An Introduction to Religious Language **by Valerie Hobbs**

Suggested Answers to Discussion and Exploration Tasks

Chapter 2

1. Open definitions could exclude people who, for whatever reason, would not want to be affiliated with religion. Some argue that we need to adopt a richer vocabulary for the wide range of terms to encapsulate people's range of experience. Here is an example of one such view:

   > If the rapid religious disaffiliation of recent decades is to teach us anything as scholars of religion, it is that we cannot continue with business as usual, to normalize religion, or at least to normalize normal religion.' (Hedstrom, 2017, p. 6)

   Scholars of religion are wise to take such views, in my opinion. However, if it is true that religious language (defined in open terms) is a human endeavour, use of a wide variety of terms is likewise problematic. Choosing a term to describe what sacred-making language is indeed complex.

2. This set of questions asked you to think about the extent to which veganism could be a religion but also the ways that vegans might use religious language to talk about the answer to this question.
   a. Potential answers

Allan	'only a few hard and fast rules' vs. a list of contested rules references persecution, references it being a 'choice'
Sima	philosophical beliefs' vs. religion philosophical beliefs VS religious protections persecution isn't enough
Jade	'valid belief' vs. 'trendy fad or extreme cult' 'a way of life' 'positive change in a society…attempting to save the planet'
Jay	'practicality of vegan philosophy' vs. 'spirit in the sky' the word 'religion' is loaded, A religion cannot be hypocritical
Lou	'a belief system'; involves proselytizing 'a choice' which 'isn't radical'; 'religion is belief in a higher power' vs. 'a philosophical belief' lack of outsider understanding 'it changes how you act, behave and think'
Jack	compares food prohibitions in Hinduism and Islam with veganism 'persecution'

   b. Instances of explicit religious language you might have identified include:

   religion, religiously drinks, religious discrimination, persecuted, Torah, Catholic, Bible, passages, rules, services, temple, sacrifice a lamb, adulterous affairs, church, confess, absolve, God, extreme cult, belief in God, way of life, Muslims, belief system, higher power, people who share the same faith, brought up Catholic, go to church, absolve themselves

You may have also identified other language functioning religiously but which is less explicit. What did you think about the use of imperatives, as in 'Don't eat animals, don't wear animals …'? Is this religious language? We know little about which syntactic and clausal structures are more common in sacred-making than elsewhere.

The task set also asked you to reflect on the criteria you used to make these judgements. You may have thought about the differences between language with obviously religious connotations and language that seemed to be functioning religiously but not as explicitly. The former type is easier to spot than the latter type, though this depends on your familiarity with the particular world religion the language is derived from.

c. In most of the interviews, religious language distanced veganism from the category of religion. An extreme example was Sima's reference to sacrificing a lamb in Trafalgar Square. Reference to this act of brutality suggests this is the sort of thing religious people do, not what vegans do. Another example was Allan's reference to sacred texts, like the Bible and the Torah. In his mind, authoritative texts like these are a distinctive of religion. Lacking texts like these, according to him veganism is not a religion. Jay likewise distances his own veganism from religion but on different grounds. He uses religious language with negative connotations like 'excommunicated' to suggest that some vegans behave like members of a religion but, in his opinion, in a way that mimics what he perceives to be among the worst qualities of religion.

   A few of the interviewees (for example, Jack and Jade) refer to common ground between world religions and veganism in order to support the perspective of veganism as religion. Jade's use of explicit religious language is slightly more nuanced, however. Like Sima, she refers to one side of the religious spectrum ('extreme cult') to hedge her claim that veganism is a religion. In her mind, it is a religion but not one of those extreme types.

d. These interviews demonstrate that religion is a loaded term and that a closed definition of religion is perhaps the dominant way of understanding religion, associating religion with belief in the supernatural and even extremism. However, religious language functioned in similar ways across the different interviewees, more particularly to mark out community boundaries.

Chapter 3

1. The book cover and the cards around it constitute a text, that is, it is a stretch of language, a form of 'little d' discourse. As Locke points out, a linguist might begin analysis of texts like these by starting with the form that the language takes on the cards and the book cover. This is a text of just fourteen words, one sentence, one noun phrase, what we might call an interjection, and a set of proper noun phrases joined with a conjunction. We might consider the grammatical structure, noting that the sentence at the start is in an imperative form which contains an existential command. Let = verb. There = dummy subject, functioning as a pronoun, Copula = BE, and a subject complement = MEAT, which completes the sense of the dummy 'There'. We then see a noun phrase, a definite article and two adjectives modifying the head noun

Bible. There is the interjection, Amen. And finally we see the two proper noun phrases which are the author's names.

But as we did with the billboard, instead of starting with the language itself, we could step back and consider bigger questions. Doing so would require investigating the category of recipe books themselves or, more specifically, the discourse around Barbecue. Is there a historic link between bbq and the sacred? To facilitate our understanding of our one image, we might compare this one not only with other discourse around bbq but also other contemporary recipe books containing religious references. We would need to ask about the function of religious language in the context of barbecue and even in the context of food. All of this would enable us to begin to construct a story about this image, in a way that helps us understand how individual texts like these, as instances of discourse, contribute to a larger set of meanings or big D Discourses. The quote from Wade Clark Roof helps us to understand the sacred quality attached to barbecue in the American South in particular. So let's go to the image now.

We've already talked about the grammatical structure of this text. What we haven't talked about is where this language is taken from. The cover of the billboard starts with the use of an archaism, a phrase taken from the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, where God creates the world. The Biblical text reports God's first creation command as 'Let there be light'. The use of the word 'meat' in the cover taps into that creation narrative, pointing to the divine quality of meat and, more specifically barbecue. The subtitle of the recipe book 'The ultimate barbecue Bible' identifies this book as a holy text, a place in which a follower of BBQ will find ultimate meaning, ultimate truth. The line underneath and the word Amen signal that this is all that needs saying, Let it be so. We should also talk about the physical appearance of the cover: the use of the black cover, the gold colour and the fork and knife in the shape of the cross, a deeply significant symbol in Christianity pointing to the Messiah Jesus. We might take this even further and consider the extent to which the MEAT is here portrayed as our Messiah, sacrificed for our hunger, an act completed when our fork and knife meet in a ritual act. So there is a great deal going on here.

In summary, this text taps into a well-established sacred regional norm in the United States, barbecue as a symbol of Southern and regional identity. The use of religious language here, taken from Christianity, the dominant religion in the American South, is recognizable to an American audience and reinforces the notion of barbecue as sacred.

However, we must also consider whether this use of religious language is effective or perhaps appropriate in this context. In the case of the recipe book by Red's BBQ, the makers relied on particular language and imagery, which they may have believed were recognizable to their audience and so facilitated their intended purposes: to reinforce the sacred quality of barbecue, to establish themselves as members of the barbecue community, and to use the discourse of barbecue to make a profit. In doing so, they were able to tap into an existing story that, as Locke puts it, is well established in the wider social context. Since this link between barbecue and religion is a distinctly American one, there are some British people who have expressed confusion about Red's use of religious language. In fact, some are even offended by it. You can see that in some of the reviews on Trip Advisor about the Red's BBQ in

Leeds. Without recognisability of the links between barbecue and the sacred, the religious language choices that Red's BBQ makes risk being rendered largely useless. Taking this recipe book out of its context and attempting to place it seamlessly into a different one means that the audience will likely react with apathy or confusion or even offense. However, perhaps Reds was using unfamiliarity to their advantage, in order to shock their audience or otherwise get their attention. It certainly worked in some respects, as their businesses are still open and seem to be thriving.

2. This claim is one that many have made, not only in response to Durkheim but more recently to such scholars of religion as Edward Bailey. Their work doesn't suggest that everything is religious but rather than anything can be religious. This is an important distinction. Determining whether a particular 'something' is religious requires close examination of the context. What is sacred for one person may not be sacred for another. This kind of approach seeks

   to take seriously on their own terms the pilgrimage that people take to Graceland, the rise of the church of Jedi, the meaning and salvation found within punk rock, animal rights activism and the growth of veganism, the statement "football is my religion", the global occupy protests or the way knitting as a form of self-care and community gives rise to deeper meaning and purpose for the knitters ("About Implicit Religion," n.d.).

Chapter 4

1. The first invitation identifies the wedding as explicitly Christian, stating the meaningfulness of marriage within Christianity. However, interestingly, though some associate Christianity with patriarchal views, the first invitation's structure suggests a more egalitarian perspective on the parent-child relationship. Both sets of parents are mentioned, though the bride's parents' names and the bride's name occur first, suggesting that the bride and her family have more responsibility for the wedding and the invitation. In the second invitation, there is no explicit religious language, but the groom's family is not mentioned, and the bride's parents are prominent. The marriage is depicted as 'the marriage of their daughter' rather than the marriage of 'their children' as in the first invitation. The structure of both invitations point to a belief in the significance of parental responsibility and perhaps even authority in the act of marriage.

2. Within any community united around a set of beliefs, there are people, beliefs, and other entities that hold more authority and/or prestige than others. Outside of overtly religious communities, consider the prominence of other people who have in many ways filled a vacuum left by a rejection of pre-modern acceptance of institutional authority. Obvious examples might include social influencers, celebrities, or political figures. People who invoke these higher powers harness their sacred authority. On this basis, invocation of a sacred legitimating authority constitutes the most powerful and perhaps the most important facet of religious language.

Chapter 5

1. If a text uses mostly core religious vocabulary, we can reasonably expect that the text's aims are more socially inclusive. This could be because the text aims to invite

others into the group or resolve conflict. If a text uses mostly technical religious vocabulary, its aims and audience are likely different. For example, someone might use more technical vocabulary to mark themselves out more clearly as a member of a sacred community.

2. The first 10 collocates in the results, across 20 countries, are: united, god, heaven, states, animal, enter, kingdom, London, Jesus, and Christ. Five of these of course have immediately explicit religious meaning (God, heaven, kingdom, Jesus, Christ). Looking at the wider context for 'enter' and 'kingdom' reveals that these too often combine with 'kingdom' to communicate religious meaning. Aside from the use of kingdom to refer to the animal kingdom or a political state, we can see from these preliminary results that 'kingdom' tends to communicate religious meaning.

Chapter 6

1. Here are some possible answers for each of the texts on climate change, though there is a great deal more that could be said and explored.

    a. Baker (2006)

    Thesis: 'Belief in global warming … seems to have replaced traditional religion as the faith of the secular' and it's too risky to be a global warming sceptic.

    Metaphor:

Vehicle Group: religion, 'faith'	**Target: global warming affirmation**
believer	people who affirm global warming
'redeemed',	outcome of belief in global warming
virtue	improved energy efficiency
Vehicle Group: unbelief, agnosticism	**Target: global warming denial**
agnostic, atheist, atheist at the gates of heaven, sceptics	people who don't affirm global warming
eternal damnation, eternal hellfire	outcome of global warming, 'earthly conflagration'

Comments: Is the religious metaphor here used in the process of sacred-making? It is used to build an argument around risk. One could argue that by using words like 'virtue' and 'redeemed' that the pro-environmentalism is being portrayed as sacred, more virtuous way. But this is not a strong boundary setting.

    b. Hari (2007)

    Thesis: Global warming is the 'truth', and deniers are clinging to myth.

    Metaphor:

Vehicle Group: religion (the author rejects this metaphor)	**Target: global warming**
'looming apocalypse'	outcome of global warming, 'global ecocidal disaster'

Vehicle Group: religion, ‘myth’, ‘the cold’	**Target: global warming denial**
deniers, sceptics, allies of ‘the fossil fuel Vatican’, NOT ‘Galileo’, ‘the faithful’ (negative connotations), dupe	people who are uncertain about global warming
‘clinging’, ‘scramble for scraps of evidence’	the act of uncertainty about global warming
Vehicle Group: war ‘the war is over’	**Target: relationship between global warming ‘sceptics’ and global warming believers**

Comments: Hari relies on a dichotomous worldview strategy to position ‘the truth,’ that is, the ‘reason’ of global warming affirmation (cites scientific facts and ‘very close empirical observation of the real world and deductions based on reason) against the idea of religion as lacking reason. Thus those who are sceptics of global warming are unreasonable. The use of metaphor is a bit confused, however. On the one hand, the author rejects the notion that environmentalism is a religion. On the other hand, he portrays climate change non-affirmers in religious terms, as deniers, as sceptics. For example, he uses the flat earth story, so it’s Galileo against the church. A larger project could consider the use of ‘deniers’ and ‘sceptics’ in discussion about climate change to see if these are most frequently used in a religious way. In short, his argument is premised on the idea that religion is anti-reason. Science and the material world are sacred.

c. Hume (2007)

Thesis: ‘Our old state religion [traditional religion] has converted to the new one [environmentalism]’ and both are anti-human.

Metaphor:

Vehicle Group: religion ‘old state religion’, ‘pseudo-religious’, the ‘new orthodoxy’, ‘new dogma’, ‘prejudices’, ‘one true faith’, ‘prejudices’	**Target: Environmentalism**
self-righteous	people who affirm global warming
‘high priests in white coats’, ‘unquestioned authority’	experts in environmentalism
condemn	criticism of people who don’t affirm global warming
‘crusade’, ‘hymn sheet’	environmentalist initiatives
‘sackcloth and ashes’	guilt about destroying the earth
‘conversion’, ‘saved from ourselves’	convincing others of global warming
Vehicle Group: ‘faith in humanity’	**Target: anti-environmentalism, humanism**
‘sinners’, (‘‘early modern religionists’?), ‘heretics’	people who don’t affirm global warming

‘burn it’ (sacrifice)	cancelling or amending Channel 4 Documentary

Comments: Hume uses the metaphor of environmentalism as religion to reject it and declare it ridiculous. It is humanism and not religion that is sacred (though he uses the phrase ‘faith in humanity’ which complicates matters).

2. Portraying the God of the Bible as female is nothing new. The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich wrote that not only is God our father, He is also our mother (Julian of Norwich, 1413). And St. Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109, likewise spoke about “Christ, my mother” in a prayer to St. Paul (Anselmo & Ward, 1988), echoing Christ’s own words in Matthew 23:37. Still, Grande’s song capitalizes on a recently revived effort, both within and outside of the Christian church, to challenge male-dominant images and language in the Bible. Grande doesn’t identify with Christianity. So her use of the Bible, particularly placing the words of God in her own mouth, is a bold move, which was no doubt intended to shock and unsettle. For those unfamiliar with the Biblical text, the text which Maddona’s disembodied voice speaks through Grande might seem like a direct quote. There is archaic language (strike down, thee, and some archaic grammatical constructions) and explicit religious vocabulary (vengeance). But this is more Quentin Tarantino than King James Bible. Tarantino rewrote Ezekiel 25:17 for the film *Pulp Fiction*, a version which Grande further modifies by adding ‘my sisters,’ giving it a distinctly (pop) feminist message. Using the appearance of a direct quote renders the boundaries between Ariane and the modified Biblical text are almost non-existent. In this song, god isn’t just a woman. God is Ariane Grande.

   Grande’s song is a celebration of a particular kind of feminine energy, sexuality in particular. Immediately after she recites the words of the God of the Bible, she throws a hammer and smashes a glass ceiling in an unmistakeable act of feminist activism. Grande is tapping into a Discourse of religious feminism. Recall the quote from Sarah Ahmed’s book in Chapter 3, where feminism is made powerfully sacred. But from whose perspective is her power constructed? Is she not perpetuating the concept of woman constructed through the male gaze? Critics are divided on this. But what we can say is that Grande’s use of the Biblical text is strategic. This and the proliferation of sacred imagery in the video make sacred the particular concept of woman she promotes.

Chapter 7

1. The image is called ‘Food Prayer,’ marking it out as an explicitly religious text. But it is also structured as a prayer, in some ways similar to the Lord’s Prayer. It begins with praise and blessing and then moves on to supplication, ending in a tradition way, ‘Amen.’ The prayer is directed outward to material entities in the world (‘hands that prepared’ and ‘energy’), though we might consider that the reference to ‘energy’ might suggest something immaterial, even upward directionality. However, the meaning of ‘energy’ is explained in a postscript, almost insisting, in case we have forgotten, that energy is in fact material. The prayer includes explicit religious vocabulary like ‘bless’ and ‘Amen’ as well as archaism and use of syntactic and anaphoric parallelism (For example, ‘let it’ and the repetition of ‘Bless the X that X’). But since food and the energy is represents is being made sacred here, this gives

implicitly religious meaning to other parts of the text as well. These include the act of hospitality and the person who is hospitable, raw ingredients grown in the natural world, and ultimately, a version of ‘clean’ eating. The prayer includes the supplication that the food unite with the body in a harmonious way, that ‘all toxins be flushed from my system.’ These tap into an existing Discourse that links an idea of being chemical-free with not just health but morality. The Bon Appetit addendum at the end of the prayer seems to promise that giving thanks for the food will help realize that wish to be toxin-free. This is a materialist prayer, on the face of it, but the Bon Appetit message nevertheless offers a subtle otherworldly meaning.

2. Answers will vary, but potential differences to consider include: amount and content of references to qualities of God, physical and physical needs and references to evil. We can also consider the ways that God is addressed in each prayer and what this might reveal.

Chapter 8

1. I hope this chapter has prompted some reflection on the phrase ‘a life well lived,’ particularly on any criteria of a life well-lived which you’ve come across or use yourself.

2. None of the words in this text appear in USAS’s ‘religion and the supernatural’ wordlist. However, there are some instances of explicit religious metaphor (for example, life as a JOURNEY and good is LIGHT) and plenty of implicit religious language. The most frequent words in the text are life/live, recovery, independence, well, world.

   The extended JOURNEY metaphor and emphasis on recovery, mental well-being, and independence paints a picture of a journey from darkness (a place people fear and misunderstand) to light, where there is no more mental illness. It promotes ‘a range of contemporary therapies’ which comprise a ‘pathway’ (religious connotations) towards ‘true’ wellness. In using the word ‘contemporary,’ the author of the book presents himself as an authority and positions himself against tradition. The message is that this isn’t just one way among many to have a life well-lived. It is *the* way. This serves the function of establishing a sacred community of people free from mental illness.

   The author preaches a message of conversion by starting with an appeal to what he portrays as a universal longing, ‘We all long for…’. This may seem unproblematic. However, consider that he then depicts those with mental health difficulties as lacking feelings of fulfilment and happiness, which they ‘struggle’ after. The message is that the main ‘barrier’ standing in their way is a belief that recovery is unachievable. He depicts this out-group as simultaneously pitied and feared and contrasts this with his ‘positive’ and ‘optimistic’ message. The author’s message is given moral connotations with use of the phrases ‘darkness’, ‘shines a light’ and ‘true meaning’. Come out of your dark world into the light of a life well-lived, free of mental illness, out of a life with no social connections, no hope, no potential, no independent, no love.

Overall, this text functions primarily to foster social cohesion, to convert this out-group into the world of contemporary therapies and 'rediscovery' of things they have lost. What of the person who doesn't recover? What of the person who continues to struggle or who accepts their mental health issues? This text is consistent with the dominant Discourse of a life well-lived insofar as it measures a life using the criteria of good mental health and declares such a life to be sacred.

3. Answers will of course vary depending on the text you've chosen. I selected the second result that appeared in a search for "waste * life" in GloWbE corpus, from Canada, specifically the results for 'waste your life.' The first link didn't work, and the second link led me to a Yahoo! Answers page, where someone had asked 'How to deal with stress?'[1] The top answer in some ways troubles the Discourse around a 'life well-lived' by encouraging readers to 'Be happy with basic needs and good people around you.' However, it goes on to explain what constitutes a life well-lived and contrast this with a wasted life, in this way:

> Be happy when you are sad, make others happy. It's life! Love and smile. Do not waste your life being not as happy as you would like to be. You control your emotions, nobody else.

We see here again the notion of a life well-lived is one that is free from stress, a happy life, a life of service to others, all of which is depicted as fully within the control of the individual. The text ends with the only explicitly religious language in the answer: 'God bless:) and smile.' For those familiar with the Biblical text, what might come to mind is James 2:16, which reads

> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?[2]

Societal forces, structural inequality, poverty, ill health, all of these matter little in this Discourse. Even God matters little here, despite the author's invocation of God. What matters is that you 'Just let it go, be free and happy with life.' The sacred life here is the life powered by a simple choice to be happy and to make others happy.

Chapter 9

1. Some have argued that what distinguishes proper use of religious language from improper use is ideology. Ian Parker writes that

> It could be, for example, that Christian discourse functions in an ideological way when it buttresses racism as a dominant worldview. But it is also *possible* that such a discourse can be empowering, and that even claims that it is a 'subjugated knowledge' (in Foucauldian jargon) could be well-founded" (Parker, 1990, p. 200)

The difficulty is making claims about mis-use of religious language is that this process is highly subjective. Who decides what counts as a mis-use? Making such judgements requires commitment to a system of morality. While this is an important process, we must acknowledge the complexity of making such judgements, make

[1] https://ca.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20120210184528AAA3jkJ&guccounter=1

[2] Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

explicit our moral criteria and acknowledge that others may and likely will arrive at different conclusions.

Blasphemy is most often defined using a closed definition of religion, referring to an intolerable expression about religion. Laws against blasphemy are widespread. A recent reported identified 71 countries that punish blasphemy, the most severe punishment being the death penalty (Maenza et al., 2018). The argument against anti-blasphemy legislation is that they violate a right to freedom of speech, they restrict (necessary) criticism of organized religion, and they often result in persecution of minorities. Indeed, blasphemy laws are often wielded by religious extremists to justify acts of violence.

However, blasphemy has also been defined more broadly, as an offense against the sacred. Viewed in this way, every society has its own version of blasphemy, whether it is legislated or not. There will always be things in any community that, if spoken, result in social stigma. In fact, we can learn a great deal about a society and its sacred values when we examine what it treats as blasphemy. Leonard Williams Levy writes that

> Blasphemy is a litmus test of the standards a society believes it must enforce to preserve its unity, its peace, its morality, its feelings, and the road to salvation' (Levy, 1993, Preface).

Indeed, there are no easy answers when it comes to the question of what counts as (im)proper religious language and what role legislation should have in defining it and punishing violators. What we can acknowledge, however, is that a community's definition of blasphemy, whether written into law or not, constitutes a form of sacred making.

2. In his inaugural address, President Trump uses religious language to construct a dichotomous worldview, a good vs. evil narrative. Early in the speech, he refers to his 'crucial conviction: that a nation exists to serve its citizens,' going on to refer to this as 'the just and reasonable demands of a righteous public.' Though this may seem to be inclusive language, he clarifies that a united country is one which has 'total allegiance to the United States of America.' This agenda he declares to be sanctioned by God, using a direct quote from Psalm 133 to ally himself with God and position himself and America (those who are allied to Him) as 'protected by God.'

   Trump uses explicit religious metaphor frequently throughout the speech, for example in his reference to 'let it shine as an example,' an appropriation of Matthew 5:15-16. Just as we open our hearts to Jesus, so should we 'open our hearts to patriotism.' And Trump's enemies are also the enemies of God, which 'we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth,' language that evokes the Flood narrative in the Biblical text.

   In these and other ways, Trump establishes himself as a moral authority and imbues his statements about the state of the country and his policies with sacred meaning, specifically Christian meaning. Certainly, his religious language functions social cohesively, to establish in and out-groups. But his use of religious language also stirs people's feelings of patriotism and connects with existing fear of attack/terrorism. He

ends his speech with a prophetic blessing. We can see in this speech the groundwork for later references to Trump as the 'chosen one,' which I referred to in this chapter. Trump is not just God's ally. He is god himself.