



CHAPTER 13



Religious Groups and Systems

SYNOPSIS

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The Organization of Religion

- Churches, Sects, and Cults

Theories of Religion

- A Functionalist Approach
- A Conflict Approach

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Throughout the world, people meditate, pray, join communes, worry about “being saved,” partake in rituals, bow to statues, burn incense, chant, offer sacrifices, torture themselves, and proclaim their allegiance to many gods or to a particular god. Anthropologists suggest that events, acts, and beliefs such as these have been part of every society throughout history. Together, these behaviors constitute a society’s religious system.

Focal Point

POLITICAL ISLAM: THE CASE OF SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is a theocratic monarchy with Islam, as practiced by Sunni Muslims, as the official religion. The ruler holds executive, legislative, judicial, and religious powers. He has taken as his official title the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The constitution of Saudi Arabia is the Qur'an and the Sunna, and while the power of the king is great, it is not absolute; rather, his power is constrained by the strictures of Islam. The ruler of Saudi Arabia remains one of the most influential leaders on earth, with 16% of the world's proven oil reserves under his control as of 2015 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017a).

The Saudi government has some of the strictest religious laws in the world. What's more, the Saudi government has no legal protection for religious freedom. It is forbidden to engage in non-Islamic worship in public, and noncitizen legal residents have to carry identity cards indicating whether they're Muslim or non-Muslim (U.S. State Department, 2019).

The government has censored religious content in the media, including blocking some websites, and prohibits criticism of Islam. The list of sites banned by the Saudi government is unavailable to the public, but their use of this tactic has been described as aggressive (Freedom on the Net, 2019). Such bans have also affected media outlets like *Al Hayat*, a major pan-Arab newspaper that has been critical of the government (BBC News, 2007). Journalists in Saudi Arabia have been imprisoned or even killed for writing about topics banned by the government. In a recent high-profile case, journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed by agents of the Saudi government inside the Saudi consulate in Turkey in October of 2018. Previously, in 2003, Khashoggi had been fired from his position as editor of *Al Watan* because the daily newspaper had published articles that were critical of the conservative Wahhabi religious establishment. Prior to his death, Khashoggi had been in self-imposed exile in the US where he continued to criticize the policies of Prince Mohammed of Saudi Arabia.

The legal system in Saudi Arabia is not derived from a common law system. Like other aspects of Saudi government, the judicial system derives from the Qur'an and Sunna. The Council of Senior Scholars (CSS)—comprising 21 Sunni religious scholars and jurists chosen at the king's discretion—issues fatwas, reports to the king, and is responsible for other ordinances and royal laws. Saudi judges do not follow legal precedent in their rulings, and there is no comprehensive criminal code, so rulings and sentences vary widely. While the CSS has members from all Sunni schools, the majority of its members are from the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. No Shia members are included in the CSS (U.S. State Department, 2019).

Factors like the plaintiff's religious affiliation and sex can influence rulings. In the case of accidental death or injury, when a male plaintiff is Jewish or Christian, he is awarded half of what a Muslim male would receive under the same circumstances. Other non-Muslims only receive 1/16th of that to which a male Muslim would be entitled (U.S. State Department, 2019).

In Saudi Arabia, education also emphasizes Islam. Accordingly, all students in public schools receive compulsory instruction on Sunni Islam according to the Hanbali School of jurisprudence. Private schools must also follow the religious curriculum set by the government, and even private international schools must teach all Saudi or Muslim students an Islamic studies course. Non-Muslim, non-Saudi students might attend an Islamic civilization course or have free time instead. Private international schools may teach courses on other religions or civilizations (U.S. State Department, 2019).

To enforce laws related to morality and public behavior, the Saudi government utilizes a corps of "religious police" called the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), also sometimes known as the *mutaween*. In a particularly tragic case in 2002, the CPVPV hindered attempts at rescuing female students from a burning building because they weren't wearing proper Islamic dress. Of the 800 students in the building, 15 died as a result (BBC News, 2002). In 2019, two sisters using the aliases Reem and Rawan gave a heart-breaking account of their experiences living as women in Saudi Arabia. They described being abused by their father and brothers and said that "living in Saudi for a woman in a strict family, it's like waiting around to die." (Barron, 2019). The sisters fled their family with the intention of claiming asylum in Australia but were intercepted in Hong Kong by officials from the Saudi consulate. The sisters then entered Hong Kong as visitors. Both girls have publicly renounced Islam—an action that is punishable by the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. Following their time in Hong Kong, they were eventually able to secure emergency visas to an undisclosed country where they hope to live a "normal life."

Understanding political Islam in Saudi Arabia is relevant to sociology and this chapter because it underscores how religion can influence society in profound and different ways. The United States, for instance, has no official religion while the Saudis are officially Sunni Muslims. The US constitution protects religious freedom. The Saudi constitution is the Qur'an, a religious text, and there is no legal protection for freedom of religion. The point is that religion is not only a simple matter of spirituality and personal belief but also a multifaceted social force with major implications for society.



(Left image iStock; center image Shutterstock; right image Getty Images)

Religion has traditionally been the anchor of identity for human beings. Religious beliefs have been a way to give meaning to life, and the experiences associated with them provide personal gratification as well as a release from the frustrations and anxieties of daily life. Ceremonies, formal acts, or rituals have been a core part of personal identity and social cohesion. These ceremonies have provided ways to rejoice about the birth of an infant, initiate a young person into adult society, celebrate a new marriage, bury the dead, and fortify the belief that life goes on. Most of these ceremonies are linked to religion.

It may make you uneasy to examine these events and rituals objectively, but the goal of sociological investigations of religion is not to criticize anyone's faith or to compare the validity of different religions. Sociologists are interested, rather, in studying how religion is organized and how it affects the members of a given society. They study how people organize in groups based on their religious beliefs and how these belief systems affect their behavior in other areas, such as family life and economic achievement. Sociologists also examine the kinds of belief systems developed by people in different circumstances and how religious beliefs change over time as external circumstances change.

13.1 A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RELIGION

13.1a What Is Religion?

One of the earliest writers on the sociology of religion was the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim defined *religion* as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church” (p. 46).

In this definition, Durkheim identified several elements that he believed to be common to all religions. He viewed the first element, *a system of beliefs and practices*, as the cultural component of religion. The *beliefs* are states of opinion and the practices, which Durkheim termed “rites,” are modes of action. These beliefs and practices exist within a social context, consistent with the values and norms of the culture.

The second element, *a community or church*, he saw as the social organizational component. A church, in this sense, is not a building or even a local group that gathers together to worship. Rather, it is a collective of people who share similar beliefs and practices. He claimed that in all history, there has not been a single religion without a community of believers. Sometimes, this community is strictly national. Such a community may be directed by a corps of priests or it may lack any official directing body. Regardless, it always has a definite group at its foundation. Even cults satisfy this condition. The community translates beliefs and practices into something shared, which led Durkheim to think of these first two elements—the cultural and social components of religion—as being linked. Contemporary sociologists of religion do recognize a functional difference between the two, in that a person may accept a set of religious beliefs without being affiliated with a particular church.

The third element, *sacred things*, he saw as existing only in relation to the profane. The **profane** is the realm of the everyday world: food, clothes, work, play, or anything generally considered mundane and unspiritual. In contrast, the **sacred** consists of objects or ideas that are treated with reverence and awe: an altar, bible, prayer, or rosary is sacred. A hamburger, rock song, football, or sociology text is profane. However,



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A man holds a rosary. Émile Durkheim believed that sacredness is not a property inherent in an object—for example, a rosary, an altar, or a bible—but rather that it exists in the mind of the beholder.

Durkheim believed that anything could become sacred. Sacredness is not a property inherent in an object. It exists in the mind of the beholder. Thus, a tree, a pebble, a ring, a scarf worn by Elvis Presley, or a baseball bat used by Babe Ruth may be considered sacred.

Durkheim (1912) hypothesized that religion develops out of group experiences as primitive tribes come to believe that feelings about sacredness are derived from some supernatural power. As people perform certain rituals, they develop feelings of awe, which reinforce the moral norms of society. In other words, when they no longer feel in awe of moral norms, society is in a state of anomie, without norms. Informal social control is possible largely because people have strong feelings that they should or should not do certain things. When they no longer have such feelings, social control breaks

down. We see an example of this in some of our cities, where church doors are locked to prevent robberies. In many societies, nobody steals from churches because they believe they will be punished or suffer some form of retribution from their god(s).

Other sociologists present somewhat different views of religion, but most would agree that a **religion** has the following elements:

1. things considered sacred, such as gods, spirits, special persons, or any object or thought defined as being sacred;
2. a group or community of believers who make religion a social, as well as a personal, experience because members of a religion share goals, norms, and beliefs;
3. a set of rituals, ceremonies, or behaviors that take on religious meaning when they express a relationship to the sacred, such as in Catholic ceremonies, when bread and wine are sacred components of communion as the body and the blood of Christ;
4. a set of beliefs—such as a creed, doctrine, or holy book—which may define things like what is to be emphasized, how people should relate to society, or what happens to people after their death;
5. and a form of organization that reinforces the sacred, unites the community of believers, carries out the rituals, teaches the creeds and doctrines, initiates new members, and so on.

Profane

That which belongs to the realm of the everyday world; anything considered mundane and unspiritual

Sacred

Objects and ideas that are treated with reverence and awe

Religion

An organized community of believers who hold certain things sacred and follow a set of beliefs and engage in ceremonies or special behaviors related to what is sacred

Animism

The religious belief that spirits inhabit virtually everything in nature and control all aspects of life and destiny

13.2 THE ORGANIZATION OF RELIGION

People have tried to understand the world around them throughout history, but we do not know exactly how or why they began to believe in supernatural beings or powers. Societies such as the San communities of Africa, who rely on hunting and gathering as their primary means of subsistence, often explain things in naturalistic terms. This type of religion is known as **animism**, which is the belief that spirits inhabit virtually everything in nature—rocks, trees, lakes, animals, and humans alike—and that these spirits influence all aspects of life and destiny. Sometimes they help, perhaps causing an arrow

to hit its mark. At other times, they are harmful, as when they make a child get sick and die. Specific rituals or behaviors, however, can sometimes influence these spirits, and pleasing them results in favorable treatment.

Some groups, such as the Jívaro of Ecuador, practice a form of religion known as **shamanism**, which revolves around the belief that certain individuals, called “shamans,” have special skills or knowledge that allow them to influence the spirits that in turn influence processes and events in the environment. Shamans (spiritual leaders), most of whom are men, are called upon to heal the sick and wounded, to make hunting expeditions successful, to protect the group against evil spirits, and to generally ensure the group’s well-being. Shamans receive their power through ecstatic experiences, which might originate from a psychotic episode, the use of a hallucinogen such as peyote, or deprivation such as fasting or lack of sleep. More than 10 million people in the world are identified as shamanists (Kurian, 2013). Many of them are located in Asia.

Within the United States, the shaman is a very powerful spiritual leader among a number of the 573 American Indian tribes recognized by the federal government. According to Joe Therrien from Michigan—a Chippewa leader, sociologist, and friend of one of the authors of this textbook—this form of religion is more ceremonial than a daily practice. He cautions us that we should not be misled into believing that all American Indians follow the shaman or tribal spiritual leader. Most (71%) are urban and most (66%) are Christian. Some have been involved in the Native American Church movement, started in the 19th century, which serves as a compromise between traditional ceremonial practices and Christian beliefs.

A third form of religion among selected groups is **totemism**, the worship of plants, animals, or other natural objects that the group has deemed to be sacred. The totem itself is the plant or animal, which is believed to be ancestrally related to a person, tribe, or clan. Totems usually represent something important to the community, such as a food source or a dangerous predator, and the people often wear costumes and perform dances to mimic the totem object. Most readers are probably familiar with the totem poles used by American Indians in Ketchikan, Alaska, often depicted in photographs, illustrations, or artifacts purchased by tourists. These tall posts, carved or painted with totemic symbols, were erected for a variety of reasons, sometimes as a memorial to the dead. While totem poles have been used by some cultures, others use different symbolic representations of totemic beliefs. Totemism is still practiced today by some New Guinea tribes and by Australian indigenous populations. Durkheim believed that totemism was one of the earliest forms of religion and that other forms of religious organization evolved from it.

Religions may be organized in terms of the number of gods their adherents worship. **Polytheism** is belief in and worship of more than one god. Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. Monotheism, on the other hand, is belief in only one god. **Monotheism** is familiar to most people in the US because the two major religions in this country—Christianity and Judaism—are monotheistic.

Less common in the US are such major religions as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and Taoism. These religions focus more on moral, ethical, or philosophical principles than belief in a god or gods (although Buddhism does not prohibit such beliefs and Shintoism does involve gods and goddesses). These religions share an emphasis on harmony and spiritual excellence. Some groups, such as the Confucianists, have no priesthood.



Totems such as these usually represent something important to the community. It is believed that totemism was one of the earliest forms of religion.

Shamanism

The religious belief that certain people (shamans) have special charm, skill, or knowledge in influencing spirits

Totemism

The worship of plants, animals, and other natural objects as gods and ancestors

Polytheism

The belief in and worship of more than one god

Monotheism

The belief in and worship of only one god

13.2a Churches, Sects, and Cults

Religious systems differ in many ways, and sociologists have devised numerous ways for classifying them. We have already seen how Durkheim divided the world into the sacred and the profane. We have also seen how the religious practices of some societies have been described in terms of animism, shamanism, and totemism. Can Christianity be understood in terms of the profane or of shamanism? Most contemporary religious scholars think not. Thus, another scheme of classification is used—that of churches, sects, and cults. This scheme focuses directly on the relationship between the type of religious organization and the world surrounding it.

Max Weber (1930) was one of the first sociologists to clarify the interrelationships between people's beliefs and their surroundings. In his classic essay, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he argued that capitalism would not have been possible without Protestantism because Protestantism stressed the importance of work as an end in itself, of personal frugality, and of worldly success as a means of confirming one's salvation and evidence of God's favor. In dealing with this relationship between religion and the economy, he identified two major types of religious leaders. One, the **priest**, owes authority to the power of the office. By contrast, the **prophet** holds authority on the basis of charismatic qualities. Priestly and prophetic leaders are often in conflict, for the priest defends and represents the institution or society in question and supports the status quo. The prophet, not bound to a given institution, is more likely to criticize both the institutions and the general society.

This contrast led Weber to suggest that different sectors of society would develop different types of organizations to accompany their different belief systems. The ruling class or leaders, the better educated, and the wealthier would need a more formalized type of religion that accepts modern science and the existing social world. The laboring class, the less educated, and the poor would need a type of religion that emphasizes another world or life and an emotional, spontaneous experience to console them regarding their deprivation in this life.

A German theologian and colleague of Weber, Ernst Troeltsch (1931), continued this line of thinking. Troeltsch divided religions into three categories: mysticism, churches, and sects. **Mysticism** is the belief that spiritual or divine truths come to us through intuition and meditation, not through the use of reason or the ordinary range of human experiences and senses. Mystics, persons who believe in mysticism, practice their beliefs outside of organized religion. They often pose problems for other religious groups because they purport to be in direct contact with divine power. Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), a Christian mystic, defined mysticism in the following way: “Mysticism, according to its historical and psychological definitions, is the direct intuition or experience of God; a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or less degree, such a direct experience—one whose religion and life are centered, not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which the person regards as first-hand personal knowledge” (Underhill, 2002, pp. 9–10).

The church and the sect are differentiated in many ways; in particular, their relationships with the world around them are quite different (see Table 13–1). A **church** is an institutionalized organization of people who share common religious beliefs. The membership of churches is mostly stable. They typically have formal bureaucratic structures with trained clergy and other officials, and they are closely linked to the larger society and seek to work within it. Most of the religious organizations in the United States would be considered churches.

Two categories of churches that are sometimes differentiated are the **ecclesia** and the *denomination*. In sociology, an *ecclesia* is a nationally recognized or official state religion that includes all or most of the members of society. As a state church, it accepts state support and sanctions the basic cultural values and norms of the society. Sometimes, it administers the educational system as well. The Church of England in Great Britain and the Lutheran churches in the Scandinavian countries are two contemporary examples of

Priests

Religious leaders who owe their authority to the power of their office

Prophets

Religious leaders who have authority on the basis of their charismatic qualities

Mysticism

The belief that spiritual or divine truths come to us through intuition and meditation, not through the use of reason or via the ordinary range of human experiences and senses

Church

An institutionalized organization of people who share common religious beliefs

Ecclesia

An official state religion that includes all or most members of society

Table 13-1 Characteristics of Churches, Sects, and Cults

Characteristics	Church	Sect	Cult
Membership based on:	Faith	Conversion	Emotional commitment
Membership is:	Inclusive, regional/national boundaries	Closely guarded and protected	Closely guarded and protected
Size is:	Large	Small	Small
Class/wealth is:	Middle/higher	Lower, limited	Varies by recruit
Organization is:	Bureaucratic	Informal organization of faithful	Loose, organization around leader
Authority is:	Traditional	Charismatic	Charismatic
Emphasis is on:	Brother/sisterhood of all humanity	The select and faithful	New and unusual lifestyle
Clergy are:	Highly trained, professional	Deemphasized, high lay participation	Divinely chosen, individualized
Salvation is through:	Grace of God	Moral purity and being born again	Adherence to leader/cult demands
Relationship to state is:	Compromising, closely aligned	Hostile	Ignored and avoided
Theology is:	Modernistic	Fundamentalistic	Innovative, unique, pathbreaking
Worship is:	Formal, orderly	Informal and spontaneous	Innovative, often radical

national churches. The contemporary power of these churches, however, is not as great as was the power of the Roman Catholic Church in Western Europe during the Middle Ages or even its power today in Spain, Italy, and many Latin American countries.

Churches that are not officially linked to state or national governments are termed **denominations**. They are common in the United States, where there is no state religion. Not only are denominations independent of the state but they may in fact be at odds with state positions on war, abortion, taxes, pornography, alcohol, equal rights, and other issues, and there are hundreds of denominations among Christians alone in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau lists approximately 80 denominations with memberships of 60,000 or more (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), but the list would probably exceed several hundred if all of the small or independent denominations were added.

Whereas churches (ecclesia and denominations) are well established and highly institutionalized, **sects** are small groups that have broken away from a parent church and that call for a return to the old ways. They follow rigid doctrines and emphasize fundamentalist teachings. **Fundamentalism** is the belief that scripture is to be taken literally and followed strictly. While members of sects are typically fundamentalist, not all fundamentalists belong to sects. Among Christians, only about 24% of the United States population (Saad, 2017) are affiliated with institutionalized churches that take very conservative views toward social issues. Different definitions of fundamentalism will yield different estimates of how many fundamentalists there are. Conservatively estimated, there are at least 30 million Christian fundamentalists in the United States alone. Like fundamentalist groups, evangelical groups maintain that the Bible is the only rule of faith. Evangelicals preach that salvation comes through faith as described in the four New Testament Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Pentecostal groups, usually both evangelical and fundamentalist, participate in highly emotional forms of worship. Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism are among the most successful religious movements of the 20th century.

Denominations

Well-established and highly institutionalized churches

Sects

Religious groups that have broken away from a parent church, follow rigid doctrines and fundamentalist teachings, and emphasize "otherworldly" rewards, rejecting or deemphasizing contemporary society

Fundamentalism

The belief that scripture is to be taken literally and followed strictly

Fundamentalist beliefs often put them at odds with other groups. The creationism controversy, for example, stems from the fundamentalist position that the world was literally created in 6 days. Sect groups follow this type of literal interpretation of the Bible, although different groups focus their attention on different Bible scriptures. Their religious services often involve extensive member participation with an emphasis on emotional expression.

Although most sects are short-lived, some acquire a stable membership and a formal organizational structure and gradually become denominations. There have been many sects in the United States throughout history; some of these, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Adventists, might now be considered by some to be denominations. Some

characteristics of churches, sects, and cults are shown in Table 13–1. You may want to place your religious group or affiliation, if any, on this church-sect-cult continuum.

Another form, some would say “extreme form,” of religious organization is the **cult**—the most loosely organized and most temporary of all religious groups. Unlike sects, cults (often under the direction of a charismatic leader) call for a radical lifestyle. Jim Jones and Father Divine, for example, believed that they were divinely chosen to lead humanity. Examples of modern cult leaders include Ryuho Okawa, founder of Happy Science, and Keith Raniere of NXIVM. In cults, the emphasis is on the individual rather than on society. Because



Jim Jones was the founder of the cult the Peoples Temple in Jonestown, Guyana.

Jim Jones in front of the International Hotel by Nancy Wong, under a CC by SA 3.0 license at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jim_Jones_in_front_of_the_International_Hotel.jpg

Cult

Extreme form of religious organization that calls for a totally new and unique lifestyle, often under the direction of a charismatic leader

cults operate outside the mainstream of society and are focused around one leader or prophet, their existence depends on the life and health of their leader. In some cases, they have given up their more radical teachings and have become churches, accepting more mainstream beliefs. The Seventh-Day Adventists have their origins in a cult group, Millerism, that proclaimed the end of the world on a specific date; when that date passed, the group maintained many of their other beliefs. Today, they are a church with a trained clergy, a stable membership, and a formal organizational structure.

thinking SOCIOLOGICALLY

Select your own religion or one with which you are well familiar. Identify the following for this religion: (a) things that are considered sacred, (b) selected characteristics of the membership or its adherents, (c) selected rituals or ceremonies in which the adherents participate, (d) key beliefs of the religion, and (e) the form of social organization that exists.

13.3 THEORIES OF RELIGION

13.3a A Functionalist Approach

The universality of religion suggests to the functionalist that religion is a requirement of group life and that it serves both manifest and latent functions. Durkheim's classic study of religion, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), answered two basic questions: (1) What is religion? (2) What are the functions of religion for human society? In answering the first question, he noted that religion is a unified system of beliefs

and practices relative to sacred things. He answered the second question by focusing on religion's social function of promoting solidarity within a society.

Unlike most people today, who view religion as primarily a private and personal experience, a functionalist approach to religion contends that the primary function of religion is to *preserve and solidify society*. Because worship, God, and society are viewed as inseparable, this approach pays little attention to the other functions of religion. This perspective assumes that religion is the central focus for integrating the social system. By developing the awe that members of society feel for moral norms, religion functions to hold society together. This social solidarity is developed through rituals such as church or synagogue services, baptisms, bar (or bat) mitzvahs, Christmas caroling and gift giving, and the multitude of observances and ceremonies practiced by specific religious groups.

A second function, related to promoting social solidarity, is to *create a community of believers*. A religion provides a system of beliefs around which people may gather to belong to something greater than themselves and to have their personal beliefs reinforced by the group and its rituals. Those who share a common ideology develop a collective identity and a sense of fellowship.

A third function is to *provide social control*. Religion reinforces social norms, providing sanctions for violations of norms and reinforcing basic values, such as property rights and respect for others. Society's existence depends on its members' willingness to abide by folkways and mores and to interact with one another in a spirit of cooperation and trust.

This list of *manifest functions* performed by religion could be continued. Religion serves to *provide answers to ultimate questions*. Why are we here? Is there a supreme being? What happens after death? Religions provide systems of belief based on the faith that life has a purpose and that someone or something is in control of the universe. They make the world seem comprehensible, often by attributing familiar, human motives to supernatural forces. In addition, religion also provides *rites of passage*, *ceremonies*, and *rituals* designed to give sacred meaning and a social significance to birth, the attainment of adulthood, marriage, death, and other momentous events.

Religion also helps to *reconcile people to hardship*. All societies have inequality, poverty, and oppression, and everyone experiences pain, crises, prejudice, and sorrow. By belonging to a religion, people may come to feel that they are special in some way—that they will be rewarded in the future for having suffered today. Many religions call for caring, mercy, charity, kindness, and other prosocial behaviors. They may provide moral, ethical, social, and even financial support to those in need.

Religion can also *cultivate social change*. Many religious groups criticize social injustice, existing social morality, and community or government actions. Some take action to change unfavorable conditions. The churches have been a major force in the civil rights movement, for example. Many protests against the Vietnam War were a result of religious teachings about love and peace. Religious groups opposed to social reforms have mounted other major protests, in opposition to the right to have an abortion, equal rights for LGBTQ+ people, and the women's rights movement.

Some *latent functions* of religion concern mate selection, experience in public speaking, and psychic rewards for donating funds or labor to worthy causes. Other groups and systems may be able to fulfill some of these manifest or latent functions, but many social scientists argue that particular functions provided by religion cannot be adequately performed by other groups. That said, other social scientists argue that some functions of religion are not needed by society at all.



Durkheim believed religion served to preserve and solidify society through rituals such as baptisms, church services, and gift giving. He also believed that those who share a common ideology develop a collective identity and a sense of fellowship.

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A functionalist approach to religion reminds us that while it performs many basic functions for society and individuals, it is likely to have dysfunctions as well. If it serves to preserve and solidify society, to create a community of believers, to reinforce social norms, and to reconcile people to hardship, it also can serve to divide society, create bias against the nonbeliever, exclude nonmembers of the group, and maintain the status quo. Religion can be dysfunctional in forcing people to accept inequities and in inhibiting its members from acting to change them. It can be dysfunctional in convincing its followers to reject this world for a future life in which rewards are guaranteed, and it can often inhibit the search for and acceptance of new truths, new ideas, and additional knowledge.

Examples of religion as both a source of integration and conflict are evident throughout the world. In Iran, the religious teachings of Islam formed the basis for convincing young people that it was honorable to die for their country in their war with Iraq. In Northern Ireland, protests and violence abound between Catholics and Protestants. In the Middle East, the conflicts between Jews and Muslims are intense. In India and Pakistan, caste and class conflicts linked to religious traditions cause death and destruction. In many countries (particularly, but not exclusively, in Muslim countries), Jews are persecuted. Wars can be justified in the name of religion. As mentioned elsewhere, to have in-groups is to have out-groups. To believe that there is only one “Truth” is to reject all ideas that challenge prejudices.

APPLYING THE FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH TO RELIGION

Some useful insights provided by the functionalist approach are that religion serves a variety of essential social functions and that an understanding of religion is linked to an understanding of an entire culture. For example, can we understand Israel without knowing about Judaism, Saudi Arabia without knowing about Islam, or the United States without knowing about Christianity? Judeo-Christian religions penetrate most of our lives—even though we may be unaware of it and may not subscribe to any particular religion. This is exemplified even by our legal tender, which has featured the phrase “In God We Trust” since the 1950s. Our entire economic system is imbued with religious overtones.

The knowledge that religion serves basic social functions may be useful in a number of careers. Notably, people whose jobs lead them to deal with foreign cultures might benefit from a thorough understanding of the major religions in those countries. Consider, for example, the difficulties that politicians, diplomats, and military personnel from the

United States might have in dealing with governments in the Middle East if they do not first understand the basic religions in these countries, their influence on Middle Eastern culture, and how they contrast with the Protestant ethic, one of the mainstays of US culture. In the ongoing war with the terrorist group ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), many people in the US came to realize just how important it is to understand the impact of a country’s religious traditions on its culture. Many US soldiers, other military personnel, medical personnel, news reporters, and others who observed the war had to adjust to what they thought were the odd attitudes that the Arab world has toward such things as gender roles, alcohol use, and the female body. Imagine what it must be like for someone from the Middle East who comes to the United States, where many religious viewpoints are tolerated.



Using the same type of advertising in the Middle Eastern countries as is used in the United States would be a mistake because gender roles are viewed differently.

Because religion plays such a key part in a society's values, norms, roles, and beliefs, people involved in international business may benefit from fully understanding a country's religious traditions. This could be especially true in the advertising of products. Even though most advertisements in the United States are still geared toward traditional gender roles, for example, many are beginning to cater to the changing roles of women and men in US society. Considering again the example of Islam, we see that using this type of advertising would be a serious mistake in Middle Eastern countries, where religion, in concert with politics, plays a significant role in keeping marriage and homemaking the central occupations of women.

13.3b A Conflict Approach

As discussed in previous chapters, the conflict approach focuses on the exploitation of the poor by the elite. The classical Marxist perspective suggests that religion, like other social structures, can be understood only in the context of its role in the economic system.

In sharp contrast to the functionalist approach, conflict theorists view religion as a tool that the elite use to get the poor to obey authority and to follow the rules established by the privileged. Religion counsels the masses to be humble and to accept their condition. In the words of Karl Marx, religion "is the opiate of the masses" because it distracts them from finding practical political solutions to their problems. The powerless find an illusion of happiness through religion and look forward to future life after death, where the streets will be paved with gold and life will be joyful and everlasting. Marx urged revolution so that people could experience during life the joy and freedom that religion postpones until after death. In US society, we supplement that illusion of happiness by focusing upon individualism and meritocracy. Loosely, meritocracy advocates that "you get what you deserve, and you deserve what you get." These two belief systems shore up the religious ideas that help to hold the inequality and lack of action in place.

Most theorists today would agree that religion serves interests other than those of the ruling class, but it is unquestionably true that there are strong relationships between religion and social class. Churches are highly segregated along racial and economic lines. In the United States, a number of denominations are largely or wholly populated with black congregants. Although the ideals of religious faith are supposed to unite people across the great chasms carved by race and ethnicity, social scientists have long noted that church attendance is perhaps the most highly segregated activity in the United States. In 2008, in a campaign speech, President Barack Obama reiterated this observation by saying, "The most segregated hour of American life occurs on Sunday morning" (National Public Radio, 2008).

Within the white population, different religious groups tend to attract people of similar educational and occupational levels. For example, few factory workers are Episcopalians and few CEOs are Baptists or members of Pentecostal groups. Some groups, such as the Roman Catholic Church, have working-class as well as wealthy members; however, generally, occupation and income vary with religious affiliation.

Is religion related to class conflict? In a general way, the answer is yes. Religious affiliation is related to class, and many social controversies result from perceptions that differ according to social class. Opinions on such issues as prayer in schools, teaching creationism, abortion, women as clergy, the Equal Rights Amendment, and homosexuality vary both by class and by religion. Conservative positions are generally supported by fundamentalists and by Pentecostal churches, which are often attended by people who have lower incomes and less education.

APPLYING THE CONFLICT APPROACH TO RELIGION

In pointing out how religion is related to class conflict, the conflict approach yields some other useful findings. One is that occupation and income vary with religious affiliation. This is an important fact known to church leaders, whether they are aware of the sociological concepts involved or not. By knowing that the members of their congregation are from a particular social class, ministers, priests, deacons, rabbis, and others are able to address the relevant needs of their congregations and formulate examples to which people can relate.

In Latin America, a branch of religious teaching known as “liberation theology” has been gaining wide acceptance. Liberation theology directly applies church policy and intervention to the social and class conflicts that plague Latin American society. Church leaders who support this approach speak out against repressive government policies, promote land reform, and generally act as advocates for the peasant population. Many priests praise liberation theology as an example of the applicability of religion to social welfare, and under Pope Francis, Catholic leadership in Rome has warmed to the progressive movement following years of harsh criticism.

Understanding the relationship between social class and religious affiliation could also be useful for you personally. You can learn a great deal about a community, for instance, by noticing its variety of churches. If you see a fairly broad representation of Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, and Episcopalian churches and Jewish synagogues, you know that the community has a fairly wide range of income and educational levels and probably a diversity of political attitudes. However, a preponderance of one type of church or temple might be a reflection of a community with less cultural diversity and less tolerance for differences.

thinking SOCIOLOGICALLY

1. Evaluate the major social functions of religion provided in this chapter. Can you give examples to illustrate each function? Do these functions exist for all religions?
2. From the conflict perspective, how does religion serve the elite?

13.4 RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD



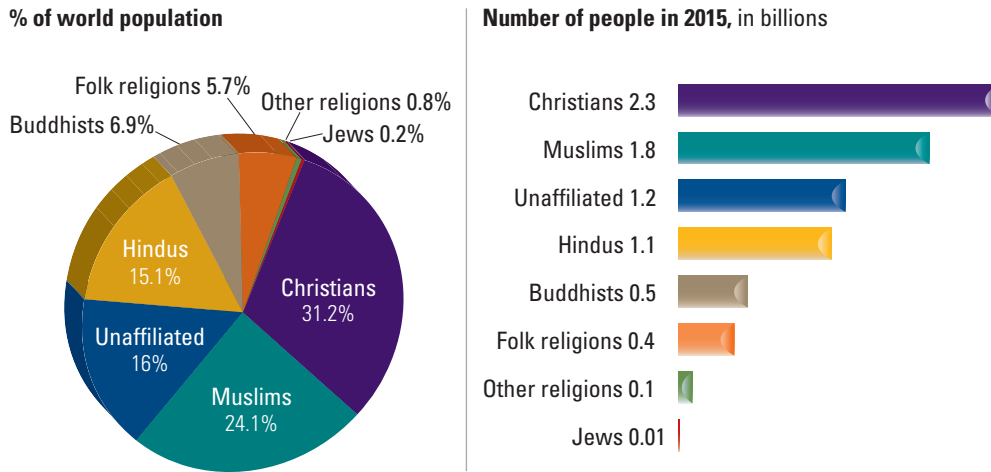
A Shinto ceremony in Japan

The world population is more than 7 billion. About 16% of these people are listed as nonreligious (see Figure 13–1). Thus, whether we refer to Asia, to Russia and other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States, to North America, or to Africa, the majority of people in the world adhere to or profess adherence to some religion.

It is difficult to measure the number of adherents to the world's religions. The procedures used by different countries and groups to measure religious membership vary widely. Some assessments include only adults; others include everyone who attends services. Some people may be included in several different religious groups, such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism. In countries where a particular religion has prevailed for centuries (such as Christianity

in Europe and Hinduism in India), the entire population may be reported as adherents. While most of us are likely to be familiar with one or two specific religions, we may be less familiar with others. We now briefly examine some major ones.

Figure 13-1 Religions of the World and Number of Adherents



Data source: "Christians Remain World's Largest Religious Group, but They are Declining in Europe," by C. Hackett and D. McClendon, 2017 *Pew Research Center*. Copyright 2019 by Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/> Adapted from CIA World Factbook 2009.

13.4a Christianity and Judaism

More than 2 billion people adhere to **Christianity**, and more than 14 million adhere to Judaism in the world today. Christians, who comprise more than a quarter of the world's population (see Table 13-2), profess faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament of the Bible, whereas adherents to **Judaism** find the source of their beliefs in the Hebrew Bible (called the *Old Testament* by Christians), especially in its first five books, which are called the *Torah*. The Torah was traditionally regarded as the primary revelation of God, originally passed on orally and eventually written.

Judaism is the oldest religion in the Western world. It comprises both a religious and an ethnic community. It was the first religion to teach monotheism, which was based on the Old Testament verse "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Jews, the people who identify with and practice Judaism, believe that God's providence extends into a special covenant with the ancient Israelites: to bring God's message to humanity by their example. As a result, the emphasis is on conduct rather than on doctrinal correctness. Adherents to Judaism have a considerable measure of latitude in matters of belief because their beliefs have never been formulated in an official creed. This lack of an official creed also meant that Judaism did not stop developing after the Bible was completed. One result of this development was the traditional Jewish prayer book, which reflects the basic beliefs of Judaism as well as changes in emphasis in response to changing conditions.

Judaism has a system of laws that regulates civil and criminal justice, family relationships, personal ethics and manners, and social responsibilities to the community as well as worship and other religious observances. Individual practice of these laws varies greatly. Some widely observed practices concern strict adherence to kosher foods and daily prayer and study; other practices include those that govern the marital relationship and define the meaning of the yarmulke (skullcap) and tefillin (worn on the forehead and left arm during morning prayers).

Christianity

One of the principal religions of the world, the followers of which profess faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ

Judaism

The oldest religion in the Western world and the first to teach monotheism; are both an ethnic community and a religious group

Table 13-2 World Religions Ranked by
Estimated Number of Adherents

Christianity
Islam
Secular/nonreligious/agnostic/atheist
Hinduism
Chinese traditional religion
Buddhism
Primal-indigenous
African traditional & diasporic
Sikhism
Juche
Spiritism
Judaism
Bahá'í
Jainism
Shinto
Cao daism
Zoroastrianism
Tenrikyo
Neo-paganism
Unitarian-Universalism
Rastafarianism
Scientology

Adapted from: "Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents," 2017, *Adherents.com*. Retrieved from http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html

The Jewish religious calendar, which was derived from a Babylonian model, consists of 12 lunar months, amounting to approximately 354 days. Because the solar year exceeds the lunar year by around 11 days, the calendar must be periodically adjusted. Whenever the number of excess days accumulates to about 30, a 13th month is added to bring the calendar back into alignment with the solar year. The Sabbath is from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

Traditionally, male children are circumcised on the 8th day after birth as a sign of the covenant with Abraham. At age 13, Jewish boys undergo the rite of becoming a bar mitzvah to signify adult status and a responsibility for performing the commandments. A similar ceremony for girls, the bat mitzvah, was introduced in the 20th century.

Christianity diverged from Judaism in ancient Israel. Christians consider Jesus to be the Jewish savior, or Messiah, and incorporated the traditional Hebrew writings of Christ's followers into the canon of their faith, the Bible. After Christ's death (and, as Christians believe, his resurrection), his teachings spread to Rome and many other centers of the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire split in 1054 CE, so did the Christian Church; it came to be called the Orthodox Church in the East and the Roman Catholic Church in the West. The Roman Catholic Church was united under popes until the 16th century. Today, of the estimated 2 billion plus Christians, around 50% are Roman Catholic. Slightly more than one-third are Protestant, and the rest are Eastern Orthodox (with around 1% being from other Christian groups).

Christians, like Jews, believe in one god (monotheism); but for most Christians, their God takes the form of a Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians experience God as the Father, Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit as

the continuing presence of God. Also, most Christians worship on Sunday instead of Saturday, which is the Jewish Sabbath. They also practice baptism by water when they become adherents or give a public testimony of their acceptance of Christ and of Christ's divinity. Christians also take the Eucharist, a sacred meal recalling the last supper that Jesus had with his disciples. The breaking of bread and the drinking of wine—symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, respectively—are sacred acts (sacraments) to most Christians. Prayer and preaching are also important Christian functions.

13.4b Islam

As of 2015, there were 1.8 billion Islamic adherents in the world (Hackett & McClendon, 2017). Followers of **Islam** follow the teachings of the Qur'an (Koran) and of Muhammad, a prophet. The Arabic root word for *Islam* means “peace, purity,” and “submission.” A person who submits to the will of Allah, the one and only God, is called a Muslim (sometimes spelled Moslem). This surrender involves a total commitment to faith, obedience, and trust in this one God. The insistence that no one but God be worshiped has led many Muslims to object to the term “Muhammadanism,” a designation formerly used in the West but thought to incorrectly suggest that Muhammad, a great prophet of Islam, is worshiped in a manner that parallels the worship of Christ by Christians.

It is sometimes assumed that Islam originated during the lifetime of Muhammad (ca. 570–632 CE), specifically during the years in which he received the divine revelations recorded in the Muslim sacred book, the Qur'an. Many Muslims, however, believe that the prophet Muhammad simply restored the original religion of Abraham.

Islam encompasses a code of ethics, a distinctive culture, a system of laws, and a set of guidelines and rules for other aspects of life. The Muslim place of worship is the mosque, and the chief gathering of the congregation takes place on Fridays. Muslims profess their faith by repeating, “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” The Muslims also have a deep awareness of the importance of a fellowship of faith and a community of believers.

The Qur'an includes rules for ordering social relationships. It is especially explicit about matters pertaining to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The family is extremely important to Muslims. In some Muslim societies, families are basically authoritarian, patriarchal, polygamous, patrilineal, and largely patrilocal. In these societies, women are subordinate to men and receive less inheritance. In countries where Muslim holy law is the law of the state, Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women as long as those women are believers. Such a man may take multiple wives (polygyny) and traditionally can divorce a wife as long as he follows certain guidelines regarding whether the marriage was ever consummated and what she is owed. Children, especially sons, are perceived as desirable. In other societies, Muslims live lives that are more mainstream. The Qur'an also emphasizes sincerity, charity, and kindness and equity toward non-Muslims.

Although laws are changing in many Islamic countries and the education of women has increased dramatically, fewer females than males attend school; even fewer women receive a higher education. Marriage and housekeeping are considered the proper occupations of women. Therefore, it is not surprising that Islam is finding it difficult to come to terms with the scientific ideas and the technology of the Western world. It is difficult to accurately report the number of Muslims in the United States because the U.S. Census does not report religious identification, so we must estimate the numbers; according to Pew, there are 3.45 million Muslims in the US (Mohamed, 2018).



Followers of Islam follow the teachings of the Qur'an and of Muhammad, a prophet. In this photo, Muslim children read the Qur'an.

Shutterstock

Islam

One of the world's principal religions, followers of which adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an and of Muhammad, a prophet

13.4c Hinduism

The majority of the 1.1 billion Hindus in the world reside in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The state religion of Nepal is Hinduism. Until 2008, the King of Nepal was considered an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. In India, approximately 80% of the

sociologyatwork



Helping Religious Refugees Readjust

Baila Miller received a doctorate in sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle (now the University of Illinois at Chicago). She used her sociological training in a variety of ways. She was a member of the faculty doing applied research in gerontology. Prior to that, she handled publications and training for SPSS, a computer software company; before that, she was the assistant director of research at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

It was at the Jewish Federation where Miller first used her sociological training to earn a living. When Miller was asked how she used her sociological training in her work at the Jewish Federation, she responded, “The federation raises charitable funds and allocates them to Jewish causes in Israel and overseas and to local Jewish social welfare, health, and educational institutions. The office of research and planning where I worked was a small department—just three people. We were responsible for analyzing the budgets of some of the agencies we supported, for preparing service statistics for submission to the United Way, for collecting and analyzing data needed by our volunteer committees, and for carrying out special research projects.”

It was in these special research projects that Miller found the fullest application of her training. “In one project, we completed a survey of the Jewish population of greater Chicago,” she says—a survey that presented unique problems among population studies because the U.S. Census Bureau does not collect data on religious affiliations in its decennial census. “We wanted to determine many things about the Jewish community: How many people were there? Where did they live? How did they maintain their Jewish identity? Did they participate in religious observances and in Jewish education? What were their service needs and how could a Jewish

agency meet [these needs]? Should we have concentrated on services for the elderly or on childcare for two-career families? Who were the Jewish poor?”

Clearly, many areas of Miller’s sociological training came into play with this one study alone. In addition to needing knowledge of various types of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, she needed to know about substantive areas in sociology—such as minority groups, religious groups, populations, communities, and families—as well as areas of social psychology, all of which were invaluable to her research.

Another project with which Miller was involved at the Jewish Federation was a study of the adjustment of Soviet Jewish émigrés to life in various communities in the United States. Miller analyzed data about Soviet Jewish émigrés in a number of ways. First, at the individual level, she studied how these people adjusted to US life in terms of occupational achievement, language acquisition, social and cultural involvement in the Jewish community, and maintenance of Jewish identity. She looked at the effects of background characteristics—like social and economic status and place of origin in the former Soviet Union—and of mediating factors, such as the type of resettlement services that were offered in various communities in this country. Second, at the community level, she looked at aggregate measures of differences across adjustment in various cities in the United States. This included an investigation of comparable studies that were done in 13 US cities and a cross-cultural analysis of the similarities and differences with other large refugee or émigré groups, particularly Asians and Mexicans. Finally, she did a policy analysis of different programs offered by Jewish agencies and national refugee organizations in order to determine their effectiveness.

population is Hindu (AlJazeera.com, 2015). **Hinduism** has evolved over about 4,000 years and comprises an enormous variety of beliefs and practices. It differs from most Western conceptions of religion in terms of organization and hierarchy.

Hinduism is so closely intertwined with other aspects of society, especially castes, that it is difficult to describe it clearly. Hindus sometimes refer to the ideal way of life as fulfilling the duties of one's class and station, which means obeying the rules of the four main castes of India: the Brahmans, or priests; the Kshatriyas, warriors and nobles; the Vaishyas, commoners; and the Shudras, servants. A fifth class, the Dalit or Scheduled Caste, includes those whose occupations require them to handle "unclean" objects.

The position of women in this system is ambiguous. In some respects, they are treated as symbols of the divine; in other ways, they are considered inferior beings. While women in India today have a number of rights under the law—including equality under the law, equal access to public places, equal opportunities in public employment, and equal pay for equal work—in practice, women are treated very differently than men. Most women must still ask permission from their families to go to the market or visit friends and relatives. Women are also less educated than men (Gangoli, 2016).

Although caste is a powerful influence in Hindu religious behavior, a person's village community and family are important as well. Villages worship different gods (or embodiments of god), meaning that the practice of Hinduism can vary between communities. Hinduism is often characterized as polytheistic; however, Hinduism can also be characterized as monotheistic, with a single supreme being, *brahman*, that has many manifestations. Alternatively, *brahman* can be interpreted as being the universe itself, with each deity serving as just one embodiment of that whole (an example of *pantheism*). The different schools of Vedanta all interpret the fundamental Hindu texts differently. In general, Hindu gods (or facets of god) behave much as humans do, and worship of them takes many forms. Some are thought to require sacrifices (sometimes including animal sacrifice—but not always) while others are worshiped at temples; shrines devoted to several gods associated with a family are often erected in private homes.

In Hinduism, *dharma* governs individual conduct; it is the religious and moral law—the social order. Hindus practice rituals that uphold this order. In a sense, Hindu people see life as a ritual. Hindus generally believe in *transmigration* (also called *reincarnation*): After a person dies, they are born again in another form. They also generally accept the complementary belief known as *karma*, a universal law that determines the future existence of a person based on their good or bad actions. The world is regarded as a great dance, determined by one's karma, through multiple lives (a cyclic process called *samsara*); the final goal of the believer is liberation or release (*moksha*). If an individual becomes righteous enough, the soul will be emancipated, never again to be reborn into an earthly form.

Many Westerners are unfamiliar with Hinduism and therefore find it confusing. However, at its core, Hinduism emphasizes unity, the essential sameness of all living beings, and love. While it is difficult to separate Hinduism from its social context (a social context that is slowly changing), it should be recognized that Hinduism is also characterized by openness, a desire to seek the truth from many sources, and tolerance—values that would benefit us all. In that regard, Hinduism is not only a religion but also a way of life.



Ganesha is the Hindu god of beginnings, sometimes associated with success. Hindu belief holds that the universe is populated by a multitude of gods (or manifestations of god) who behave much as humans do; worship of these embodiments of god takes many forms.

Hinduism

One of the world's principal religions, sometimes described as polytheistic but sometimes characterized as monotheistic or *pantheistic*, the organization and hierarchy of which are different from a Western conception of religion; practiced mainly in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal

13.4d Buddhism

Buddhism has about half a million adherents. It is impossible to precisely determine the number of Buddhists because many people accept Buddhist beliefs and engage in Buddhist rites while practicing other religions, such as Shintoism, Confucianism, Taoism, or Hinduism.

Buddhism is thought to have originated as a reaction against the Brahmanic tradition of Hinduism in the fifth or sixth century BCE. At that time, a prince named



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A Buddhist nun prays. Buddhism is thought to have originated as a reaction against the Brahmanic tradition of Hinduism sometime during the fifth or sixth century BCE.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in northern India to a prosperous ruling family. As he grew older, the suffering he witnessed among the people distressed him. At age 29, he left his wife and family to go on a religious quest. He renounced all material things and yet still he was not satisfied. Then one day, as he was meditating under a bodhi tree, he became enlightened—the first Buddha. He decided to share his experience with others and became a wandering teacher, preaching his doctrine of the Four Noble Truths: (1) This life is suffering and pain. (2) The source of suffering is attachment and craving. (3) Suffering can cease. (4) The practice of the Eightfold Path can end suffering. The Eightfold Path consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. It combines ethical and

disciplinary practices, training in concentration and meditation, and the development of enlightened wisdom. This doctrine was Buddha's message until age 80, when he passed into nirvana, a state of transcendence forever free from the cycle of suffering and rebirth.

After Buddha's death, legends of his great deeds and supernatural powers emerged. Stories were told of his heroism in past lives, and speculations arose about his true nature. Some groups viewed him as a historical figure, whereas others placed him in a succession of several Buddhas of the past and a Buddha yet to come. Differing views eventually led to a diversity of Buddhist sects in different countries. Some remained householders who set up Buddha images and established holy sites that became centers of pilgrimage. Others became monks, living in monastic communities and depending on the laity for food and material support. Many monks became beggars, and in several Southeast Asian countries, they have been known to go on daily alms rounds. They spend their days performing rituals and devotions, practicing meditation, studying, and preaching.

Buddhism is often practiced alongside a native religion. With its emphasis on ethics, concentration, and wisdom, Buddhism could be considered a philosophy as much as a religion. The integration of Buddhism into so many cultures has resulted in different interpretations of the path to enlightenment. However, the core principles of Buddhism have been maintained throughout these reinterpretations.

Buddhism

One of the world's principal religions, adherents of which follow the teachings of Buddha, the enlightened one, who taught the doctrine of Four Noble Truths

Confucianism

One of the world's principal religions, associated mainly with China, adherents of which follow the teachings of Confucius

13.4e Confucianism

Confucianism, which has about 6.1 million adherents, is associated primarily with China, the home of nearly 409 million adherents to Chinese folk religions. Confucianism has influenced the civilizations of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, as well as China. Confucianism is the philosophical and religious system based on the teachings of Confucius, who was born in 551 BCE, in what is today the Shandong province in China, to a family who were likely once members of the aristocracy—but who had become impoverished by the time he was born; his father died when he was only 3 years old. As a young man, he held several minor government positions; however, he became best known as a teacher, philosopher, and scholar. He may have been distressed by the misery and oppression that surrounded him and thus chose to dedicate his life to attempting to relieve the suffering of the people.

Accounts of Confucius and his life are sometimes contradictory, but it is thought that he was able to attract many disciples by talking with younger men about his ideas to reform government so that it served the people rather than the rulers. He emphasized sincerity, ethics, and the right of individuals to make decisions for themselves. Although Confucius was not a religious leader in the usual sense of the word, he believed that there was a righteous force in the universe and yet his philosophy was founded not on supernaturalism but on humanity. Virtue and humility were also important to him.

The basic philosophy of Confucius is found in his many sayings: “Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.” “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.” “In education there should be no class distinction.” “By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart.” “Wherever you go, go with all your heart.” The ideals of Confucius were motivated not by the desire for rewards or an afterlife but simply by the satisfaction of acting with “earnestness, liberality, truthfulness, diligence, and generosity.”

Confucius had a pervasive influence on all aspects of Chinese life—so much so that there are temples to him in every province in China. People throughout China have tried to live in accordance with the Confucian code of conduct. His values have guided human relations at all levels—among individuals, communities, and nations. His thought has guided conduct in work and in the family. Even today, the East Asians who profess to be Shintōists, Taoists, Buddhists, Muslims, or Christians are likely Confucians as well.

One of the Five Classics of Confucianism (a collection of ancient Chinese books of great prestige all associated with Confucius) is the *Yijing* or *Book of Changes* (Wade-Giles romanization *I-Ching*). This book is familiar to many people in the US and is used for divination.

thinking SOCIOLOGICALLY

Given the tremendous variability in religious beliefs and practices seen around the world, consider statements such as these:

1. Religious truth is only found in a literal interpretation of the Bible.
2. Religion is a social creation.
3. Whether there is no god, one god, or many gods is only relevant in terms of what people believe.

13.5 RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

Christianity predominates in the United States. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest religious group in the United States, comprising 23% of the adult population. When combined, almost half of the adult population (48.9%) in this country are non-Catholic Christians, including around 112 million Protestants, 3 million Mormons, and 800,000 Greek Orthodox (Newport, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Protestants belong to such churches as the National and Southern Baptist conventions, the Assemblies of God, the United Methodist Church, and the Lutheran Church, to mention just a few. The 2012 Statistical Abstract of the United States recorded 2.7 million people who self-identified as Jewish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011e). In 2014, around 77% of the population clearly identified with a religious group (Cooperman, Smith, & Ritchey, 2015).

The United States, which has no state church, has more than 200 denominations and is greatly influenced by a variety of religious groups and belief systems (Hill & Mead, 2010). In addition to churches and denominations, revivalists preach on TV and radio and religious leaders such as Joel Osteen give spiritual advice and seek converts to Christianity. Bumper stickers tell us that “Jesus Saves” or to “Honk if you love Jesus.”

Table 13–3 Religious Identification in the US: 2016

Religion	%
Protestant/other Christian	48.9
Catholic	23.0
Mormon	1.8
Jewish	2.1
Muslim	0.8
Other non-Christian religion	2.5
None/atheist/agnostic	18.2
No response given	2.6

Data source: Based on 173,229 interviews conducted between Jan. 2 and Dec. 19, 2016. “Five Key Findings on Religion in the U.S.” by F. Newport, 2016, *Gallup*. Copyright 2016 by Gallup. Retrieved from <http://news.gallup.com/poll/200186/five-key-findings-religion.aspx>

Williams (1980) conceptualizes US religion as interplay between two forces: the structured and the unstructured—the major religious communities and the informal groups that he calls “popular religions.” These two trends developed, he says, in response to the demands of life in a new country. Faced with a diverse population, a new political system, and rapid technological change, people in the US found organized religions too limiting; response to the demands of a new nation, they have developed new religious movements.

13.6 THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

Religion in US society is infused with the core US value of individualism. Despite the emergence of religious groups that seemingly are a response to individualism, there is in fact, a strong commonality that runs through the various religious movements in the United States. Although different denominations are guided by different practices, the nature of faith and the relationship of faith to social commitments in the US are very much guided by a sacred adherence to individualism (Madsen, 2009). Some so-called

liberal religious groups have downplayed the supernatural aspects of Christianity and have emphasized the importance of ethical conduct and a remote, depersonalized god. Others worship a personal god and express their beliefs emotionally. Those who worship in this way seek signs of divine intervention in their daily lives.

One kind of religious movement is the development of sects (review Table 13–1). In the 16th and 17th centuries, two similar movements began to emerge—the Anabaptists and the Pietists. These movements were at odds with more traditional churches, as is the case with many sects. The Anabaptists rejected worldliness in favor of pacifism while the Pietists emphasized an aspiration toward perfection. The Amish and the Hutterites are US groups descended from the Anabaptists while modern Methodists and Evangelicals were influenced by the Pietists.



A group of Amish children walk along a road. The Amish are considered to be the descendants of the Anabaptists, who rejected worldliness in favor of pacifism.

Another sect is the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), who came to the US from England; Pennsylvania was their most famous colony. Quakers believe in an Inner Light, and that people mystically partake of the nature of God. Thus, they see no need for a religious structure (e.g., clergy or churches) interceding between God and human beings.

Another theme in US religious life has been **millennialism**, the belief that a dramatic transformation of the earth will occur and that Christ will rule the world for 1,000 years of prosperity and happiness before the Last Judgment. One millennial movement took place among the Millerites around the 1830s. William Miller, the founder, was convinced that the Second Coming of Christ would happen in 1843. When it did not, some of his associates changed the date to 1844. Again, nothing happened. Some of his followers, who still believed convened and formed the Evangelical Adventists, which would become the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventists and all other modern Adventist churches.

A more recent example of millennialism is Christian Exodus, a group that incorporates Evangelical Christianity and paleoconservative beliefs as a response to social crises that they believe have resulted from liberalized social values and economic uncertainty. Christian Exodus feels that these values have threatened a Christian way of life and that the way to salvation is through the electorate. The group's focus is aimed at dominating South Carolina politics as an attempt to create policies that reinforce traditional Christian values (Sweet & Lee, 2010).

Other US religious movements have been based on divine revelation. One such prophet who received a divine revelation was Joseph Smith, who founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in 1830. His following was recruited from the rural people of upstate New York. About 30 years later, Mary Baker Eddy had a religious experience that affected her profoundly after she suffered a life-threatening accident; after reading Jesus's healings, she experienced a dramatic recovery. In 1879, she established the Church of Christ, Scientist, also known as Christian Science. Ms. Eddy's revelation was that Jesus has divine healing power. In general, it is thought that sects like these develop into denominations when people of wealth and status become adherents.

Pentecostalism involves a practice similar to divine revelation. Pentecostal Christians hold highly emotional services that resemble revivals. Participants also "speak in tongues" (*glossolalia*), in which they go into ecstatic fits and utter a rapid flow of apparently meaningless syllables that are claimed to be a direct gift from the Holy Spirit.

Another feature of Pentecostalism is *faith healing*, which experienced a revival after World War II. In faith healing, the fundamentalist preacher asks members of the congregation who are sick or disabled to come forward. If their faith in Christ is strong enough, a person who is blind will see, a person on crutches can throw them away, and so on. Followers of Pentecostalism come primarily from the poor or working classes; given that people from these demographics often do not have health insurance, adequate financial resources, or access to information on what medical care options are available or where to go for medical treatment, it can be speculated that perhaps their interest in faith healing stems in part from these factors.

A recent manifestation of the interplay between denominations and fundamentalist sects concerns the teaching of evolution in public schools. Most educated people in the United States, including many Christians, accept the theory of evolution. Many fundamentalists, however, interpret the Bible literally and believe that God created heaven and earth in exactly the 6 days it specifies. Creationists believe that creationism should be given "equal time" with evolution in school science classes. The basic assumptions of



Pentecostalism involves a practice similar to divine revelation. The participants speak in tongues, which is considered to be a gift from the Holy Spirit.

AP Photo/Arizona Daily Star, Chris Richards

Millennialism

The belief prevalent among certain Christian sects that there will be a dramatic transformation of life on earth and that Christ will rule the world for 1,000 years of prosperity and happiness

scientists and religious fundamentalists are in direct conflict: Science is based on deductions drawn from empirical reality, whereas creationism is based on divine revelation and denounces empirical evidence that contradicts biblical accounts. The issue of whether creationism should be taught in public schools was temporarily muted in 1982 when a federal district judge in Arkansas ruled that the two-model approach of the creationists is simply a contrived dualism that has no scientific factual basis or legitimate educational purpose (*McLean v. Arkansas*, 1982). The ruling contended that because creationism is not science, the conclusion is inescapable that the only real effect of teaching creation theory is the advancement of religion. What the creation law does, in effect, is to make the teaching of creationism in public schools unconstitutional.

A ruling in the opposite direction, which illustrates the impact of fundamentalism on our judicial system, took place in 1987. A federal district judge in Alabama ruled that about 40 social studies books be removed from public schools because they taught what creationists called “secular humanism.” The judge ruled that secular humanism was a religion that gave credit to humans rather than to God.

policydebate



Should Corporal Punishment of Children Be Allowed?



The concept of corporal punishment is an example of the link between religion and other institutions—specifically the family and education—and how religious beliefs have played an important part in shaping cultural practices. Corporal punishment can be broadly defined as the infliction of physical pain or confinement in response to an offense or an occurrence of misbehavior. Typical forms of corporal punishment against children are slapping, spanking, and paddling. Corporal punishment, however, has included other much more abusive practices as well, such as vigorous shaking (often causing concussion), grabbing, dragging, kicking, washing a child’s mouth with noxious substances, not allowing a child to use the bathroom, denying a child normal movement, and many others. Corporal punishment usually is discussed primarily in connection with children in schools, but it is also important to consider it in relation to disciplining children at home and in nonparental childcare settings (Clark & Clark, 1989; Vockell, 1991).

From its inception, US law viewed corporal punishment as an effective and acceptable method of maintaining order both at home and in school. Nevertheless, its morality (or immorality) and long-term effects on children have been topics long debated by parents, educators, and legislators. In

1867, New Jersey banned corporal punishment in public schools. However, not until more than 100 years later did another state, Massachusetts, make corporal punishment illegal. In *Baker v. Owen*, the Supreme Court ruled that the school has authority over parents in issues involving discipline. In 1977, the United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of corporal punishment in *Ingraham v. Wright*, a case that involved a student who was hospitalized from injuries inflicted by a paddling from school authorities. These cases upheld corporal punishment as an acceptable means of maintaining discipline in schools, even over a parent’s objection to corporal punishment, and the court ruled that the Eighth Amendment—which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment—does not apply to the paddling of children in school (Clark & Clark, 1989).

The religious roots of corporal punishment are traceable from ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, through medieval Europe, and then early colonial America to the present United States. Religious groups have maintained considerable influence over legislation related to corporal punishment over the years. For example, in 1991, legislation in North Carolina banned corporal punishment in public child-care centers—but not in church ones. Many religious

policydebate

groups (especially fundamentalist ones) argue that corporal punishment is positively sanctioned in the Bible in the books of Proverbs, Chronicles, Joshua, and Kings in the Old Testament. The key text that is cited in support of corporal punishment is Proverbs 23:14—“Thou shalt beat him with the rod, / And shalt deliver his soul from hell.” A similar expression that is not from the Bible, but which is perhaps more common, is “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Although Jesus never urged punishment for children, the rationale for corporal punishment from the New Testament is derived from the belief that wickedness will be punished in hell, which is taken to imply the need to inflict pain on children in the present to prevent them from evil. Some fundamentalist child-rearing manuals have gone so far as to describe the details of how the discipline ritual should be performed, including information on where to position children and what instruments to use when hitting them (Greven, 1991).

One example of such a parenting manual is *To Train Up a Child* by Debi and Michael Pearl. This guide has been used by some evangelical Christians since it was published in the 1990s, but it has gained attention more recently thanks to television personalities like the Duggar family. Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar are famous for their large family and devout Baptist faith, both of which were at the forefront of their reality show, *19 Kids and Counting* (which was canceled in 2015 in the wake of multiple scandals, though several of their adult children have continued to appear on television in various spin-off programs). It has been alleged that the Duggars are proponents of the “blanket training” method put forward by *To Train Up a Child*, which involves placing a baby on a blanket and swatting them each time they try to roll or crawl off. The book claims this will teach children obedience, but this and other methods described in the book have been widely criticized and remain controversial. As you can see, the religious basis of corporal punishment has had a strong influence on its acceptance among groups that continue to use it in the United States.

Besides the religious arguments, there are other important aspects of the debate. In a 1991 article, Edward L. Vockell, professor of education at Purdue University Calumet, discusses some of the pros and

cons of corporal punishment in education. Among the “advantages” of corporal punishment, Vockell lists the following: (1) corporal punishment is very likely to be perceived as unpleasant by the recipient, unlike other forms of punishment, which might be unpleasant to some children but not to others; (2) it can be administered, and is over with, quickly compared to other forms of punishment, which can be time consuming; and (3) while other forms of punishment can be ambiguous, corporal punishment is specific, obvious, and clear.

Vockell goes on to list the following disadvantages of corporal punishment: (1) there is likely no logical relationship between the misbehavior and corporal punishment; (2) with other forms of punishment, children can engage in good behaviors to end the punishment, but this is not so with corporal punishment; (3) it models behavior for children that is socially inappropriate, which could lead to aggression; (4) it can lead to injury or abuse; (5) adults may use corporal punishment for the wrong reasons, including their own irritation, frustration, or racism; (6) children might feel resentment due to the embarrassment involved, which might interfere with future discipline; and (7) if an accident occurs and a child is injured, a lawsuit may follow.

To expand on Vockell’s fifth disadvantage, it does appear to be the case that corporal punishment is disproportionately used against children of color. According to research done by the Southern Poverty Law Center, in schools that practice corporal punishment, 14% of black boys have been struck by an educator compared to 7.5% of white boys; this disparity is even greater for black girls (5.2%) compared to white girls (1.7%) (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). These differences persist despite research indicating that black students are not more prone to misbehavior than white ones.

While no one would argue against the necessity of suitable discipline of children, the debate over the use of corporal punishment continues. As of 2019, corporal punishment is still legal in public schools in 19 states, and it continues to be pervasive worldwide. Of the 192 countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, only 51 have banned corporal punishment (UN Tribune, 2016; Zolotor & Puzia, 2010).

13.6a Current Trends in Religion

The use of computers and sophisticated statistical techniques has brought about significant changes in social science research, in general, and in the scientific study of religion, in particular. Researchers can now deal efficiently with large samples of the population and can test some of the theories developed by Durkheim and Weber.

One such study was published in 1961 by Gerhard Lenski, whose book, *The Religious Factor*, is now considered a pioneering quantitative study of religion. Using survey techniques on a probability sample of males in the Detroit area, Lenski tried to test Weber's notions about the Protestant ethic. Lenski reasoned that if Protestants were more oriented toward the Protestant ethic than Catholics, they should show more upward mobility. He found that more white Protestant men than Catholic men rose into the upper middle class or retained that status and that Catholic men were more likely to move into or remain in the lower half of the working class.

Subsequent studies (Greely, 1989) have contradicted Lenski's findings and show no direct relationship between Protestant or Catholic religious beliefs and socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, quantitative research on religion became much more popular following Lenski's publication. We now have a profile of US religious beliefs and their relation to social class, race, age, and other factors. One important finding of this research has been that a sizable part of the population has no conventional religious commitment, although they are concerned with ethical and moral beliefs and practices that often have their roots in Judeo-Christian teachings. This movement away from the church is known as "secularization." By contrast, Darnell and Sherkat (1997) used qualitative research,

Sociology Students in Real Life

Katherine Carter

Graduating class: 1992



Katherine Carter

Favorite sociology course: *Introduction to Ethnography, Introduction to Anthropology, Introduction to Sociology, Social Theory, Social Inquiry, Internship in Sociology, Senior Seminar in Sociology*

How has sociology helped you in your job or in your life? *"Sociology at Elon [University] taught me how to write well [and] gave me confidence to speak publicly and give presentations, all three of which I do now on a daily or weekly basis. Sociology has helped me understand there are multiple layers within an organization and hopefully each of the layers are working together toward the same goal. Sociology has enabled me to work with people from all walks of life [and] has taught me about nonjudgmental attitudes, cultural relevance, gender differences, race and ethnicity differences, socioeconomic status, and walking a mile in others' shoes. Having lived and worked abroad now for 20 years (Hungary, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Namibia), holding these concepts in the back of my mind every day as I interact with others has been key. Being open, flexible, and willing to try things are also important keys sociology has provided me."*

examining insider documents from conservative Protestant communities, to examine the impact of religious socialization on achievement. They found that “fundamentalist beliefs and conservative Protestant affiliation both have significant and substantial negative influences on educational attainment above and beyond social background factors” (p. 306).

13.6b Secularization

It is widely accepted by social scientists that the dominant trend in modern religion is secularization. **Secularization** means to focus on this world and on worldly things such as science, reason, and technology, as distinguished from the church, religious affairs, and faith. It means that problems are solved by humans through their own efforts, as opposed to unquestioned faith in supernatural powers and a focus on the next world or an afterlife. It means a trend toward the declining influence of religion in the lives of people and the institutions of society. Today, for example, marriages are assumed to be decided between humans, not foreordained by a god. Tragedies such as automobile accidents are explained in terms of human interactions and the laws of science, not as manifestations of divine will.

This secular way of thinking is extremely disturbing to fundamentalists and to right-wing evangelicals. To them, the idea that human beings are in control of their own destiny and that individuals themselves can change the condition of their lives without divine providence or intervention is unimaginable and unbelievable, if not evil and sinful. To emphasize materialism, consumption, and the here and now runs counter to giving up your “sinful ways,” trusting in God, and focusing on salvation and the hereafter.

Sociologists who study religion (e.g., Clark & Grandchamp, 2011; Riesebrodt, 2014; Stark & Bainbridge, 1981) argue that secularization is a major trend but that it is not a new or modern development and does not presage the demise of religion. It is a process that goes on in all societies while countervailing intensification of religion goes on in other parts. The dominant religious organizations are always becoming more *secularized* (worldly) but are supplanted by more vigorous and less worldly religions.

The authors demonstrate that secularization is one of three interrelated processes that constantly occur in all societies. Secularization itself generates two countervailing processes: revival and religious innovation. *Revival* is born out of secularization, as protest groups and sect movements form to meet the demand for a less worldly religion and to restore vigorous otherworldliness to a conventional faith. *Religious innovation*, also stimulated by secularization, leads to the birth of new faiths and new religious traditions. These new faiths will not be found in the directories of major churches but will be found in lists of obscure cult movements.

Cults flourish where conventional churches are weakest. Stark and Bainbridge provide evidence that in the US, there are very robust *negative* correlations between church membership rates and cult activity rates. The states and cities that have low church membership rates have the highest rates of membership in cults. Centuries ago, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism began as cults that rose to power because of the weaknesses in the dominant religions of their time. Stark and Bainbridge argue that the same process is happening today. Thus, in the US, as in most societies, the history of religion is not only a pattern of secularization and decline but also equally one of birth and growth. While the sources of religion are shifting constantly, the amount of religion remains fairly constant.



At a Catholic mass in Cameroon, Pope Benedict XVI urged Cameroon's bishops to defend against secularization. Secularization means that problems are solved by humans through their own efforts as opposed to unquestioned faith in supernatural powers.

AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell

Secularization

The process through which beliefs concerning the supernatural and religious institutions lose social influence

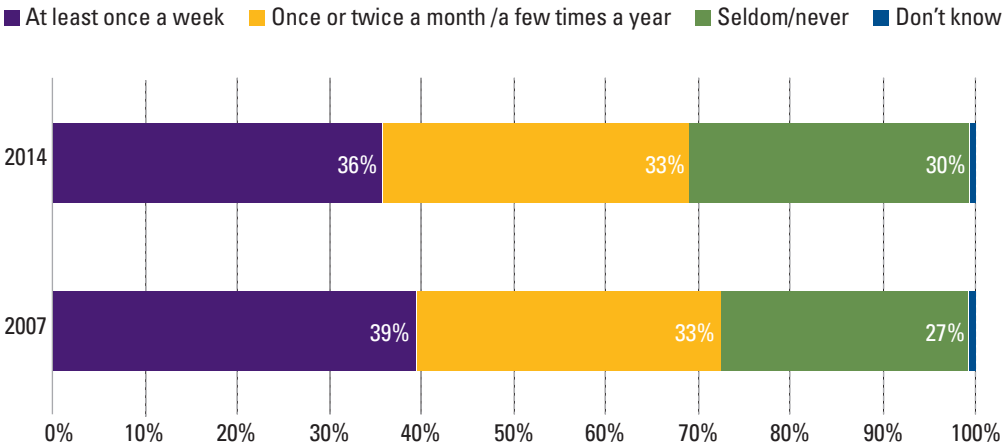
Researchers from Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, found that women are more likely than men to describe their outlook as “religious” versus secular. They also found that, in the US, older people are more likely than younger people to view religion as very important in their lives. Additionally, African Americans are the least likely to describe themselves as secular, and Asian Americans are most likely to describe their outlook as secular (Pew Research Center, 2014a). There are several reasons why various groups are more or less likely to become secular. There is evidence that women are defecting from churches now at a higher rate than men (Earls, 2017). This is highly likely due to changing gender roles in society and the liberation of women from traditional expectations associated with submissive womanhood (Woodhead, 2008).

13.6c Religiosity and Church Attendance

Religiosity, the level of religious belief and behavior (Grant, 2008) is a qualitative factor that is difficult to assess accurately. While difficult to measure, church attendance is one indication of the importance of religion. According to a 2014 Pew Research report, 36% of people in the US say they go to religious services weekly or almost weekly, down from 39% in 2007 (see Figure 13–2).

Figure 13–2 Attendance at Religious Services

Percentage of adults who attend religious services



2014 data adapted from “Religious Landscape Study,” by Pew Research Center, 2014, *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

But while church attendance is one possible indication of the importance of religion, it might not be an accurate measure of *religiosity* because people go to churches, synagogues, temples, or mosques for many reasons—to worship God, yes, but also to see friends, enjoy music, meet social expectations, and so on. Public opinion polls consistently indicate that a high percentage (around 80%) of people believe in God and life after death, and those with Christian backgrounds often want their children to go to Christian schools (Ferguson, 2017; Fox, 2016). The discrepancy between church attendance and religious belief indicates that factors other than formal religious organizations influence religious thought. Until recently, social scientists have not had a satisfactory way of measuring overall religiosity within societies. Sociologists have used indicators such as attendance at religious services, prayer and meditation, membership in churches and other religious organizations, religious beliefs and attitudes, and the subjective importance of religion. Rather than seeing these as individual indicators, Grant (2008) used them to arrive at an “aggregate religiosity” to measure the overall

Table 13-4 Church Attendance in the United States

Frequent Church Attendance, January–May 2010, by Demographic Group

Demographic Group	%	Demographic Group	%
Women	57	Independent	38
Men	43	Liberal	22
Non-Hispanic black	47	Democrat	29
Hispanic	39	South	41
Non-Hispanic white	34	Midwest	35
Asian	26	Northeast	30
65+	48	West	32
50 to 64	38	Married	43
30 to 49	33	Not married	32
18 to 29	27	Postgraduate	36
Conservative	50	College graduate	36
Republican	44	Some college	34
Moderate	31	High school or less	37

Note. Percentage saying they attend “at least once a week”

Data source: “Religious Landscape Study,” by Pew Research Center, 2014. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

religiosity of a society. Using this measure, Grant found that there was a sharp rise in religiosity in the United States in the 1950s, a decline beginning in the 1960s, and a slower decline since the 1970s.

13.6d The Electronic Church

Through television, many people in the United States “attend church” without ever leaving their homes. In the 1980s, *televangelists* (a blend of television and evangelist) like Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker gained a new level of popularity. Today, popular televangelists include Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, and T. D. Jakes. It has proven possible to create a huge financial empire as a televangelist, using a variety of marketing techniques.

The notoriety of some of these televangelists increased as unusual activities were picked up by the press and sensationalized. Oral Roberts announced that God had told him that he would die unless he raised millions of dollars by a certain date. The Bakkers used PTL Club funds for a Christian theme park, several expensive homes for their personal use, a new Corvette and houseboat, and a luxurious air-conditioned doghouse. Both Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart were caught in indiscrete sexual relationships. Pat Robertson, who speaks in tongues and is believed to receive prophecies directly from God, ran for president of the United States. Jerry Falwell started the Moral Majority and became actively involved in supporting conservative political candidates and right-wing social causes before passing away in May 2007. Several, such as Jerry Falwell and Bob Jones, established universities that only accept born-again instructors and that serve as bastions of fundamentalist Christian teachings. Some, such as Robert Schuller, who claimed to have a congregation of 10,000 at his Crystal Cathedral in California as well as international members worldwide established worldwide ministries while retaining a direct affiliation with a church or denomination (in Schuller’s case, the Reformed Church in America) rather than becoming sect-like (Crystal Cathedral Ministries went bankrupt in 2010).

It might be asked why religious television shows appear to be dominated by right-wing and fundamentalist ministers (with some exceptions) rather than preachers of mainstream denominations. Although no simple answers are available, some clues can be found in their messages and in their organization.

Their *messages* are usually simple, clear, precise, and based on a literal interpretation of the Bible. Perhaps this is because in a pluralistic society with social and moral ambiguities over women's roles, freedom of speech and expression, sexual norms, family planning, abortion, and the like, it can be comforting for some to believe that social as well as personal problems can be solved by a doctrinaire return to traditional gender roles and social values and a faith in God. Additionally, the claim can be made that television is not friendly to the intellectual discussion of ambiguous moral issues; such discussions may be more common among seminary graduates and the leadership of more established denominations.

The *organization* of these religious shows and their associated institutions often revolves around a single charismatic person (almost always male). These individuals select their advisors and boards to back them and to establish an independent media network that is seldom accountable to other organizations or institutions. They understand the value of showmanship and make appeals (often highly emotional) in the name of God to save souls, cleanse an immoral nation, and support their ministry. Unless an organization becomes established and institutionalized to provide continuity of the television program, the ministry is likely to die with the removal or death of the charismatic leader.

In functional terms, the success of the electronic church is explained in terms of what it does for people: that is, its religious functions. Among others, it may provide answers to ultimate questions, reconcile people to hardship, and advocate the return to less complex and more traditional ways. The extent to which it facilitates social integration, creates a community of believers, and provides rituals is questionable, however. It is unlikely that many people kneel for prayer or join hands with others in front of a TV set. On the other hand, the millions of dollars sent to television preachers indicate that they are important to many people in the US and fill various needs.

13.6e Ecumenism

Ecumenism

A movement calling for different denominations to join together in pursuit of common interests in a spirit of worldwide Christian unity

One response to the current trend toward secularization has been for different denominations to join together in pursuit of common interests. This trend, known as **ecumenism** or the ecumenical movement, calls for worldwide Christian unity. Interdenominational organizations such as the National Council of Churches are attempting to reconcile the beliefs and practices of different religious groups.

thinking SOCIOLOGICALLY

1. Is religion a key factor in maintaining the status quo, a key factor in stimulating social change, both, or neither?
2. What types of variables influence the involvement of religious groups in politics? Do the variables change depending on the sociological theory you are using? Describe and explain.
3. How is secularization related to or caused by changes such as industrialization, urbanization, an increasingly educated population, political conservatism or liberalism, changing roles of women, and so forth?

13.6f A New Religious Consciousness

Durkheim believed that as societies become more complex and diversified, so do the forms of religious belief and practice. One example of this is the *new religious consciousness*, a wave of new religious groups that emerged around the 1960s in the US (Glock & Bellah, 1976). Some of these groups, such as Scientology and Synanon (which has been defunct since 1991), started by emphasizing personal religious experiences and growth. Others, like Jews for Jesus and the highly controversial Children of God, (now called The Family International) began as neo-Christian movements. A striking feature of many of these groups was the influence of Asian religions. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), also known as the Hare Krishna Movement, was founded in New York and has roots in Hindu culture. The US also appropriated ideas and practices from ancient traditions like Zen Buddhism and Yoga. Today, these westernized interpretations of Asian practices are often far removed from their religious roots. Nevertheless, Yoga remains popular in the US.

Why have these groups and religious movements arisen? Several factors may be responsible. Some see the new religious consciousness as a search for identity and meaning. Some see these movements as a reaction against the militaristic and capitalistic values that are emphasized in contemporary US society. Others contend that new religions have arisen in response to the climate of moral ambiguity in the United States. The decline of established churches has undoubtedly been influential as well. In all probability, each of these factors has had an effect.

13.6g Religion and Other Institutions

Relationships between churches and other institutions are complex. Institutions and the functions they perform are not always easy to differentiate. As was mentioned earlier, Max Weber argued near the middle of the 20th century that capitalism was enhanced by the work ethic of Protestantism. In the 1980s, the entry of televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson into the political arena reflected the linkage between religion and politics. Other interinstitutional linkages include the influence of religion on school curricula, family size and family planning, and the economy (through ownership or control of businesses and endorsement or nonendorsement of various products). There is increasing evidence that many evangelical members of the power elite within the United States, especially within politics and business, have a strong sense of cohesion because of the salience of their religious beliefs, thus furthering the strength of the evangelical movement (Lindsay, 2008).

There is also a strong link between religion and marital status. In 2014, those who identified with one of the main religious groups were considerably more likely to be married than those who were unaffiliated. In particular, individuals who identified as atheist were more likely to be living with a partner but unmarried compared to any other group—except for those who were unaffiliated with a particular religion but who nevertheless considered religion to be important. Bucking the trend, the individuals most likely to identify as never married were Muslims (45%)—but they were closely followed by agnostics (41%) and atheists (40%). Taken together, the unaffiliated group showed the lowest incidence of marriage at 37% compared to those who identified with one of the Christian faiths (52%) and those who identified with the non-Christian faiths (46%). All these groups were less likely to be married in 2014 compared to 2007 except Jehovah's Witnesses, who held steady at 53%. Those identifying as Mormon had the highest incidence of marriage in 2014, at 66%, unseating Hindus, who had the highest incidence of marriage in 2007 at 79% (Pew Research Center, 2015a).

Émile Durkheim noted the key linkage between the sacred and the secular or profane when he stated that anything could be made sacred. Political rituals such as those that accompany the election of a president, family behaviors such as eating dinner together, economic goods such as automobiles, or educational events such as a graduations can all be considered sacred. These interrelationships and religious influences extend beyond basic institutions. Note, for example, how religious principles have served as the foundation for opposition to war, restrictions on alcohol, or policies regarding the disciplining of children (see the *policy debate* in this chapter). In today's world, although the church as a social institution may currently be in decline, religion and religious values continue to exert a major influence on societies, on all the institutions within them, and on the lives of individuals around the globe.

thinking SOCIOLOGICALLY

1. How do you define “being religious”? Can you be religious without a church, synagogue, mosque, or other formal institution? Can you be religious without being part of a social group of like-minded people?
2. Using theories and facts about religious groups and systems, discuss how and why religious groups become involved in political activities, both domestically and internationally. Provide specific examples of the types of policies religious groups would be concerned with.



CHAPTER 13 Wrapping it up

Summary

1. A *religion* is a ritualized system of beliefs and practices related to things defined as *sacred* by an organized community of believers.
2. People have believed in supernatural powers throughout history. Some societies have believed that supernatural powers inhabit everything in nature, including things like rocks and trees. This is known as *animism*. Others have assumed that supernatural powers reside in a *shaman*, who could be called upon to protect the group or to bring success. A third form of belief is *totemism*, in which a specific plant or animal is considered sacred to a person or tribe.
3. Religions are sometimes differentiated by the number of gods that adherents believe in. *Monotheistic* religions believe in one god; *polytheistic* religions believe in a number of gods.
4. Religion may take a variety of forms. *Mysticism* is based on the belief in powers that are mysterious, secret, and hidden from human understanding. *Churches* are institutional organizations with formal bureaucratic structures; they are sometimes differentiated into *ecclesia*, which in sociology are nationally recognized or official state religions, and *denominations*, which are independent of the state.
5. *Sects* are small separatist groups that follow rigid doctrines and emphasize fundamentalist teachings. *Cults* are loosely organized religious organizations whose members adopt a new, unique, and unusual lifestyle. Rather than attempting to change society, cults generally focus on the spiritual lives of the individual participants.
6. There are a number of theories about religion. The functionalist perspective examines what religion does for society. Religion is generally perceived as fulfilling social functions, such as preserving and solidifying society, creating a community of believers, cultivating social change, and providing a means of social control. It also fulfills personal functions such as answering ultimate questions, providing rites of passage, and reconciling people to hardship.
7. The conflict perspective views religion as a tool used by dominant individuals and groups to justify their position and to keep the less privileged in subordinate positions.
8. More than 6 billion people are believed to be identified with or have an affiliation with one of the world's major religions. More than 2 billion are Christians, who profess faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Nearly 2 billion are Muslims, who put their faith in Allah and follow the teachings of the prophet Muhammad.
9. Excluding the nonreligious, Hindus are the third largest religious group in the world; Hinduism is closely linked to the traditional caste system of India. Hindus have a vast array of religious practices and beliefs.
10. Followers of Buddhism believe they can liberate themselves from human suffering by following the practice of the Eightfold Path. Confucianism, based on the life and teachings of Confucius, is both a philosophy and a religion and is closely linked to Shintoism and Buddhism.
11. The United States has no state church, and a wide variety of religious groups exist in this country. There are two contrasting trends in contemporary religious practice. One type of group emphasizes formal religious organization, whereas the other emphasizes an informal, personalized, emotional belief system. Over the course of US history, religious life has been influenced by folk religions, sects, Pentecostal groups, and groups that believe in millennialism, divine revelation, and faith healing.
12. Modern studies of religion have been influenced by developments in qualitative and quantitative research techniques and computer technology. The use of these and other techniques has revealed a trend toward secularization, which is counterintuitively believed to contribute to the emergence of cult activities and sects.

(continues)

432 Summary (continued)

13. The number of US adults who attend religious services at least once a week decreased from 39% in 2007 to 36% in 2014, but a majority of the population still professes a belief in God.
14. Televised religious programs reach millions of people in their homes, and the televangelists who appear on these programs have created huge financial empires.
15. The ecumenical movement calls for unity among Christians worldwide.
16. With the development of a new religious consciousness around the 1960s, many new religious movements took root in the US. Some derived from the Christian tradition, others emphasized personal growth, and still others had roots in (or appropriated from) Eastern religions.
17. Several explanations for the creation of these groups have been offered. It has been suggested that they have arisen in response to our diverse culture, search for identity, and need for precise, simplistic answers, or as a protest against secularization and materialism. The institution of religion in the US and around the world is linked with the family as well as with economic, political, and educational institutions. These institutions both influence religious beliefs and practices and, in turn, are influenced by religion.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss some ways in which religion affects our identity and our behavior.
2. How do you think life in the US would be different if our culture were based on polytheism rather than monotheism?
3. How would you explain why some people are attracted to churches, others to sects, some to cults, and still others to no religious groups at all?
4. Regardless of an individual's beliefs, everyone in the US is affected by the Protestant ethic. Explain how Protestantism has helped to shape our cultural beliefs and values and how it may have affected you.
5. Compare the functionalist and conflict approaches to religion and discuss how these views are different from or similar to views you may have been socialized to believe about religion.
6. Discuss some ways in which religion affects society—for example, what impact has religion had on gender roles in the Southern US.
7. Select one of the religions discussed in the text other than your own (if you do not have a religion, then select any of them). Explore how your involvement in family and in political, economic, and educational institutions might be different if you were a member of that religion.
8. Make a list of trends in religion. How would you explain them? How can they be changed?
9. Explain the appeal of televangelists. What accounts for their popularity, fund-raising success, and longevity?
10. Discuss the linkage between religion and other institutions, such as the family or school.

Pop Quiz for Chapter 13

1. Which of the following is *not* one of the elements Durkheim identified as being common to all religions?
 - a. system of beliefs
 - b. set of rituals
 - c. sacred things
 - d. church buildings
2. People in certain societies who are believed to have special knowledge and the ability to influence spirits are called _____.
 - a. priests
 - b. shamans
 - c. totems
 - d. witch doctors
3. Belief in and worship of more than one god is known as _____.
 - a. monotheism
 - b. animism
 - c. polygyny
 - d. polytheism
4. The largest religious denomination in the United States is _____.
 - a. Southern Baptists
 - b. Roman Catholics
 - c. Lutherans
 - d. Mormons

5. In sociology, nationally recognized or official state religions are referred to as _____.
 - a. central churches
 - b. ecclesia
 - c. denominations
 - d. sects
6. Manifest functions of religion include which of the following?
 - a. preserving and solidifying society
 - b. reinforcing social norms
 - c. answering ultimate questions
 - d. all of the above
7. According to historians, the oldest religion in the Western world is _____.
 - a. Judaism
 - b. Christianity
 - c. Catholicism
 - d. Confucianism
 - e. Islam
8. The religion that emphasizes submission to the will of Allah is _____.
 - a. Judaism
 - b. Hinduism
 - c. Confucianism
 - d. Islam
9. What religion is usually practiced along with a native religion?
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Islam
 - c. Judaism
 - d. Christianity
10. In the United States, the religious belief that a dramatic transformation of the world will occur and that Christ will rule the world is called _____.
 - a. ecumenism
 - b. transcendentalism
 - c. transformation
 - d. millennialism
11. Sacredness is a property inherent in an object. T / F
12. Fundamentalists believe in a strict literal interpretation of the Bible. T / F
13. Sects may in time become denominations. T / F
14. Televised religious programming in the United States is typically not-for-profit, with most of the money generated going to charities and nongovernment organizations. T / F
15. ISKCON is rooted in Hinduism. T / F

Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. d 4. b 5. b 6. d 7. a 8. d 9. a 10. d 11. F 12. T 13. T 14. F 15. T