

What is Religion.1?

- a system of beliefs and practices around *sacred* things, a set of shared “stories” or narratives that guide belief and action
- religious beliefs help shape social behavior by setting expectations and helping people distinguish between right and wrong. This is where “morality” enters in Sociology, because values are moral beliefs that guide norms...
- religion helps to frame norms in society based on *beliefs* about what is right and wrong.



What is Religion.2?

Three key components

- **Meaning System**—ideas and symbols provide a sense of purpose in life, help explain the “unexplainable,” and reflect societal needs
- **Belonging System**—interpersonal relationships and emotional ties, a friendship and kinship network
- **Structure System**—designates which statuses can interpret theology (priests, ministers), what the norms are, and provides methods of “survival” such as financial and socialization



What is Religion.3?

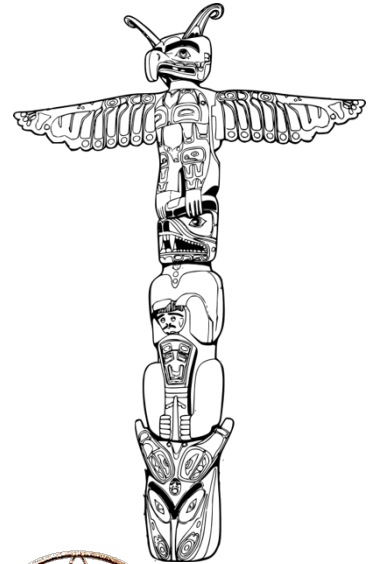
- *Sacred* describes holy things.
- *Profane* describes ordinary, mundane things of everyday life (as opposed to profanity, which is “swear words,” or “cuss words”).

Although *profane* is a sociological term coined by Durkheim (remember him? ...one of the founding fathers of Sociology...) we don't use it much outside of the academic setting...



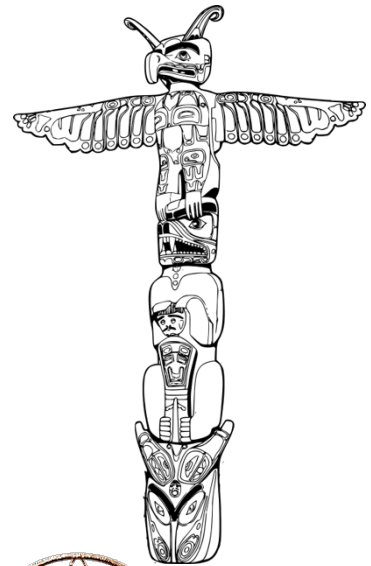
What is Religion.4?

- There are many *religions* throughout the world, all of which fall into one of three broad categories:
 - Theism is the worship of a god or gods. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism are examples.
 - Ethicalism is adherence to certain principles to lead a moral life. Buddhism and Taoism are examples.
 - Animism is the belief that spirits roam the natural world and are embodied in all *things*. Totemism is an example—the belief that a totem (e.g., totem pole, spirit-catcher) is animated by and with spirits.



What is Religion.5?

- In contrast to religion and religiosity, *secularism* is a general movement away from religiosity and spiritual belief and toward a rational, scientific orientation. Secularism often poses a profound threat to those with deeply-held religious beliefs, because it threatens their way of life (e.g., radical Islam, ISIS, fundamentalist Christians).



Sociological Theory and Religion.1

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Three components of meaning

- Symbols—something that represents something else and has meaning beyond its own existence
- Myths—stories, whether true or untrue, that transmit values and ideas about life and the world
- Rituals—ceremonies or repeated practices that make ideas sacred. Rituals use symbols extensively and often act out myths.

These reinforce norms, create social boundaries, and perpetuate culture (e.g., Kosher food rules among Jews)



Sociological Theory and Religion.2

Structural-functionalist Perspective



Three main sociological functions of religion

- Social cohesion—belonging, common sense of purpose, but if many competing religions, may be source of conflict or hatred among them (sometimes seen in U.S.).
- Legitimizing values and norms—“sacralizes” social norms and makes them “larger than life,” giving them an absoluteness, which gives society stability (e.g., family structure, including sacred nature of marriage).
- Facilitating or hindering social change—fundamentalist sects tend to hinder, while others tend to embrace change. Hindering change makes life simpler for adherents.

Sociological Theory and Religion.3

Conflict Perspective



Focuses on how religion relates to stratification

- Class based—sees how it perpetuates the power structure. For working classes it's a sedative that dulls the pain of being “low” in the structure and provides an escape from reality.
- Upper classes tend to be rule-creators, while lower classes tend to be rule-followers.
- Often affiliation with a specific religious denomination is associated with SES.

What does it mean to be religious?

Statistics on Religion in the U.S.



- National

<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

- California

<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/california/>

- Other states?

If you didn't get these statistics in class, get them online...there will be at least one question about these statistics on the next exam.