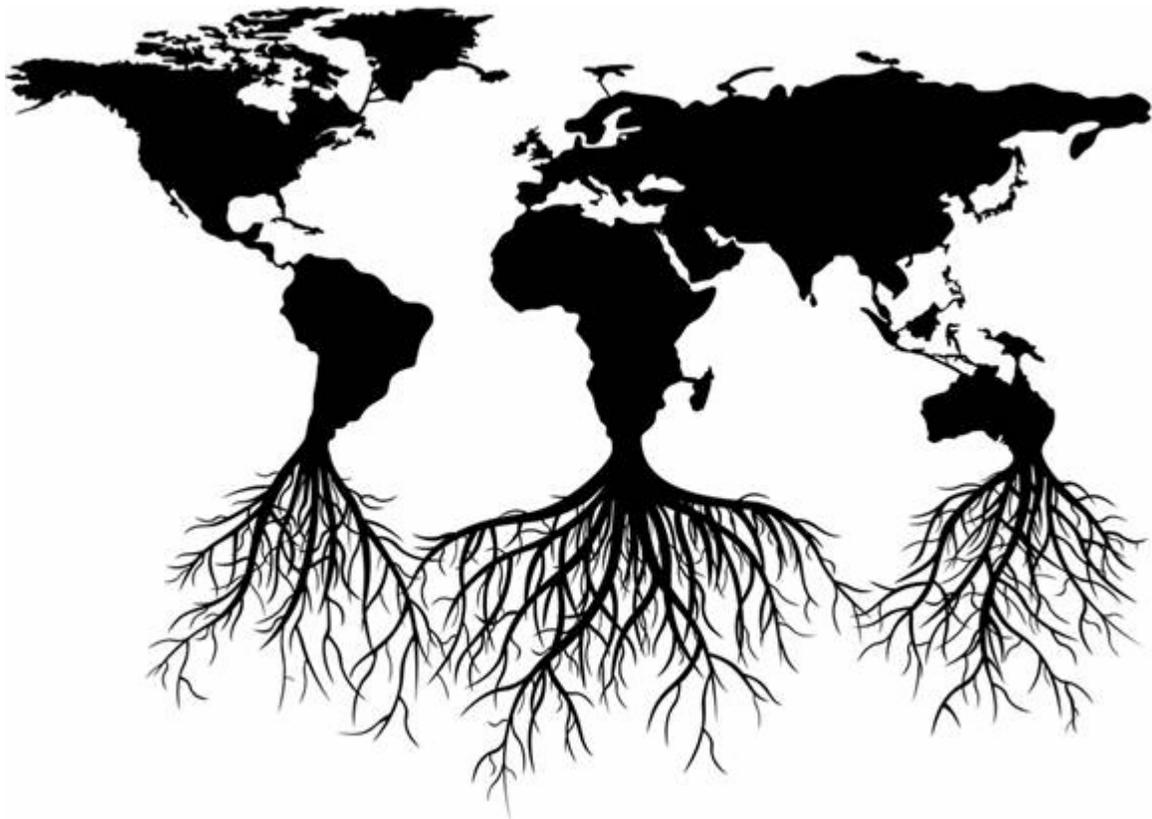


AColyte

OCTOBER 2009

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



AColyte

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Rev. John Williams, Ph.D., Editor

900 N. Grand Ave.

Suite 61647

Sherman, TX 75090

903.813.2220

jwilliams@austincollege.edu

WHAT IS AN *AColyte* AND WHY DO I HAVE ONE?

Welcome to the first edition of the *AColyte* for the 2009-10 school year. This journal is intended to provide a forum for the Austin College community to discuss theological issues and keep up with what's going on in our various Religious Life programs.

We operate with a fairly broad definition of theology around here. As far as we're concerned, anybody who spends time thinking about which things matter more than other things is a theologian. That probably even includes you.

The use of the term "AColyte" for our title is based on our hope that, like an acolyte who lights candles in a worship service, we can also be "bringers of light," or "bringers of flame," or instruments to help "lighten things up." If nothing else, we can promise to provide ample opportunities to practice the virtues of patience and forgiveness.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Southbound on U.S. 69
Just North of Muskogee
September 14, 2009

*It's not just me
And it's not just you;
This is all around the world.*
--Paul Simon, "The Myth of Fingerprints"

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;*
--Psalm 24:1

Everything is part of it.
--Tom Robbins, "Still Life with Woodpecker"

*Maybe it means that I'm funky and cool;
But I seriously doubt that that's what it means.*
--Ray Wylie Hubbard, "The Rabbit"

DOES THIS EVER happen to you?:

You've been driving for a long time, and your mind kind of wanders—but in a good way. Not a "drifting out of your lane, missed that last speed limit sign" way. But, as the world goes by and the music is good and the kids are asleep or just looking out the window, one thing reminds you of another, and then another, and on and on for maybe a hundred miles. There's no place else you're supposed to be and nothing else you're supposed to be doing. You just drive and think. It's great.

It happened to me as we crossed the **Verdigris River** on U.S. Highway 69.

Rivers do it to me a lot. I think about what's upstream. And what's downstream. And how part of what makes a river a river is that it's always moving. In some sense, a river is more of a process or a system than a static *thing*. It never really stays the same.

But there's also some long-term continuity to rivers that lets us all know, for example, that the Verdigris River is *here* and not *over there*. (About 2500 years ago, an old Greek guy named Heraclitus had some interesting things to say about things like this—look him up.)

Anyway...crossing the **Verdigris** made me think about processes and flows and continuity and how some things sort of lead to, or flow into, other things.

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THAT MADE ME THINK of **Ruth Hawkinsen**. On September 13, I was at her grave in Sycamore, Illinois.

Ruth Hawkinsen was born in **Sweden** late in the nineteenth century. In the early 20th century, she and her family immigrated to North America, coming first to Canada and then to the USA—settling in **Wilmette, Illinois** in 1903.

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THINKING ABOUT IMMIGRANTS coming to the U.S. and ending up in **Wilmette, Illinois** reminded me of an experience my wife and kids had in Chicago on September 12.

We were in Chicago because I was one of the ministers at **Kurt Esslinger's** wedding. Kurt graduated from Austin College in 2002 and we were fortunate to get to go to Chicago for his wedding. Although I had to be at the Church early for photos, my family had spent the morning being tourists in Chicago. They had planned to ride the train from our hotel near O'Hare Airport to Lake View Presbyterian Church (5 blocks from Wrigley Field) in time for the wedding.

But they were running late. So they got off the train and hailed a cab.

The cabdriver was originally from **Pakistan**. Like **Ruth Hawkinsen**, lived in **Wilmette, Illinois**. He was a nice guy. And my six-year-old, Joseph, thought the cab ride was a big adventure,

The cab got them to the church on time.

(Extra points for you if that line makes you think of *My Fair Lady*.)

It's funny how some things remind you of other things.

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THE WEDDING WAS GREAT.

Kurt is a boisterous, goofy, passionate, hard-to-ignore guy.

Fortunately for our entire species, he found (or was found by) a woman who is every bit as boisterous, goofy, passionate, and hard-to-ignore as he.

Her name is **Hyeyoung Lee**. She and Kurt met at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.

Hyeyoung is from Korea and their wedding was done in both Korean and English. That combination made for a unique, interesting, rich, nuanced wedding experience. It was fun. And moving. And not like any wedding I've ever been to before. And just right.

As we planned their wedding during the summer, **Hyeyoung** and **Kurt** told me that they wanted it thematically to be about relationships and covenants and rainbows.

They each had seven attendants – the “Bride’s People” and the “Groom’s People.” There were no gender restrictions for either group. There were some women among the “Groom’s People” and some men among the “Bride’s People.”

The visual you had when the entire wedding party was assembled at the front of the church was **Kurt** and **Hyeyoung** in the center flanked by seven attendants on each side. From outside to the center, each successive attendant was dressed in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

And, in case we missed the symbolism (which we didn’t), the scripture reading in the service was Genesis 9:12-17

God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

All that cool rainbow symbolism in the wedding was intended to remind us all that God’s first covenant in the Old Testament was with “every living creature,” with “all flesh that is on the earth.”

Hyeyoung’s and **Kurt’s** wedding--and maybe all of our life together trying to figure out which things matter more than other things—could be boiled down to celebration and affirmation of the truths that

- a. God’s commitment is to *all* of us and not just *some* of us;
- b. A big part of what we need to do is get together and take care of each other; and
- c. We’ve still got plenty to learn from each other about how to survive and prosper.

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EARLIER THIS YEAR, Austin College adopted a “**Quality Enhancement Plan**’ in which the institution made the commitment to

build on existing strengths with initiatives that will bring our global learning programs to a new level of quality. We will provide every student with an opportunity for international experience, and will support those experiences with tangible resources. We will enhance global learning in obvious and subtle ways, through faculty development, student scholarships, and infrastructure to support and coordinate programs and resources, including the creation of a Center for Global Learning that will promote cultural awareness among all Austin College students.

There are plenty of folks around here with a deeper, richer, and more nuanced understanding than I have of the significance and potential of our new Global Learning initiatives, but I think there’s a sense in which everything that we do to encourage and facilitate “international experiences” for all Austin College students is related to our recognition that we’ve got plenty to learn from each other (and possibly insights to offer each other) about how to survive and prosper.

We’re all part of more and bigger stories than we knew when we got here.

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WHICH BRINGS ME BACK to Ruth Hawkinsen and the Verdigris River.

Ruth Hawkinsen grew up in Illinois.

She eventually met and married a man named **Howard Shurtleff**. He had a long career in the U.S. Army, much of it serving under **General John J., “Black Jack” Pershing**.

Ruth and **Howard** had two sons, **John** and **Willie**.

John had a son and a daughter. My family and I ate dinner with his daughter, **Karen**, and two of her children at the Avenue Ale House in Oak Park, Illinois on September 11.

Willie had two daughters and three sons.

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I'VE NEVER BEEN TO THE SOURCE OF THE VERDIGRIS RIVER—literally the first place where water comes bubbling up out of the ground and begins flowing in an identifiable stream that becomes that big river—but I've been within about a mile of that place. A tiny stream flows through a ranch in **Chase County, Kansas** that is owned by the man who is married to **Willie's** oldest daughter, the granddaughter of **Ruth** and **Howard**.

That couple (Jeannie and Dave) has two sons, the oldest of whom, **Sam Jones**, is an Austin College senior who is spending this semester studying in **Zanzibar**.

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RUTH'S FULL NAME was **Ruth Linnea Hawkinsen Shurtleff**.

Willie's younger daughter is named after her: **Linnea Ruth Shurtleff**.

Twenty years ago, she added another last name: mine.

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I'M NOT COMPLETELY SURE what all that means. But it sure feels like it means something.

Until next time, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,

Wondering if it means that—if you look closely enough--everything is related to everything else.

Or that there are probably some relevant stories that we don't know yet—but can learn.

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain

**SUNDAY NIGHT
WORSHIP
WITH COMMUNION
6:00PM SUNDAYS
IN THE SMALL CHAPEL
FOLLOWED BY DINNER IN THE HOME
OF AN AC FACULTY OR STAFF MEMBER.**



MIDDAY PRAYERS
A Service of Scripture, Prayer, and Song
12:00-12:20pm Tuesdays
In the Small Chapel

5:30PM TUESDAYS
IN THE MOSELEY ROOM:

(bring your tray and your brain, we'll provide the rest)

B.S. in the W.C.

*(That stands for "Bible Study in the Wright Center"—
get your mind out of the gutter.)*

GREAT DAY
OF SERVICE

Saturday November 7, 2009

SIGN UP.
GET BUSY.

BE SURE IT'S GOOD NEWS FOR
SOMEBODY ELSE THAT YOU
SHOWED UP HERE.

Austin College AActivators



The Austin College AActivators are a group of Austin College students who work with Chaplain John Williams to plan and lead regional Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) youth ministry events. The AActivators traveling teams normally include four or five Austin College students and Rev. Williams. The teams choose scripture-based themes and prepare keynote presentations, small group materials, music, and recreational activities for each event. AActivators also act as partners with other program

organizations, filling leadership roles and working with other church groups who work with children, youth, adults, and senior citizens.

Since its founding in February 1995, the ACtivators program has involved 412 Austin College students who have traveled over 138,000 miles to plan and lead 382 ministry events involving over 37,000 children, youth, adults, and senior citizens from 20 states.

Any AC student interested in becoming part of this program is invited to contact John Williams at jwilliams@austincollege.edu.

ACtivators

2009-10 Schedule

Wednesday nights through November 11, 2009

Covenant Presbyterian Church "WOW" children's program.

October 23-25, 2009

Grace Presbytery Junior High Youthquake #1
Camp Gilmont

November 13-15, 2009

Grace Presbytery Junior High Youthquake #2
Camp Gilmont

November 20-22, 2009

"WARP'D"
Palo Duro Presbytery Youth Conference
Butman Methodist Camp and Retreat Center
Merkel, TX

January 29-31, 2010

Grace Presbytery Senior High Youth Connection
AC Campus

Wednesday nights February 10 through April 21, 2010

Covenant Presbyterian Church "WOW" children's program.

April 16-18, 2010

Grace Presbytery Kidquake #1

April 23-25, 2010

Grace Presbytery Kidquake #1
April 30-May 2, 2010
Grace Presbytery Kidquake #1



We need you;
we've got a lot to do.

ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT
MAKING A CAREER
WORKING FOR THE CHURCH?



DO YOU THINK YOU MIGHT BE
CALLED TO MINISTRY?
HAVE YOU TOLD ANYBODY?

Austin College Students Considering Church Vocations is an informal group of students who are thinking about these things. Their names and addresses are shared with seminary admissions offices (if they so desire) and they occasionally talk to guests on campus about various forms of ministry and other church vocations. If you would like for your name to be included on the list of Austin College Students Considering Church Vocations, please notify John Williams at jwilliams@austincollege.edu.

You don't have to be sure of anything except that you are thinking about maybe making a career in the church.

THEOLOGIAN OF THE MONTH

In most of our issues, the *AColyte* chooses a **Theologian of the Month**. Often, people who are designated as Theologian of the Month don't even realize that they are theologians. They receive this not-really-coveted distinction because they have made some contribution to the culture that can be helpful for the rest of us as we think about the ultimate theological question:

WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

This month's honoree probably *does* have some inkling that he's a bit of a theologian. Earlier this summer, I heard **Angelina Jolie's uncle** sing the following country song on the radio:

*I drink it down; he fills it up.
I turn around; he turns to me.
I say, "I'm bad, Lord;" He says, "Whatever.
Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."*

*I said, "But I have questions about you, Jesus;
Your precious word, the stories told.
Eighty years later, did them four investigators
Deliver us some tarnished gold?"*

*And I have questions about you, Moses;
The parting sea, the burning sand.
Why did you not leave one button from your sleeve
As proof for the historians?*

*I drink it down; he fills it up.
I turn around; he turns to me.
I say, "I'm bad, Lord;" He says, "Whatever.
Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."*

*And I have questions about forever:
Will it be like Yonkers or San Antone?
Can I be trutin' you'll let me wear my justice?
What happened when the soul is gone?*

*I drink it down; he fills it up.
I turn around; he turns to me.
I say, "I'm bad, Lord;" (to the bone)
He says, "Whatever (You're not alone).
Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."*

For us "Cowboy Preacher" types, there's a whole lot of interesting stuff going on in that song.

I drink it down; he fills it up.

See John 4:5-10:

5 So [Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

I turn around; he turns to me.

About 40 times in the Bible, someone gets called to "repent." The English word, "repent" is a translation of the Greek word μετανοια ("metanoia"). It literally means "turn around."

I say, "I'm bad, Lord;" He says, "Whatever.

Check out John 7:10-11:

10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.."

Does Jesus say, "Whatever" to that woman caught in adultery? I think he kinda does.

Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."

See Psalm 150:4:

*Praise [the Lord] with **tambourine and dance**; praise him with strings and pipe!*

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Then the song goes on. The singer starts sounding a little like an AC student at this point.

*I said, "But I have questions about you, Jesus;
Your precious word, the stories told.*

If you're paying attention at all, you're bound to have some questions, too.

*Eighty years later, did them four investigators
Deliver us some tarnished gold?*

That's an especially interesting question. Do any of us really know for sure anything that Jesus said? Or do we just know what Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John *say* that Jesus said? Does that matter? Why?

*And I have questions about you, Moses;
The parting sea, the burning sand.*

There was a pretty interesting show on the History Channel this week. It has been on several times before. It's essentially about investigating the stories of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (plagues, parting of the Red Sea, etc.) and arguing that there is scientific evidence that things like those described in the biblical Book of Exodus actually happened in and around Egypt about 1500BCE.

*Why did you not leave one button from your sleeve
As proof for the historians?*

Does it make any difference if there's scientific or historical evidence for those Biblical events? Does faith depend on proof like that? Does that mean it could be *disproven*?

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*I drink it down; he fills it up.
I turn around; he turns to me.
I say, "I'm bad, Lord;" He says, "Whatever.
Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."*

See Psalm 30:11:

*You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,*

*And I have questions about forever:
Will it be like Yonkers or San Antone?*

Yonkers is a suburb of New York City that some people – apparently including **Angelina Jolie's uncle** – regard as something less than lovely.

San Antone is a cool city (it's hard to find many good rhymes to "San Antonio").

*Can I be trustin' you'll let me wear my justice?
What happens when the soul is gone?*

That's my best guess for what he's singing there. But I'm not sure.

That line (if it's in fact the line from the song) reminds me of Psalm 139:17-18.

*How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them – they are more than the sand;
I come to the end – I am still with you.*

Psalm 139:18 is a pretty good answer to the question, "What happens when the soul is gone?"

"I come to the end, I am still with you."

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*I drink it down; he fills me up.
I turn around; he turns to me.
I say, "I'm bad, Lord;" (to the bone)
He says, "Whatever (You're not alone).
Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."*

That whole "Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me" line can be interpreted in several ways.

It could be that the songwriter is assuming and proclaiming that everybody will eventually be Christian – it's just a matter of time.

But that seems doubtful, given the overall attitude of the song. The world is full of people – Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, others (including lots of Christians) – who aren't ready to buy that Christian exclusivist line.

What if "Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me" is a reminder of God's promises never to abandon us – any of us?

Isn't that part of what's going on in Genesis 9:12-17?

God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:

*I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the **covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.**"*

And in Psalm 139:7-10?

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol [wherever dead people go], you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

There's a poem by the 14th century Muslim poet **Hafiz** that often gets quoted in the *AColyte*. It seems especially relevant here.

*Every child has known God,
Not the God of names,
Not the God of don'ts,
Not the God who ever does anything weird,
But the God who only knows four words
And keeps repeating them, saying:*

(Before you read on, think about what four words folks think God repeats to all children.

"Follow all the rules"?

"Be Christian or else"?

Here's what four words the poet thinks God repeats to every child:)

*"Come dance with me."
Come
Dance.*

That sounds a little like "Son, in time, you're gonna dance with me."

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Angelina Jolie's uncle is a singer/songwriter named **Chip Taylor** (he's the brother of the actor **John Voight** – Angelina's father).

He wrote a couple pretty famous songs in the '60s – *Wild Thing* and *Angel of the Morning* (ask your parents). Lately, he's been living in Austin and writing and recording a lot of good Americana songs with fiddle player **Carrie Rodriguez**.

The song quoted here, *Dance with Jesus*, is a fun little ditty about trying to have intellectual integrity while not completely discarding biblical terms and categories and stories that have proven to be so relevant and so useful to so many people in so many contexts for so many years.

We like that kind of thing around here. We like country music (at least some of us do). We like asking questions and thinking about things. And we like looking at the world through the lens of the Bible.

Chip Taylor does all of that in this song.

And that's enough to earn him the distinction as *AColyte* October 2009
Theologian of the Month.

We're a pretty diverse bunch out here on the Texas prairie. And we're interested in learning about each other. So we thought it might be helpful or interesting to compile a list of

2009-10 Religious Dates and Festivals

We had all the best intentions of circulating this information earlier in the school year. But we figure better late than never. Please contact the Chapel if you have any questions, corrections or additions (jwilliams@austincollege.edu).

AUGUST 21-SEPTEMBER 19, 2009

Ramadan (Islam)

Ramadan ([Arabic](#): رمضان) (also written *Ramazan*, *Ramzan*, *Ramadhan*, *Ramdan*, *Ramadaan*) is an [Islamic](#) religious observance that takes place during the ninth month of the [Islamic calendar](#); the month in which the [Qur'an](#), according to tradition, was revealed to the [Prophet Muhammad](#). It is the Islamic month of [fasting](#), in which participating Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking from [sunrise](#) until

[sunset](#). Fasting is meant to teach the [Muslim](#) patience, modesty and spirituality. Ramaḍān is a time to fast for the sake of [Allah](#), and to offer more prayer than usual. Muslims also believed through good actions, they get rewarded twice as much as they normally can achieve. During Ramaḍān, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils, and try to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

SEPTEMBER 19-20, 2009

Rosh Hashanah (Judaism)

Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of [Tishri](#). In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, literally, "head of the year" or "first of the year." Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American midnight drinking bash and daytime football game.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one: Many Americans use the New Year as a time to plan a better life, making "resolutions." Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year.

No [work](#) is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in [synagogue](#), where the regular daily [liturgy](#) is somewhat expanded. In fact, there is a special prayerbook called the machzor used for Rosh Hashanah and [Yom Kippur](#) because of the extensive liturgical changes for these holidays.

The common greeting at this time is L'shanah tovah ("for a good year"). This is a shortening of "L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem" (or to women, "L'shanah tovah tikatevi v'taihatemi"), which means "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year."

SEPTEMBER 20, 2009

Eid (Islam)

Eid ul-Fitr or Id-ul-Fitr ([Arabic: *Īdu l-Fitr*](#)), often abbreviated to Eid, is a [Muslim holiday](#) that marks the end of [Ramadan](#), the Islamic holy month of [fasting](#). *Eid* is an Arabic word meaning "festivity", while *Fitr* means "to [break the fast](#)" (and can also mean "nature", from the word "fitrah"); and so the holiday symbolizes the breaking of the fasting period. It is celebrated starting on the first day of the Islamic month of [Shawwal](#).

SEPTEMBER 28, 2009

Yom Kippur (Judaism)

Yom Kippur ([Hebrew: יום כּפּוּר](#), IPA: [[ɔjɔm kiɔpur](#)]), also known in English as the *Day of Atonement*, is the most solemn and important of the [Jewish holidays](#). Its central themes are [atonement](#) and [repentance](#). Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of [fasting](#) and intensive [prayer](#), often spending most of the day in [synagogue](#) services.

Yom Kippur is the tenth and final day of the [Ten Days of Repentance](#) which begin with [Rosh Hashanah](#). According to Jewish tradition, God, or "YHVH" ("The One Who Was, Is and Shall Be"), inscribes each person's fate for the coming year into a "book" on Rosh Hashanah and waits until Yom Kippur to "seal" the verdict. During the Ten Days of Repentance, a Jew tries to amend his behavior and seek forgiveness for wrongs done against God (*bein adam leMakom*) and against his fellow man (*bein adam lechavero*). The evening and day of Yom Kippur are set aside for public and private petitions and confessions of guilt ([Vidui](#)). At the end of Yom Kippur, one considers one's self absolved by God.

OCTOBER 3-9, 2009

Sukkot (Judaism)

The Festival of Sukkot begins on [Tishri 015](#), the fifth day after [Yom Kippur](#). It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays in our year to one of the most joyous. Sukkot is so unreservedly joyful that it is commonly referred to in Jewish prayer and literature as *Z'man Simchateinu*, the Season of our Rejoicing.

Sukkot is the last of the [Shalosh R'galim](#) (three pilgrimage festivals). Like [Passover](#) and [Shavu'ot](#), Sukkot has a dual significance: historical and agricultural. Historically, Sukkot commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as *Chag Ha-Asif*, the Festival of Ingathering.

The word "Sukkot" means "booths," and refers to the temporary dwellings that we are commanded to live in during this holiday in memory of the period of wandering. The Hebrew pronunciation of Sukkot is "Sue COAT," but is often pronounced as in [Yiddish](#), to rhyme with "BOOK us." The name of the holiday is frequently translated "Feast of Tabernacles," which, like many translations of Jewish terms, isn't very useful. This translation is particularly misleading, because the word "tabernacle" in the Bible refers to the portable Sanctuary in the desert, a precursor to the [Temple](#), called in Hebrew "mishkan." The Hebrew word "sukkah" (plural: "sukkot") refers to the temporary booths that people lived in, not to the Tabernacle.

Sukkot lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival, [Shemini Atzeret](#) and [Simchat Torah](#), are separate holidays but are related to Sukkot and are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot. The festival of Sukkot is instituted in [Leviticus 23:33 et seq.](#) No [work](#) is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday. (See [Extra Day of Holidays](#) for an explanation of why the Bible says one day but we observe two). Work is permitted on the remaining days. These

intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of [Passover](#).

OCTOBER 17, 2009

Diwali (Hinduism)

Dīvalī (or Dīpāwali, often written Deepavali) ([Tamil](#): தீபாவளி; [Telugu](#): దీపావళి) is a significant festival in [Hinduism](#), [Sikhism](#), [Buddhism](#), and [Jainism](#), and an official holiday in [India](#).^[1] Adherents of these religions celebrate Diwali as the *Festival of Lights*. They light diyas—cotton-like string wicks inserted in small clay pots filled with coconut oil—to signify victory of good over the evil within an individual.

The five day festival of Diwali occurs on the new moon between October 13 and November 14. On the [Hindu calendar](#) it is centered on the new moon day that ends the month of [Ashwin](#) and begins the month of [Kartika](#), beginning on the 13th day of the dark half of [Ashwin](#) (Ashwin 28th) and ending on the 2nd day of the bright half of [Kartika](#) (Kartika 2nd). The main day of celebration varies regionally.¹

NOVEMBER 1, 2009

All Saints Day (Christianity)

All Saints' Day (officially the **Feast of All Saints** and also called **All Hallows** or **Hallowmas**^[1]), often shortened to **All Saints**, is a feast celebrated on November 1 in [Western Christianity](#), and on the first Sunday after [Pentecost](#) in [Eastern Christianity](#) in honour of all the [saints](#), known and unknown.

In terms of [Western Christian](#) theology, the feast commemorates all those who have attained the [beatific vision](#) in [heaven](#). Specifically, in the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the next day, [All Souls' Day](#), commemorates the departed faithful who have not yet been [purified](#) and reached [heaven](#).

DECEMBER 12-19, 2009

Hanukkah (Judaism)

Hanukkah ([Hebrew](#): חנוכה, pronounced [alt. Chanukah]), also known as the [Festival of Lights](#), is an eight-day [Jewish holiday](#) commemorating the rededication of the [Holy Temple](#) in [Jerusalem](#) at the time of the [Maccabean Revolt](#) of the [2nd century BCE](#). Hanukkah is observed for eight nights, starting on the 25th day of [Kislev](#) according to the [Hebrew calendar](#), and may occur from late November to late December on the [Gregorian calendar](#).

The festival is observed by the kindling of the lights of a special [candelabrum](#), the nine-branched [Menorah](#) or *Hanukiah*, one light on each night of the holiday, progressing to eight on the final night. An extra light called a [shamash](#) ([Hebrew](#): "guard" or "servant") is also lit each night for the purpose of lighting the others, and is given a distinct location, usually above or below the rest.

DECEMBER 25 Christmas (Christianity)

Christmas, also referred to as **Christmas Day**, is an annual [holiday](#) celebrated on [December 25](#) that commemorates the birth of [Jesus of Nazareth](#). The day marks the beginning of the larger season of [Christmastide](#), which lasts [twelve days](#).^[4] The [nativity of Jesus](#), which is the basis for the [anno Domini](#) system of dating, is thought to have occurred between 7 and 2 BC.^[5]

JANUARY 6, 2010

Epiphany (Christianity)

Epiphany ([Greek](#) for "to manifest" or "to show"), is a Christian [feast day](#) which celebrates the revelation of [God in human form](#) in the person of [Jesus Christ](#). Epiphany falls on January 6. ...Western Christians commemorate the visitation of the [Biblical Magi](#) to the [child Jesus](#) on this day, i.e., his manifestation to the [Gentiles](#). [Eastern Christians](#) commemorate the [baptism of Jesus](#) in the [Jordan River](#), his

manifestation to the world as the [Son of God](#). It is also called [Theophany](#), especially by Eastern Christians.

FEBRUARY 17, 2010

Ash Wednesday (Christianity)

In the [Western Christian calendar](#), [Ash Wednesday](#) is the first day of [Lent](#) and occurs forty-six days (forty days not counting [Sundays](#)) before [Easter](#). It is a [moveable feast](#), falling on a different date each year because it is dependent on the [date of Easter](#). It can occur as early as 4 February or as late as 10 March.

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are gathered after the Palm Crosses from the previous year's [Palm Sunday](#) are burned. In the liturgical practice of some churches, the ashes are mixed with the Oil of the [Catechumens](#)^[1] (one of the [sacred oils](#) used to anoint those about to be [baptized](#)), though some churches use ordinary oil. This paste is used by the minister who presides at the service to make the [sign of the cross](#), first upon his or her own forehead and then on those of congregants. The minister recites the words: "Remember (O man) that you are dust, and to dust you shall return", or "Repent, and believe the Gospel."

FEBRUARY 28, 2010

Purim (Judaism)

[Purim](#) ([Hebrew](#): *Pûrîm* "lots", related to [Akkadian](#) *pûru*) is a [festival](#) that commemorates the deliverance of the [Jewish](#) people of the ancient [Persian Empire](#) from [Haman](#)'s plot to annihilate them, as recorded in the [Biblical Book of Esther](#) (*Megillat Esther*). According to the story, Haman [cast lots](#) to determine the day upon which to exterminate the Jews.

Purim is celebrated annually according to the [Hebrew calendar](#) on the 14th day of the [Hebrew month](#) of [Adar](#) (Adar II in leap years), the day

following the victory of the Jews over their enemies; as with all Jewish holidays, Purim begins at sundown on the previous secular day. In cities that were protected by a surrounding wall at the time of [Joshua](#), including [Shushan](#) (Susa) and [Jerusalem](#), Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month, known as *Shushan Purim*. Purim is characterized by public recitation of the Book of Esther (*keriat ha-megilla*), giving mutual gifts of food and drink (*mishloach manot*), giving charity to the poor (*mattanot la-eyyonim*), and a celebratory meal (*se'udat Purim*);^[1] other customs include drinking wine, wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration.

MARCH 30-APRIL 5, 2010

Passover (Judaism)

Passover ([Hebrew](#), [Yiddish](#): פּסח, [Pesach](#) is a [Jewish](#) and [Samaritan](#) holy day and festival commemorating the Hebrews escape from enslavement in Egypt.

Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of [Nisan](#) (equivalent to March and April in Gregorian calendar), the first month of the [Hebrew calendar's](#) festival year according to the [Hebrew Bible](#)

In the story of [the Exodus](#), the Bible tells that God inflicted [ten plagues](#) upon the Egyptians before Pharaoh would release his Hebrew slaves, with the tenth plague being the killing of firstborn sons. The Hebrews were instructed to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a spring lamb and, upon seeing this, the spirit of the Lord *passed over* these homes, hence the term "passover".^[2] When Pharaoh freed the Hebrews, it is said that they left in such a hurry that they could not wait for bread to rise. In commemoration, for the duration of Passover, no [leavened bread](#) is eaten, for which reason it is called "The Festival of the Unleavened Bread".^[3] [Matza](#) (unleavened bread) is the primary symbol of the holiday. This bread that is flat and unrisen is called Matzo.

APRIL 1, 2010

Maundy Thursday (Christianity)

Maundy Thursday, also known as “Holy Thursday” is the Thursday of [Passion Week](#), one day before Good Friday (the Thursday before Easter). Maundy Thursday is the name given to the day on which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, known as the Last Supper. Two important events are the focus of Maundy Thursday.

First, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples and thereby instituted the Lord’s Supper, also called Communion ([Luke 22:19-20](#)). Some Christian churches observe a special Communion service on Maundy Thursday in memory of Jesus’ Last Supper with His disciples. Second, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet as an act of humility and service, thereby setting an example that we should love and serve one another in humility ([John 13:3-17](#)). Some Christian churches observe a foot-washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday to commemorate Jesus’ washing the feet of the disciples.

The word “Maundy” is derived from the Latin word for “command.” The “Maundy” in Maundy Thursday refers to the command Jesus gave to the disciples at the Last Supper, that they should love and serve one another.

APRIL 2, 2010

Good Friday (Christianity)

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday, Black Friday, or Great Friday, is a [holiday](#) observed primarily by adherents to [Christianity](#) commemorating the [crucifixion of Jesus](#) and his death at [Calvary](#). The holiday is observed during [Holy Week](#) as part of the [Paschal Triduum](#) on the [Friday](#) preceding [Easter Sunday](#), and often coincides with the Jewish observance of [Passover](#).

APRIL 4, 2010

Easter (Christianity)

Easter ([Greek](#): Πάσχα, *Pascha*) is the most important annual religious feast in the [Christian liturgical year](#).^[1] According to Christian scripture, [Jesus](#) was [resurrected](#) from the dead on the third day from his [crucifixion](#). Christians celebrate this resurrection on **Easter Day** or **Easter Sunday**^[2] (also **Resurrection Day** or **Resurrection Sunday**), two days after [Good Friday](#) and three days after [Maundy Thursday](#). The [chronology](#) of his death and resurrection is variously interpreted to be between [A.D.](#) 26 and 36. Easter also refers to the [season](#) of the church year called [Eastertide](#) or the [Easter Season](#). Traditionally the Easter Season lasted for the forty days from Easter Day until [Ascension Day](#) but now officially lasts for the fifty days until [Pentecost](#). The first week of the Easter Season is known as Easter Week or the [Octave of Easter](#). Easter also marks the end of [Lent](#), a season of fasting, prayer, and penance.

MAY 19, 2010

Shavuot (Judaism)

Shavuot (or **Shavuos**, in [Ashkenazi](#) usage; [Hebrew](#): שבועות, lit. "Weeks") is a [Jewish holiday](#) that occurs on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of [Sivan](#) (late May or early June). Shavuot commemorates the anniversary of the day [God](#) gave the [Torah](#) to [Moses](#) and the Israelites at [Mount Sinai](#). It is one of the [shalosh regalim](#), the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals. It marks the conclusion of the [Counting of the Omer](#).

The date of Shavuot is directly linked to that of [Passover](#). The [Torah](#) mandates the seven-week [Counting of the Omer](#), beginning on the second day of Passover and immediately followed by Shavuot. This counting of days and weeks is understood to express anticipation and desire for the Giving of the Torah. On Passover, the Jewish people were freed from their enslavement to [Pharaoh](#); on Shavuot they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God.

In the Bible, Shavuot is called the *Festival of Weeks* (Hebrew: *Hag ha-Shavuot*, [Exodus 34:22](#), [Deuteronomy 16:10](#)); *Festival of Reaping* (Hebrew: *Hag ha-Katsir*, [Exodus 23:16](#)), and *Day of the First Fruits* (Hebrew *Yom ha-Bikkurim*, [Numbers 28:26](#)). The [Mishnah](#) and [Talmud](#) refer to Shavuot as *Atzeret* (Hebrew: , a solemn assembly), as it provides closure for the festival activities during and following the holiday of Passover. Since Shavuot occurs 50 days after Passover, Christians gave it the name [Pentecost](#) (Πεντηκόστη, "fiftieth day").

According to Jewish tradition, Shavuot is celebrated in the Land of [Israel](#) for one day and in the diaspora (outside of Israel) for two days. [Reform Jews](#)^[1] celebrate only one day, even in the diaspora.

MAY 23, 2010

Pentecost (Christianity)

Pentecost ([Ancient Greek](#): Πεντηκοστή [ἡμέρα], pentekostē [hēmera], "the fiftieth day") is one of the prominent feasts in the [Christian liturgical year](#). The feast is also called [Whitsun](#), Whitsunday, Whit Sunday, Whitsuntide, especially in the [United Kingdom](#). Pentecost is celebrated seven weeks (49 days) after [Easter Sunday](#), hence its name.^[1] Pentecost falls on the tenth day after [Ascension Thursday](#).

Historically and symbolically related to the Jewish [harvest festival](#) of [Shavuot](#), which commemorates God giving the [Ten Commandments](#) at [Mount Sinai](#) fifty days after the [Exodus](#), Pentecost now also commemorates the descent of the [Holy Spirit](#) upon the [Apostles](#) and other followers of [Jesus](#) as described in the [Book of Acts](#), Chapter [2](#) in the [New Testament](#). For this reason, Pentecost is sometimes described as "the Church's birthday."

The Jewish calendar marks 5770 years since the events of [Genesis 1:1](#), creation. The Islamic Calendar is about to celebrate 1431 years since

the Hijra of Muhammad. The Hindu Bhadrapada calendar is currently in year 5110.

Also, the Hindu, Hebrew, and Muslim calendars—being Lunar—mark a shorter year than the Gregorian solar calendar. This is why the holidays slide around each year instead of remaining fixed on our calendar.