



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.