

# Chapter 4

## Worldview and Religion

Worldview is an encompassing picture of reality based on a set of shared assumptions about how the world works

### Religion

It is difficult to have a single definition of religion

John Bowen takes a two stage approach

1. ideas and practices that postulate reality beyond that which is immediately available to the senses
2. how the specific people perceive reality

Worldviews differ from culture to culture thus reality takes different forms in the context of religion

Definitions are leaning towards the idea not of beings but symbols and the meaning within those symbols

The importance of religion seems to be because:

1. Helps people with uncertainty that they otherwise cannot control
2. Provide meaning to people's lives
3. Helps explain the unexplainable
4. Helps create social solidarity

The major world [religions](#) today

Anthropologists classify religion by type

One of the earliest forms of religion is animism, now called traditional religion, is based on the belief in the existence of such souls or spirit beings

Ancestor religion is one in which dead relations still maintain a strong interest and role in the living person's life

Polytheism may have gods that may maintain personal attributes such as gender or have children with gods or even humans

Monotheism has primary god though that does not mean there are no other entities such as devils or angels

Religious belief can range from orthodox (correct) belief to a more relax belief system

## **Myth**

Myths are stories that recount how various aspects of the world came to be the way they are

Myths can seem very real when the stories fit in so well to a person's views on how the world works

Almost all cultures of an origin myth

Two major approaches to myths have developed in the field of Anthropology

1. Bronislaw Malinowski believed myths are charters for social action we own the land because our stories say so
2. Claude Levi-Strauss believed myths are cognitive tools for resolving logical contradictions in human social experience men v. women nature/nurture life and death

## **Ritual**

Rituals are repetitive social practices many of which have no direct religious context

Rituals are well, very ritualized!

Rituals tend to work because the "power" comes from a source beyond the people performing the ritual

Most religions have developed specialized social routines like prayer or offering something of value (tithing)

Some religions dictate nearly all aspects of daily life orthopraxy

Rites of passage primary are used to transform a person from one social role to another Birth! Graduation! Marriage! Divorce! Death!

Rites of passage often follow a three part sequence

1. Separation
2. Transition (liminal period where you are neither in nor out)
3. Reintegration

### **Magic and Witchcraft**

Magic is not just a card trick

Magic is the ritual practices that do not have technically or scientifically apparent effects but are believed to influence the outcome of practical matters

Anyone ever have rabbit's foot? Four leaf clover? A luck piece of clothing?

Malinowski believed these objects might help redirect the anxiety of given situation

Can prayer really heal?

The idea of witchcraft possible developed from the idea that unseen forces exist in the world and the nothing happens to people by accident

### **Religious Practitioners**

Shamans are part-time religious specialists commonly found in small-scale egalitarian societies

Shaman may enter altered states of consciousness, bring messages to the group, remove illness (the smoking cure)

Priests are skilled in the practice of religious rituals and are frequently full-time, formally trained specialists

### **Change in Religious Systems**

Anthropologists look to how changes affect religious beliefs and practices

Sometimes groups will do a full change or conversion

Often times groups will incorporate new ideas with older ideas syncretism

Syncretism may be a choice or forced on a people

## **Secularism, Fundamentalism, and New Religious Movements**

Secularism is broadly defined as the separation of church and state

Secularism is used in three different ways:

1. the state has the final say not the religious body (except in places like Iran)
2. social institutions become differentiated from each other
3. the decline of religion

Fundamentalism has a negative connotation today but it is really a matter of “a quest for certainty, exclusiveness, and unambiguous boundaries