**THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ANCIENT GREEK AND MODERN RELIGIONS**

Apart from the obvious differences between Greek religion, which was polytheistic, and modern religions, such as Christianity and Islam, which are monotheistic, there are a number of fundamental differences of organisation and tradition.

First of all there was no clear distinction between secular and sacred activities in the Greek world. Religion permeated most aspects of Greek life, both at home and in the wider area of the Greek city. Most important aspects of ‘secular’ life were under the protection of a patron deity. Hephaistos, for example, was the god of craftsmen, while the god Hermes had particular responsibility for commercial transactions in the market place. Therefore Greeks embarking on any particular form of activity would often address prayers to its patron deity.

Furthermore Greek religion was not a strictly organised religion like many modern religions. It had no priestly caste or sacred books. The priesthood was seldom a way of life and should be seen as a part-time or honorary office. There was no equivalent to the Bible or Koran in ancient Greece.

Another feature of Greek religion was its lack of any set orthodoxy. Religious ideas were not fixed but were constantly changing often in response to changes in a world where threats to order were always close. New gods were frequently introduced, for example at Athens the worship of the god Pan was introduced after the Battle of Marathon because he was supposed to have helped the Athenians achieve victory. In addition Greek myths lacked any sense of finality. These traditional stories could be re-told with new meanings and incidents which made them relevant to contemporary society. Fifth century Athenian tragedians, for instance, used mythical stories as the basis for their plays and these plays were intended to convey messages about morality that were understandable to the audience.

Finally it is important to remember that the main emphasis of Classical Greek religion was on doing rather than believing. The Greeks spoke of ‘acknowledging’ the gods rather than of ‘believing’ in them. Therefore religious actions meant more than pure faith in the gods; prayers, sacrifices and building of temples were all ways in which a Greek could acknowledge the gods in an active way.