

Lecture Notes:

- ① **All** religion centers on **transcendent** explanations of the world; that is, they appeal to dimensions or forces beyond that which we can directly apprehend with our senses.
- Turner (1997:107) defines religion as “that structuring of activities revolving around beliefs and rituals pertaining to the sacred and/or supernatural and organized into cult structures which have consequences for reinforcing norms, legitimating inequality, guiding socialization and social placement, and managing variable sources of tension and anxiety in a society.”
 - ! sociologists are **not** interested in the “truth” or “falsity” of a given religious experience or belief, only in their social, cultural, and behavioral effects
- **Religion** can be seen as many things...
- aspects of religion:
 - individual or collective ecstatic, euphoric, or orgiastic experience
 - a means to separate the sacred from the profane
 - a set of rituals and orthodoxies
 - justification for a normative code
 - a system of meaning for life and the world
 - a hierarchy of social organization
 - religion may be seen as basically **rational** or **emotional**
 - religion has many **functions** in a society
- ③ Some important distinctions in the study of religion:
- **religion**: a system of beliefs in spiritual, sacred, and transcendent things and the institutions, practices, and rituals, associated with such beliefs; these beliefs and practices unite the believers into a moral community; religious doctrines supply answers to ultimate or existential questions that have no empirical answers
 - **ecclesia**: a supranational, formal religious organization (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church)
 - **church**: any body of people, and their institutions, beliefs, and practices constituting a distinctive religious grouping
 - **denomination**: a distinctive branch of a church usually differing on one or more important doctrinal points
 - **sect**: a religious social movement opposed to or rejecting orthodox religious institutions; they may have several responses to an orthodoxy: conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, manipulationist, thumaturgical, reformist, or utopian (Bryan Wilson, 1973)
 - **cult**: the most informal and transient type of religious organization or movement, usually deviating from established religious orthodoxies within a society; they often center on charismatic leaders and recombine existing cultural capital in innovative ways (syncretism)
 - **magic**: an attempt to fulfill functional ends through supernatural or spiritual agencies; in contrast with religion, the focus of magic is usually more immediate and instrumental, while also being more personal and less organizationally developed (*Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."*)
- ④ Religion gives its adherents a sense of meaning and order through these common aspects:
- separates the **sacred** from the **profane**
 - supplies a set of **calendrical** and **occasional rituals**
 - a set of **beliefs** that shape our sense of order and propriety
 - **cosmology**: a picture of how both the **natural** and (supposed) **transcendent** world works
 - **values**: ethical ideals giving purpose to social goals and organizations and guiding social interactions
 - a revered **canon** of teachings often passed down in sacred texts
 - internal social structures and hierarchies
 - rules for determining who belongs and does not belong, as well as those governing how others can join
 - religions and their sects differ in the latitude of interpretation individuals and groups are afforded
- ⑤ Religions can be both **conservative** and **revolutionary** or **disintegrative** forces

Key Ideas:

Religion, church, sect, cult, sacred vs. profane, ritual.