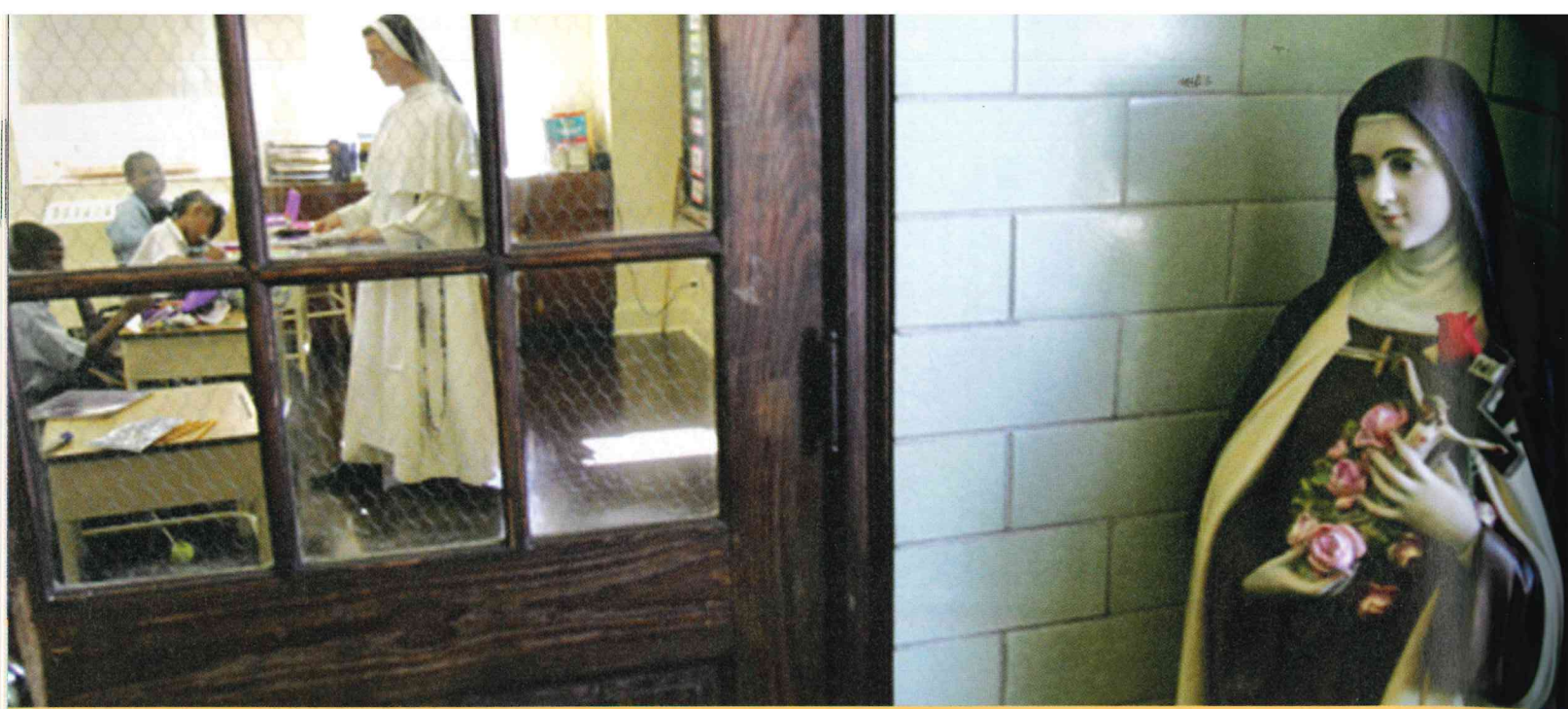




LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1** Discuss the ideas of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim on the role of religion as a central force in many lives.
- 2** Define religion.
- 3** Define the major components of religion—beliefs, rituals, and experiences.
- 4** Describe the types of religious organizations.
- 5** Apply structural/functional and conflict/critical theories to religion.
- 6** Describe the relationship between globalization and the world's major religions.

Students recite the Koran, the holy book of Islam, near an important shrine west of Tripoli (Libya). Sociologists are concerned not with the truth of any particular religion but rather with the role belief and ritual play in human lives. Does religion have a role in your life?



Proposed by Charles Darwin in 1859 and affirmed by countless twentieth-century biologists and geneticists, the theory of evolution has achieved scientific consensus as an explanation of the natural origin of humankind over time. In contrast, the idea of intelligent design sees the overwhelming complexity of the universe as the work of a rational, omnipotent designer, whether a god, an alien, or some other source.

Since 1925, U.S. laws and court cases have challenged the teaching of first evolution, then religious creationism (essentially, the belief that the biblical God created the universe), and finally

Sociology studies the central role of religion as a force in many lives.

intelligent design in public schools. Advocates of evolution-only science programs cite the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which sets forth the separation of church and state, as well as the imperative to offer ideas that are scientifically valid in the classroom. Intelligent design proponents believe evolution and intelligent design should be taught equally, and that students should be encouraged to decide the controversy for themselves.

Even though intelligent design was developed to sidestep the religious nature of the creationism argument, its acceptance of an otherworldly,

untestable force is deeply rooted in religious belief and a nonscientific framing of the world. Humans have explained life as the work of an omnipotent, sentient god or gods since before recorded history, passing creation myths down across many centuries and even millennia of socialization. Many advocates of evolution thus contend that intelligent design has no place in educational courses dedicated to evidence-based knowledge.

While the debate over evolution has been going on for more than a century, it is but one indication of a larger phenomenon in the modern world: our efforts to define the relationship between science and religion. One view of this relationship privileges science over religion, saying that science undermines the credibility of religion and leads us to abandon it as an outdated worldview characteristic of premodern times.

Another view does the opposite, saying that when science challenges religious convictions—such as literal interpretations of the biblical creation story—we should reject science in favor of a religious perspective. Yet another position calls for treating science and religion as each having its own proper place, rejecting the idea that making such a choice is necessary or wise.

We'll see in this chapter that sociology takes no position in the debate. Its purpose in studying religion is rather to understand the role it plays as a central force in many lives. •

EARLY SOCIOLOGISTS AND RELIGION

The early giants in the field were all in one way or another affected by, and interested in, religion:

- The founder of sociology, Auguste Comte, was raised by a father who was an ardent Catholic, but he turned away from religion and toward science, especially a science of sociology. However, Comte transformed his science into a religion that resembled Catholicism. He saw himself as its leader—the “Pope”—of the new religion. (See Chapter 2.)
- Although his father had converted to Christianity, Karl Marx came from a religious Jewish family and a long line of rabbis. He did not approve of his father's decision to convert. Rather, Marx rejected *all* religions because he came to see them as tools used by capitalists to control the proletariat. Religion distracted workers from seeing the need for social revolution. (See Chapter 2.)
- Émile Durkheim was also raised in a religious Jewish family. In fact, his father was a rabbi. Durkheim came to reject religion as his own personal belief system. However, religion, and morality more generally, became a major subject of study for him, especially in his famous *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim [1912] 1965). (See Chapter 2.)
- Max Weber was torn between his highly religious mother and his secular father, a modern bureaucrat and political operative. Weber had a nervous breakdown when his father died soon after they had a violent argument. After he recovered, Weber spent the rest of his personal and professional life wrestling with the relationship between faith in religion and the rationalization of the modern world epitomized by bureaucracy. (See Chapter 2.)

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, the three most influential of the classic sociologists, shared a critical perspective on religion, although their differences were considerable.

KARL MARX: RELIGION AS A DRUG

Marx viewed religion as essentially an illusion (Marx 2002: 170) This view of religion is one of the most frequently misunderstood aspects of his thinking. According to Marx, religion brings pleasure or consolation to believers who think that they are incapable of changing their distressing

social conditions. It is a response to the alienation from the social world that people experience. However, religion is not capable of changing the conditions that caused the distress in the first place. In Marx's view, capitalism, because it encouraged rational thinking, tended to undermine religious beliefs. People were increasingly forced to look at their world without such illusions. He thought this was a positive development because it helped people to clearly see the underlying causes of exploitation and social injustice. According to Marx, freedom of religion was not the ultimate goal, for whether religion was imposed or freely chosen, it remained an illusion. Instead, in the socialist utopia that he hoped the proletariat would establish, religion would simply disappear. In other words, people would experience freedom *from* religion. It is worth observing that Marx never advocated the suppression of religion. However, the communist regimes of the twentieth century in countries such as the Soviet Union and China actively attacked established religions. In contrast, Marx believed that religion would simply evaporate in a just and equal society.

ASK YOURSELF

Why would religion, in Marx's view, vanish in a just and equal society? Do you agree with this view? Do you think religion might someday vanish for other reasons? Why or why not?

MAX WEBER: THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD

Weber's major contribution to the sociology of religion derives from his comparative studies of the belief systems and the ethical orientations of the major world religions. He explored these systems with an eye to understanding the ways that they influenced both the psychological orientations of people and the social structures of societies identified with certain religions. Unlike Marx, Weber appreciated religious belief systems, their various forms, and their implications for the ways people act in the world. In fact, Weber wanted to better understand the ways in which different religions helped to create different kinds of societies and different personality types.

In undertaking these comparative studies, Weber became convinced that certain trends originating within the Protestant world of Western Europe (discussed in



Creationism vs. Evolution

Chapter 2) were serving to erode religious conviction. In his view, the rational character of modern western societies fosters the “disenchantment of the world” (Weber [1922] 1946: 155). This means that the sacred realm recedes as the world is increasingly seen solely in terms of the profane. The power of religion to influence everyday life is reduced. Religion is increasingly compartmentalized and separated from other spheres of social life and from other institutions. For example, economic decisions are not made on the basis of religious beliefs or criteria, but in terms of the laws of the market. At the individual level, it means that religion tends to become more privatized.

Unlike Marx, Weber did not look forward to a world free of religion. In fact, although he described himself as “religiously unmusical,” he was not antireligious or irreligious (Weber 1988: 324). While he did think that secularization was one major trend in the modern world, he did not conclude that this meant the inevitable disappearance of religion. On the contrary, he foresaw the emergence of new religions and the quest for revitalizing old religious traditions as likely responses to the challenges to religious belief posed by secularization. In addition, Weber saw religion as a way of explaining why people suffer and die. Such explanations are called **theodicies**. Unlike Marx, Weber realized that suffering was not linked to a particular economic system. For one thing, all people die. Illness, injuries, accidents, natural disasters, and the like all contribute to suffering. So, too, do relationship problems. For example, marital conflicts that cause pain and suffering for everyone in the family occur in all economic systems.

ÉMILE DURKHEIM: THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

Durkheim did not share Weber’s prediction that religion would erode in the future. On the contrary, he wrote that “there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself” (Durkheim [1912] 1972: 243). However, the differences between these two thinkers may be exaggerated, in part because they focused on different aspects of religion. Weber concerned himself with the highly developed major world religions. In contrast, Durkheim had an anthropological interest in the simplest, most elementary forms of religious phenomena. His classic, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ([1912] 1965), demonstrated his interest in, for example, Australian aboriginals. He looked to less developed societies to provide clues about core factors that had contributed to the development of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. He wanted to describe religion from its simplest to its most complex expressions. By doing so, he thought he could grasp the common functional

significance of religion for all people in every historical period.

Of particular importance to Durkheim’s understanding of religious phenomena was the role of social interaction in producing feelings of a powerful force that stands beyond the ordinary world, while in various ways influencing it. This force was described as the sacred, and it was distinguished from the profane that characterized daily life. Hand in hand with the emergence of a belief in the sacred were two developments: the creation of rituals and the establishment of cultic organizations. Rituals in early human societies were directed toward totems, animals and plants that served as symbolic representations of the sacred.

Durkheim contended that religion is the basis of the collective conscience (see Chapter 2). He believed that this was the source of the fundamental categories of thought that provide people with a stable and coherent worldview. This includes how people think about space, time, causality, categorization, and related conceptual issues (Durkheim and Mauss ([1903] 1963). The collective conscience also provided the main way by which early societies created solidarity and social integration. In these societies characterized by mechanical solidarity (see Chapter 2), a system of shared beliefs among people doing essentially the same things was the glue that held the social order together. Part of the belief system included moral values that proscribed certain kinds of conduct and defined societal expectations and individual obligations. Modern societies characterized by organic solidarity (see Chapter 2) are held together by their differences. When they appeared on the scene, the kind of homogeneous value consensus characteristic of the past was no longer so essential. Value pluralism would not necessarily threaten a society, and thus some of religion’s original purpose would be less evident. Durkheim never fully explored the role of religion in modern societies, but he seemed to think that religion would remain important as a source of meaning and social support.

Given this history, and the importance of religion to society, it is not surprising that religion became a central concern within sociology.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

The worship service at the Holiness Church of God in Jesus’ Name in eastern Tennessee, located in the heart of Appalachia (see the accompanying photo from a similar church in the region), preserves a unique

theodicies Ways of explaining why people suffer and die.

regional tradition that can be traced to the early twentieth century. In an austere church building, without stained glass windows or a steeple, the worshipers gather to participate in an emotionally charged service. The presence of electric guitars and drums does not make this church different from many other Pentecostal and Holiness churches in the area. Nor do the personal testimonies about being lost to sin and then found make this church particularly distinctive. Not even the fact that as the service proceeds, some present begin to speak in tongues (known as *glossolalia*), makes this church unique.

What does make the service different from that of other churches in the area can be found in the crude wooden boxes at the foot of the pulpit, which bear inscriptions such as “Lord Jesus” and “Mark 16:18.” It can also be found in the contents of the mason jars sitting on the pulpit. The gathering, which will last for hours, comes to an emotional peak when the boxes are opened and their contents—poisonous snakes—are distributed to the assembled throughout the room. People hold the snakes above their heads, wrap them around their necks like scarves, and in other ways “take up serpents.” Some of the faithful also lift the mason jars to their lips and drink the strychnine contents. These dangerous activities are undertaken with the full knowledge that others before them have died while engaging in the same practices. The congregants also know that they are violating state law (Burton 1993).

So why do they do it? Like others who claim to be Christian fundamentalists, these serpent-handling believers argue for a literal interpretation of the Bible. What distinguishes them from other literalists is the particular importance they attach to a passage in Mark 16, in which Jesus appears after the Resurrection to proclaim: “All these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them.”



Pastor MackRandy Wolford of the Jolo (West Virginia) Church of the Lord Jesus died after refusing medical treatment for a rattlesnake bite he suffered during a sermon. What might sociologists try to learn about the role of a snake-handling church in the lives of its members?

CHECKPOINT 13.1 EARLY SOCIOLOGISTS ON RELIGION

Marx	Religion brings consolation to believers in distressing conditions they cannot change, but it is essentially an illusion from which an ideal world will be free.
Weber	Different religions have helped to create different kinds of societies and personality types. New religions and revitalizations of old traditions will emerge in response to the challenge of secularization.
Durkheim	Religion is the basis of the collective conscience; it relies on social interaction to produce a sense of the sacred and create rituals and cultic organizations.

But why do the thousand or so people who handle serpents and drink poison do so, while the overwhelming majority of people affiliated with Christian congregations do not? Why do the former believe that a literal interpretation of scripture is required? Why is this particular scriptural passage given such importance? What sociological or psychological variables are involved in inclining one to join a snake-handling church?

These are the kinds of questions that sociologists of religion seek to address. But they are not only interested in marginalized religious groups, such as the one in this



Religious Involvement

example; they are also interested in the beliefs and practices of more conventional, mainstream religions. Sociologists are also interested in religious institutions and in the ways that they contribute to shaping a society's cultural values.

At the outset, it is essential to define religion. Many scholars see religion as difficult or impossible to define because it is so complex and perceived so differently by different societies and even by individuals within any given society (James [1902] 1960; Weber 1963). Nevertheless, we need a definition to shape our discussion and analysis of religious phenomena (Hargrove 1989).

Sociologists have relied on definitions that stress the idea that religious beliefs address issues related to the ultimate meaning of life and point to a realm of existence beyond the ordinary or everyday. In looking at various definitions that sociologists can use, it is useful to distinguish two broad definitions. The first suggests that religion addresses questions related to ultimate meaning. As noted above, this was Weber's focus. He viewed religion as a way of dealing with suffering, injustice, and the inevitability of death. Religions offer a wide variety of responses to these aspects of the human condition, ranging from passive acceptance of these problems to active efforts to remedy them. For example, a slave might have believed that his servitude was God's will. Slave owners worked to instill such a belief, because it was in their self-interest to have their slaves passively accept their fate. Those slaves that accepted this did so with the hope of entering into heaven after death. On the other hand, a slave might interpret slavery to be a gross violation of God's will. If this is what a slave believed, she might feel justified in engaging in acts of resistance to slavery. The main point is that religious belief does not necessarily provide happiness, but meaning and purpose.

The second definition of religion is largely one derived from Durkheim's ([1912] 1965) classic statement: **Religion** is a social phenomenon that consists of beliefs about the sacred; the experiences, practices, and rituals that reinforce those beliefs; and the community that shares similar beliefs and practices (Kurtz 2012). Before proceeding to examine the components of religion identified in this definition, it is important to note that sociologists of religion do not judge the truth claims of differing religious systems. Instead, they bracket these claims and address the consequences of such beliefs on believers and on the larger society. Because sociologists rely solely on data from the everyday world (the profane realm), they have no access to the sacred and thus are not in a position to say one way or the other whether religious beliefs are "true." Instead, sociologists begin with the assumption that if people believe something is real, whether or not it is the case, the consequences of

their beliefs are real. And this is what they can and do study.

ASK YOURSELF

Which view of religion—an answer to questions about the ultimate meaning of human experience, or a social phenomenon consisting of beliefs, experiences, and community—is closer to your own current view of religion? Can we accept both views at once? Why or why not?

COMPONENTS OF RELIGION

Three of the major components of religion are beliefs, rituals, and experiences. The fourth, community, will be discussed in a later section. Beliefs and rituals have grown out of and acted back on each other for millennia. They have persisted but also changed as believers of various religious traditions have diffused globally and interacted with other religions in the lands they have passed through and in which they have settled. Moreover, neither belief nor ritual is created in isolation, but both are created as a response to people's experiences and particular times in particular places. Beliefs and rituals, in turn, shape these experiences.

BELIEF

Every religion has a set of interrelated **beliefs**, or ideas that explain the world and identify what should be sacred or held in awe, that is, the religion's "ultimate concerns." Religious beliefs have been shaped over thousands of years and both are embedded in religious traditions and serve as the "raw material" for new religions.

Durkheim ([1912] 1965: 14) wrote that religion deals with "things which surpass the limits of our knowledge." This view was echoed by Rudolph Otto (1923), who referred to this domain as the realm of the holy. Others have used such words as *supernatural*, *supramundane*, or *sacred* to describe this realm. Durkheim, as was made clear earlier, preferred the last of these terms, as he argued that all human experience could be divided into two categories:

religion A social phenomenon that consists of beliefs about the sacred; the experiences, practices, and rituals that reinforce those beliefs; and the community that shares similar beliefs and practices.

beliefs Ideas that explain the world and identify what should be sacred or held in awe, that is, a religion's ultimate concerns.



The city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia is a sacred place. The birthplace of Muhammad, it is the holiest city in Islam and the site of a mandatory pilgrimage for all who are able. Non-Muslims are forbidden to enter.

the **sacred**, or what is of ultimate concern, and the **profane**, or the ordinary and mundane. People can come to *believe* that virtually anything is sacred—a deity, a place (like Jerusalem or Mecca), a particular time or season (Ramadan, Diwali), an idea (freedom), or even a thing (an animal, a mountain, a tree, a canyon, a flag, or a rock). The sacred is treated with respect, and one's relation to it is often defined in rituals: You might genuflect when passing in front of an altar or take off your shoes when entering a temple. People believe that anything that is not considered sacred is profane.

Each religious tradition weaves together a fabric of many different and interdependent beliefs. These include beliefs about creation and suffering, as well as ethical standards for judging proper behavior. For example, when Muslims declare in their daily prayers that they believe God is the most merciful and the most compassionate, it means that their behavior must reflect

sacred To Durkheim, that which has been defined as being of ultimate concern.

profane To Durkheim, that which has not been defined as sacred, or that which is ordinary and mundane.

CHECKPOINT 13.2 TWO BROAD DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

Religion provides meaning and purpose in the face of suffering, injustice, and death, but not necessarily happiness.

Religion is a social phenomenon consisting of beliefs about the sacred, the rituals and experiences that enforce beliefs, and the community that shares them.

God's mercy: "The imperative to be merciful—to bring benefit to the world and avert harm—must underlie a Muslim's understanding of reality and attitude toward society" (Abd-Allah 2005).

Beliefs are often presented in sacred stories and scriptures. They address questions about the origin and meaning of life, theories about why the world was created, and explanations of suffering and death. They first express a *worldview*, that is, a culture's most comprehensive image of the ways in which life—nature, self, and society—is ordered (Geertz 1973). That worldview, in turn, shapes an *ethos*, which "expresses a culture's and a people's basic attitude about themselves and the world in general" (Geertz 1973: 173).

These beliefs are at the same time both models of and models for reality. They provide believers with information and a framework for interpreting the world around them. As models *for* reality, however, beliefs show how the world should be versus how it really is, often prompting the believer to act. Mahatma Gandhi believed that the world

was ultimately grounded in truth and nonviolence, and that a just god ruled the world. His noncooperation with the British Empire on behalf of the struggle for Indian independence was not only political resistance, but also an act of faith. He saw no reason to be fearful of unjust political powers that were simply under the illusion that they were in control of the world. Hindu and Buddhist theories of *ahimsa*, nonharmfulness or nonviolence, not only explained the real power behind the universe for Gandhi, but also gave him a guide for how to act.

Most religious belief systems include a *cosmogony*, a story about how and why the world was created, which usually links the believers to the act of creation.

Finally, every religious tradition provides an explanation for the presence of evil, suffering, and death. Most explanations of this type identify the source of evil in the world. How a religion recommends confronting evil may affect everything from individual beliefs and decisions to a nation's foreign policy. We can find a wide range of explanations in the world's religions for the existence of suffering: It may be seen as punishment for sinful behavior, the result of a battle between evil and good, or just part of the natural cycles of life and death.

One of the most difficult dilemmas for any religion is to explain why good people suffer and bad people sometimes flourish. While the suffering of the righteous is problematic, most religious explanations suggest that ethical behavior will eventually be rewarded. Most mainstream religions suggest that suffering is just part of the way the universe functions, so that everyone is subject to it at one time or another. It is how you deal with suffering that is most important.

RITUAL

In most religious traditions, simply believing is never enough; one also has to act. The belief systems of religious traditions are loaded with rituals that reinforce those beliefs, serve as reminders, and help believers enact their beliefs in the world. A **ritual** is a set of regularly repeated, prescribed, and traditional behaviors that serve to symbolize some value or belief (Kurtz 2012). Rituals are enacted during ceremonies and festivals, such as funerals, weddings, and baptisms. In other words, rituals are part of the **rites of passage** that surround major transitions in life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Also included under the heading of rituals are ongoing spiritual practices, such as personal prayer and attending worship services of faith communities, as well as elements of everyday language that serve as religious reminders for many people.

Rituals come in many forms. Some, such as prayer, chanting, singing, and dancing, help people communicate or show devotion to the gods. Some, such as mantras and

meditations, help believers organize their personal and social lives. Some frame daily life, like those relating to diet, hygiene, and sexual practices, while others celebrate cycles of nature and build community, like holidays, seasonal festivals, and processions.

Rituals solve problems of personal and collective life by providing time-tested actions, words, and sentiments for every occasion. When addressing serious problems, such as death, violence, natural disasters, or social crises, people often use rituals to

1. identify the source of the problem,
2. characterize it as evil,
3. mark boundaries between “us” and “them,” and
4. give them some means of working toward a solution, or at least the satisfaction that they are doing something about the problem.

In times of crisis, rituals can help people transform tragedy into opportunity. They build a sense of solidarity that provides support for the suffering and reinforces the authority of the social order and the institutions that sponsor the rituals, especially when they are being threatened. Rituals provide a theory of evil and focus participants' attention on some abstract issue, a personified devil or mythical figure, or a human enemy who needs to be denounced or attacked.

ASK YOURSELF

Which religious rituals have you been involved in or witnessed in your life? Consider those of your own religion, if any, and those of other religions to which you have been exposed through friends or relatives. What was the stated purpose of these rituals? Were there other reasons for these rituals that were less obvious? If so, what were they?

Participants usually believe that their rituals are effective and remember the stories from their culture or religion that remind them of their efficacy. Although partly a rational process, rituals as symbols also evoke sentiments

ritual A set of regularly repeated, prescribed, and traditional behaviors that serve to symbolize some value or belief.

rites of passage Rituals that surround major transitions in life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

and emotions that go beyond rationality. When a traditional ritual is used to solve personal or social troubles, it gains new authority and helps to sustain old habits and preserves the society and its institutions.

Religious rituals are also crucial for social change and cultural innovation, especially when traditional rituals can be transformed for revolutionary purposes. One example is Gandhi's use of religious processions, prayers, and scripture readings to mobilize his fellow Indians, as brothers and sisters of the same god, to demand their freedom from the British Empire. In another example, in 1989, the Christian rituals of Eastern Europe provided spaces for nonviolent political resistance against communist regimes. And in 2011, the Muslim Friday prayers in Egypt became occasions for large gatherings on Friday afternoons that moved from prayer to protest.

Moreover, religious rituals often mark a **liminal period**, or a special time set apart from ordinary reality (Turner 1967). The sacred time during a religious ceremony may involve an inversion of apparent reality, giving hope for the oppressed that they will be liberated, for the sad that they will be comforted, and for the last that they shall be first. In the traditional Catholic Carnival ritual preceding Lent (a period of penitence), Old Man Winter is dethroned by the young Princess Spring. The norms of appropriate behavior appear to be suspended as the celebrants sing, dance, and drink to excess. This helps encourage the revelers to overthrow masculine authority. In the liminal period where stodgy patriarchy is defeated by youthful feminine energy, the cycles of nature replace winter with spring, resurrecting hope in the hearts of the celebrants.

EXPERIENCE

The combination of beliefs, rituals, and other practices forms the variety of religious experiences for believers, regardless of which tradition they celebrate. Much of the human community views the world through a religious lens and constructs an identity around religious affiliation and experiences, such as prayer or attendance at religious services. In a survey of 40 countries, large numbers of

liminal period A special time set apart from ordinary reality.



Most religions are marked by ritual, including those like Christian baptism that signal an individual's entry into the community of the faithful. What religious rituals have you witnessed or participated in?

people, especially in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, reported religion and religious experiences to be very important in their lives (see Figure 13.1).

Even in the United States, 59 percent of respondents report that religion is very important to them. Moreover, 58 percent say that they pray daily. Approximately two-thirds of American women, people over 65, and people earning less than \$30,000 a year report that they pray daily (see Figure 13.2).

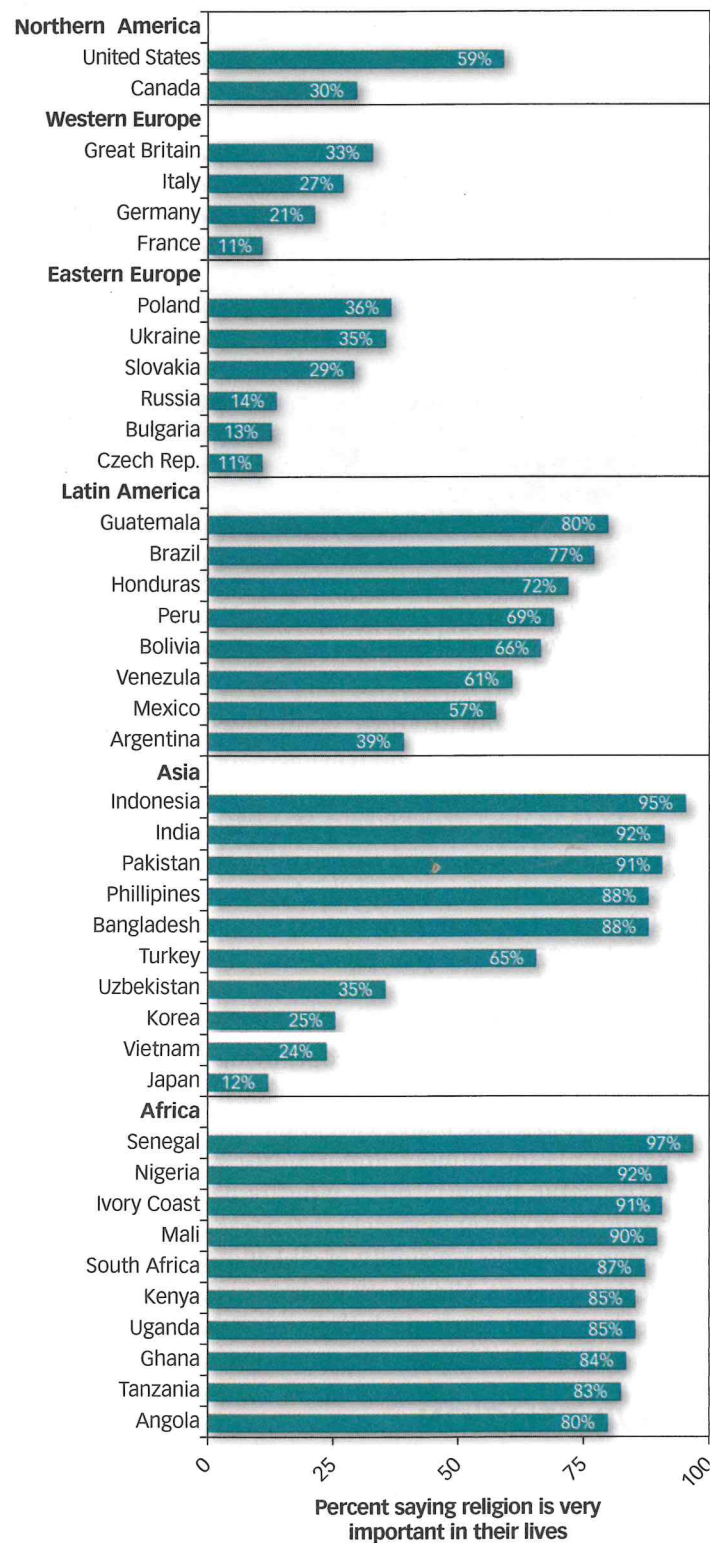
Interestingly, a negative relationship exists between wealth and religiosity, with people living in poorer nations being more religious than those in wealthy countries (see Figure 13.3). The major exception is the United States. Religion is much more important to Americans than it is to people living in other wealthy nations. In African countries, no fewer than eight in ten report religion as very important, as do a majority of all Latin Americans except the Argentinians. Nine in ten of those in the predominantly Muslim countries (e.g., Indonesia, Pakistan, Mali, and Senegal) view religion as very important.

CIVIL RELIGION

The experiences discussed to this point in this section relate to organized religion. However, many religious experiences occur outside of, and side-by-side with, those that occur in



FIGURE 13.1 • Importance of Religion Worldwide



SOURCE: *U.S. Stands Alone in Its Embrace of Religion among Wealthy Nations*, December 19, 2002. Pew Global Attitudes Project, Pew Research Center.

the context of those religions. One set of such experiences has been very important to Americans in particular—**civil religion**, or the beliefs, practices, and symbols that a nation holds sacred (Yamane 2007). This idea has a long history in philosophy and sociology, including the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Émile Durkheim. However, it was an essay by Robert Bellah in 1967, titled “Civil Religion in America,” that gave this idea broad visibility in the sociological study of religion. He argued that civil religion has existed in American society since its founding. It exists, among other places, in presidential addresses, from those of George Washington to those of Barack Obama (Gorski 2011); in texts, such as the Constitution; at revered geographical locations, like the battlefield at Gettysburg or Arlington National Cemetery; and in community rituals, like parades and fireworks on the Fourth of July. Civil religion becomes especially prominent and important in difficult times, such as after 9/11. In the immediate aftermath of this tragedy, many Americans sought to express their shared national identity by flying flags. This was a powerful moment during which people felt a deep bond with their fellow Americans. With the passage of time, the site of the main attack on the World Trade Center has become a sacred geographical area. The 10-year anniversary of the attack witnessed a communal ritual on the site, as well as one involving a large portion of the American population via the mass media.

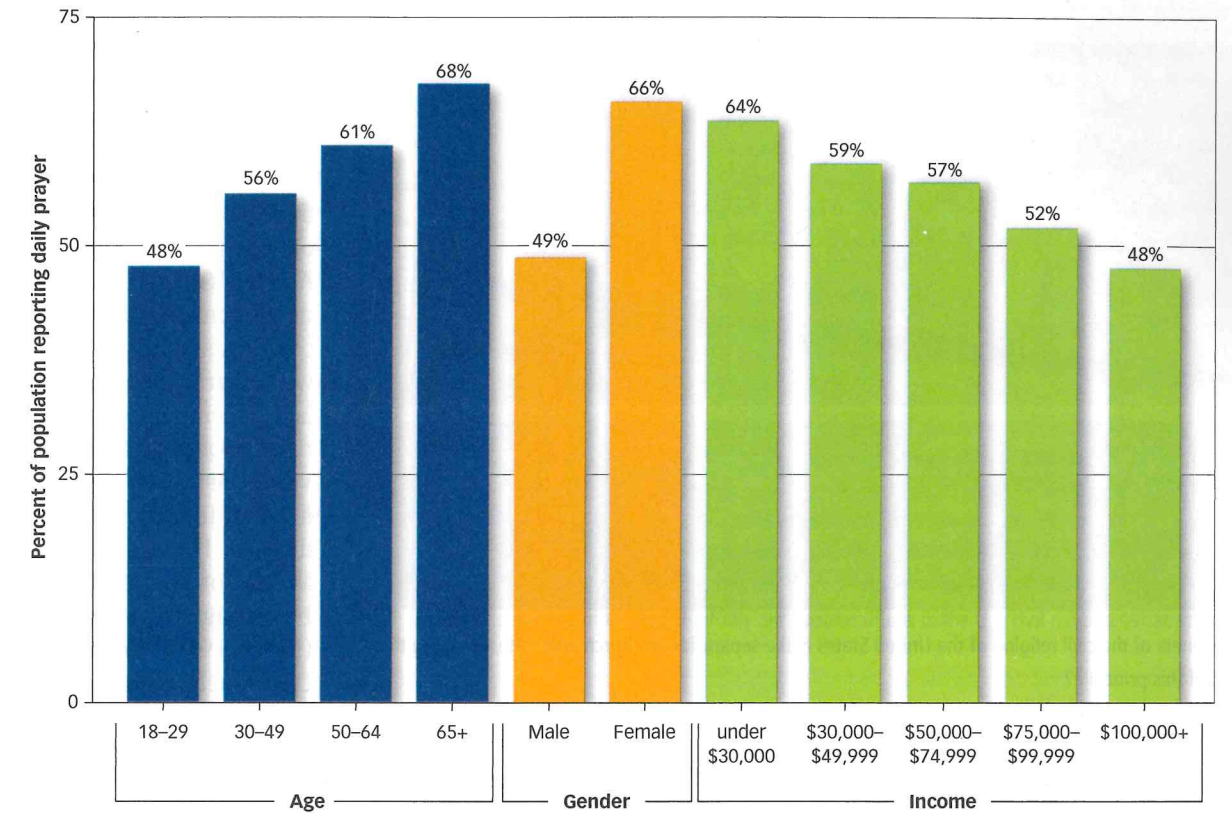
What is the function of civil religion? As the example above illustrates, it provides a sense of a collective national identity. It does so by promoting shared ideas and ideals that are reaffirmed in various ceremonies and rituals. It reinforces a sense of solidarity, defining who the “we” is in “we the people.” Of course, although this is not always obvious, it creates a boundary at the same time. By defining who falls into the category of “we,” it also establishes the category of “they.” As such, religion becomes a source of patriotism. It has not always been clear which groups fall into one or the other of these categories.

The civil religion of America is not rooted in a particular religion, as is true in Britain, where the Anglican Church links church and state. The separation of church and state in the United States means that no one particular religion can become the official religion of the nation. Rather, the civil religion has to be broader than any one religious tradition.

This being said, the nation’s founding groups were overwhelmingly Christian. More specifically, they were Protestant Christians of one denomination or another. This is significant for two reasons. First, certain ideas about

civil religion The beliefs, practices, and symbols that a nation holds sacred.

FIGURE 13.2 • Daily Prayer in the United States, 2011



SOURCE: National Day of Prayer, April 28, 2011. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center.

America and its place in the world derive from those earliest settlers. Thus, the ideas that the nation has a covenant with God and that it is a model for other nations—a beacon on a hill—are deeply rooted in the country’s history. One can find these themes in countless presidential addresses up to the present. Second, Protestants, as the “insiders,” have often been unwilling to accept the idea that other religious traditions, and nonreligious traditions, should be considered part of the civil religion. From the nineteenth century into the twentieth, the two largest non-Protestant groups were Catholics and Jews. Both faced considerable hostility and opposition. For example, Catholics were described as unfit to be citizens in a democracy because of their loyalty to the Pope. Meanwhile, virulent anti-Semitism condemned Jews and sought to prevent them from being accepted.

Over time, these ideas about American identity persisted. However, the “we” category was revised to become more inclusive. This did not occur without conflict. Nonetheless, by the second half of the twentieth century, prejudice against Catholics and Jews had declined considerably. As a result, these groups were included under the canopy of civil religion (Berger 1969). It became fashionable to describe the United States as a “Judeo-Christian” nation (Herberg

[1955] 1983). The extent to which this new tolerance and inclusiveness extends to religious traditions that are neither Christian nor Jewish is not entirely clear, nor is the place of those who profess no religious beliefs. In terms of the former, Rhys Williams (2011) has argued that there is some evidence that efforts are being made to include Muslims. Thus, defining Islam as sharing a history with Judaism and Christianity because they are all “Abrahamic religions” (after the Old Testament figure) or “religions of the book” is an attempt to find room for them under the canopy. On the other hand, sociologists from the University of Minnesota’s American Mosaic Project have concluded that in contemporary America, the ultimate “other” is the self-professed atheist (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006).

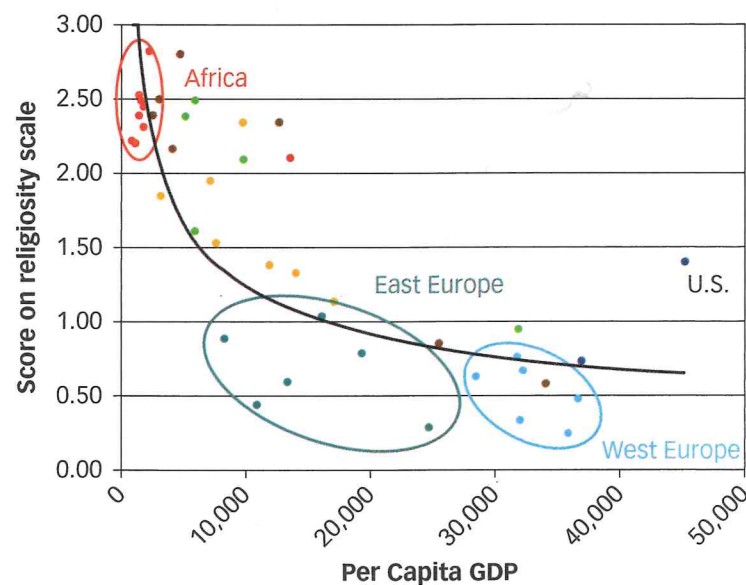
Many Americans experience civil religion by reading the sacred texts, visiting key places in the nation’s history, and participating in rituals such as those associated with the Fourth of July. By actively participating in this distinctive American religion, Americans serve to legitimate the state





Among the tenets of the civil religion of the United States is the separation of church and state. What are the advantages of this principle?

FIGURE 13.3 • Wealth and Religiosity



SOURCE: *U.S. Stands Alone in its Embrace of Religion among Wealthy Nations*, December 19, 2002. Pew Global Attitudes Project, Pew Research Center

NOTE: Religiosity is measured using a three-item index ranging from 0–3, with “3” representing the most religious position. Respondents were given a “1” if they believe faith in God is necessary for morality; a “1” if they say religion is very important in their lives; and a “1” if they pray at least once a day.

(Bloom 1992). While many Americans continue to believe in the country’s civil religion, others contend that it is less important today than it was when Bellah first developed the concept. For one thing, so it is argued, there has been a

resurgence of traditional religions, as well as an emergence of new religions, that for at least some people appear to be dwarfing civil religion in importance. For another, divisions within American society, especially between liberals and conservatives, suggest that there may no longer be a consensus on the major components of America’s civil religion. While the divide across political views makes consensus difficult, Bellah actually was aware of this possibility. In fact, during the era of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, the nation was also very divided. In fact, it was likely more divided. He wrote about this era as one of a “broken covenant,” but thought that it could be fixed (Bellah 1975). Of course, another crisis such as the one associated with 9/11 would serve to reduce those differences and lead to

a reaffirmation of America’s civil religion. But even beyond moments of national crisis, as long as nations continue to exist, citizens of those nations need to share certain values and beliefs, which are the glue that holds the country together.

ASK YOURSELF

Do you think civil religion is more important to American society now than it was when, say, you were a child? Why or why not? Give examples to support your answer.

SECULARIZATION

Secularization is defined as the declining significance of religion (Bruce 2013; Calhoun, Jurgensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011; Dobbelaere 2007; Martin 2005; C. Taylor 2007). It occurs at both the societal and individual levels. At the societal level, it can involve the declining power of organized religion, as well as the loss by religion of functions such as education to the state. At the individual level, secularization means that individual experiences with religion are less intense and less important than other kinds of experiences.

secularization The declining significance of religion.

Secularization refers to historical developments in the modern world that undermine the authority of religion. Among the mechanisms that are seen as contributing to it are the following:

1. The rise of scientific thinking as an alternative way of interpreting the world. The scientific perspective encourages skepticism and doubt, thereby challenging the certainty of religious belief.
2. The development of industrial society, particularly when it results in relative affluence and thus encourages materialism and downplays otherworldly concerns.
3. The rise of governments that do not mandate or promote an established religion.
4. The encouragement of religious tolerance, which leads to a “watering down” of religion in general and religious differences in particular.
5. The existence of competing secular moral ideologies, such as humanism. (Smelser 1994: 305–306)

Given the combined impact of these developments, by the 1960s, proponents of secularization theory (e.g., Berger 1969; Wilson 1966) assumed that religion would continue to decline. People would be less likely to attend religious services, join religious institutions, or embrace religious beliefs. What was happening in the wealthy industrial nations, the first to become “modern,” would inevitably happen elsewhere, too, at some point in the future. The place that seemed to exemplify this trend was Western Europe, where the churches were empty and religious convictions were waning. But even as these views were being presented, there was awareness of a problem: The United States remained a highly religious nation. The evidence was clear. In the 1980s, sociologist and priest Andrew Greeley (1989) found that more than 90 percent of Americans said they believed in God, and 40 percent reported that they attended religious services every week. This appeared to be an exception to what was expected to happen. But given the vibrancy of religion in most of the world, Europe increasingly looked like the exception. This, at any rate, is what Peter Berger concluded when he changed his mind and rejected the secularization thesis.



Lavish celebrations of the Fourth of July are popular rituals in the U.S. civil religion. What others can you identify?

There are still some proponents of the original secularization thesis. Nobody is more explicit about this than Scottish sociologist Steve Bruce in his provocatively titled book *God Is Dead* (2002). In a recent book, Bruce (2013) admits that such views, and more generally secularization, are “unfashionable.”

However, more sociologists today have embraced the idea of a “postsecular” society. While there is a lot of debate about what that term actually means, the growing view is that two contradictory trends can be observed: on the one hand, increasing religiosity, and on the other, an entrenched and expanding secularization (Goldstein 2009; Gorski et al. 2012).

RELIGION AS A FORM OF CONSUMPTION

A religious marketplace exists in societies that have a great deal of religious diversity and in which people are free to choose. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (2005) have built on this idea by describing religious institutions in terms of a “religious economy” that operates like commercial economies. In this view, religious institutions are like business firms seeking to serve a market, and in so doing, they enter into competitive relationships with other “firms” in order to maintain or expand market share.

Religious consumers have different tastes, which can be influenced by class, race, gender, educational attainment, age, region, and similar factors. When consumers “purchase” a religious institution, they do so

BIOGRAPHICAL bits



Robert N. Bellah (American, 1927–2013)

Robert Bellah obtained his doctorate from Harvard University in sociology and Far Eastern languages. He taught at Harvard for a decade and then at the University of California at Berkeley as Ford Professor of Sociology for 30 years. He published many books on religion and morality, including one on Émile Durkheim's work on morality. *Habits of the Heart*, perhaps Bellah's best-known book, analyzes the conflict between individualism and community, including the kind of community offered by religion. President Bill Clinton awarded Bellah the United States Humanities medal for his work on community in American society and the dangers of unchecked individualism.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- The sociology of religion

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-industrial Japan* (1957)
- *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (coauthored, 1985)
- *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (2011)
- *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (with Hans Joas, 2012)

KEY IDEAS & CONTRIBUTIONS

- The conflict between individualism and community
- Civil religion, the beliefs and practices a nation holds sacred, has existed in American society since its founding

for different reasons. Some might seek a family-friendly place with quality child care on the premises, some might emphasize worship that is very traditional, others may value contemporary worship formats, and still others might place a premium on the religious leaders' stances on various social and moral issues.

One measure of the degree to which the leaders of religious organizations have become conscious of the need to market their "product" can be seen in the increasing stress placed on treating potential members as

customers engaged in a particular form of consumption. Religion thus can be seen as an arena in which to market religious experiences (Drane 2008). Like all other aspects of consumer culture, religions need to respond to the demands of those who consume them and advertise what they have to offer (Roof 2001). Among the more obvious examples, which are certainly not new phenomena, are efforts to sell all sorts of goods and services linked to religion (Moore 1997). All major holidays are associated with one form of consumption or another, but this is most clearly true of Christmas (Belk 1987). There are even religious theme parks devoted to consumption (O'Guinn and Belk 1989). For example, in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, the "Biblical Times Theater" offers dinner theater performances of Biblical stories not far from Dolly Parton's Dollywood. In Orlando, near Disney World, the Trinity Broadcasting Network runs the "Holy Land Experience." At this theme park, customers can visit such places as the Garden of Eden, Bethlehem, and the Garden of Gethsemane.

Less obvious is the fact that religion itself has become another form of consumption. That is, in the United States and elsewhere, people "shop" for religion much as they shop for most other things (Gonzalez 2010; Warner 1993). In this context, religions must compete for consumers of religion in much the same way that manufacturers and shopping malls compete for customers. This occurs in what sociologist Wade Clark Roof (2001) calls the "spiritual marketplace."

Many churches, especially the large megachurches, are increasingly oriented to making themselves consumer friendly. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research defines megachurches as churches having at least 2,000 people in attendance at worship services each week. Among the more well-known megachurches are Willow Creek Community Church, led by Rev. Bill Hybels in suburban Chicago, Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in Southern California, and Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston. In these churches and others like them, the founders "have created sanctuaries that can only be intended to be entertainment spaces complete with stages, lighting, and even theatre-style seats" (Drane 2000: 90–91). The fanciest megachurches may have aerobics classes, food courts, and bowling alleys, as well as multimedia Bible classes presented in ways that resemble MTV videos (Niebuhr 1995). At crusades, and in some cases in churches themselves (such as Canterbury Cathedral in England), people exit through a bookstore/gift shop that sells all sorts of religious and nonreligious items. On Sunday morning, big screens project scripture verses and lyrics to pop-style religious songs so that everyone in the congregation can see and follow along (Niebuhr 1995). The pastor of one Baptist church who sought to make services more "fun" urged

his staff to study the techniques used by Disney World (Barron 1995).

While religion has become more like much more secular forms of consumption, it can be argued that consumption has become our new religion. As a result, shopping malls and fast-food restaurants, among many other settings, have become places where people go to practice their consumer religion. For example, at the opening of a McDonald's in Moscow, a worker spoke of it "as if it were the Cathedral at Chartres . . . a place to experience 'celestial joy'" (Keller 1990). A trip to Disney World has been described as the "middle class hajj, the compulsory visit to the sunbaked city" (Garfield 1991).

Shopping malls have much in common with traditional religious centers (Zepp 1997). In line with religious centers, shopping malls fulfill various human needs, such as connecting with other people; gaining a sense of community as well as receiving community services; being in the presence of nature in the form of water, trees, plants, and flowers found in the atria; and participating in the nonstop festivals that are, and that take place in, shopping malls. Malls also provide the centeredness usually associated with temples. They are characterized by a similar balance, order, and symmetry. Play is generally an integral part of religious practice, and malls are certainly a place to play. Similarly, malls offer a place where people can partake of ceremonial meals. In these and other ways, the shopping mall has religious qualities and therefore can truly be considered a "cathedral of consumption" (Ritzer 2010a). It is in those cathedrals, and in the process of consumption, that many people have what can only be described as religious experiences.

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

In modern societies, defined as secular or postsecular, we often think of religion as a private matter. However, it is the faith communities that sustain and nurture religious experience in individuals. Religious traditions that persist become institutionalized. In the twenty-first century, reflecting the societies in which they exist, many have become bureaucratized.

Like all other aspects of religion, its institutions are highly diverse, both between and within religious traditions. On the one hand, religious institutions tend

sect A small group of people who have joined the group consciously and voluntarily to have a personal religious experience.

to reflect the organizational forms prominent in any specific society. On the other, there is always tension between the large established, formalized institutions and newer or less formal religious groups that either come and go or end up becoming tomorrow's establishment. Moreover, religious institutions with a pluralistic religious worldview and a diverse population tend to be decentralized institutionally, whereas those with more homogeneous populations and belief systems may tend to be more centralized. Hinduism and Buddhism tend to be less centralized and hierarchical, whereas Christianity has become more formalized, in part as a response to the universalism of its membership.

Sociologists have worked with various typologies to describe the most common religious institutions. Much of this work begins by distinguishing between two basic kinds of religious organizations, the *sect* and the *church*. These concepts were first developed by German theologian and church historian Ernst Troeltsch, who borrowed from and expanded on Weber's work on the sociology of religion (Swatos 2007, N.d.; Troeltsch 1932). These two terms are appropriately conceptualized as poles on a continuum from the sect at one end to the church on the other.

SECT

A **sect** is a small group of people who have joined the group consciously and voluntarily to have a personal religious experience. They see themselves as the "true believers" who have privileged access to religious truths, which makes them critical of other religious institutions. The members' religious experiences and general behavior tend to be spontaneous and unregimented. A sect's leadership is usually composed of laypersons rather than those with specialized training. As such, the organizational structure is nonbureaucratic and nonhierarchical. Leaders often arise because they are seen as possessing charisma, and thus should be obeyed without question. Sects tend to be antiestablishment, and the members often feel alienated from, and as a result are prone to reject, society and the status quo. In fact, sects can be seen as breakaway, dissident groups that leave established religious institutions. They do so because they think such institutions have compromised too much with "the world" and therefore have polluted the religion's teachings.

Sects frequently draw their membership from the lower classes, who are more interested either in changing society or in remaining apart from it than in maintaining



Biobit: Robert N. Bellah



Religious Sects

McDONALDIZATION TODAY

Supersized McChurch

Some observers are worried by evidence of the McDonaldization of many Christian churches today: an overemphasis on efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control (Drane, 2001/2008; 2008). This process was largely driven by the Church Growth Movement, an attempt to expand membership using the techniques large corporations had developed to sell goods and services—and thus shaped by a view of members and potential members as consumers. Nowhere is this perspective more evident than in some nondenominational megachurches (churches having more than 2,000 members).

The largest of these is Lakewood Church in Houston, which reports that 44,000 people a week attend its services. Joel Osteen has been pastor since the death of his father in 1999. Lakewood has none of the appearance of a traditional church. In a building that was once home to the NBA team the Houston Rockets, the congregation sits in comfortable theater-style seats instead of pews. The stage below has three Jumbotron screens and a lighting and sound system more typical of a concert venue than a church. The similarity is apt. A sympathetic television interviewer once described a Lakewood church service as “part rock concert, part

sporting event.” There is no portrayal of Christ, no image of the cross, and no altar. The lectern bears an abstract symbol, and the focal point of the space is a large gold globe. Broadcasts of Osteen’s services reach 95 percent of cable television households in the United States and viewers in dozens of other countries.

Osteen’s critics contend that he offers “Christianity lite,” tasty and filling but not nutritious. Conservatives say he avoids talking about sin, the devil, and hell. More liberal Christians fault him for ignoring the reality of suffering and death in the world and the call to sacrifice for others, while avoiding social justice issues. Osteen is proud of having a multiracial audience and says he has never made decisions intended to promote integration. Asked why he does not address same-sex marriage (he privately disapproves), he says he wants to emphasize the positive and not polarize people. His message in sermon after sermon is the power of positive thinking: Realize that God wants good things to happen to you, and they will.

Osteen is sometimes called a practitioner of the prosperity gospel, promoting belief in God as the way to achieve wealth, health, and positive social relationships. His best-selling books, including

Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential, look like typical self-help fare rather than religion. Judging by the size of his congregation, the number of television outlets, and the number of books sold, Osteen is a masterful marketer playing to the desires of spiritual consumers seeking a message that gifts will be bestowed on them, rather than making a call to make a deep commitment to the poor and oppressed.

And his message is conveyed through techniques familiar to the entertainment industry. There are no hymnals in Lakewood, no traditional hymns are sung, and there is no liturgy. Instead, audiences are warmed up by professional contemporary Christian musicians, hear personal testimonials by people who have been “blessed,” and then experience Osteen’s sermon, which invariably concludes that “God has something great planned for you.”

Think About It

In what ways do you think Osteen’s ministry reveals characteristics of McDonaldization? Would you expect these characteristics to affect the religious or social experience of being a member of his congregation? If so, how? If not, why not?

the status quo. Sects tend to set themselves apart from the larger society and only admit those who rigorously conform to the group’s norms. There is a demand for high levels of commitment on the part of members. Likewise, doctrinal purity is emphasized, and diversity of opinions within the group about such matters is not permitted. They frequently set themselves apart from society in terms of such things as how they dress and what they eat. In addition, they might even segregate themselves physically and live in areas that are largely isolated from the rest of the community. Sect members may not be in a position to effectively challenge religious competition, but they do not believe in tolerating other religious organizations.

The Puritans in the seventeenth century are a good example of a sect. Forced to leave England because of their religious convictions, they created a closed community in New England. They considered themselves to be God’s chosen people who had what they described as an “errand in the wilderness.” They did not tolerate dissenters. Many who ran afoul of the Puritan leadership in Massachusetts were forced to flee. One particularly famous example is Roger Williams, who ended up helping to establish Rhode Island as a place that promoted religious tolerance (his statue can be found on top of the state capitol building’s dome).

Numerous sects within the Christian tradition have long histories in the United States, including the

ACTIVE SOCIOLOGY

Does Religion Work on the Web?

One quality that interests sociologists about religion is its ability to create a sense of community or solidarity. While television and radio broadcasts have long brought church services to many who cannot attend in person, churches like Calvary Chapel in Fort Lauderdale go a step further. Visit the website of this evangelical church’s “digital and media ministry” (www.calvaryftl.org) and record your observations by answering the following questions. Be ready to share your information with the class.

1. What areas or features of the website might encourage online visitors to feel connected to others in the church’s community? List as many as you find.
2. What characteristics of the website suggest institutional aspects of religion as opposed to spiritual aspects? Be specific.

Now click the Media tab on the homepage to view a live service, or select the Sermon Library if no live service is being streamed. Sample as much of a real-time or recorded service as you like.

1. What aspects of the service do you think contribute to on-site participants’ sense of community? List as many as you observe.
2. What aspects of the video or streaming feed contribute to the website user’s sense of community? List as many as you observe.
3. Do you think a religious organization’s website can succeed in fostering a feeling of belonging to a community? Why or why not?

Amish, Hutterites, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Sects with twentieth-century origins include the Children of God and the snake-handling groups described earlier in this chapter. Within Judaism, Hasidic Jews are an example of a sect.

CHECKPOINT 13.3 THREE COMPONENTS OF RELIGION

Beliefs	Ideas that explain the world and identify what should be held sacred.
Rituals	Sets of regularly repeated, prescribed, and traditional behaviors that symbolize a value or belief.
Experiences	Combinations of beliefs, rituals, and other religious practices, such as prayer and services.

CHURCH

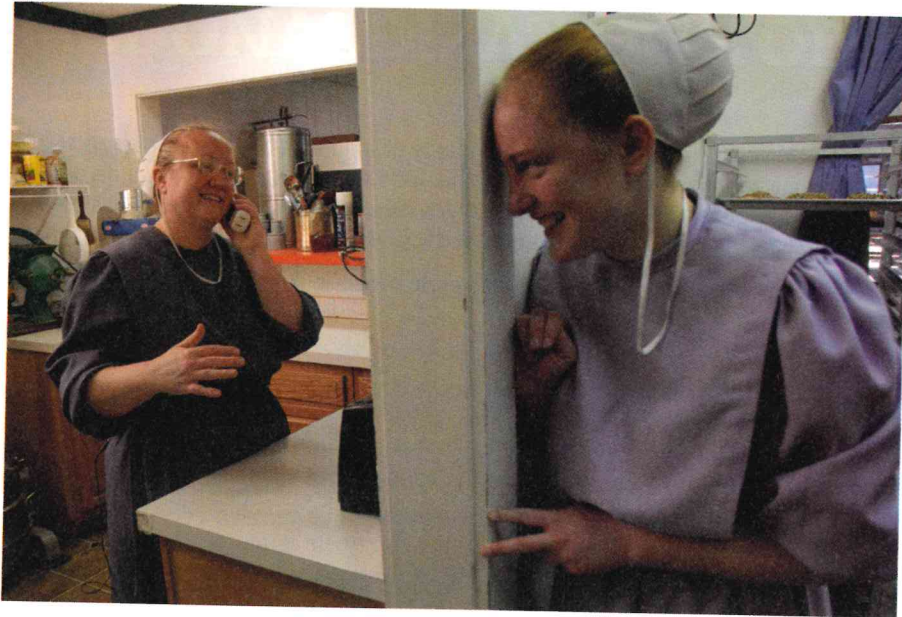
In contrast, a **church** is a large group of religiously oriented people that one is usually born into rather than joining consciously and voluntarily. The church’s leadership is composed of professionals who have highly specialized training. The church as a whole tends to have a highly bureaucratic structure and a complex division of labor (Diotallevi 2007). Churches tend to draw members from throughout society and across all social classes. While

church A large group of religiously oriented people that one is usually born into rather than joining consciously and voluntarily.

a sect tends to restrict membership to true believers, a church seeks to include as many people as possible. Churches often actively seek out new members, sometimes by employing missionaries. A church’s belief systems tend to be highly codified, and rituals are often elaborate and performed in a highly prescribed manner. In comparison with members of sects, church members tend to have a lower level of commitment, and much less is expected of them. While sects tend to reject the status quo, churches accept it.



God in America



In the most traditional Amish sects, clothing is plain and modest, and outside contacts and influences are minimal. What advantages and disadvantages do sects present for their members?

Using this term strictly in terms laid out by Troeltsch, there are no churches in the United States. This is because according to his definition, the church is closely connected to the state. It seeks a religious monopoly, attempting to eliminate, marginalize, or co-opt the religious competition. Thus, it seeks to be the all-embracing religious affiliation of all or at least the vast majority of the nation's population. Churches function to legitimate the existing society, culture, and political system. This function was evident during the 2013 funeral of Margaret Thatcher, the long-serving and extremely divisive conservative former prime minister of her nation. The flip side of this relationship is that the state ensures that the church has a privileged position.

The Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages is perhaps the best illustration of the strict meaning of *church*, existing in relatively pure form. It still has the status of church in some Western European nations. In the Nordic countries, the Lutheran church is an official state church (although this is changing at present in some of them). As the example of Thatcher's funeral suggests, the Church of England (or Anglican Church) is another example.

While *sect* and *church* are presented here as if they are totally distinct, in reality there is no clear dividing line between them. They are discussed above as "ideal types" (see Chapter 3) so that they can be clearly distinguished. In fact, over time there is a tendency for sects to become transformed into something that takes on the organizational features of a church. As sects become larger, they need, among other things, ever-larger bureaucratic structures with less charismatic leadership and more leadership

based on expertise. The behavior of sect members becomes less spontaneous and more formal. The key point is that when we use these terms, they are static. In other words, they capture an organization at a particular moment in time.

CULTS AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

A cult resembles a sect in many ways, but it is important to distinguish between them (Stark and Bainbridge 1979). While a sect is a religious group that breaks off from a more established religion as a result of a schism in order to revive it and rediscover the original beliefs and practices of that organization, a **cult** is a new, innovative, small, voluntary, and exclusive religious tradition that was never associated with

any religious organization. A cult is often at odds with established religions as well as the larger society. Those who found a cult tend to be religious radicals who want to go back to religion's origins, to import ideas from other religions, or to create totally new ideas. Like sects, cults demand high levels of commitment and involvement on the part of members. Because they are new, cults, even more than sects, tend to be led by charismatic figures.

The term *cult* has fallen out of favor in sociology because it has come to be associated in the popular mind and press with such destructive groups as Charles Manson and his "family," which murdered a number of people, including actress Sharon Tate in 1969. The Manson cult was not actually a religious organization. But a number of religiously based cults have proved to be very destructive. These include Jim Jones's People's Temple, David Koresh's Branch Davidians, and Heaven's Gate. All of these groups ended in tragedy. In the case of the People's Temple, the end involved the 1979 mass suicide and murder of 918 of Jones's followers in their jungle compound in Guyana. In the case of the Branch Davidians, the leader and members died in a controversial confrontation in Waco, Texas, with federal officials from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. And in the case of Heaven's Gate, a charismatic leader convinced his followers that Comet Hale-Bopp was hiding a mother

cult A new, innovative, small, voluntary, and exclusive religious tradition that was never associated with any religious organization.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

Andrew M. Greeley: Sociologist, Priest, Novelist

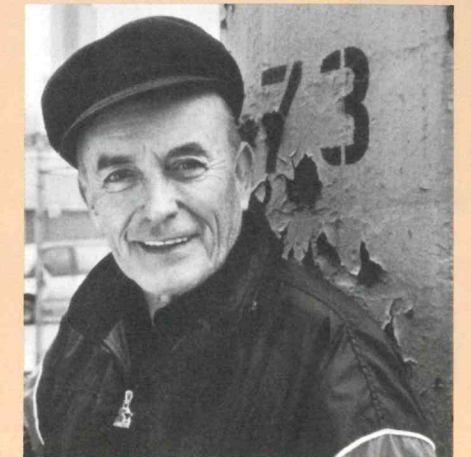
Andrew Greeley was a unique person and a unique public sociologist. He obtained degrees in theology in the early 1950s and served as an assistant priest at a church in Chicago. However, he also began studying sociology at the University of Chicago and received his PhD from there in 1962. Thus, Greeley often fused theology and sociology in his work, and this allowed him to deal with some of the big social issues in the context of religion as well as some of the major questions of theology in the context of contemporary social realities and problems. His involvement in both theology and sociology allowed him to fuse imagination with rationality in both his theological and his sociological work. He held various academic positions and published numerous important academic articles and monographs, but what distinguished Greeley was the breadth of his public sociology.

As a priest, Greeley used sociology to raise a variety of social issues that needed to be faced by his parishioners, the Catholic Church, and society as a whole. He gave homilies and wrote religious books and articles that dealt with sociological and religious issues confronting the Catholic Church and its members. He wrote a weekly column for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and was a frequent contributor to other newspapers, including the *New York Times*. Greeley was also a popular interviewee on radio and television.

What most distinguished Greeley as a public sociologist was the fact that he published 50 novels—many of them best

selling! Although these are novels and therefore tell good stories, they also often deal with important sociological issues. Most sociological work requires that the authors be good storytellers, but Greeley took this to its logical conclusion in his novels. However, it would be wrong to conclude that Greeley's main goal in his novels was to teach sociological lessons. Rather, he remained a priest, and as such his major objective was to teach moral and religious lessons both to laypeople and to those who labored in the church hierarchy. However, our main interest here is in the sociology in Greeley's novels. Among his novels and their sociological themes are the following:

- *The Priestly Sins: A Novel* (2005) takes on the issue of priests who are pedophiles, but is especially critical of the church bureaucracy and those who ignored and even protected those priests.
- In *White Smoke: A Novel of Papal Election* (1997), the election of a new Pope is an occasion for Greeley to reflect on the nature of power and the role of old-fashioned politics and succession in the church hierarchy.
- Power and politics, this time in the White House, is the subject of *The Bishop in the West Wing* (2003).
- *Angel Light* (2006) deals with the very contemporary topics of the Internet, cyberspace, and computer hackers.



Does Andrew M. Greeley fit your idea of what a priest should be?

- Greeley was also concerned about the problems faced by women in society, which he highlighted in a series of books, the first of them *Irish Gold* (1994), that feature a strong female character, Nuala Anne McGrail.

In 2008, Greeley suffered a devastating brain injury when his coat got caught in the door of a taxicab as it pulled away. He was under 24-hour care for years, had difficulty speaking, and was no longer able to write. Andrew Greeley died on May 29, 2013.

Think About It

What were some of the major sociological issues Andrew Greeley addressed in his novels? Do you agree that fiction can serve a public sociological purpose? Why or why not?



About 3,500 couples were married in this mass wedding ceremony of the Unification Church that took place recently in Seoul, Korea. Why do so many people consider this church to be a cult?

ship that would take them to a better world. The result was that 39 members committed suicide. Other cults have directed violence outward. In Japan, the Aum Shinrikyo cult was involved in the release of sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system, killing 12 people and injuring thousands of others (Juergensmeyer 2003). There are a variety of other violent groups, ranging from Christian militias associated with the Aryan nation and other extremist groups to al-Qaeda (Juergensmeyer 2009).

However, none of these are true cults in the sense of the definition offered above. Among those that better fit the definition are more benign groups such as Baha'i; the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, commonly known as *Hare Krishnas*; Transcendental Meditation; Rastafarians; the Peace Mission of Father Divine; Silva Mind Control; Rosicrucianism; and the Divine Light Mission. The most widely studied cult is that founded by South Korean reverend Sun Myung Moon, known as the Unification Church. It began recruitment efforts in the United States in the 1950s, billing itself as a religion that fused the core teachings of all the major world religions. It defined itself as a world-transforming movement that sought to restore all of humanity to a positive relationship with God. To accomplish its goal, it aggressively sought new recruits. This activity, along with the practice of mass arranged marriages, led to much criticism, and the organization was often belittled as "Moonies." Nevertheless, they have substantial financial

resources. They have used these resources to promote themselves as acceptable. Thus, they own one of the two daily newspapers in Washington, DC, the *Washington Times*. Rev. Moon died in late 2012, at which time his wife and sons took control of the Unification Church.

Given the negative connotations associated with the term *cult*, many sociologists today have discontinued using it. However, others continue to view *cult* as a useful sociological concept (Shepard 2007).

Some sociologists prefer to use the term *new religious movements* to encompass sects, cults, and a wide array of other innovative religious groups. **New religious movements** are typified by their zealous religious converts, their charismatic leaders, their appeal to an atypical portion of the population, a tendency to differentiate between "us" and "them," distrust of others, and proneness to rapid fundamental changes (Barker 2007). One example is the New Age movement, characterized by a belief in the

coming of a global renewal in the "age of Aquarius" as well as an individually oriented spirituality (Introvigne 2007). Using the term *new religious movement* is intended to eliminate or reduce the negative connotations associated with cults. It also emphasizes the idea that each unconventional religious organization should be examined objectively based on its own characteristics.

The case of Scientology suggests that controversy cannot be eliminated by opting for a different term to describe a movement. In 2012, Russian courts upheld a ban on the publication and distribution of Scientologist books, citing them as extremist literature. A similar effort by the German government was undertaken, but fell through in 2008. Meanwhile the United States accepts Scientology as a legitimate religion. It actively recruits new members, making use of substantial resources provided by high-profile celebrity members such as Tom Cruise and John Travolta. At the same time, it has provoked

new religious movements Movements that attract zealous religious converts, follow charismatic leaders, appeal to an atypical portion of the population, have a tendency to differentiate between "us" and "them," are characterized by distrust of others, and are prone to rapid fundamental changes.

considerable controversy in this country, too (L. Wright 2013).

DENOMINATIONS

The church–sect distinction does not accurately reflect the realities of religion in America. H. Richard Niebuhr (1929) long ago noted that although many religious institutions in the country look in some respects like churches, in other ways they are different. He referred to these institutions as **denominations**. Like a church, a denomination is an organized form of religious expression that is usually supportive of the social order and of other religious forms. Since the United States has no established religion, all religious institutions must survive in the religious marketplace. Denominations do this in a general spirit of tolerance and acceptance of other religious bodies. In this regard, they are quite different from sects.

Like a church, a denomination has a positive view of the larger society. It supports the culture and nonreligious institutions such as public schools. Unlike a sect, a conversion experience—such as being born again—is not required. Religious services of denominations, like those of churches, are formal and reserved, with an emphasis on teaching rather than on an emotional religious experience.

Denominations are hierarchical and bureaucratic. Local organizations are not independent, but part of a larger regional or national institutional structure. They rely on a specialized, professionally trained, full-time clergy. The clergy are generally trained in seminaries run by the denomination to ensure conformity to doctrines.

Among major Christian denominations today are a long list of Protestant groups, including Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, the United Church of Christ, and Unitarians. But this list would also include Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Denominationalism accepts a pluralistic view of religion and is in line with political pluralism (see Chapter 9).

denomination A religious group not linked to the state that exhibits a general spirit of tolerance and acceptance of other religious bodies.

CHECKPOINT 13.4 TYPES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Sect	A small group of people who see themselves as true believers and who voluntarily join a group, usually broken off from a more established religion, in order to have a personal religious experience.
Church	A large group of religiously oriented people that members are usually born into rather than consciously join.
Cult	A small, new, and exclusive group whose religious tradition has never been associated with any established religious organization and is often at odds with the rest of the religious community.
Denomination	A religious group that exhibits a general spirit of tolerance and acceptance of other religious bodies.

THEORIZING RELIGION

Because religion is such an important sociological subject, it should come as no surprise that sociologists have examined it from the perspectives of the major sociological theories. In the following sections, religion will be addressed through the lenses of structural/functional and conflict/critical theory. While the former purports that religion fulfills important social functions—and perhaps simultaneously causes a panoply of dysfunctions—the latter argues that religion serves merely as a distraction from economic and social inequalities.

STRUCTURAL/FUNCTIONAL THEORIES

Early sociologists such as Auguste Comte and Émile Durkheim believed that religion fulfills important social functions. The structural-functionalist perspective that emerged from their work focuses not only on the functions, or social purposes, served by religion, but also on its dysfunctions.

Functions of Religion

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim ([1912] 1965: 230) emphasizes the solidarity produced by religion: "It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object, that they become and feel themselves to



Public Sociology: Andrew M. Greeley



Religious Cults



New Age Religion

TABLE 13.1 • Founders of the Global Religions and Key Ideas

Founder	Key Ethical Teaching	Treatment of Violators
Buddha	Silver Rule (Don't do unto others . . .) Show compassion to all creatures 10 immoral actions, 5 precepts	Karma: Reap what you sow Repent; it can be okay (King Ajatsattu)
Confucius	Silver Rule Filial piety, respect	Reciprocity
Jesus	Golden Rule (Do unto others . . .) Love God and your neighbor Be perfect	Let the one without sin cast the first stone Give food and drink; visit the prisoner
Moses	Decalogue (Ten Commandments): Do not kill, steal, envy, etc. Love God and your neighbor Follow the law	Plead with God for mercy Punishment for the unrepentant
Prophet Muhammad	Love God Follow the law Show mercy to all of creation Hospitality Strict personal discipline	Compassion for repentant sinners Judgment for those who will not repent Reciprocity of mercy: If you show it, you will get it

SOURCE: From Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2012: p. 147.

be in unison.” In addition to solidarity, religion provides a number of other functions for individuals and societies.

First, as Peter Berger (1969) suggests, religious and cultural traditions become a “sacred canopy” that covers a people, provides a sense of security, and answers their questions about *meaning*, or the purpose of life. A religion’s answers to these questions include an overall vision of the universe, a worldview, and perceptions of how best to organize life, individually and collectively.

Second, Durkheim ([1912] 1965) observes that religion provides explanations for puzzling aspects of life. Of particular importance are the previously discussed theodicies, theories that help us to better understand and deal with suffering and death.

A third and vital function of religion for any society and its individuals is to provide a set of ethical guidelines (or ethics). These guidelines identify taboo lines marking what is unacceptable or immoral behavior. Ethical guidelines also promote positive action, such as sharing and caring for others. Each religious tradition will also have a theory about what happens when people violate

the norms, the most important of which are codified in a society’s laws. While there is much variation within each religion, it is interesting to compare the similarities and differences between the ethics of the founders of the global religions, as shown in Table 13.1.

Most of these founding fathers begin with something like the Silver Rule of the Buddha and Confucius, or Jesus’s Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated. This ethic is implied in the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) that Moses issued and the prophet Muhammad’s insistence on showing mercy and compassion to others because God is the most merciful and the most compassionate.

In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, the consequences of violating the system’s ethics come more or less automatically and are built into the structure of the universe and expressed in the idea of karma, which is actually quite similar to the Christian idea that you will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7) (Jagannathan 1984: 54). The law of karma is basically a law of cause and effect, which has the same status as the law of gravity in western science. The consequences of every thought, word, and deed grow exponentially: If we harm people, it is very possible that they will not only

harm us back, but go on to harm others. It is also possible that harming others will become a habitual practice for dealing with conflict. Those they harm may, in turn, go on to harm still others, so that the entire network in which they interact turns to violence more frequently. If, on the other hand, we show compassion—even to those who harm us—it increases the chances that those we treat well will treat others well, and on and on. That is why the Buddha insisted, “Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law” (Buddha N.d.).

The idea of treating others with compassion and love—including one’s enemies—is a theme that runs through all the world’s faith traditions, perhaps mitigating intercommunal hatred and violence. Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you just as God sends rain on both the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5: 43–45). Similar sentiments can be found in the scriptures of Taoism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Islam (World Scripture N.d.).

A fourth function of religion is to provide guidelines for a better style of life. Americans who are actively religious are more likely to have better physical and mental health (Ellison 1999). One way this is accomplished is by helping people develop social support networks and ways of coping with various types of stress.

ASK YOURSELF

Do you think it is possible to develop community, ethics, social change, and compassion for all without religion? Why or why not?

Fifth, religious systems can provide individuals and groups with hope for the future, including what happens after death, giving believers a sense of self-confidence. If you believe the universe is friendly, or at least that you are on the right side of larger forces or that they are protecting you, it is easier to have a sense that the future will turn out well, even if the present seems dark. For example, the Qur’an (9:72) insists that no matter how difficult life seems at the moment,

*God has promised
the believing male and the believing females
gardens beneath which rivers flow,
to abide in them,
and pleasant dwellings
in gardens of eternity.* (Cleary 2004: 93)

Finally, religion plays a crucial role in the process of social change. Although religious institutions are often intertwined with ruling elites, they also provide the foundation for major changes in a society. Examples include the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s condemnation of racism in the United States, the antiapartheid movement’s challenge to the South African government, and the uprisings in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Arab world in 2011.

Dysfunctions of Religion

Although religion can facilitate the creation of community, it also might lead to ethnocentrism involving intolerance, conflict, and sometimes violence between religious groups. This is the “paradox of community”: The same things that draw us together tear us apart (Ekland-Olson 2012). Although being a Hindu in South Asia may give

one a sense of belonging to a significant community, for some it is at the expense of bonds with Muslims. In forging their identities in terms of negative comparisons, the two communities tend to cultivate disrespect for each other. This mutual disrespect sometimes becomes violent.

Moreover, the very functions of religions may be dysfunctional. Further, what is functional from one point of view is dysfunctional from another. Religion may promote solidarity and order, but to the detriment of oppressed minority groups or those exploited by the system by helping to keep injustice in place. It may provide explanations for suffering and evil that single out some groups as responsible for a society’s problems. It therefore provides a rationale for the subordination of those groups or for hostility against them.

ASK YOURSELF

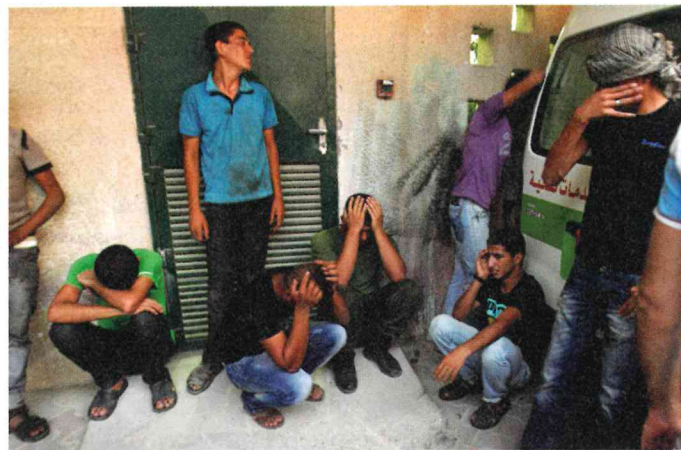
Can you think of any other social institutions besides religion that present a paradox of community? If so, what are they and how do they serve this double function?

The flip side of social solidarity is antipathy toward the other, which is a hallmark of religious history in many times and places. Exclusivist, “chosenness” theologies that promote the status of one group or society at the expense of another can be functional not only for a given community or society, but for regional and international relations. Those traditions that accentuate differences between “us” and “them,” and imbue those differences and their perceived superior status with sacred endorsement, are almost inevitably going to engage in conflict with others. Religious communities with an ethnocentric view of the world and a belief that they are chosen by God—that only people who follow their beliefs and rituals are God’s elect—are more vulnerable to rhetoric of exclusion and the condemnation of outsiders. In the midst of communal conflicts, both parties may see the other community as the focus of evil in the world and the source of all their problems. Religious justifications for these social divisions—such as the scapegoating of Jews in Nazi Germany—intensify emotions and sometimes give the conflict itself a sacred meaning (Kurtz 2005). In short, escalating communal conflict can lead to violence and even war.

The final and perhaps most dangerous dysfunction of religion, therefore, is the fact that it sometimes



Religious Intolerance



Palestinians (left) and Israelis both mourn family and friends lost in fighting between the two groups. Is religion dysfunctional when it is used to justify war?

promotes violence and even evil behavior. A major reason for this is that religion provides a rationale for the use of violence against others. Individuals who are going to harm others have to use what are called “mechanisms of moral disengagement” to avoid having guilty feelings for carrying out such behavior (Bandura et al. 1996). Among the most effective of those mechanisms, often facilitated by religious beliefs, are the practices of dehumanization, blaming the victim, and advantageous comparison. That is, if others are evil and condemned by God, they are more easily dehumanized and rationalized as unworthy of respect or dignity.

CONFLICT/CRITICAL THEORIES

A discussion of the dysfunctions of religion leads nicely into the conflict/critical approach to religion. Much of this approach continues to be informed by Karl Marx’s original thinking in general, especially on the base and superstructure of capitalist society. To Marx ([1859] 1970), the *base* of capitalist society is the economy, while everything else—ideas, the state, and religion—are part of the *superstructure*. The things that are part of the superstructure in capitalist society are erected on an economic base. Thus, the nature of ideas, the state, and religion are ultimately traceable to that base. As a result, it is the capitalist economy that controls religion—as well as the state and ideas—and religion serves to enhance and protect the economic base.

To Marx, religion performs this function by serving as an ideology that, like all ideologies, distorts and hides the underlying realities of capitalist society. Religious ideologies also serve to distract people and to obscure those economic and social realities. They are like drugs that put people into a daze so that they cannot see the social world accurately. It is this view that leads Marx

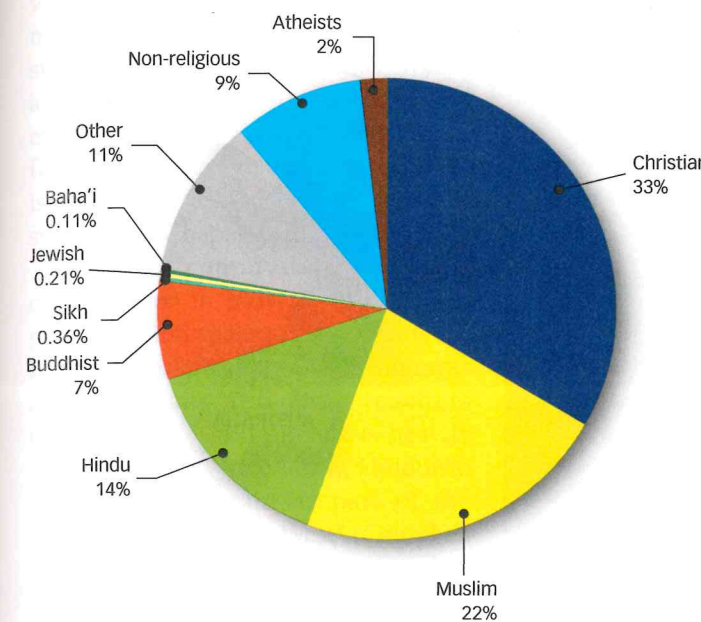
([1843] 1970) to his famous idea that religion is the “opium of the people.” People who are drugged by religion are not only unable to have an accurate view of social problems; they are also unable to act on those problems, let alone overthrow the capitalist social structure that is the source of those problems.

Religion can be seen as what the contemporary critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (1975) called **legitimations**, or systems of ideas generated by the social system to support its own existence. Thus, the ideas associated with religion legitimate not only it, but also the social, economic, and political system in which it exists. To critical theorists, legitimations serve to “mystify” all of these systems, making it unclear exactly what is happening, especially the negative effects these systems are having on large numbers of people.

Another way of thinking of religion is that its distortions and illusions lead people into *false consciousness* (see Chapter 2). That is, because of religion and many other social forces, large numbers of people do not have a clear and correct sense of their true interests. For example, the working class does not realize that it is being exploited in a capitalist system. To critical theorists, false consciousness, including that induced by religion, prevents people from acquiring *class consciousness*, or a true sense of their interests. Without religion, people would be better able to see that their interests would be furthered by the overthrow of the capitalist system as well as the religious system that supports it (Lukacs [1922] 1968).

legitimations Systems of ideas generated by the social system to support its own existence.

FIGURE 13.4 • The World’s Dominant Religions by Percentage of Adherents



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook, 2012. Retrieved May 31, 2012, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>.

RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

Every major religious tradition was originally a local, even tribal, expression of faith that grew out of a specific environment and then diffused across certain regions and eventually the globe. All of the global religions originated in Asia: The eastern religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, originated in South Asia and then spread east into China and East and South Asia. The western religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, came from West Asia, or the Middle East.

Today, over two billion people in the world might identify themselves as Christians (see Figure 13.4) (Britannica 2012; Kurtz 2012: 46). Over one and a half billion are Muslims, there are almost a billion Hindus, and a smaller number practice Buddhism and Chinese folk religions. All other religious groups, including Judaism and Sikhism, are minuscule in comparison.

The study of the relationship between religion and globalization is very contemporary, but it is clear that religion globalized before anything else. In fact, by this accounting, globalization is at least 2,000 years old (Beyer 2006). Although religion, like globalization, is a highly

contested concept, we can focus on institutional religion and, under that heading, on two aspects of its relationship to globalization.

First, there is the issue of the importance of religion in transnational migration, in the bringing of institutional religion to new locales. Migrants transplant religions into new places, making those places more multireligious. They also generate in those locales new and different versions of the local religions, even as the migrants’ versions are influenced and altered by local religions. This, in turn, can alter religion in the migrants’ homeland. Thus, transnational migration globalizes religion spatially and contributes to the further pluralization of religion around the world. Migrants play a variety of other roles in globalization. They help to unify various parts of the world by, for example, making pilgrimages to religious sites like Mecca and the Wailing Wall, posting prayers in cyberspace, and sending money to religious centers in their homelands.

Second is the spread of religious organizations and movements through independent missions. Here the Christian Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, has played a central role through its missionaries. In fact, Christianity became the first worldwide religion. Messengers for Islam created the most global system prior to the modern era (see page 459).

Many other religions have expanded globally, but special note must be made of Buddhism and Islam and their renewed expansion and the utilization of new possibilities and technologies.

It is also important to keep in mind that the spread of institutionalized religion was not unrelated to other institutions and other aspects of globalization. For example, the spread of Christianity from the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century was closely related to the spread of European political power and influence.

CHECKPOINT 13.5 THEORIES ABOUT RELIGION

Structural/functional theory	Religion fulfills social functions, such as producing solidarity; explains life’s puzzling aspects, such as suffering and death; and provides a set of ethical guidelines (ethos). However, solidarity can help keep social injustice in place and sometimes rationalize violence or other evil behavior.
Conflict/critical theory	Religion is a system of ideas generated by the social system to support its own existence.

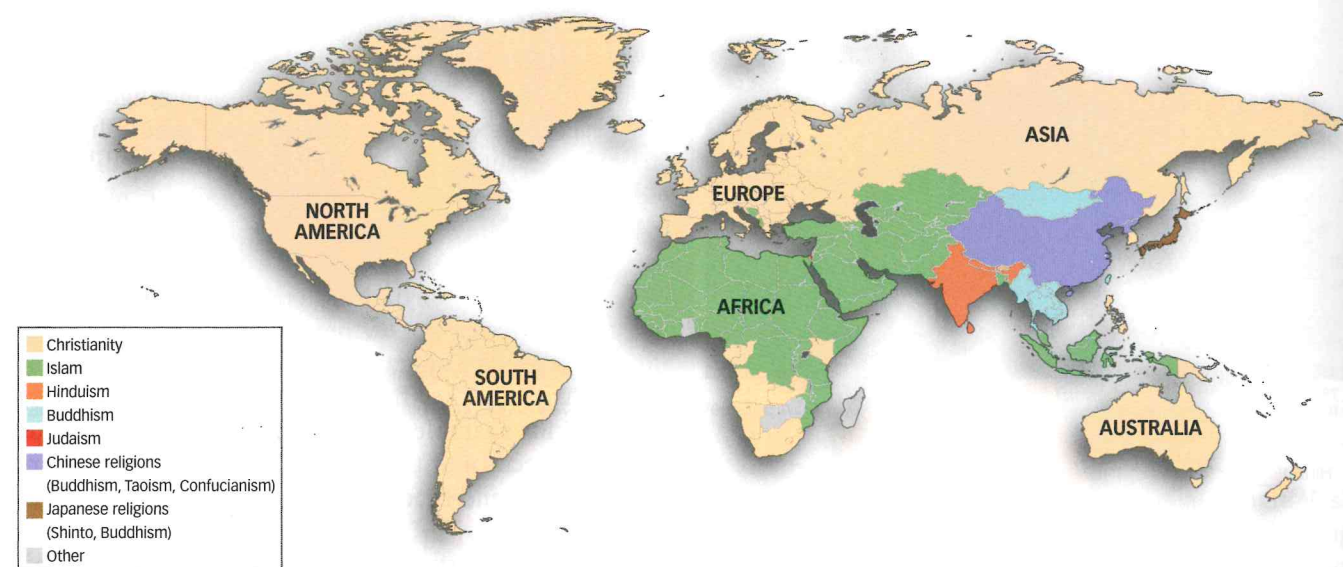


Theorizing Religion



Religion and Globalization

FIGURE 13.5 • Majority Religions, by Country



SOURCE: World Religion Map. 2012. Retrieved May 31, 2012 from <http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-religion-map.htm>.

ASK YOURSELF

Have any other social institutions spread as widely as religion? What do you think accounts for religion's staying power in the places to which it has been transported? Why are religions still expanding globally today?

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT GLOBAL RELIGIONS

The religions we will deal with in this section are those that have globalized the most, or have spread furthest throughout the world: Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity (see Figure 13.5). Although it is not a large global religion, and debates continue concerning whether it should be defined as a Christian denomination or a new religion, we will also examine Mormonism. We do so because of its very contemporary efforts to become a global religion.

Judaism

Founded more than 3,000 years ago, Judaism is today one of the smallest of the world's religions, with roughly 13.4 million people in the world defining themselves as Jews (Goldberg 2007; Goldscheider 2012). However, for a variety of reasons, Judaism's importance both historically and contemporarily has been far greater than one would think by simply looking at the numbers

involved. By the late nineteenth century, there were 12 million Jews in the world who had migrated from the Middle East and were spread in mostly small enclaves throughout the world. There was and continues to be a large concentration of Jews in Europe, but migrations to North America, as well as to Palestine (then under Ottoman control), began during this period. By the onset of World War II, the number of Jews in the world had grown to 16.6 million, but the atrocities of the Nazis led to a reduction in the population to about 10 million. The founding of Israel in 1948 marked an important turning point for Jews, and its population is now approaching 6 million people. Another large concentration of Jews—approximately 6 million—lives in North America, mostly in the United States. The vast majority of the more than 13 million Jews alive today live in either North America or Israel, with fewer than 2 million living elsewhere, especially in Europe. Just a few of the factors that give Judaism great global significance are the spread of Jews throughout the world, Zionism (which helped lead to the founding of Israel), the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors over Palestine.

Hinduism

Although there is no precise starting date, Hinduism began sometime between 800 and 200 BCE (Abrutyn 2012). While it has ancient origins, Hinduism became firmly established in India as it opposed foreign occupations

of Muslims (999–1757) and later the British (1757–1947). Today, the vast majority of Hindus (about 800 million) live in India. Hinduism is strongly defined by the *Vedas*, which are both historical documents and enumerations of incantations needed for successful rituals. Hinduism is also closely associated with the caste system (see Chapter 8).

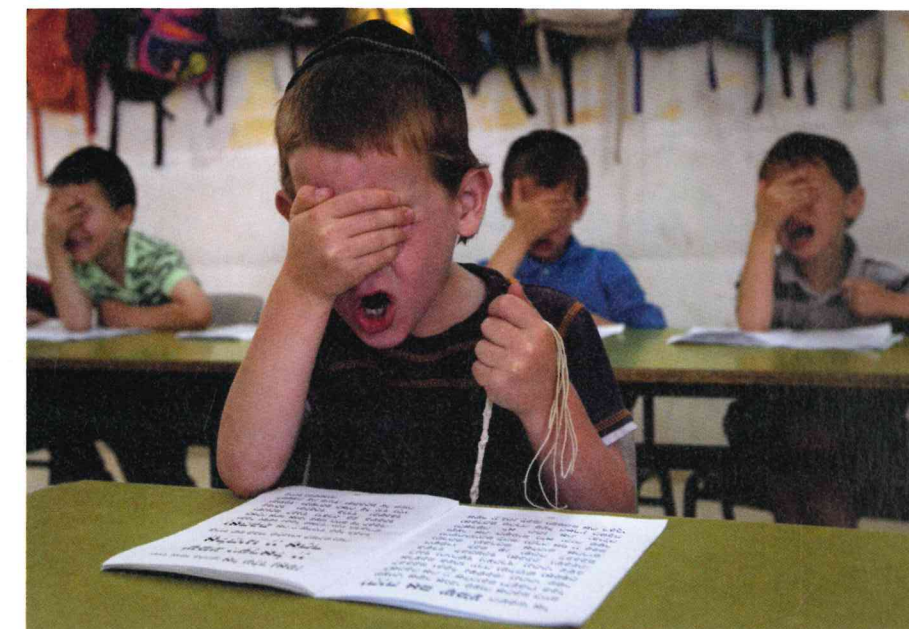
While it continues to be heavily concentrated in India, Hinduism is a global religion spanning six continents. It has been spread by both migrants and itinerant religious teachers (Madan 2007). Although it is heavily concentrated geographically, Hinduism has been important as part of the “Easternization of the West” (Campbell 2007) in, for example, the spread of yoga, transcendental meditation, and so on. However, Hinduism has not been nearly as expansionistic as Christianity, Islam, or even Buddhism.

Buddhism

Buddhism arose in the Indus Ganges Basin in about the sixth century BCE and began to have a transnational influence about three centuries later (Nichols 2012; J. L. Taylor 2007). Today, there are somewhere between 230 million and 500 million Buddhists across the globe, although the vast majority are in Asia. China has the largest number of Buddhists, followed by Japan. Other Asian countries with majority Buddhist populations include Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Vietnam. Thus, while Buddhism moved out from its origins in India, it has remained primarily concentrated on the Asian continent.

Islam

Islam was founded by the prophet Muhammad, who was born on the Arabian Peninsula and lived between 570 and 632 CE. The lands encompassed by Islam were seen as the center of the world, with all else subordinate to it. Important to its spread (see Figure 13.6) was its universalistic worldview; Muslims did not view themselves as a chosen people but believed that they and all of humanity had a common destiny. Islam's universalistic ideas (God-given standards that lead everyone to search for goodness) had to be diffused throughout the world. Such beliefs led to a global



Ultra-Orthodox Jewish boys pray during a school day in Jerusalem. They are part of a conservative minority resisting ethnic desegregation in schools and other government regulations.

mission to rid the world of competing idea systems, such as idolatry and superstition. On the other hand, it saw itself as building on, but going beyond, Judaism and Christianity. Thus, “Islam was the first of the world's great religious civilizations to understand itself as one religion among others” (Keane 2003: 42).

Believers in Islam, as well as their armies, spread westward into Spain and France and eastward into Byzantium, Persia, and eventually India and China. They traveled with the belief that they were the messengers and that everyone was eagerly awaiting, if not being actively denied, their message. Thus, the belief emerged that “Islam would prevail among the world's peoples, either by willing acceptance, or by spiritual fervour, or (in the face of violent resistances) by conquest” (Keane 2003: 42). Because there was only one God and therefore only one law according to Islam, such a view—and mission—meant that followers of Islam took no notice of nation-states and their borders.

In the end, of course, the efforts of Islam's early missionaries were thwarted. One factor was the efforts of alternative religions, especially Christianity and its



World's Religions Women and Religious Self-Identity



The Hindu Holi festival, or the festival of colors, occurs in the spring and celebrates the love of Krishna and Radha.

various militaristic campaigns against Islam. Another was that the principle of *jihad*, or the duty to struggle on behalf of God against those who doubted him or were his enemies, was rarely pursued unconditionally. Thus, Islam was willing to compromise with its opponents, and this proved fatal to its ambitions. Furthermore, because ultimate victory was ensured, Muslims believed that contact, trade, and traffic with nonbelievers was acceptable, even encouraged. These efforts ultimately had only limited success because of the Crusades as well as military defeats that forced Muslims out of Italy, Spain, and Portugal. However, the history of such efforts remains strong among many devotees of Islam and helps to inform contemporary thinking of jihadists and Islamic fundamentalists (Sayyid 2012).

Christianity

Christianity and Islam are the two fastest-growing religions in the world today (Garrett 2007; Thomas 2012). Christianity spread in the Middle East following the death of Jesus of Nazareth. By 1000 CE, a schism had developed between Roman Catholicism in the West and Orthodoxy in the East, with more Christians living in the East than the West. A major series of events in the history of globalization was the Crusades, which began in 1095 CE and lasted for centuries. The Crusades were designed to liberate the Holy Land from Muslims and others who had gained control of Jerusalem in

638 CE. This is still a sensitive issue for Muslims, as reflected in protests that erupted when President George W. Bush used the word *crusades* in a speech shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Christianity today is declining in Europe, but that is more than compensated for by strong growth in the Global South, including parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Growth is so strong in the Global South that it is predicted that by 2050, 80 percent of the world's Christians will be Hispanic. Furthermore, southern Christianity is different—

“more . . . morally conservative, and evangelical” (Garrett 2007: 143). However, it is important to remember that there were not just outflows from Europe, but also reverse flows and cross-flows, producing original variants of Christianity.

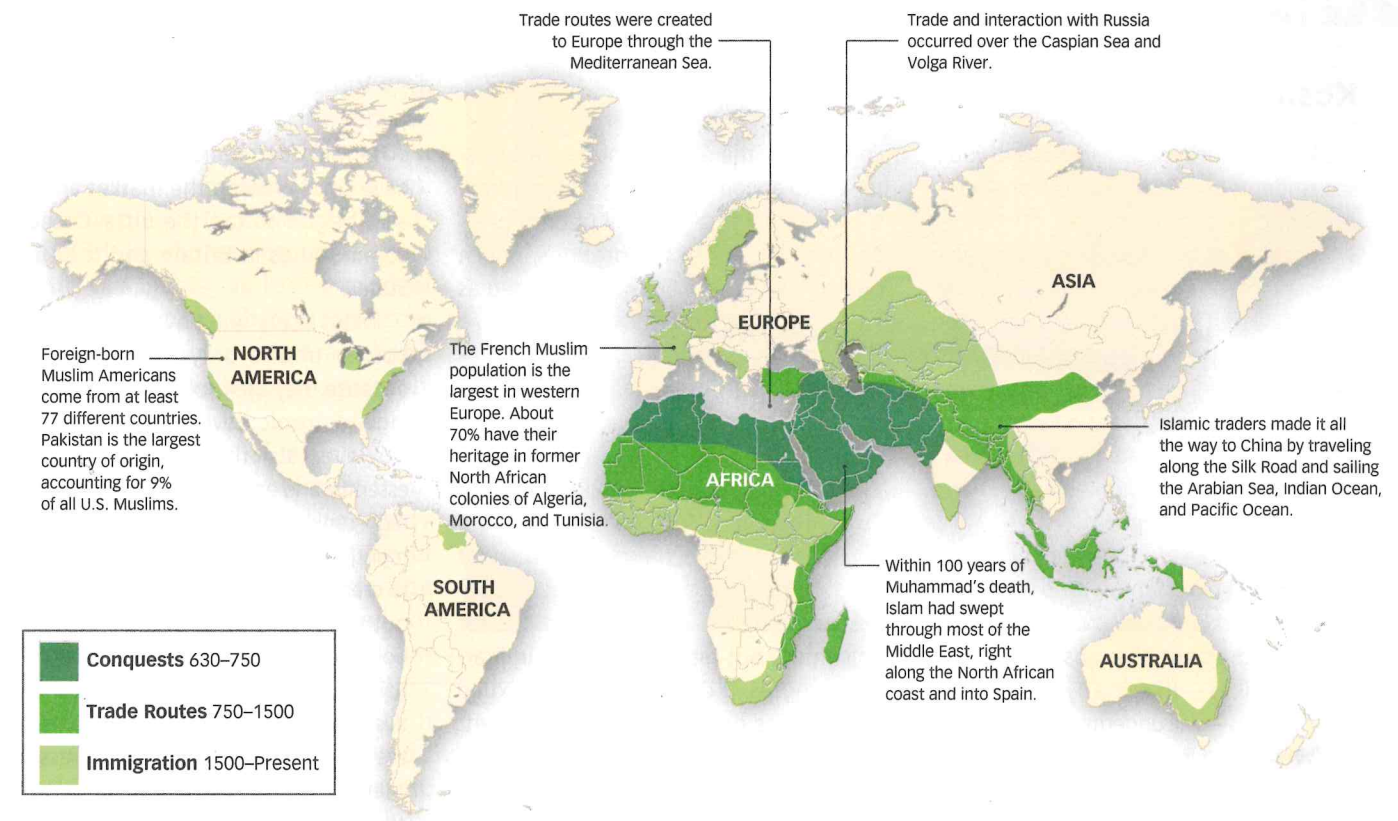
Pentecostalism, a charismatic movement, offers another example of the spread of Christianity around the globe. This religion had its origins in poor black and white revivals held in Los Angeles in 1906. It is now the second-largest and fastest-growing form of Christianity, with somewhere between 150 million and 400 million adherents. It has come to exceed in size all forms of Christianity except Catholicism. Its growth has been especially great in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Lechner and Boli 2005). Missionaries from there now often travel back to the United States and Europe. It has produced many variations and localized forms that are linked through publications, conferences, electronic media, and travel.

Mormonism

Mormonism, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, has shown substantial growth in the last 50 years. Founded in the United States in the nineteenth century, Mormonism had fewer than 2 million members in 1960, but today that number has risen to approximately 13 million.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is centrally controlled from its headquarters in Salt Lake

FIGURE 13.6 • The Global Expansion of Islam



SOURCE: The World of Islam—Version 2.0, 2001, Editor: J. Dudley Woodberry, General Mapping International.

City, Utah. The organization exercises considerable oversight over its churches in the United States and around the world from these headquarters. It also transmits much content, such as conferences and leadership training, via satellite throughout the world. And, of course, it maintains websites for the use of its global members.

Once almost exclusively an American religion, today it has more members (about 7 million) outside the United States and has 8,400 churches and meetinghouses in 178 countries and territories. Although it banned blacks from becoming priests until 1978, today it is growing rapidly in Africa and has about a quarter million members there (Jordan 2007).

The global expansion of Mormonism is not only an example of globalization but also the result of a variety of global processes. First, as noted above, the church has made extensive use of the Internet, especially its well-known website (www.mormon.org). Second, church services, conferences, and leadership training conducted at the church's headquarters are broadcast via satellite to

6,000 of its churches around the world. Third, it continues to follow the traditional path of global and globalizing religions by sending tens of thousands of missionaries around the world. The global acceptance and expansion of Mormonism is especially notable because of its sectlike character and practices. For example, the church has a history of polygamy and the marriage of preteen girls to older men—practices that some fundamentalist branches of Mormonism continue to this day. Such traditions are not easily accepted in many cultures and parts of the world. Other unusual practices include having a family “sealed” so that it can stay together after death, and *tithing*, whereby one-tenth of one's income is given to the church.

In contrast to other globally successful religions, Mormonism has not significantly adapted to local customs and realities. For example, unlike the far more rapidly



Religion in Politics

DIGITAL LIVING

Kosher Phones

Walk across any college campus and you'll see students busy with their cell phones—texting, checking their email, or in other ways being connected. The phone also plays an important entertainment role as they check out YouTube videos and listen to their favorite musicians. People compare the features of their smartphone with those of others and try to figure out when it's time for an upgrade—which always means obtaining additional features and an expanded list of apps.

But not everyone has the same attitude toward cell phones. This is particularly true of conservative religious groups concerned about the possibility that such devices—like many other new technologies—will undermine their way of life. While most Israelis are as tech savvy as their counterparts in Western Europe and North America, the ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel have only reluctantly embraced the idea that cell phones might be beneficial.

In a community where relationships between males and females are highly regulated and restricted, rabbis and parents have expressed concern about texting between men and women. Likewise, access to the Internet opens up potential problems, including the ability to download pornography and other lewd material or to engage in gambling.

For some of the ultra-Orthodox, even listening to a woman singing on a ringtone is prohibited. In short, cell phones present any number of temptations, which one conservative magazine described as "a candy store for the evil impulse." At the same time, there is growing awareness that cell phones can be an asset for doing business and keeping track of children.

With this in mind, a group of ultra-Orthodox rabbis in Israel established a committee for telecommunications that set about creating a phone they considered acceptable. It is intended not for enjoyment but rather for simple utilitarian purposes. It does not contain texting capabilities or access to the Internet. There are no apps, nor is there a camera or video option. In addition, more than 10,000 phone-sex numbers are blocked. In short, what the committee has created is a cell phone that is only a phone, and when it is turned on, the seal of approval of the rabbinate appears on the screen—accounting for its nickname, "the kosher phone."

Mirs, the smallest cell phone company in the country, was the first to attract the niche audience for the kosher phone. This market accounts for about 10 percent of the Israeli population, or some 500,000

potential customers. Other companies have since entered the market and have also begun to tap the ultra-Orthodox communities in Britain and the United States.

Most users will have access to their kosher phone only six days a week, because they are prohibited from activating electronic devices on the Sabbath. However, strictly for those working in essential and emergency services and some high-ranking officials in the Israeli government, rabbis have worked with engineers to create a phone that can be dialed without technically violating Sabbath regulations. Manufacturers of the kosher phone have now discovered that other conservative religious groups, including some from the Islamic community, have expressed an interest in the phone, voicing the same concerns as the ultra-Orthodox about digital threats to their way of life (Hirshfeld 2012).

Think About It

What accommodations should religious organizations make to the society in which they function? How far should society go to accommodate religious beliefs that run counter to social norms, for instance, the prohibition in some religious groups against medical interventions like surgery, vaccinations, and blood transfusions?

expanding Pentecostalism, Mormonism has *not* incorporated a variety of indigenous customs (such as drumming and dancing) into its African Sunday services. Said one member who had moved to Nigeria and married a Nigerian: "No matter where you go in the world, the service is the same . . . the buildings, baptismal fonts, services and hymns in Lagos were nearly identical to those back home in the United States" (Jordan 2007: A13). Through watching Salt Lake City services via satellite, worshippers elsewhere in the world can easily see that the services and the teachings are the same—or at least very similar.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Religious **fundamentalism** is a strongly held belief in the fundamental or foundational precepts of any religion (Stolow 2004). It is also characterized by a rejection of the modern secular world (Kivisto 2012a). Fundamentalists

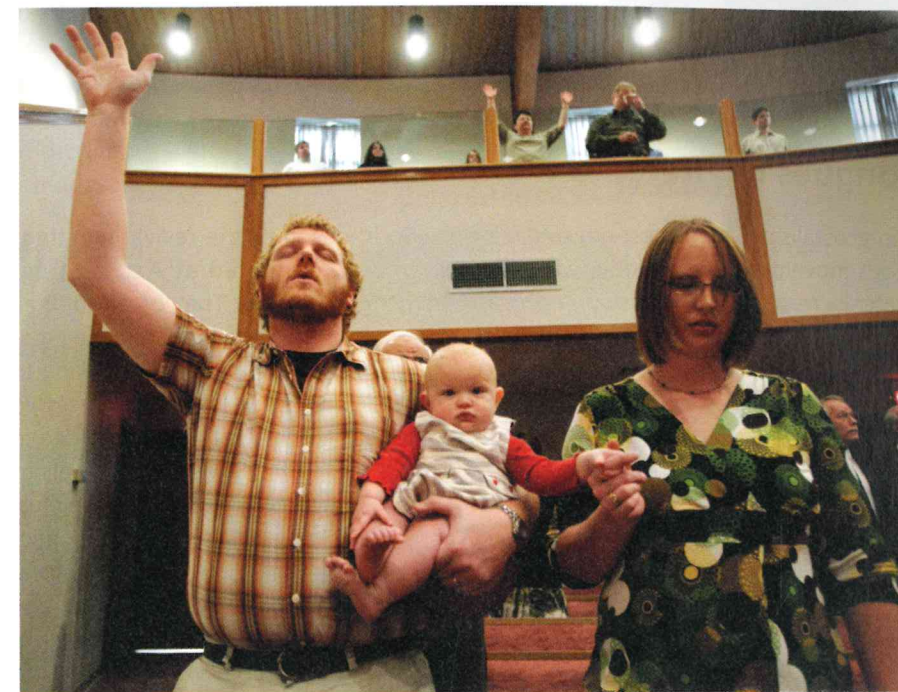
fundamentalism A strongly held belief in the fundamental or foundational precepts of any religion, and a rejection of the modern secular world.

see it world in stark terms, dividing it into the true believers who are saved and the rest of the world's population, who are damned. Fundamentalists seek to replace doubt and ambiguity with crystal-clear certainty. All of the major world religions have fundamentalist elements, as do many smaller religions. One example of fundamentalism is the belief in *sharia*, or traditional Islamic law. This includes modest dress for women, abstention from alcohol, and public prayers. Sharia law is espoused as a governmentally enforced legal structure among Islamic fundamentalists, most notably the Taliban in Afghanistan. Moreover, in this case, it has been used to justify such inhumane practices as cutting off the hands of thieves and the stoning to death of people convicted of committing adultery. Fundamentalism has increased in importance in light of such developments as the growth of the Christian right in the United States; the Iranian Revolution of 1979, when Islamic fundamentalists led by Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the pro-western government of the shah; and more recently terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists in various places in the world.

Fundamentalism can be seen as being involved in globalization in at least two major senses (Lechner 1993). First, it is often expansionistic, seeking to extend its reach into more and more areas of the world and to extend its power in those areas. Second, it is profoundly affected by various globalizations. For example, the globalization of one fundamentalist religion, such as Islamic militants, is likely to lead to a counterreaction by another, such as Hasidic Jews. Another important reaction involves that against various forces seen as emanating from the modern world, including secularism, popular culture, rationalization, and the United States and the West in general. Much of the momentum for the recent rise of fundamentalism can be seen as traceable to a reaction against such forces. In a subtler sense, it has become a global expectation that people will develop a communal identity through involvement in fundamentalism.

FAITH ON THE MOVE

The globalization of religion—and the growing diversity of religions around the globe—is also the result of the



The Bella Vista Assembly of God church in Arkansas is one of a loosely connected group of churches that make up the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world.

movement of people. The United Nations estimates that in 2010, there were 214 million immigrants globally. This figure represents just over 3 percent of the total population of the world. Recently, an attempt was made to determine what that movement of people meant in terms of the movement of religions across international borders. The Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project provided a broad overview of the movement of major world religions in a study led by Phillip Connor (2012). Figure 13.7 summarizes the findings. It is perhaps not surprising that the world's two largest religions—Christianity and Islam—contribute the largest numbers of immigrants. Christians account for 2.3 billion adherents worldwide, and nearly a half of all immigrants. There are 1.6 million adherents to Islam, and Muslim immigrants amount to 27 percent of all immigrants. Hinduism is the third-largest religion, but only 1 percent of Hindus are migrants. Jews, though the smallest of the world religions, contribute 2 percent of all immigrants. This is the same percentage as that for Buddhists, even though that religion has many more members than Judaism. This indicates that just as



Fundamentalism



Religious Fundamentalism

Tongues of Fire

Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing religious movement in the world, with dramatic increases in membership in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and especially Latin America. Estimates place the number of Pentecostals in the world today at around 400 million.

This figure is remarkable given the movement's modest origins. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a charismatic itinerant preacher named William J. Seymour, a one-eyed African American whose parents had lived in slavery, felt called to set up operations in a decrepit former church on Azusa Street in Los Angeles's black ghetto. In this setting Seymour managed to attract large and enthusiastic interracial audiences in what came to be called the Azusa Street Revival.

The term *Pentecostal* derives from the New Testament account of the Holy Spirit coming to Jesus's followers after his resurrection, upon which tongues of fire appeared on their heads and they spoke in tongues (or what is known as glossolalia). Those who witnessed the event thought these followers of Jesus had either been touched by the divine or were drunk. Central to this narrative is the occurrence of an emotionally intense religious experience expressed with exuberance.

So it was with the revival meetings Seymour conducted at Azusa Street beginning in 1906. They often took all night, with people caught up in the emotional intensity of the moment falling to the ground and writhing about, possessed by the spirit so that they, too, spoke in tongues. Sympathizers viewed the meetings as an indication of Seymour's great spiritual gifts and the presence of the divine. Critics called them the product of, as a *Los Angeles Times* reporter put it, "weird doctrine" and "fanatical rites." Enthusiasm persisted for about a decade, after which attendance dropped off.

But before this happened, Pentecostals had begun to send missionaries around the world to spread their distinctive belief system, which emphasized speaking in tongues, faith healing, and prophesying. Nowhere has the growth of Pentecostalism been more evident than in Latin America, which until recently was almost entirely Roman Catholic. At present, the Pentecostal branch of Protestantism attracts 13 percent of the region's population. Guatemalans were particularly inclined to convert, especially after intense missionary efforts following a 1976 earthquake. A brutal civil war then sent many

Guatemalan Pentecostals to the United States, where they established churches with connections to those left behind. Pentecostalism thus came full circle: U.S. missionaries working in Guatemala succeeded in converting many people who later migrated to the United States.

Whether in Guatemala or the United States, many congregations preach what has been called the "health and wealth gospel." Unlike the view of the Pentecostals on Azusa Street that the sufferings of this world will be rewarded in heaven, the message of these churches is that we can get ahead through individual initiative, and that aspiring to be economically successful is serving the will of God. At the same time, like Pentecostals around the globe, they continue to enact their religion in ways that William Seymour would have understood (Liana 2007; Miller and Yamamori 2007).

Think About It

What accounts for the recent surge in the Pentecostal population? Do you think a focus on earthly success, such as the "health and wealth gospel," is compatible with the spiritual role religion plays in many peoples' lives? Why or why not?

Jews have historically been a diasporic people (i.e., a people scattered around the world), so they are today.

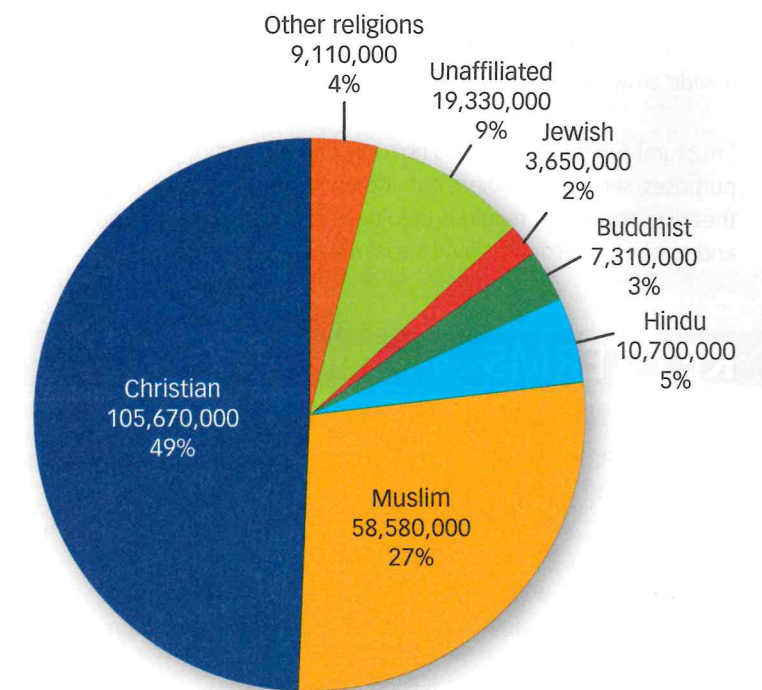
In terms of country of origin, more Christian immigrants are from Mexico than from any other nation. For Muslims, the largest point of origin is the Palestinian Territories. Most Palestinians are not recent migrants, but rather became refugees after the establishment of Israel in 1948. For Jews, the largest point of origin is Russia; for Hindus, it is India; and for Buddhists, it is Vietnam. China, a major country of emigration, is the top country for both "other religions" and the unaffiliated.

Turning to destination countries, the United States is the number one country for Christians, followed by Russia,

Germany, Spain, and Canada. The United States is also the number one country for Buddhists, followed by India, Australia, and Canada. Furthermore, the United States is the primary destination for the unaffiliated, followed by Russia, Germany, and Canada. Israel is the main destination for Jews, followed by the United States, Canada, and Australia. Saudi Arabia is the main destination for Muslims, followed by Russia, Germany, and France. India is a rather curious case, for it is both the number one country of origin for Hindus and the number one destination. It is followed by the United States, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Finally, the "other" category ends up in the United States, Ivory Coast, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

In this detailed listing, two things are clear. First, some countries are especially important destinations. These include three countries with long histories of immigration: the United States, Australia, and Canada. They also include the larger countries of Western Europe: France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. In these countries, worship centers for new immigrant groups have been created, sometimes amid controversy. Thus, in various locales, efforts to "purpose-build" mosques (with minarets and other distinctive features) have been resisted by residents hostile to a growing Muslim presence in their communities. This has been a far bigger issue in Europe than in the United States, reflecting the fact that Europe has a much larger Muslim population. Thus, voters in Switzerland voted to prohibit the construction of any more minarets on mosques even though there are only four in the entire country. Similarly, the wearing of veils by Islamic women has become a highly charged political issue in several European countries, particularly France (Joppke 2009). The United States has not been immune to such resistance. For example, efforts were made in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to prevent a mosque from opening even though an Islamic worship community had lived in the area for two decades.

FIGURE 13.7 • Religious Affiliations of International Migrants, 2010



SOURCE: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life Global Religion and Migration Database, 2010.

CHECKPOINT 13.6 RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

Migrants transplant religion to new places.

Religious organizations and movements spread through independent missions.



Veiled Women



Modern Religious War

SUMMARY

Marx argued that religion was a tool utilized by those in power to keep those whom they oppressed—especially the working class—from seeing clearly. Thus the oppressed would not fight to overcome the inequalities they experienced. Weber addressed the impact that the rationalization of the modern world had on religious belief. Durkheim's work has proved to be of particular importance for later generations of sociologists and begins by distinguishing between the sacred and the profane.

Two views of religion are that it provides meaning and purpose in the face of suffering, injustice, and death, but not necessarily

happiness; and that it is a social phenomenon consisting of beliefs about the sacred, the rituals and experiences that enforce beliefs, and the community that shares them.

The components of religion include a set of interrelated beliefs, a variety of rituals, and religious experiences. While religion can be separate in many respects from the rest of society, it is also often interconnected. This is true of civil religion, which uses religious values and rituals to promote national identity and patriotism.

Sociologists have identified different types of religious institutions. These include sects, small communities of "true believers";

churches, large groups into which members are usually born; cults, exclusive small groups often at odds with established religions; and denominations, groups not linked to the state that generally tolerate other religious institutions. Some sociologists prefer to use the term *new religious movements* to encompass sects, cults, and a wide array of other innovative religious groups.

Structural-functionalists focus not only on the functions, or social purposes, served by religion, but also on its dysfunctions. Conflict theorists argue that religious ideologies serve to distract people and to obscure economic and social realities.

The spread of religion is not new, but it has accelerated with increased globalization. The most significant global religions are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions in the world and are growing, while Judaism is the smallest. The vast majority of Buddhists reside in Asia, and the majority of Hindus live in one particular country: India. However, Buddhism and Hinduism have been spreading to other places around the globe. Mormons have aggressively expanded globally using modern techniques and technologies. One factor contributing to growing global religious diversity is global migration.

KEY TERMS

beliefs, 438	legitimations, 456	ritual, 440
church, 449	liminal period, 441	sacred, 439
civil religion, 442	new religious movements, 452	sect, 447
cult, 450	profane, 439	secularization, 444
denomination, 453	religion, 438	theodicies, 436
fundamentalism, 463	rites of passage, 440	

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Religion is one of sociology's longest-running concerns. How have some of history's greatest sociologists been affected by their own religious upbringing and environment? How might religion have shaped their sociological interests and research?
2. How do we define religion? What are the basic elements and components of religious institutions? In what ways have religions changed over time?
3. What are the major religions of the world? How are people distributed among the major religions of the world? In what ways are religions global?
4. What is the difference between a sect and a church? Provide one example of a sect and one of a church. Why has the term *cult* fallen out of favor with sociologists of religion?
5. What is ritual? Why is it an important component of religion? Offer examples of ritual practice from one of the major global religions discussed in the chapter. Provide another example, this time from a new religious movement.
6. Provide a definition of civil religion and discuss its function. The text describes several examples of civil religion. Offer additional examples.
7. What is secularization? Five factors are cited that sociologists think contributed to secularization. Which ones do you think are most important, and why?
8. What does it mean to speak of a religious or spiritual marketplace? Provide examples that illustrate how religion is marketed to consumers.
9. Nondenominational megachurches have become very common today. What is their appeal to religious consumers, and what might turn some people off about them?
10. Most Christians, including those who claim to read the Bible literally, do not handle poisonous snakes during religious services. Offer a sociological explanation about how those thousand or so who do are different from the vast majority of Christians. Why are they willing to engage in such a dangerous practice?

APPLYING THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

This chapter pointed out that a large and increasing number of people in the world today consider themselves nonreligious. For this activity, think of yourself as someone who is nonreligious seeking to become a member of one of the major world religions. Use the Internet (Google search, Twitter hashtags) to learn more

about the major world religions and to determine the pros and cons of trying to adopt and participate in a specific religion. What would you do to facilitate your membership? How is choosing a religion different from choosing to buy a certain product or join a certain gym?

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