



## Chapter 2

# “You Believe What?”

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# Sociology and Religion

- To understand religion in our world, you have to realize that religious beliefs, practices and experiences are social constructs.
- The sociological lens will help us understand religious diversity and the consequences of beliefs, rituals, and experiences for people, communities, and entire societies.

# Comparing Religious Beliefs and Practices

- Of the nearly 7 billion people in the world today, about 84% belong to one of the world's major religions.
- 31.5% Christianity
- 22% Islam
- 13% Hinduism
- 6% Buddhism
- .22% Judaism

# Christianity

- The core beliefs and practices of Christianity center around the life and teachings of Jesus,
  - who is understood to be the Son of the one God and who came to earth to save humans from their sins by dying and returning to life again.
- Christians believe that the Bible is the word of God.
  - Literal word
  - Inspired word

# Catholicism

- If asked, Catholics would probably say that their Church goes all the way back to the days when the first Christian communities were founded by disciples of Jesus.
- Different congregations:
  - Orthodox Churches
  - Roman Catholic Churches

# Eastern Orthodox Catholicism

- Orthodox Churches represent one of three major branches of Christianity, along with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.
- Since the 13th century, Christians in Western Europe have used “catholic” to describe churches, communities, and individuals that are loyal to the Bishop of Rome (the Pope).

# Catholicism

- Three creeds form the core of all Roman Catholic belief and doctrine:
  - the Apostles' Creed,
  - the Nicene Creed,
  - and the Athanasian Creed.
- Creeds are formal statements of belief that people say out loud.

# Catholicism

- Roman Catholics also emphasize seven rituals or sacraments:
  - baptism (in which babies are sprinkled with water as a sign that they are members of the community)
  - confirmation (in which teens make a formal statement that they intend to belong to the Church)
  - Eucharist (or Communion), which is a re-enactment of the Last Supper
  - reconciliation (in which individuals confess sins or bad things that they have done to a priest and receive forgiveness)
  - matrimony (we'll assume you know that one)
  - holy orders (in which men become priests)
  - anointing of the sick



# Mainline Protestantism

- The Protestant Reformation broke the Roman Church's monopoly on Western Europe.
- Mainline Protestant denominations include:
  - United Methodist Church
  - the Disciples of Christ
  - the United Church of Christ
  - the Anglican or Episcopal Church
  - the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
  - the American Baptist Church
  - the Presbyterian Church

# Protestantism

- United Methodists started as a movement within the Church of England between 1738 and 1790 under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley.
- Churches of Christ, Christian churches trace their roots to the early 1800s when a small group of Presbyterians and Methodists set out to restore what they saw as the structure and doctrine of first-century Christians.

# Protestantism

- Disciples and UCC churches hold liberal theological and social attitudes.
- Anglicans grew out of the Church of England.

# Black Protestants

- The core of Black Protestantism is a set of historic African American religious bodies founded in the days of slavery:
  - The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)
  - The African Methodist Episcopal Church of Zion (AMEZ)
  - the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)

# Evangelical Protestants

- Evangelical denominations include:
  - Assemblies of God
  - Holiness Churches
  - Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches
  - Churches of the Nazarene
  - Southern Baptists
  - Jehovah's Witnesses
  - Full Gospel
  - Apostolic Churches
  - Churches of God
  - and many more

# Evangelical Protestants

- Christian fundamentalism, for example, emerged as a counterforce to secularizing trends, including modernity, science, and academic scholarship.
- Christian fundamentalist churches teach the doctrines of biblical inerrancy and stress justification by faith, entire sanctification, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit as on the Day of Pentecost.

# Other Christian Denominations

- Christian Scientists
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- the Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
- Unitarian Universalists
- Pietist denominations such as the Society of Friends (Quakers)

# Islam

- Islam is the world's second-largest religion.
- There are five key beliefs and five pillars of ritual behavior in Islam:
- Key Beliefs:
  - There is One God
  - There are Angels
  - There have been many prophets in addition to Mohammed, but only one message.
  - There will be a final judgment.
  - It is possible to know God and God's will in this life.



# Islam

- Required rituals:
  - *Shahada*, stating that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammed is his prophet
  - *Salat*, praying five times a day while facing Mecca
  - *Zakat*, giving alms
  - *Siyam*, observing the one-month Feast of Ramadan
  - *Hajj*, making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime

# Islam

- *Imams, who are heads of local mosques, interpret Sharia law and the teachings of the Qu'ran to the faithful.*
- There are four major forms of Islam: Shi'ism, Sunnism, Sufism, and the Nation of Islam.

# Hinduism

- Hindu belief and practice originated in India around 1500 B.C.E.
- Although Christians often assume that Hindus worship many gods and goddesses, they are actually all forms of one God, called Brahman, the original spirit and creative force of the universe.
- Hindus see the One reflected in a trinity of Gods: Brahma, the creator of the universe; Vishnu, its maintainer; and Shiva, the destroyer who brings new life.

# Hinduism

- Hindu sacred texts include the Vedas, but their role is different from that of the Bible for Christians or the Qur'an for Muslims.
- Dharma is a core Hindu belief that captures the idea of duty and moral righteousness in behavior.
- Karma are the actions that one takes to achieve dharma.

# Buddhism

- Buddhism originated after the sixth century B.C.E.
- It emerged from followers of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or Enlightened One, and his teachings.
  - After many years of living a life of wealth and privilege, protected from pain and suffering, Siddhartha set out to discover the realities of material existence.
  - He began by rejecting his past life of wealth to follow a monastic path of self-denial.

# Buddhism

- Over time, two main traditions arose within Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana.
  - Theravada Buddhism is an elite form of Buddhism that is linked to the specialized life and religious devotions of monks who live together in communities called *sanghas*.
  - Mahayana Buddhism embodies a more complex understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds.

# Judaism

- Judaism gave birth to Christianity, but it takes a very different approach in its beliefs and practices.
- Apart from a belief in the oneness of God, there is no unifying creed among Jews.
  - Instead, Judaism emphasizes the observance of rituals and ethical practices.

# Judaism

- Contemporary Judaism is based on the Torah, but generally does not follow all the ritual practices, including animal sacrifice, that it mandates.



# Judaism

- The beliefs and rituals vary depending on the branch of Judaism.
  - Hasidic and Orthodox Jews are the most conservative
  - Conservative Judaism follows the rules of the Torah and Talmud but allows for reinterpretation of ancient Jewish teaching in light of contemporary experience.
  - Reform Judaism holds that the rules in the Torah related to social justice and peace are more important than the observance of rituals and dietary laws.
  - Reconstructionists hold to the importance of Jewish heritage while seeking new ways to experience the sacred in the modern world.

# Understanding Contemporary Religious Ritual Practices

- For most of the world's religious people, religion is less a matter of what you *believe intellectually and more what you do—your everyday behaviors and ritual practices—and also what you experience—* the subjective feelings, emotions, and states of being that result from these behaviors.

# Worship Styles to Meet Every Need

- Religious groups around the world take diverse approaches to worship.
- To transform or maintain tradition can be a source of intense conflict for some religious groups.