

19 Religion

Learning Objectives



Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



Understand the differences among various types of religious organizations.



Apply sociology's major theoretical approaches to religion.



Analyze the importance of gender in organized religions.



Evaluate the claim of the secularization thesis that religion has decreasing importance in modern societies.



Create the ability to see how religion differs from other types of knowledge and to identify the types of questions that only religion can answer.



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explores the meaning and importance of religion, a major social institution. Although religion varies around the world, it is always based on the concept of the sacred. ■



With its many churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques (a recent study put the figure at one house of worship for every 1,000 people), one country stands out as among the most religious countries on Earth.

- For its entire history, its leaders have proclaimed that God is responsible for its prosperity and liberty.
- Today, four out of five of this nation's people say they have “experienced God's presence or a spiritual force.”
- Together, its people give more than \$100 billion each year to religious organizations—more than the total economic output of most low-income countries.
- Written on its money is the official national motto, “In God We Trust.”
- And in schools, children stand before the national flag and pledge their allegiance to “one nation under God” (Sheler, 2002; Aprill, 2004).

You have already guessed that the country described is the United States. But although the United States is a religious nation, it is also a country of immigrants, and as a result, its people have many different images of God. In countless places of worship—from soaring Gothic cathedrals in New York City to small storefront tabernacles in sprawling Los Angeles—Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians, and followers of dozens of other religions can be found (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; Sheler, 2002). One scholar described the United States as the world's most religiously diverse nation, a country in which Hindu and Jewish children go to school together and Muslims and Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains work in the same factories and offices as Protestants and Catholics (Eck, 2001). And as you will see, many people in the United States today are deeply spiritual without being part of any organized religion.

This chapter begins by explaining what religion is from a sociological point of view. We then explore the changing face of religious belief throughout history and around the world and examine the vital and sometimes controversial place of religion in today's society.

Religion: Basic Concepts

Understand

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim stated that religion involves “things that surpass the limits of our knowledge” (1965:62, orig. 1915). We define most objects, events, or experiences as **profane** (from Latin, meaning “outside the temple”), *included as an ordinary element of every-*

day life. But we also consider some things **sacred**, *set apart as extraordinary, inspiring awe and reverence.* Setting the sacred apart from the profane is the essence of all religious belief. **Religion**, then, is *a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on recognizing the sacred.*

There is great diversity in matters of faith, and nothing is sacred to everyone on Earth. Although people regard most books as profane, Jews believe that the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament) is sacred, in the same way that Christians revere the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and Muslims exalt the Qur'an (Koran).

But no matter how a community of believers draws religious lines, Durkheim explained, people understand profane things in terms of their everyday usefulness: We log on to the Internet with our laptop or turn a key to start our car. What is sacred we reverently set apart from daily life, giving it a “forbidden” or “holy” aura. Marking the boundary between the sacred and the profane, for example, Muslims remove their shoes before entering a mosque to avoid defiling a sacred place with soles that have touched the profane ground outside.

The sacred is embodied in **ritual**, or *formal, ceremonial behavior.* Holy Communion is the central ritual of Christianity; to the Christian faithful, the wafer and wine consumed during Communion are never treated in a profane way as food but as the sacred symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Religion and Sociology

Because religion deals with ideas that transcend everyday experience, neither common sense nor sociology can prove or disprove religious doctrine. Religion is a matter of **faith**, *belief based on conviction rather*

Although rituals take countless forms, all religion deals with what surpasses ordinary or everyday understanding. This man in Los Angeles is part of a dance group taking part in the Day of the Dead, a Mexican celebration involving prayer and remembering those who have passed on.



than on scientific evidence. The New Testament of the Bible defines faith as “the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1) and urges Christians to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Some people with strong faith may be disturbed by the thought of sociologists turning a scientific eye on what they hold sacred. However, a sociological study of religion is no threat to anyone’s faith. Sociologists study religion just as they study the family, to understand religious experiences around the world and how religion is tied to other social institutions. They make no judgments that a specific religion is right or wrong in terms of ultimate truth. Rather, scientific sociology takes a more worldly approach, asking why religions take a particular form in one society or another and how religious activity affects society as a whole.

Theories of Religion

Apply

Sociologists apply the major theoretical approaches to the study of religion just as they do to any other topic. Each approach provides distinctive insights into the way religion shapes social life.

Functions of Religion: Structural-Functional Analysis

According to Durkheim (1965, orig. 1915), society has a life and power of its own beyond the life of any individual. In other words, society itself is godlike, shaping the lives of its members and living on beyond them. Practicing religion, people celebrate the awesome power of their society.

No wonder people around the world transform certain everyday objects into sacred symbols of their collective life. Members of technologically simple societies do this with a **totem**, *an object in the natural world collectively defined as sacred*. The totem—perhaps an animal or an elaborate work of art—becomes the centerpiece of ritual, symbolizing the power of society over the individual. In our society, the flag is treated with respect and is not used in a profane way (say, as clothing) or allowed to touch the ground.

Similarly, putting the words “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency (a practice started in the 1860s at the time of the Civil War) or adding the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance (in 1954) symbolizes some widespread beliefs that tie society together. Across the

religion a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on recognizing the sacred

faith belief based on conviction rather than on scientific evidence

United States, local communities also gain a sense of unity by linking totems to sports teams, from the New England Patriots to the Iowa State University Cyclones to the San Francisco 49ers.

Durkheim identified three major functions of religion that contribute to the operation of society:

1. Establishing social cohesion.

Religion unites people through shared symbolism, values, and norms. Religious thought and ritual establish rules of fair play, organizing our social life.

2. Promoting social control.

Every society uses religious ideas to promote conformity. By defining God as a “judge,” many religions encourage people to obey cultural norms. Religion can also be used to back up the power of political systems. In medieval Europe, for example, monarchs claimed to rule by “divine right,” so that obedience was seen as doing God’s will. Even today, our leaders ask for God’s blessing, implying that their efforts are right and just.

3. **Providing meaning and purpose.** Religious belief offers the comforting sense that our brief lives serve some greater purpose. Strengthened by such beliefs, people are less likely to despair in the face of change or even tragedy. For this reason, we mark major life course transitions—including birth, marriage, and death—with religious observances.

● **Evaluate** In Durkheim’s structural-functional analysis, religion represents the collective life of society. The major weakness of this approach is that it downplays religion’s dysfunctions, especially the fact that strongly held beliefs can generate social conflict. Terrorists have claimed that God supports their actions, and many nations march to war under the banner of their God. A study of conflict in the world would probably show that religious beliefs have provoked more violence than differences of social class.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING What are Durkheim’s three functions of religion for society?

Constructing the Sacred: Symbolic-Interaction Analysis

From a symbolic-interaction point of view, religion (like all of society) is socially constructed (although perhaps with divine inspiration). Through various rituals—from daily prayers to annual religious observances such as Easter, Passover, or Ramadan—people sharpen the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Peter Berger (1967:35–36) claims that placing our small, brief lives within some “cosmic frame of reference” gives us the appearance of “ultimate security and permanence.”

profane included as an ordinary element of everyday life

sacred set apart as extraordinary, inspiring awe and reverence



Religion is founded on the concept of the sacred—aspects of our existence that are set apart as extraordinary and demand our submission. Bowing, kneeling, or prostrating oneself are all ways of symbolically surrendering to a higher power. These Filipino Christians seek atonement for their sins in an annual Lenten ritual.

Marriage is a good example. If two people look on marriage as merely a contract, they can agree to split up whenever they want. Their bond makes far stronger claims on them when it is defined as holy matrimony, which is surely one reason that the divorce rate is lower among people with strong religious beliefs. More generally, whenever human beings face uncertainty or life-threatening situations—such as illness, natural disaster, terrorist attack, or war—we turn to our sacred symbols.

Evaluate Using the symbolic-interaction approach, we see how people turn to religion to give everyday life sacred meaning. Berger notes that the sacred’s ability to give special meaning to society requires that we ignore the fact that it is socially constructed. After all, how much strength could we gain from beliefs if we saw them merely as strategies for coping with tragedy? Also, this micro-level analysis ignores religion’s link to social inequality, to which we turn next.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How would Peter Berger explain the fact that deeply religious people have a low divorce rate?

Inequality and Religion: Social-Conflict Analysis

The social-conflict approach highlights religion’s support of social inequality. Religion, proclaimed Karl Marx, serves ruling elites by legitimizing the status quo and diverting people’s attention from social inequities.

Today, the British monarch is the formal head of the Church of England, illustrating the close ties between religious and political elites. In practical terms, linking the church and the state means that opposing the government amounts to opposing the church and, by implication, God. Religion also encourages people to accept the social

problems of this world while they look hopefully to a “better world to come.” In a well-known statement, Marx dismissed religion as preventing revolutionary change; religion is, in his words, “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (1964:27, orig. 1848).

Religion and social inequality are also linked through gender. Virtually all the world’s major religions are patriarchal, as the Thinking About Diversity box explains.

Evaluate Social-conflict analysis emphasizes the power of religion to support social inequality. Yet religion also promotes change toward equality. For example, nineteenth-century religious groups in the United States played an important part in the movement to abolish slavery. In the 1950s and 1960s, religious organizations and their leaders formed the core of the civil rights movement. In the 1960s and 1970s, many clergy opposed the Vietnam War, and today many support any number of progressive causes such as feminism and gay rights.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How does religion help maintain class inequality and gender stratification?

The Applying Theory table on page 446 summarizes the three theoretical approaches to understanding religion.

Religion and Social Change

Apply

Religion can be the conservative force portrayed by Karl Marx. But at some points in history, as Max Weber (1958, orig. 1904–05) explained, religion has promoted dramatic social change.

Max Weber: Protestantism and Capitalism

Weber argued that particular religious ideas set into motion a wave of change that brought about the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe. The rise of industrial capitalism was encouraged by Calvinism, a movement within the Protestant Reformation.

As Chapter 4 (“Society”) explains in detail, John Calvin (1509–1564) was a leader in the Reformation who preached the doctrine of *predestination*. According to Calvin, an all-powerful and all-knowing God had selected some people for salvation but condemned most to eternal damnation. Each individual’s fate, sealed before birth and known only to God, was either eternal glory or endless hellfire.

Driven by anxiety over their fate, Calvinists understandably looked for signs of God’s favor in this world and came to see prosperity as a sign of divine blessing. Religious conviction and a rigid devotion to duty led Calvinists to work hard, and many amassed great wealth. But money was not for selfish spending or even for sharing with the poor, whose plight they saw as a mark of God’s rejection. As agents of God’s work on Earth, Calvinists believed that they best fulfilled their “calling” by reinvesting profits and achieving ever-greater success in the process.

All the while, Calvinists practiced self-denial by living thrifty lives. In addition, they eagerly adopted technological advances that promised to increase their workplace effectiveness. Together, these traits laid the groundwork for the rise of industrial capitalism. In

Thinking about Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender



Religion and Patriarchy: Does God Favor Males?

Why do two-thirds of adults in the United States say they think of God as “father” rather than “mother” (NORC, 2011:278)? It is probably because we link godly traits such as wisdom and power to men. Just about all the world’s religions tend to favor males, a fact evident in passages from their sacred writings.

The Qur’an (Koran), the sacred text of Islam, declares that men are to dominate women: “Men are in charge of women. . . . Hence good women are obedient. . . . As for those whose rebelliousness you fear, admonish them, banish them from your bed, and scourge them” (quoted in W. Kaufman, 1976:163).

Christianity, the major religion of the Western world, also supports patriarchy. Many Christians revere Mary, the mother of Jesus, but the New Testament also includes the following passages:

A man. . . is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Corinthians 11:7–9)

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14:33–35)

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. . . . As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be

subject in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22–24)

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Timothy 2:11–15)

Judaism has also traditionally supported patriarchy. Male Orthodox Jews say the following words in daily prayer:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a gentile.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a slave.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a woman.

Many patriarchal religions also exclude women from the clergy. Today, Islam and the Roman Catholic Church ban women from the priesthood, as do about half of Protestant denominations. But a growing number of Protestant religious organizations do ordain women, who now represent about one-fifth of U.S. clergy. Orthodox Judaism upholds the traditional prohibition against women serving as rabbis, but Reform and Conservative Judaism look to both men and women as spiritual leaders. Across the United States, the proportion of women in seminaries has never been higher (now roughly one-third), which is more evidence of a trend toward greater equality (Association of Theological Seminaries, 2011; Hartford Institute, 2011; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011).

Feminists argue that unless traditional ideas of gender are removed from our understanding of God, women will never be equal to men in the church. The theologian Mary Daly puts the matter bluntly: “If God is male, then male is God” (quoted in Woodward, 1989:58).



Patriarchy is a characteristic of all the world’s major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Male dominance can be seen in restrictions that limit religious leadership to men and also in regulations that prohibit women from worshiping alongside men.

What Do You Think?

1. Are you or other members of your family affiliated with a religious organization? If so, what evidence of patriarchy do you see in this religion?
2. Why do you think many religions encourage people to think of God as male?
3. Can you think of God in terms that do not include gender? Explain your answer.

time, the religious fervor that motivated early Calvinists weakened, leaving a profane “Protestant work ethic.” To Max Weber, industrial capitalism itself amounted to a “disenchanted” religion, further showing the power of religion to alter the shape of society (Berger, 2009).

Liberation Theology

Historically, Christianity has reached out to oppressed people, urging all to a stronger faith in a better life to come. In recent decades, however, some church leaders and theologians have taken a decidedly political approach and endorsed **liberation theology**, *the combining of Christian principles with political activism, often Marxist in character.*

This social movement started in the 1960s in Latin America’s Roman Catholic Church. Today, Christian activists continue to help people in poor nations liberate themselves from abysmal poverty. Their message is simple: Social oppression runs counter to Christian morality, so as a matter of faith and justice, Christians must promote greater social equality.

Pope Benedict XVI, like Pope John Paul II before him, condemns liberation theology for distorting traditional church doctrine with left-wing politics. Nevertheless, the liberation theology movement has gained strength in the poorest countries of Latin America, where many people’s Christian faith drives them to improve conditions for the poor and oppressed (Neuhouser, 1989; J. E. Williams, 2002).

APPLYING THEORY

Religion

	Structural-Functional Approach	Symbolic-Interaction Approach	Social-Conflict Approach
What is the level of analysis?	Macro-level	Micro-level	Macro-level
What is the importance of religion for society?	Religion performs vital tasks, including uniting people and controlling behavior. Religion gives life meaning and purpose.	Religion strengthens marriage by giving it (and family life) sacred meaning. People often turn to sacred symbols for comfort when facing danger and uncertainty.	Religion supports social inequality by claiming that the social order is just. Religion turns attention from problems in this world to a “better world to come.”

Types of Religious Organizations

Understand

Sociologists categorize the hundreds of different religious organizations found in the United States along a continuum, with *churches* at one end and *sects* at the other. We can describe any actual religious organization in relation to these two ideal types by locating it on the church–sect continuum.

Church

Drawing on the ideas of his teacher Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch (1931) defined a **church** as a *type of religious organization that is well integrated into the larger society*. Churchlike organizations usually persist for centuries and include generations of the same families. Churches have well-established rules and regulations and expect leaders to be formally trained and ordained.

Though concerned with the sacred, a church accepts the ways of the profane world. Church members think of God in intellectual terms (say, as a force for good) and favor abstract moral standards (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”) over specific rules for day-to-day living. By teaching morality in safely

abstract terms, church leaders avoid social controversy. For example, many congregations celebrate the unity of all peoples but say little about their own lack of racial diversity. By downplaying this type of conflict, a church makes peace with the status quo (Troeltsch, 1931).

A church may operate with or apart from the state. As its name implies, a **state church** is a *church formally allied with the state*. State churches have existed throughout human history. For centuries, Roman Catholicism was the official religion of the Roman Empire, and Confucianism was the official religion of China until early in the twentieth century. Today, the Anglican Church is the official church of England, and Islam is the official religion of Pakistan and Iran. State churches count everyone in the society as a member, which sharply limits tolerance of religious differences.

A **denomination**, by contrast, is a *church, independent of the state, that recognizes religious pluralism*. Denominations exist in nations, including the United States, that formally separate church and state. This country has dozens of Christian denominations—including Catholics, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Lutherans—as well as various categories of Judaism, Islam, and other traditions. Although members of any denomination hold to their own doctrine, they recognize the right of others to have different beliefs.



In global perspective, the range of religious activity is truly astonishing. Members of this Southeast Asian cult show their devotion to God by suspending themselves in the air using ropes and sharp hooks that pierce their skin. What religious practices common in the United States might seem astonishing to people living in other countries?

Sect

The second general religious form is the **sect**, a *type of religious organization that stands apart from the larger society*. Sect members have rigid religious convictions and deny the beliefs of others. Compared to churches, which try to appeal to everyone (the term *catholic* also means “universal”), a sect forms an exclusive group. To members of a sect, religion is not just

Animism is widespread in traditional societies, whose members live respectfully within the natural world on which they depend for their survival. Animists see a divine presence not just in themselves but in everything around them. Their example has inspired “New Age” spirituality, described on pages 456–57.

one aspect of life but a firm plan for living. In extreme cases, members of a sect withdraw completely from society in order to practice their religion without interference. The Amish community is one example of a North American sect that isolates itself. Because our culture generally considers religious tolerance a virtue, members of sects are sometimes accused of being narrow-minded in insisting that they alone follow the true religion (Kraybill, 1994; P. W. Williams, 2002).

In organizational terms, sects are less formal than churches. Sect members may be highly spontaneous and emotional in worship, compared to members of churches, who tend to listen passively to their leaders. Sects also reject the intellectualized religion of churches, stressing instead the personal experience of divine power. Rodney Stark (1985:314) contrasts a church’s vision of a distant God (“Our Father, who art in Heaven”) with a sect’s more immediate God (“Lord, bless this poor sinner kneeling before you now”).

Churches and sects also have different patterns of leadership—the more churchlike an organization, the more likely that its leaders are formally trained and ordained. Sectlike organizations, which celebrate the personal presence of God, expect their leaders to exhibit divine inspiration in the form of **charisma** (from Greek, meaning “divine favor”), *extraordinary personal qualities that can infuse people with emotion and turn them into followers*.

Sects generally form as breakaway groups from established religious organizations (Stark & Bainbridge, 1979). Their psychic intensity and informal structure make them less stable than churches, and many sects blossom only to disappear soon after. The sects that do endure typically become more like churches, with declining emphasis on charismatic leadership as they become more bureaucratic.

To sustain their membership, many sects actively recruit, or *proselytize*, new members. Sects highly value the experience of *conversion*, a personal transformation or religious rebirth. For example, members of Jehovah’s Witnesses go door-to-door to share their faith with others with the goal of attracting new members.



Finally, churches and sects differ in their social composition. Because they are more closely tied to the world, well-established churches tend to include people of high social standing. Sects attract more disadvantaged people. A sect’s openness to new members and its promise of salvation and personal fulfillment appeal to people who feel they are social outsiders.

Cult

A **cult** is a religious organization that is largely outside a society’s cultural traditions. Most sects spin off from conventional religious organizations. However, a cult typically forms around a highly charismatic leader who offers a compelling message about a new and very different way of life. As many as 5,000 cults exist in the United States (Marquand & Wood, 1997).

Because some cult principles or practices are unconventional, the popular view is that they are deviant or even evil. The suicides of thirty-nine members of California’s Heaven’s Gate cult in 1997—people who claimed that dying was a doorway to a higher existence, perhaps in the company of aliens from outer space—confirmed the negative image the public holds of most

cults. In short, calling any religious community a “cult” amounts to dismissing its members as crazy (Shupe, 1995; Gleick, 1997).

This charge is unfair because there is nothing basically wrong with this kind of religious organization. Many longstanding religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism included—began as cults. Of course, few cults exist for very long. One reason is that they are even more at odds with the larger society than sects. Many cults demand that members not only accept their doctrine but also adopt a radically new lifestyle. This is why people sometimes accuse cults of brainwashing their members, although research suggests that most people who join cults experience no psychological harm (Kilbourne, 1983; P. W. Williams, 2002).

Religion in History

Understand

Like other social institutions, religion shows marked variation according to time and place. Let us look at several ways in which religion has changed over the course of history.

Religion in Preindustrial Societies

Early hunters and gatherers practiced **animism** (from a Latin word meaning “breath of life”), *the belief that elements of the natural world are conscious life forms that affect humanity*. Animists view forests, oceans, mountains, and even the wind as spiritual forces. Many Native American societies are animistic, which explains their reverence for the natural environment.

church	a religious organization that is well integrated into the larger society	sect	a religious organization that stands apart from the larger society	cult	a religious organization that is largely outside a society’s cultural traditions
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Belief in a single divine power responsible for creating the world began with pastoral and horticultural societies, which first appeared 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. The conception of God as a “shepherd” arose because Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all began among pastoral peoples.

Religion becomes more important in agrarian societies, which develop a specialized priesthood in charge of religious rituals and organizations. The huge cathedrals that dominated the towns of medieval Europe—many of which remain standing today—are evidence of the central role of religion in the social life of medieval agrarian society.

Religion in Industrial Societies

The Industrial Revolution introduced a growing emphasis on science. More and more, people looked to doctors and scientists for the knowledge and comfort they used to get from priests. But as Durkheim (1965, orig. 1915) predicted almost a century ago, religion persists in industrial societies because science is powerless to address issues of ultimate meaning in human life. In other words, learning *how* the world works is a matter for scientists, but *why* we and the rest of the universe exist at all is a question of faith. In addition, as already noted, the United States stands out as a modern society in which religion has remained especially strong (McClay, 2007; Greeley, 2008).

World Religions

Understand

The diversity of religions in the world is almost as wide-ranging as the diversity of culture itself. Many of the thousands of different religions are found in just one place and have few followers. But there are a number of *world religions*, with millions of adherents. We shall briefly examine six world religions, which together claim almost 5 billion believers—just about three-fourths of humanity.

Christianity

Christianity is the most widespread religion with 2 billion followers, one-third of the world’s people. Most Christians live in Europe or the Americas; more than 80 percent of the people in the United States and Canada identify with Christianity. As shown in Global Map 19–1, people who think of themselves as Christian represent a large share of the population in many world regions, with the notable exceptions of northern Africa and Asia. European colonization spread Christianity throughout much of the world over the past 500 years. Its dominance in the West is shown by the fact that our calendar numbers years from the birth of Jesus Christ.

Although it began as a cult, Christianity’s 2 billion followers make it now the most widespread of the world’s religions.



As noted earlier, Christianity began as a cult, drawing elements from Judaism, a much older religion. Like many cults, Christianity was built on the personal charisma of a leader, Jesus of Nazareth, who preached a message of personal salvation. Jesus did not directly challenge the political power of his day, the Roman Empire, telling his followers to “render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21). But his message was a revolutionary one all the same, promising that faith and love would triumph over sin and death.

Christianity is one example of **monotheism**, *belief in a single divine power*. This new religion was quite different from the Roman Empire’s traditional **polytheism**, *belief in many gods*. Yet Christianity views the Supreme Being as a sacred Trinity: God the Creator; Jesus Christ, Son of God and Redeemer; and the Holy Spirit, a Christian’s personal experience of God’s presence.

The claim that Jesus was divine rests on accounts of his final days on Earth. Brought to trial as a threat to established political leaders, Jesus was tried in Jerusalem and sentenced to death by crucifixion, a common means of execution at the time. This explains why the cross became a sacred Christian symbol. According to Christian belief, three days after his execution, Jesus rose from the dead, revealing that he was the Son of God.

Jesus’ followers, especially his twelve closest associates, known as the apostles, spread Christianity throughout the Mediterranean region. At first, the Roman Empire persecuted Christians. But by the fourth century, the empire had adopted Christianity as a state church, the official religion of what became known as the Holy Roman Empire.

Christianity took various forms, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, based in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation in Europe gave rise to hundreds of new denominations. In the United States, dozens of these denominations—the Baptists and Methodists are the two largest—command sizable followings (W. Kaufman, 1976; Jacquet & Jones, 1991; Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011).

Islam

Islam has about 1.6 billion followers, which is almost one-fourth of humanity. Followers of Islam are called Muslims. A majority of people in the Middle East are Muslims, so we tend to associate Islam with Arabs in that region of the world. But most of the world’s Muslims live elsewhere: Global Map 19–2 shows that most people in northern Africa and Indonesia are Muslims. In addition, large concentrations of Muslims are found in western Asia in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. Because Muslims have a birthrate that is twice the rate for non-Muslims, it is possible that Islam could become the world’s dominant religion by the end of this century.

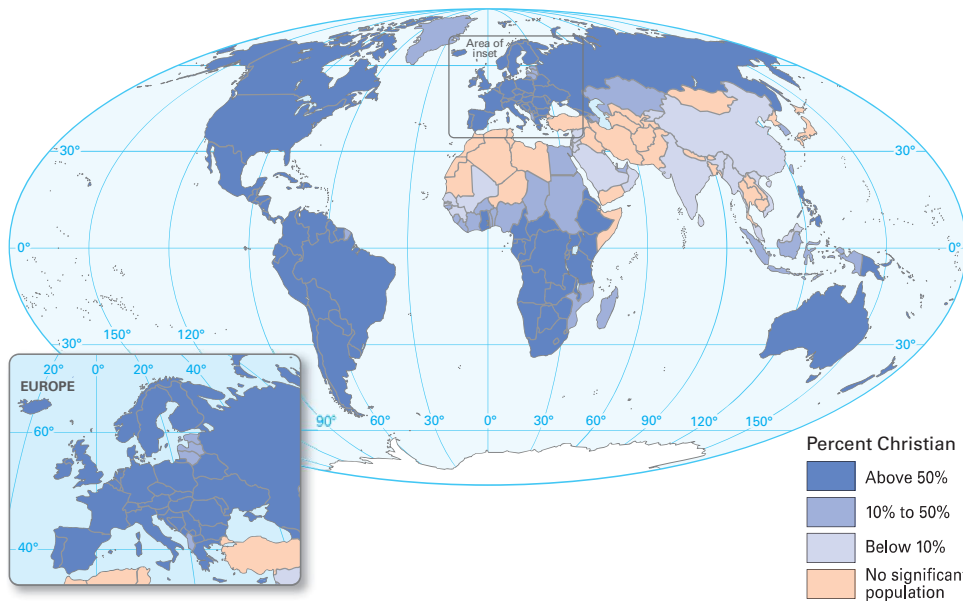
Most estimates put the Muslim population of the United States at about 2.6

Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 19-1 Christianity in Global Perspective

Christianity is the dominant religion of Western Europe and became the dominant religion of the Americas. Can you explain this pattern?

Source: Association of Religion Data Archives (2009).

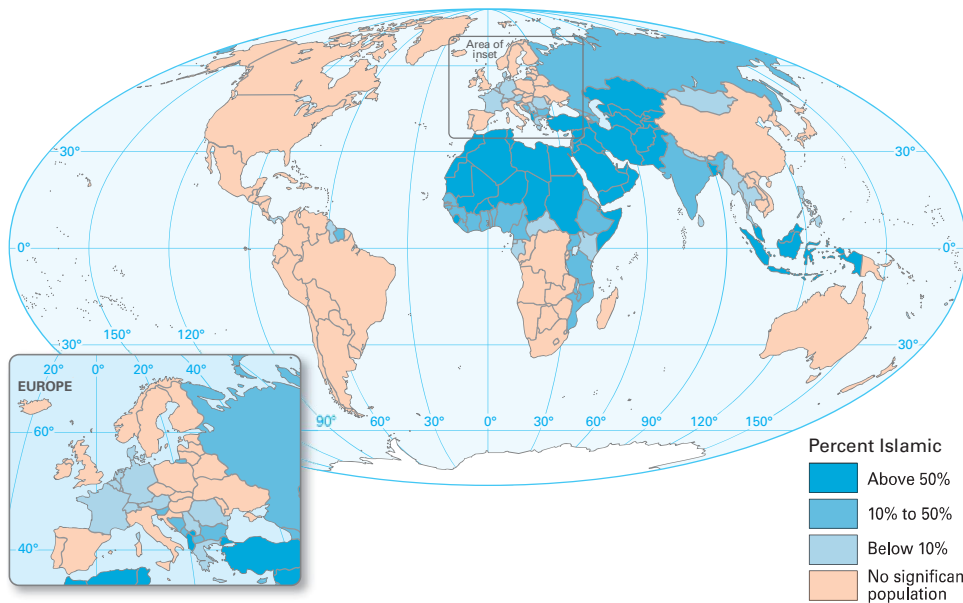


Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 19-2 Islam in Global Perspective

Islam is the dominant religion of the Middle East, but most of the world's Muslims live in North Africa and Southeast Asia.

Source: Pew Research Center (2011).



million, although a few sources place the number a bit higher. In any case, Islam is clearly an important part of our country's religious life. The Muslim population is not only large but also quite diverse. It includes Arab Americans and others with Middle Eastern ancestry, Asian Americans, and African Americans (Eck, 2001; Pew Research Center, 2011).

Islam is the word of God as revealed to Muhammad, who was born in the city of Mecca (in what is now Saudi Arabia) about the year 570. To Muslims, Muhammad is a prophet, not a divine being as Jesus is to Christians. The text of the Qur'an (Koran), which is sacred to Muslims, is the word of Allah (Arabic for "God") as transmitted through Muhammad, Allah's messenger. In Arabic, the word *islam* means both "submission" and "peace," and the Qur'an urges submission to Allah as the path to inner peace. Muslims express this personal devotion in a ritual of prayers five times each day.

After the death of Muhammad, Islam spread rapidly. Although divisions arose among Muslims, all accept the Five Pillars of Islam: (1)

recognizing Allah as the one, true God and Muhammad as God's messenger; (2) ritual prayer; (3) giving alms to the poor; (4) fasting during the month of Ramadan; and (5) making a pilgrimage at least once in one's life to the Sacred House of Allah in Mecca (Weeks, 1988; El-Attar, 1991). Like Christianity, Islam holds people accountable to God for their deeds on Earth. Those who live obediently will be rewarded in heaven, and evildoers will suffer unending punishment.

Muslims are also required to defend their faith, which has led to calls for holy wars against unbelievers (in roughly the same way that medieval Christians fought in the Crusades). Recent decades have witnessed a rise in militancy and anti-Western feeling in much of the Muslim world, where many people see the United States as both militarily threatening and representing a way of life that they view as materialistic and immoral. Many Westerners—who typically know little about Islam and often stereotype all Muslims on the basis of the terrorist actions of a few—respond with confusion and sometimes hostility (Eck, 2001; Ryan, 2001).

Many religions promote literacy because they demand that followers study sacred texts. As part of their upbringing, most Muslim parents teach their children lessons from the Qur'an; later, the children will do the same for a new generation of believers.

Many people in the United States also view Muslim women as socially oppressed. There are differences among Muslim nations in terms of rights given to women: Tunisia allows women far more opportunities than, say, Saudi Arabia, which does not allow women to vote or even drive a car. It is true that many Muslim women lack some of the personal freedoms enjoyed by Muslim men. Yet many—perhaps even most—accept the mandates of their religion and find security in a system that guides the behavior of both women and men (Peterson, 1996). Defenders of Islam also point out that patriarchy was well established in the Middle East long before the birth of Muhammad and that Islam actually improved the social position of women by requiring husbands to deal justly with their wives. For example, Islam permits a man to have up to four wives, but it requires men to have only one wife if having more would cause him to treat any woman unjustly (Qur'an, "The Women," v. 3).

Judaism

In terms of numbers, Judaism's 15 million followers worldwide make it something less than a world religion. Jews make up a majority of the population in only one country—Israel. But Judaism has special importance to the United States because the largest concentration of Jews (5.7 million people) is found in North America.

Jews look to the past as a source of guidance in the present and for the future. Judaism has deep historical roots that extend 4,000 years before the birth of Christ to the ancient societies of Mesopotamia. At this time, Jews were animistic, but this belief changed after Jacob—grandson of Abraham, the earliest great ancestor—led his people to Egypt.

Jews survived centuries of slavery in Egypt. In the thirteenth century B.C.E., Moses, the adopted son of an Egyptian princess, was called by God to lead the Jews from bondage. This exodus (a word with Latin and Greek roots mean "marching out") from Egypt is remembered by Jews today in the annual ritual of Passover. After their liberation, the Jews became monotheistic, recognizing a single, all-powerful God.

A distinctive concept of Judaism is the *covenant*, a special relationship with God by which the Jews became God's "chosen people." The covenant implies a duty to observe God's law, especially the Ten Commandments as revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jews regard the Old Testament of the Bible as both a record of their history and a statement of the obligations of Jewish life. Of special importance are the Bible's first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), called the *Torah* (a word meaning "teaching" and



"law"). In contrast to Christianity's central concern with personal salvation, Judaism emphasizes moral behavior in this world.

Judaism has three main denominations. Orthodox Jews (including roughly 600,000 people in the United States) strictly observe traditional beliefs and practices, wear traditional dress, segregate men and women at religious services, and eat only kosher foods (prepared precisely as prescribed in the Torah). Such traditional practices set off Orthodox Jews in the United States from the larger society, making them the most sectlike. In the mid-nineteenth century, many Jews wanted to join in with the larger society, which led to the formation of more churchlike Reform Judaism (now including about 2 million people in this country). A third segment, Conservative Judaism (with more than 1.5 million U.S. adherents), has established a middle ground between

the other two denominations (Grim & Masci, 2008).

Whatever the denomination, Jews share a cultural history of oppression as a result of prejudice and discrimination. A collective memory of centuries of slavery in Egypt, conquest by Rome, and persecution in Europe has shaped the Jewish identity. It was Jews in Italy who first lived in an urban ghetto (this word comes from the Italian *borghetto*, meaning "settlement outside the city walls"), and this residential segregation soon spread to other parts of Europe.

Jewish immigration to the United States began in the mid-1600s. The early immigrants who prospered were assimilated into largely Christian communities. But as great numbers entered the country at the end of the nineteenth century, prejudice and discrimination against Jews—commonly termed *anti-Semitism*—increased. Before and during World War II, anti-Semitism reached a vicious peak as the Nazi regime in Germany systematically annihilated 6 million Jews.

Today, the social standing of Jews is well above average. Still, many Jews are concerned about the future of their religion because in the United States, only half the children growing up in Jewish households are learning Jewish culture and ritual, and more than half marry non-Jews. Others are more optimistic, suggesting that a rising number of "mixed marriages" may attract new people to Judaism (Dershowitz, 1997; Keister, 2003; Goldscheider, 2004).

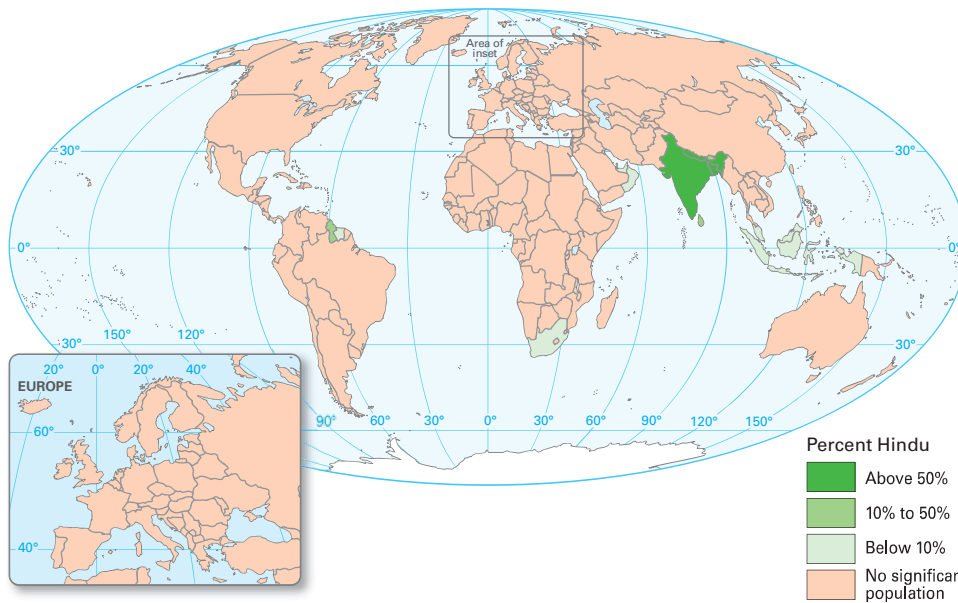
Hinduism

Hinduism is the oldest of all the world religions, originating in the Indus River valley about 4,500 years ago. Today, there are about 870 million Hindus, which is almost 14 percent of the world's people. Global Map 19–3 shows that Hinduism remains an Eastern religion, mostly practiced in India and Pakistan but with a significant presence in southern Africa and Indonesia.

Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 19-3 Hinduism in Global Perspective

Hinduism is closely linked to the culture of India.
Source: Association of Religion Data Archives (2009).



Over the centuries, Hinduism and the culture of India have blended so that now one is not easily described apart from the other (although India also has a sizable Muslim population). This connection also explains why Hinduism, unlike Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, has not diffused widely to other nations. But with 1.3 million followers in the United States, Hinduism is an important part of our country's cultural diversity.

Hinduism differs from most other religions in that it is not linked to the life of any single person. In addition, Hinduism envisions God as a universal moral force rather than a specific entity. For this reason, Hinduism—like other Eastern religions, as you will see shortly—is sometimes described as an “ethical religion.” Hindu beliefs and practices vary widely, but all Hindus believe that they have moral responsibilities, called *dharma*. Dharma, for example, calls people to observe the traditional caste system, described in Chapter 10 (“Social Stratification”).

Another Hindu principle, *karma*, involves a belief in the spiritual progress of the human soul. To a Hindu, each action has spiritual consequences, and proper living results in moral development. Karma works through *reincarnation*, a cycle of death and rebirth by which a person is born into a spiritual state corresponding to the moral quality of a previous life. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism recognizes no ultimate judgment at the hands of a supreme god. But in the ongoing cycle of rebirth, it may be said that people get what they deserve. For those who reach *moksha*, the state of spiritual perfection, the soul has no further need to be reborn.

The case of Hinduism shows that not all religions can be neatly labeled as monotheistic or polytheistic. Hinduism is monotheistic insofar as it views the universe as a single moral system; yet Hindus see this moral force at work in every element of nature. Hindus connect to this moral force through their private meditation and rituals, which vary from village to village across the vast nation of India. Many also participate in public events, such as the *Kumbh Mela*, which every twelve years brings some 20 million pilgrims to bathe in the purifying waters of the sacred Ganges River.

Hinduism is not well understood by most people in the United States, although elements of Hindu thought have entered the New Age movement, discussed later in this chapter. But more than 2.6 million people in this country claim Asian Indian ancestry, and the number of immigrants from India is rising, which is making Hinduism more and more important in the United States (Larson, 2000; Eck, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Buddhism

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the rich culture of India gave rise to Buddhism. Today, some 380 million people, or 6 percent of humanity, are Buddhists, and almost all live in Asia. As shown in Global Map 19-4 on page 452, Buddhists are a majority of the population in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Japan. Buddhism is also widespread in India and the People's Republic of China. Buddhism has much in common with Hinduism: It recognizes no god of judgment, sees each daily action as having spiritual consequences, and believes in reincarnation. But like Christianity, Buddhism has origins in the life of one person.

Siddhartha Gautama was born to a high-caste family in Nepal in 563 B.C.E. Even as a young man, he was deeply spiritual. At the age of twenty-nine, he experienced a personal transformation, which led him to years of travel and meditation. By the end of this journey, he achieved what Buddhists describe as *bodhi*, or enlightenment. By gaining an understanding of the essence of life, Gautama became the Buddha.

Drawn by his personal charisma, followers spread the Buddha's teachings—the *dhamma*—across India. In the third century B.C.E., India's ruler became a Buddhist and sent missionaries throughout Asia, transforming Buddhism into a world religion.

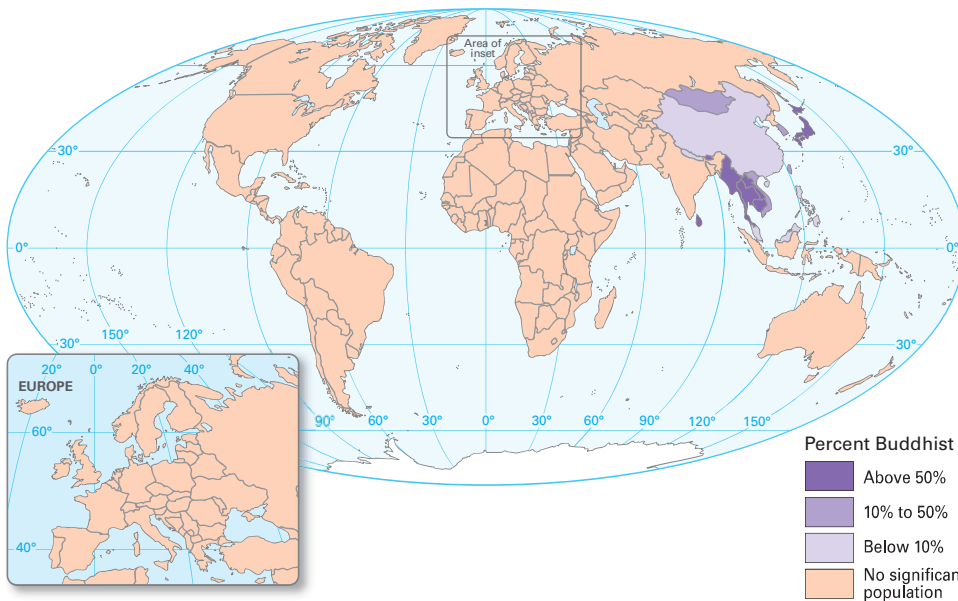
Buddhists believe that much of life in this world involves suffering. This idea is rooted in the Buddha's own travels in a very poor society. But, the Buddha claimed, the solution to suffering is not seeking worldly wealth and power. On the contrary, a concern with worldly things is actually the problem, because it holds back spiritual development. Instead, the Buddha taught that we must use medita-

Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 19-4 Buddhism in Global Perspective

Buddhists represent a large part of the populations of most Asian nations.

Source: Association of Religion Data Archives (2009).



tion to transcend the world—that is, to move beyond selfish concerns and material desires. Only by quieting the mind can people connect with the power of the larger universe—the goal described as *nirvana*, a state of spiritual enlightenment and peace (E. J. Thomas, 1975; Van Biema, 1997; Eck, 2001).

Confucianism

From about 200 B.C.E. until the beginning of the twentieth century, Confucianism was a state church—the official religion of China. After the 1949 revolution, the Communist government of the new People's Republic of China repressed all religious expression. But even today, hundreds of millions of Chinese are still influenced by Confucianism. China is still home to Confucian thought, although Chinese immigration has spread this religion to other nations in Southeast Asia. Only a small number of people who follow Confucius live in North America.

Confucius, whose Chinese name was K'ung Fu-tzu, lived between 551 and 479 B.C.E. Like the Buddha, Confucius was deeply moved by people's suffering. The Buddha's response was sectlike—a spiritual withdrawal from the world. Confucius took a more churchlike approach, instructing his followers to engage the world according to a code of moral conduct. In the same way that Hinduism became part of the Indian way of life, Confucianism became linked to the traditional culture of China.

A central idea of Confucianism is *jen*, meaning “humaneness.” In practice, this means that we must always place moral principle above our self-interest, looking to tradition for guidance in how to live. In the family, Confucius taught, each of us must be loyal and considerate. For their part, families must remember their duties toward the larger community. In this model, layers of moral obligation unite society as a whole.

Of all world religions, Confucianism stands out as lacking a clear sense of the sacred. Perhaps Durkheim would have said that Confucianism is the celebration of the sacred character of society itself. Others might call Confucianism less a religion than a model of disciplined living. However you look at it, Confucianism shares with religion a body of beliefs and practices through which its followers seek moral goodness and social harmony (Schmidt, 1980; McGuire, 1987; Ellwood, 2000).

Religion: East and West

You may already have noticed two general differences between the belief systems of Eastern and Western societies. First, religions that arose in the West (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) have a clear focus on God as a distinct entity. Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism), however, see divine power in everything, so that these belief systems make little distinction between the sacred and the profane and seem more like ethical codes for living.

Second, followers of Western religions form congregations, worshipping together in a special place at a regular time. Followers of Eastern religions, by contrast, express their religion anywhere and everywhere in their daily lives. Religious temples do exist, but they are used by individuals as part of their daily routines rather than by groups according to a rigid schedule. This is why visitors to a country like Japan are as likely to find temples there filled with tourists as with worshippers.

Despite these two differences, however, all religions have a common element: a call to move beyond selfish, everyday concerns in pursuit of a higher moral purpose. Religions may take different paths to this goal, but they all encourage a spiritual sense that there is more to life than what we see around us.

Religion in the United States

Analyze

Compared to almost every other high-income nation in the world, the United States is a religious country (World Values Survey, 2010). As Figure 19-1 shows, more than 70 percent of U.S. adults claim that religion is important in their life, and this share is higher than in most other high-income countries.

That said, scholars debate exactly how religious we are. Some claim that religion remains central to our way of life, but others conclude that a decline of the traditional family and the growing importance of science are weakening religious faith (Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993; Greeley, 2008).

Religious Affiliation

National surveys show that about 81 percent of U.S. adults identify with a religion (NORC, 2011:256). Table 19–1 shows that more than half of U.S. adults say they are Protestants, one-fourth Catholics, and 2 percent Jews. Large numbers of people follow dozens of other religions, from animism to Zen Buddhism, making our society the most religiously diverse on Earth (Eck, 2001). This remarkable religious diversity results from a constitutional ban on government-sponsored religion and from our historically high numbers of immigrants from all over the world.

About 90 percent of U.S. adults report that they had at least some formal religious instruction when growing up, and 60 percent say they belong to a religious organization (NORC, 2011:598, 2579). National Map 19–1 on page 454 shows the share of people who claim to belong to any church across the United States.

National Map 19–2 on page 454 goes a step further, showing that the religion most people identify with varies by region. New England and the Southwest are mostly Catholic, the South is mostly Baptist, and in the northern Plains states, Lutherans predominate. In and around Utah, most people belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, whose followers are more commonly known as Mormons.

Religiosity

Religiosity is the importance of religion in a person's life. However, exactly how religious we are depends on how we operationalize this concept. For example, 90 percent of U.S. adults claim to believe in a divine power, although just 58 percent claim that they “know that God exists and have no doubts about it” (NORC, 2011:601). Fifty-eight percent of adults say they pray at least once a day, but just 30 percent report attending religious services on a weekly or almost weekly basis (NORC, 2011:269, 260).

Clearly, the question “How religious are we?” has no easy answer, and it is likely that many people in the United States claim to be more religious than they really are. Although most people in the United States say they are at least somewhat religious, probably no more than about one-third actually are. Religiosity also varies among denominations. Members of sects are the most religious of all, followed by Catholics and then “mainstream” Protestant denominations such as Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians. In general, older people are more religious than younger people. Finally, women are more religious than men: 49 percent of men and 63 percent of women say religion is very important in their lives (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999; Miller & Stark, 2002; Pew Forum, 2009).

What difference does being more religious make? Researchers have linked a number of social patterns to strong religious beliefs, including low rates of delinquency among young people and low rates of divorce among adults. According to one study, religiosity helps unite children, parents, and local communities in ways that benefit young people, enhancing their educational achievement (Muller & Ellison, 2001).

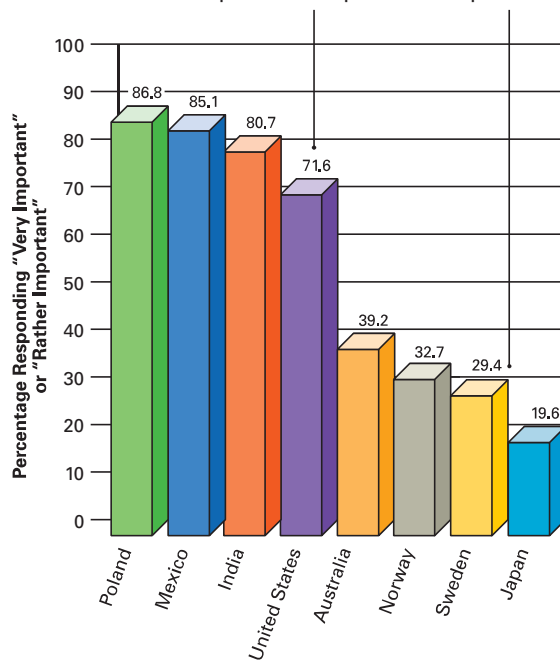
Religion: Class, Ethnicity, and Race

Religious affiliation is related to a number of other factors, including social class, ethnicity, and race.

Social Class

A study of *Who's Who in America*, which profiles U.S. high achievers, showed that the 10 percent of the people who have a religious affili-

- In general, people in higher-income countries are less religious than those in lower-income nations. The U.S. population is an important exception to this pattern.



Survey Question: "How important is religion in your life?"

Global Snapshot

FIGURE 19–1 Religiosity in Global Perspective

Religion is stronger in the United States than in many other nations.

Source: World Values Survey (2010).

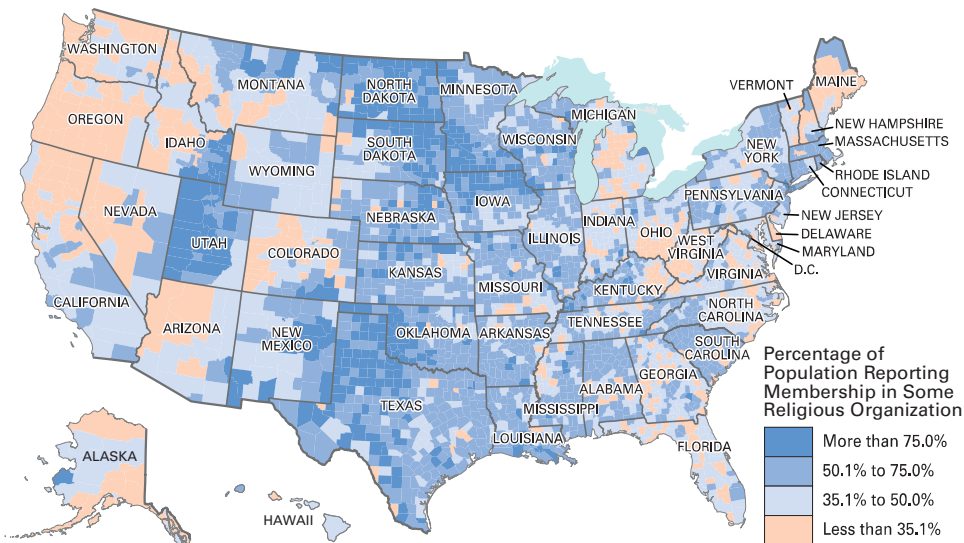
ation as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and United Church of Christ members represent 33 percent of all listings in *Who's Who*. Jews, too, enjoy high social position, with this 2 percent of the population accounting for 12 percent of the listings in *Who's Who*.

Research shows that other denominations, including Congregationalists, Methodists, and Catholics, have moderate social standing.

TABLE 19–1 Religious Identification in the United States, 2010

Religion	Share of Respondents Indicating a Preference
Protestant denominations	51.9%
Baptist	18.9
Methodist	6.1
Lutheran	4.4
Presbyterian	3.2
Episcopalian	1.9
All others or no denomination	17.4
Catholic	25.7
Jewish	2.0
Other or no answer	1.1
No religious preference	19.3

Source: *General Social Surveys, 1972–2010: Cumulative Codebook* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, March 2011).



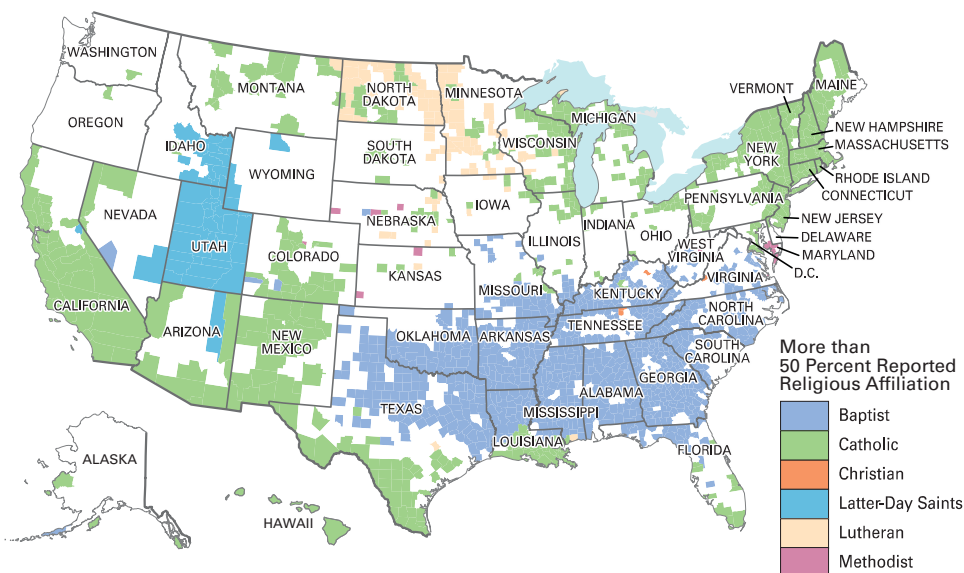
Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 19-1 Religious Membership across the United States

In general, people in the United States are more religious than people in other high-income nations. Yet membership in a religious organization is more common in some parts of the country than in others. What pattern do you see in the map? Can you explain the pattern?

✱ **Explore** patterns of religious membership in your local community and in counties across the United States on mysoclab.com

Source: Glenmary Research Center (2002).



Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 19-2 Religious Diversity across the United States

In most counties, a large share of people who report having an affiliation are members of the same religious organization. So although the United States is religiously diverse at the national level, most people live in communities where one denomination predominates. What historical facts might account for this pattern?

Source: Glenmary Research Center (2002).

Lower social standing is typical of Southern Baptists, Lutherans, and especially Jehovah's Witnesses and other members of sects. Of course, there is considerable variation within all denominations (Keister, 2003; Smith & Faris, 2005; Pyle, 2006).

Ethnicity

Throughout the world, religion is tied to ethnicity, mostly because one religion stands out in a single nation or geographic region. Islam predominates in the Arab societies of the Middle East, Hinduism is fused with the culture of India, and Confucianism runs deep in Chinese society. Christianity and Judaism do not follow this pattern; although these religions are mostly Western, Christians and Jews are found all over the world.

Religion and national identity are joined in the United States as well. For example, we have Anglo-Saxon Protestants, Irish Catholics, Russian Jews, and people of Greek Orthodox heritage. This linking of nation and creed results from the influx of immigrants from nations with a single major religion. Still, nearly every ethnic category displays some religious diversity. For example, people of English ances-

try may be Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, or followers of other religions.

Race

Scholars claim that the church is both the oldest and the most important social institution in the African American community. Transported to the Western Hemisphere in slave ships, most Africans became Christians, the dominant religion in the Americas, but they blended Christian belief with elements of African religions. Guided by this religious mix, African American Christians have developed rituals that seem, by European standards, far more spontaneous and emotional (Frazier, 1965; Paris, 2000; McRoberts, 2003).

When African Americans started moving from the rural South to the industrial cities of the North around 1940, the church played a major role in addressing the problems of dislocation, poverty, and prejudice (Pattillo, 1998). Black churches have also provided an important avenue of achievement for talented men and women. Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesse Jackson have all achieved world recognition for their work as religious leaders.

Today, with 87 percent of African Americans claiming a religious affiliation, this category is somewhat more religious than the population as a whole. The vast majority favors a Protestant denomination. However, there is an increasing number of non-Christian African Americans, especially in large U.S. cities. Among them, the most common non-Christian religion is Islam, with about 400,000 African American followers (Paris, 2000; Pew Forum, 2009).

Religion in a Changing Society

Analyze

Like family life, religion is also changing in the United States. In the following sections, we look at two major aspects of change: changing affiliations over time and the process of secularization.

Changing Affiliation


A lot of change is going on within the world of religion. Within the United States, membership in established, mainstream churches such as the Episcopalian and Presbyterian denominations has fallen by almost 50 percent since 1960. During this period, as we shall see shortly, other religious categories (including both the “New Age” spiritual movement and conservative fundamentalist organizations) have increased in popularity.

Many people are moving from one religious organization to another. A survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008) shows that 44 percent of adults in the United States report that they have switched religious affiliation at some point in their lives. The pattern by which people are born and raised with a religious affiliation they keep throughout their lives is no longer the case for almost half of the U.S. population.

Such personal changes mean that religious organizations experience a pattern of people coming and going. Catholics, for example, have represented almost one-fourth of the U.S. adult population for some time. But this fairly stable statistic hides the fact that about one-third of all people raised Catholic have left the church. At the same time, about the same number of people—including many immigrants—have joined this church. A more extreme example is the Jehovah’s Witnesses: Two-thirds of the people raised in this church have left, but their numbers have been more than replaced by converts recruited by members who travel door-to-door spreading their message.

This pattern of religious “churn” means that there is an active and competitive marketplace of religious organizations in the United States. Perhaps one result of this active competition for members is that U.S. society remains among the most religious in the world. But it also reflects a loosening of ties to the religious organizations people are born into, so men and women now have more choice about their religious beliefs and affiliation.

 **Watch** the video “The History of Religion in America” on mysoclab.com

 **Read** “Abiding Faith” by Mark Chaves on mysoclab.com

June 4, Ticonderoga, New York. This upstate New York church is small—maybe forty people attend on a typical Sunday. These days, says longtime member Ed Keller, it’s tough for churches to survive because kids’ sports teams schedule practices and games on Sunday morning, Walmart and the other discount stores are open for shopping, and many dog-tired people are taking advantage of the chance to catch up on sleep. Our modern society, Ed claims, seems less than “church-friendly.”

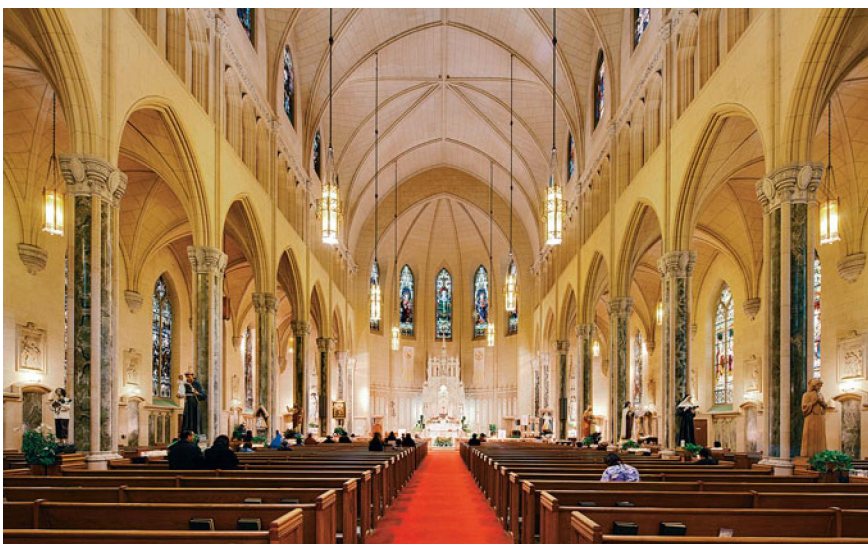
Secularization

Secularization is the historical decline in the importance of the supernatural and the sacred. Secularization (from a Latin word for “worldly,” meaning literally “of the present age”) is commonly associated with modern, technologically advanced societies in which science is the major way of understanding.

Today, we are more likely to experience the transitions of birth, illness, and death in the presence of physicians (people with scientific knowledge) than in the company of religious leaders (whose knowledge is based on faith). This shift alone suggests that religion’s relevance to our everyday lives has declined. Harvey Cox (1971:3) explains:

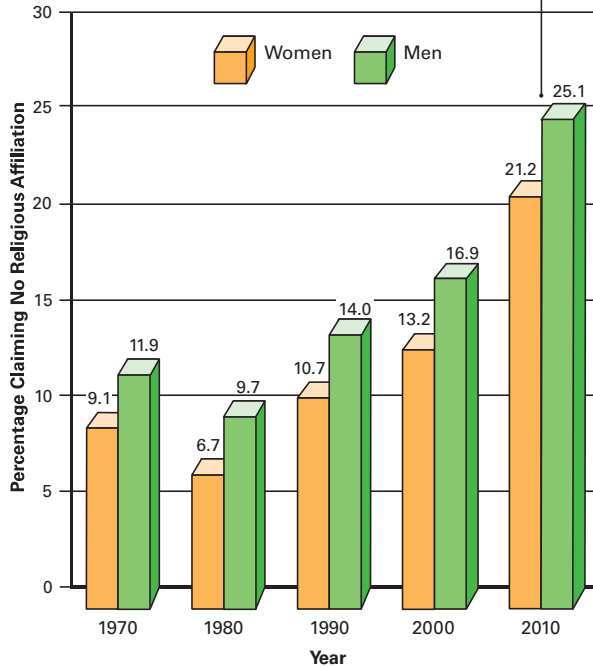
The world looks less and less to religious rules and rituals for its morality or its meanings. For some [people], religion provides a hobby, for others a mark of national or ethnic identification, for still others an aesthetic delight. For fewer and fewer does it provide an inclusive and commanding system of personal and cosmic values and explanations.

If Cox is right, should we expect religion to disappear someday? Some analysts point to survey data that show that the share of our population claiming no religious affiliation is increasing. As Figure 19–2 on page 456 shows, the share of first-year college students saying they have no religious preference has gone up, doubling between 1980 and 2010. This trend is mirrored in the larger adult population. Other analysts have pointed to the fact that large numbers of unaffiliated adults now can be found not only in the Pacific Northwest (a long-



In the last fifty years, traditional “mainstream” religious organizations have lost about half their membership. But during this same period, fundamentalist and new spiritual movements have increased their membership. From another angle, almost half of our people change their religious affiliation over their lifetimes.

- Although the share has been increasing, only about one-quarter of women and men on U.S. campuses claim no religious affiliation.



Student Snapshot

FIGURE 19–2 Religious Nonaffiliation among First-Year College Students, 1970–2010

The share of students claiming no religious affiliation has risen in recent decades.

Sources: Astin et al. (2002) and Pryor et al. (2011).

time secular region) but also in the Northeast, where Christianity in this country first took hold (Meacham, 2009).

But other sociologists are not so sure that religion is going away. They point out that the vast majority of people in the United States still say they believe in God, and as many people claim to pray each day as vote in national elections. In fact, they remind us, the share of people with a religious affiliation is actually higher today than it was back in 1850. Finally, more people may be switching their religious affiliation from one organization to another, and some may be leaving organized religion entirely, but their spiritual life may continue all the same (McClay, 2007; Greeley, 2008; Van Biema, 2008; Pryor et al., 2011).

Everyone sees religious change, but people disagree about whether it is good or bad. Conservatives tend to see any weakening of religion as a mark of moral decline. Progressives view secularization in more positive terms, as liberation from the dictatorial beliefs of the past, giving people greater choice about what to believe. Secularization has also helped bring some practices of many religious organizations, such as ordaining only men, into line with widespread support for greater gender equality.

According to the secularization thesis, religion should weaken in high-income nations as people enjoy higher living standards and greater security. A global perspective shows that this thesis holds for the countries of Western Europe, where most measures of religiosity

have declined and are now low. But the United States—the richest country of all—is an exception, a nation in which, for now at least, religion remains quite strong.

Court decisions have played a part in the secularization debate. In 1950, Congress established a “National Day of Prayer,” setting the first Thursday in May as a day for people “to turn to God in prayer and meditation.” In 2010, a federal district court in Wisconsin struck down this law as violating the principle of separation of church and state. A successful appeal to change this decision was made by the federal government in 2011, continuing the “National Day of Prayer” (Perez, 2010).

Another important event in the history of the secularization debate took place in 1963, when the U.S. Supreme Court banned prayer in public schools, claiming that school prayer violates the principle of separation between church and state. In recent years, however, religion has returned to many public schools; the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box takes a closer look at this trend.

Civil Religion

One expression of secularization in the world is the rise of what sociologist Robert Bellah (1975) calls **civil religion**, a quasi-religious loyalty linking individuals in a basically secular society. In other words, formal religion may lose power, but citizenship takes on religious qualities. Most people in the United States consider our way of life a force for moral good in the world. Many people also find religious qualities in political movements, whether liberal or conservative (Williams & Demerath, 1991).

Civil religion also involves a wide range of rituals, from singing the national anthem at major sporting events to waving the flag in public parades. At all such events, the U.S. flag serves as a sacred symbol of our national identity, and we expect people to treat it with respect.

“New Age” Seekers: Spirituality without Formal Religion

December 29, Machu Picchu, Peru. We are ending the first day exploring this magnificent city built high in the Andes Mountains by the Inca people. Lucas, a local shaman, or religious leader, is leading a group of twelve travelers in a ceremony of thanks. Leading us into a small stone building, he kneels and places offerings—corn and beans, sugar, plants of all colors, and even bits of gold and silver—on the dirt floor in front of him. These are gifts to Mother Earth. With the gifts, he adds his prayer for harmony, joy, and the will for all people to do good for others. His heartfelt words and the magical setting make the ceremony a very powerful experience.

In recent decades, more and more people have been seeking spiritual development outside of established religious organizations. This trend has led some analysts to suggest that the United States is becoming a *postdenominational society*. In simple terms, more people seem to be spiritual seekers, believing in a vital spiritual dimension to human existence that they pursue more or less separately from membership in any formal denomination.

What exactly is the difference between this so-called New Age focus on spirituality and a traditional concern with religion? As one analysis (Cimino & Lattin, 1999:62) puts it, spirituality is

the search for . . . a religion of the heart, not the head. It . . . downplays doctrine and dogma, and revels in direct experience of the divine—



It is late afternoon on a cloudy spring day in Minneapolis, and two dozen teenagers have come together to pray. They share warm smiles as they enter the room. As soon as everyone is seated, the prayers begin, with one voice following another. One girl prays for her brother; a boy prays for the success of an upcoming food drive; another asks God to comfort a favorite teacher who is having a tough time. Then they join their voices to pray for all the teachers at their school who are not Christians. Following the prayers, the young people sing Christian songs, discuss a Scripture lesson, and bring their meeting to a close with a group hug (Van Biema, 1998, 1999).

What is so unusual about this prayer meeting is that it is taking place in Room 133 of Patrick Henry High School, a public institution. In public schools from coast to coast, something of a religious revival is taking place as more and more students hold meetings like this one.

You would have to be at least fifty years old to remember when it was routine for public school students to start the day with Bible reading and prayer. In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that religion in the schools violated the constitutional ban on government-sponsored religion, and this decision soon put an end to all religious activities in public schools.

But from the moment the ruling was announced, critics charged that by supporting a wide range of other activities and clubs while banning religious activities, schools

were really being *antireligious*. Critics also point out that nowhere does the U.S. Constitution demand a separation of church and state; the First Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” So why can’t students meet to participate in religious activities if they choose to do so? In 1990, such thinking led the Supreme Court to hand down a new ruling, stating that religious groups can meet on school property as long as group membership is voluntary, the meetings are held outside regular class hours, and students rather than adults run them.



Although some U.S. colleges and universities are operated by religious organizations, most offer a secular education. At secular schools, do you think religious groups should be treated the same in terms of funding as any other groups? Why or why not?

In recent years, student religious groups have formed in perhaps one-fourth of all public schools. Evangelical Christian organizations such as First Priority and National Network of Youth are using the Internet as well as word of mouth in an effort to expand the place of religion in every public school across the country. However, opponents of school prayer worry that religious enthusiasm may lead some students to pressure others to join their groups. Such disagreements ensure that the debate over prayer in school will continue.

What Do You Think?

1. Do you think that religious clubs should have the same freedom to operate on school grounds as other organizations? Why or why not?
2. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that Congress must not establish any official religion and must also pass no law that would interfere with the free practice of religion. How would you apply this principle to the issue of prayer in school?
3. Schools support the mental and physical development of students; should they also support their spiritual development? If you were a member of the local school board, what would be your position on the place of religion in public schools?

whether it’s called the “holy spirit” or “divine consciousness” or “true self.” It’s practical and personal, more about stress reduction than salvation, more therapeutic than theological. It’s about feeling good rather than being good. It’s as much about the body as the soul.

Millions of people in the United States take part in New Age spirituality. Hank Wesselman (2001:39–42), an anthropologist and spiritual teacher, identifies five core values that define this approach:

1. **Seekers believe in a higher power.** There exists a higher power, a vital force that is within all things and all people. Each of us, then, is partly divine, just as the divine spirit exists in the world around us.
2. **Seekers believe we are all connected.** Everything and everyone is interconnected as part of a universal divine pattern that seekers call “spirit.”
3. **Seekers believe in a spirit world.** The physical world is not all there is; more important is the existence of a spiritual reality or “spirit world.”
4. **Seekers want to experience the spirit world.** Spiritual development means gaining the ability to experience the spirit world. Many seekers come to understand that helpers and teachers (traditionally called “angels”) dwell in the spirit world and can touch their lives.
5. **Seekers pursue transcendence.** Through various techniques (such as yoga, meditation, and prayer) people can gain an increasing ability to rise above the immediate physical world (the experience of “transcendence”), which seekers believe is the larger purpose of life.

From a traditional point of view, this New Age concern with spirituality may seem as much psychology as it is religion. Perhaps it would be fair to say that New Age spirituality combines elements of rationality (an emphasis on individualism as well as tolerance and pluralism) with a spiritual focus (searching for meaning beyond everyday concerns). It is this combination that makes New Age seeking particularly popular in the modern world (Tucker, 2002; Besecke, 2003, 2005).



In this outstanding example of U.S. folk art, Anna Bell Lee Washington's *Baptism 3* (1924) depicts the life-changing experience by which many people enter the Christian faith.

Religious Revival: “Good Old-Time Religion”

At the same time as New Age spirituality is becoming more popular, a great deal of change has been going on in the world of organized religion. Membership in established, mainstream churches has fallen in recent decades, and affiliation with other formal religious organizations, including the Mormons, the Seventh-Day Adventists, and especially Christian sects, has risen dramatically.

These opposing trends suggest that secularization may be self-limiting: As many churchlike organizations become more worldly, many people leave them in favor of more sectlike communities offering a more intense religious experience (Stark & Bainbridge, 1981; Jacquet & Jones, 1991; Iannaccone, 1994; Hout, Greeley, & Wilde, 2001).

Religious Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is a conservative religious doctrine that opposes intellectualism and worldly accommodation in favor of restoring traditional, otherworldly religion. In the United States, fundamentalism has made the greatest gains among Protestants. Southern Baptists, for example, are the largest Protestant religious community in the country. But fundamentalist groups have also grown among Roman Catholics, Jews, and Muslims.

In response to what they see as the growing influence of science and the weakening of the conventional family, religious fundamentalists defend what they call “traditional values.” As they see it, liberal churches are simply too open to compromise and change. Religious fundamentalism is distinctive in five ways (Hunter, 1983, 1985, 1987):

1. **Fundamentalists take the words of sacred texts literally.** Fundamentalists insist on a literal reading of sacred texts such as the Bible to counter what they see as excessive intellectualism among more liberal religious organizations. For example, fundamentalist Christians believe that God created the world in seven days precisely as described in the biblical book of Genesis.

2. **Fundamentalists reject religious pluralism.** Fundamentalists believe that tolerance and relativism water down personal faith. Therefore, they maintain that their religious beliefs are true and other beliefs are not.
3. **Fundamentalists pursue the personal experience of God’s presence.** In contrast to the worldliness and intellectualism of other religious organizations, fundamentalism seeks a return to “good old-time religion” and spiritual revival. To fundamentalist Christians, being “born again” and having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ should be evident in a person’s everyday life.
4. **Fundamentalists oppose “secular humanism.”** Fundamentalists think that accommodation to the changing world weakens religious faith. They reject “secular humanism,” our society’s tendency to look to scientific experts rather than to God for guidance about how we should live. There is nothing new in this tension between science and religion; it has existed for centuries, as the Sociology in Focus box explains.
5. **Many fundamentalists endorse conservative political goals.** Although fundamentalism tends to back away from worldly concerns, some fundamentalist leaders (including Christian fundamentalists Pat Robertson and Gary Bauer) have entered politics to oppose what they call the “liberal agenda,” which includes feminism and gay rights. Fundamentalists oppose abortion and gay marriage; they support the traditional two-parent family, seek a return of prayer in schools, and criticize the mass media for coloring stories with a liberal bias (Manza & Brooks, 1997; Thomma, 1997; Rozell, Wilcox, & Green, 1998).

Opponents regard fundamentalism as rigid, judgmental, and self-righteous. But many find in fundamentalism, with its greater religious certainty and emphasis on the emotional experience of God’s presence, an appealing alternative to the more intellectual, tolerant, and worldly “mainstream” denominations (Marquand, 1997).

Which religions are fundamentalist? In recent years, the world has become familiar with an extreme form of fundamentalist Islam that supports violence directed against Western culture. In the United States, the term is most correctly applied to conservative Christian organizations in the evangelical tradition, including Pentecostals, Southern Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Assemblies of God. Several national religious movements, including Promise Keepers (a men’s organization) and Chosen Women, have a fundamentalist orientation. In national surveys, 26 percent of U.S. adults describe their religious upbringing as “fundamentalist,” 39 percent claim a “moderate” upbringing, and 31 percent a “liberal” background (NORC, 2011:259).

The Electronic Church

In contrast to local congregations of years past, some religious organizations, especially fundamentalist ones, have become electronic churches featuring “prime-time preachers” (Hadden & Swain, 1981). Electronic religion has not spread around the world but is found only in the United States. It has made James Dobson, Joel Osteen, Franklin Graham, Robert Schuller, and others more famous than all but a few clergy of the past. About 5 percent of the national television audience (some 10 million people) regularly view religious television, and 20 percent (about 40 million) watch or listen to some religious programming every week (NORC, 2011:600).



Cihan: I think someday science will prove religion to be false.

Sophie: You better hope God doesn't prove *you* to be false.

Rasheed: Cool it, both of you. I don't think science and religion are talking about the same thing at all.

About 400 years ago, the Italian physicist and astronomer Galileo (1564–1642) helped launch the Scientific Revolution with a series of startling discoveries. Dropping objects from the Leaning Tower of Pisa, he discovered some of the laws of gravity; making his own telescope, he observed the stars and found that Earth orbited the sun, not the other way around.

For his trouble, Galileo was challenged by the Roman Catholic Church, which had preached for centuries that Earth stood motionless at the center of the universe. Galileo only made matters worse by responding that religious leaders had no business talking about matters of science. Before long, he found his work banned and himself under house arrest.

As Galileo's treatment shows, right from the start, science has had an uneasy relationship with religion. In the twentieth century, the two clashed again over the issue of creation. Charles Darwin's masterwork, *On the Origin of Species*, states that humanity evolved from lower forms of life over the course of a billion years. Yet this theory seems to fly in the face of the biblical account of creation found in Genesis, which states that "God created the heavens and the earth," introducing life on the third day and, on the fifth and sixth days, animal life, including human beings fashioned in God's own image.

Galileo would certainly have been an eager observer of the famous "Scopes monkey trial." In 1925, the state of Tennessee put a small-town science teacher named John Thomas Scopes on trial for teaching Darwinian evolution in the local high school. State

law forbade teaching "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible" and especially the idea that "man descended from a lower order of animals." Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. His conviction was reversed on appeal, so the case never reached the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Tennessee law stayed on the books until 1967. A year later, the Supreme Court, in *Epperson v. Arkansas*, struck down all such laws as unconstitutional government support of religion.

Today, almost four centuries after Galileo was silenced, many people still debate the apparently conflicting claims of science and religion. A third of U.S. adults believe that the Bible is the literal word of God, and many of them reject any scientific findings that run counter to it (NORC, 2011:295). In 2005, all eight members of the school board in Dover, Pennsylvania, were voted out of office after they took a stand that many townspeople saw as weakening the teaching of evolution; at the same time, the Kansas state school board ordered the teaching of evolution to include its weaknesses and limitations from a religious point of view ("Much Ado about Evolution," 2005). And in 2010, an Ohio middle school science teacher was dismissed from his job based on charges that he was teaching Christianity to his students (Boston, 2011).

But a middle ground is emerging: 43 percent of U.S. adults (and also many church leaders) say that the Bible is a book of truths inspired by God without being accurate in a literal, scientific sense. In addition,

a recent survey of U.S. scientists found that half of them claimed to believe in God or some form of higher power. So it seems that many people are able to embrace science and religion at the same time. The reason this is possible is that science and religion are two different ways of understanding, and they answer different questions. Both Galileo and Darwin devoted their lives to investigating *how* the natural world works. Yet only religion can address *why* we and the natural world exist in the first place.

This basic difference between science and religion helps explain why our nation is both the most scientific and among the most religious in the world. As one scientist noted, the mathematical odds that a cosmic "big bang" 12 billion years ago created the universe and led to the formation of life as we know it are even smaller than the chance of winning a state lottery twenty weeks in a row. Doesn't such a scientific fact suggest an intelligent and purposeful power in our creation? Can't a person be a religious believer and at the same time a scientific investigator?

In 1992, a Vatican commission concluded that the church's silencing of Galileo was wrong. Today, most scientific and religious leaders agree that science and religion each represent important, but very different, truths. Many also believe that in today's rush to scientific discovery, our world has never been more in need of the moral guidance provided by religion.

Join the Blog!

Why do you think some scientific people reject religious accounts of human creation? Why do some religious people reject scientific accounts? Do you think religion and science can coexist? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Sources: Gould (1981), Huchingson (1994), Applebome (1996), Greely (2008), and Pew Forum (2009).



Religion: Looking Ahead

Evaluate

The popularity of media ministries, the growth of fundamentalism, new forms of spirituality, and the connection of millions of people to mainstream churches show that religion will remain a major part of modern society for decades to come. High levels of immigration from many religious countries (in Latin America and elsewhere) should

intensify as well as diversify the religious character of U.S. society in the twenty-first century (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001).

The world is becoming more complex, and change seems to move more rapidly than our ability to make sense of it all. But rather than weakening religion, this process fires the religious imagination. As new technology gives us the power to change, extend, and even create life, we are faced with increasingly difficult moral questions. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, it is little wonder that many people look to their faith for guidance and hope.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

CHAPTER 19 Religion

How religious is our society?

Compared to most other high-income nations, the United States has a relatively high level of religious belief and activity. We consider ourselves to be a modern, secular society, yet as this chapter explains, most people claim to be religious and at least one-third of the population actually is. Civil religion is also evident in many aspects of our everyday lives. Look at the photos below: Can you point to elements of civil religion in each of these familiar situations?

Hint As this chapter explains, civil religion is a quasi-religious loyalty linking members of a mostly secular society. Important events that qualify as civil religion are not formally religious but are typically defined as holidays (a word derived from “holy days”); involve gatherings of family, neighbors, and friends; and include ritual activities and the sharing of specific foods and beverages.

On Thanksgiving Day, most families across the United States gather to share a special dinner and give thanks for their good fortune. What religious or quasi-religious elements are part of a typical Thanksgiving celebration?



What about the Fourth of July? How is this special day an example of civil religion?

In recent decades, football's Super Bowl has emerged as an important annual event. What elements of civil religion can you find in Super Bowl Sunday?



Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. Make a list of other events, activities, and pastimes that might be considered examples of civil religion. (Start off with Election Day; what about baseball?) Are there any local college events or rituals that might be included? In each case, explain the religious element that you see and the way the event or activity affects members of a community.
2. Is religion in the United States getting weaker? One way to answer this question is to use historical documents such as a local newspaper. Go to a local library and find a copy of the local newspaper from fifty or 100 years ago. Systematically go through the newspapers to compare the amount of attention to religious activity and issues then and now. What patterns do you discover?
3. Can you explain the difference between studying religion sociologically and holding personal religious beliefs? To learn more about this difference, go to the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” feature on mysoclab.com and read the additional material found there.

Religion: Basic Concepts

- **Religion** is a major social institution based on setting the *sacred* apart from the *profane*.
- Religion is grounded in *faith* rather than scientific evidence, and people express their religious beliefs through various rituals. **p. 442**

profane (p. 442) included as an ordinary element of everyday life

sacred (p. 442) set apart as extraordinary, inspiring awe and reverence

religion (p. 442) a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on recognizing the sacred

ritual (p. 442) formal, ceremonial behavior

faith (p. 442) belief based on conviction rather than on scientific evidence

Theories of Religion

The **structural functional approach** describes how people celebrate the power of society through religion. Emile Durkheim identified three major functions of religion:

- Religion unites people, promoting social cohesion.
- Religion encourages people to obey cultural norms, promoting conformity.
- Religion gives meaning and purpose to life. **p. 443**

The **symbolic-interaction approach** explains that people use religion to give everyday life sacred meaning.

- People create rituals that separate the sacred from the profane.
- Peter Berger claimed that people are especially likely to seek religious meaning when faced with life's uncertainties and disruptions. **pp. 443–44**

The **social-conflict approach** highlights religion's support of social inequality.

- Karl Marx claimed that religion justifies the status quo and diverts people's attention from social injustice.
- In this way, religion discourages change toward a more just and equal society.
- Religion is also linked to gender inequality:
The world's major religions are all patriarchal.

p. 444

totem (p. 442) an object in the natural world collectively defined as sacred

Religion and Social Change

- Max Weber argued, in opposition to Marx, that religion can encourage social change. He showed how Calvinism became "disenchanted," leading to a profane "Protestant work ethic" that contributed to the rise of industrial capitalism.
- **Liberation theology**, a fusion of Christian principles and political activism, tries to encourage social change. **pp. 444–45**

liberation theology (p. 445) the combining of Christian principles with political activism, often Marxist in character

Types of Religious Organizations

Churches are religious organizations well integrated into their society. Churches fall into two categories: *state churches* (examples: the Anglican Church in England and Islam in Morocco), and *denominations* (examples: Christian denominations such as Baptists and Lutherans, as well as various categories of Judaism, Islam, and other traditions). **p. 446**

Sects are the result of religious division. They are marked by charismatic leadership and members' suspicion of the larger society. **pp. 446–47**

Cults are religious organizations based on new and unconventional beliefs and practices. **p. 447**

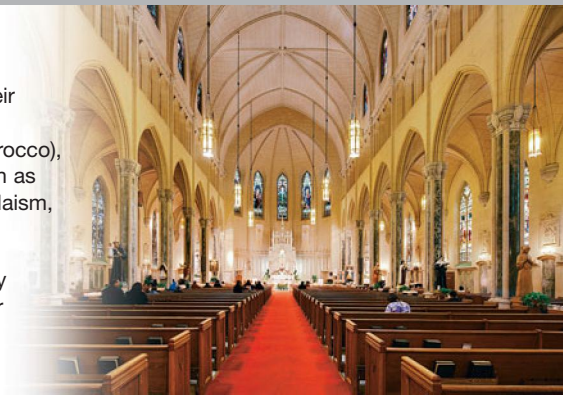
Sociologists categorize religious organizations in the United States along a continuum, with churches at one end and sects at the other.

Churches

- try to appeal to everyone
- have a highly formal style of worship
- formally train and ordain leaders
- are long-established and organizationally stable
- attract members of high social standing

Sects

- hold rigid religious convictions
- have a spontaneous and emotional style of worship
- follow highly charismatic leaders
- form as breakaway groups and are less stable
- attract members who are social outsiders



church (p. 446) a type of religious organization that is well integrated into the larger society

state church (p. 446) a church formally allied with the state

denomination (p. 446) a church, independent of the state, that recognizes religious pluralism

sect (p. 446) a type of religious organization that stands apart from the larger society

charisma (p. 447) extraordinary personal qualities that can infuse people with emotion and turn them into followers

cult (p. 447) a religious organization that is largely outside a society's cultural traditions

Religion in History

- Hunting and gathering societies practiced **animism**, viewing elements of the natural world as spiritual forces.
- Belief in a single divine power began in pastoral and horticultural societies.
- Organized religion gained importance in agrarian societies.
- In industrial societies, scientific knowledge explains *how* the world works, but people look to religion to answer questions about *why* the world exists. **pp. 447–48**



animism (p. 447) the belief that elements of the natural world are conscious life forms that affect humanity

World Religions

Western Religions

Christianity

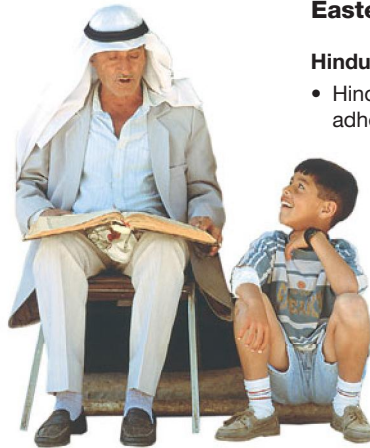
- Christianity is the most widespread religion, with 2 billion followers—almost one-fourth of the world’s people.
- Christianity began as a cult built on the personal charisma of Jesus of Nazareth; Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God and follow his teachings. **p. 448**

Islam

- Islam has about 1.6 billion followers, who are known as Muslims—almost one-fifth of the world’s people.
- Muslims follow the word of God as revealed to the prophet Muhammad and written in the Qur’an, the sacred text of Islam. **pp. 448–50**

Judaism

- Judaism’s 15 million followers are mainly in Israel and the United States.
- Jewish belief rests on the covenant between God and his chosen people, embodied in the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament of the Bible. **p. 450**



Eastern Religions

Hinduism

- Hinduism is the oldest world religion and today has about 870 million adherents.
 - Hindus see God as a universal moral force rather than a specific being and believe in the principles of *dharma* (moral responsibilities) and *karma* (the spiritual progress of the human soul). **pp. 450–51**

Buddhism

- Buddhists number about 380 million people.
 - Buddhist teachings are similar to Hindu beliefs, but Buddhism is based on the life of one person, Siddhartha Gautama, who taught the use of meditation as a way to move beyond selfish desires to achieve *nirvana*, a state of enlightenment and peace. **pp. 451–52**

Confucianism

- Confucianism was the state church of China until the 1949 Communist revolution repressed religious expression. It is still strongly linked to Chinese culture.
- Confucianism teaches *jen*, or “humaneness,” meaning that people must place moral principles above self-interest. Layers of moral obligations unite society as a whole. **p. 452**

monotheism (p. 448) belief in a single divine power

polytheism (p. 448) belief in many gods

Religion in the United States

The United States is one of the most religious and religiously diverse nations. How researchers operationalize “religiosity” affects how “religious” our people seem to be:

- 81% of adults identify with a religion
- 60% claim to belong to a religious organization
- 58% profess a firm belief in God
- 58% of adults say they pray at least once a day
- just 30% say they attend religious services weekly or almost weekly **pp. 452–53**

✳️ **Explore the Map** on [mysoclab.com](#)

Religious affiliation is tied to *social class*, *ethnicity*, and *race*:

- On average, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Jews enjoy high standing; lower social standing is typical of Baptists, Lutherans, and members of sects.
- Religion is often linked to ethnic background because people came to the United States from countries that have or had a major religion.
- Transported to this country in slave ships, most Africans became Christians, but they blended Christian beliefs with elements of African religions they brought with them. **pp. 453–55**

religiosity (p. 453) the importance of religion in a person’s life

Religion in a Changing Society

- **Secularization** is a decline in the importance of the supernatural and sacred.
- In the United States, while some indicators of religiosity (like membership in mainstream churches) have declined, others (such as membership in sects) have increased. **pp. 455–56**

👁️ **Watch the Video** on [mysoclab.com](#)

📖 **Read the Document** on [mysoclab.com](#)

- Today, **civil religion** takes the form of a quasi-religious patriotism that ties people to their society.
- *Spiritual seekers* are part of the New Age movement, which pursues spiritual development outside conventional religious organizations.
- **Fundamentalism** opposes religious accommodation to the world, interprets religious texts literally, and rejects religious diversity. **pp. 456–58**

secularization (p. 455) the historical decline in the importance of the supernatural and the sacred

civil religion (p. 456) a quasi-religious loyalty linking individuals in a basically secular society

fundamentalism (p. 458) a conservative religious doctrine that opposes intellectualism and worldly accommodation in favor of restoring traditional, otherworldly religion