies. He is a member of the Joan Maragall Foundation's Board of Trustees, the Editorial Board of the journal *Qüestions de Vida Cristiana*, and the Faculty of Theology of Barcelona's Reflection on Theology and Thought Group. He is also the Diocese of Girona's social media delegate. He

has coordinated the publication of works such as *Catalunya, reptes ètics* [Catalonia: Ethical Challenges] (2006), *Religions i espiritualitat en un món en crisi* [Religions and Spirituality in a World in Crisis] (2009) and *Valors útils per a la Catalunya del futur* [Useful Values for the Catalonia of the Future] (2009). He is co-author of *Les veus dels indignats a Catalunya* [The Voices of Catalonia's Indignant Citizens] (2013) and *Palabras clave de sociología* [Keywords in Sociology] (2015).

Lluís Duch i Álvarez

(Barcelona, 1936) Holder of a PhD in anthropology and theology from the University of Tübingen. He is an emeritus professor in the Faculty of Communication Studies at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, in the Sant Fructuós de Tarragona Institute of Religious Studies, and in the Abbey of Montserrat, where he has been a monk since 1961. He has studied the different languages of the symbolic and mythical universes, and their manifestation in modern everyday life. He has translated texts penned by Luther, Müntzer, Silesius, Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer to Catalan and Spanish. He is the author of more than 50 books and opuscles, and of over 300 articles and contributions to collective works.

Daniel Giralt-Miracle i Rodríguez

(Barcelona, 1944) Holder of a degree in philosophy and the arts from the University of Barcelona, a degree in information sciences from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and a diploma in design and communication from the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm in Germany. In addition to working as an art critic and historian, he has taught at the two aforementioned universities in Barcelona and has organised national and international art and design exhibitions. His responsibilities in the field

of public and private cultural management have included being director of the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art and general curator of the International Gaudí Year. He is currently a member of the Executive Committee of Barcelona's Council for Culture, as well as a fellow of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts of Barcelona and the Sant Jordi Royal Academy of Fine Arts. The Government of Catalonia awarded him a Creu de Sant Jordi (one of Catalonia's highest civil distinctions) in 2013.

Francesc Xavier Marín i Torné

(Gironella, 1963) Holder of a PhD in philosophy and a diploma in religious studies. An expert in Islam and the Islamic culture and civilisation, he lectures at Ramon Llull University, where he is the Identity and Intercultural Dialogue research group's principal investigator. He also lectures at the Institutes of Religious Studies of Barcelona and Vic, as well as on a number of postgraduate and master's degree courses on immigration, intercultural education and development in Africa. He has been a guest lecturer on Islam at the University of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He is secretary of the Interfaith Association for the Study of Religion (FAR), and an honorary member of the ETHNOS and ORÍGENS associations.

Xavier Melloni i Ribas

(Barcelona, 1962) A Jesuit with a PhD in theology and a degree in cultural anthropology. He is a member of the Christianity and Justice Study Centre, as well as a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia and the Sant Cugat del Vallès Institute of Fundamental Theology. He was a member of the Advisory Board to the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona. He lives in and participates in the work

of the Cova de Sant Ignasi Spiritual Centre in Manresa. He is the author of a number of publications on subjects such as theology, mysticism, interreligious dialogue and Ignatian spirituality.

Yaratullah Monturiol i Virgili

(Barcelona, 1961) Scholar of Islam and exegete. She has lectured internationally on Islam, women, spirituality, interreligious dialogue and interculturalism since 1994. She cofounded and chaired Catalonia's first community of Muslim women (1994-2001) and Europe's first independent mosque for women (1998-2001). She directed both the first Muslim Women's Conference (1999) and the first Conference on Islamic Feminism (2005), and was the official representative of the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Organisations (FEERI) in Catalonia (2005). She has been deputy chair of the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue (2001-2009), a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Dialogal* (2002-2010) and Spain's representative in the European Muslim Network (2000-2010). She founded the Association for the Development of Islamic Feminism (2004-2012) and cofounded the International Group for Studies and Reflection on Women and Islam (GIERFI, 2008-2012), which nowadays operates as a training centre for female ulemas in Morocco, directed by Asma Lamrabet. She has written various books and articles in addition to contributing to numerous collective works.

Joan-Andreu Rocha Scarpetta

(Bogota, Colombia, 1965) Historian with a PhD in the history of religions. Vice dean of journalism at Abat Oliba University. Director of and lecturer on the church, ecumenism and religions master's degree programme at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome.

Guest lecturer at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and the University of Tehran. His areas of specialisation revolve around communication processes in interreligious relations, the media and religions, and religious journalism.

Xavier Rubert de Ventós

(Barcelona, 1939) Philosopher, politician, essayist and lecturer with a degree in law and a PhD in philosophy from the University of Barcelona. He is the author of a great many essays and philosophical writings on aesthetics, culture theory, practical philosophy (ethics and political philosophy) and general philosophy. He has been professor of aesthetics and composition at the Barcelona School of Architecture, and a member of both the Spanish and European Parliaments. He has received numerous awards, including the Government of Catalonia's Creu de Sant Jordi (one of Catalonia's highest civil distinctions), the Lletra d'Or Award for Catalan literature and the City of Barcelona Award for literature. He has been a member of the Dignity Commission (which seeks the return to their rightful owners of documents confiscated by the Franco regime), and is currently a senior fellow of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Section of the Institute for Catalan Studies, as well as president of the Barcelona Institute of Humanities.



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