

Religion

Kottak Ch. 10

How to define "religion"?

- Same problems as defining marriage?
- Wallace:
 - "belief and ritual associated with the **supernatural**"
- Reese:
 - Focus on people who "gather" for a worshipful purpose
 - Relationship w/ divinity, supernatural, etc.

Even more diverse!

- Durkheim:
 - The "effervescence" of religion (collective emotions)
- V. Turner
 - Idea of *communitas* (togetherness)

Anthropological study

- Questions an anthropologist may ask:
 - Who plays what roles in religion and why?
 - What role does religion play in daily lives of people?
 - What is the language of religion?
 - How do we know religion when we see it? Feel it?
 - How are religion and ethics/morality linked?

Is religion a cultural universal?

- Distinction between natural/supernatural not universal
- Distinction between godly and earthly not universal
- Heaven/Hell not universal
- Singular God not universal
- "Purposeful life" not universal

Religious Expression

- Animism
 - Idea that religion started because people needed help explaining the unexplainable
 - Things like death, dreaming, trances
 - Popular via an anthropologist named Edward Tylor
 - Thought that religion would change as science helped w/ explanations (people would be less confused)

Animism: The Basics

- Animism = 2 entities
 - One during waking hours and one at sleep
- When both entities leave the body, the person dies

Mana

- **Mana** = sacred force inhabiting the universe
 - Like “May the Force be With You”
 - Or “the Oracle” in the Matrix
 - Some have it, some don’t
 - Objects, plants, animals and people can have mana
 - Think about *Serpent and the Rainbow*
 - Mana = success, luck, fertility, magical prowess
 - Also **socially determined** in cases!
 - You may be born with mana
 - You may be “worthy” of mana through your actions
 - Or, you have mana because you are royal

Taboo

- Linked to possessing mana
- Chiefs/nobles had so much mana, they were off-limits to touching or walking in their footsteps
- Functional explanation: mana works to explain the differential successes in society
- Blame it on the supernatural!

Beings and Forces

- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| ■ Gods | ■ Charms |
| ■ Goddesses | ■ Talismans |
| ■ Saints | ■ Crystals |
| ■ Souls | ■ Sacred crosses |
| ■ Ghosts | ■ MORE |
| ■ Demons | |
| ■ MORE | |

Magic

- Supernatural techniques to accomplish specific goals
 - Spells, formulas, incantations (EXAMPLES)
- Imitative magic
 - i.e., voodoo dolls, wax mannequins
- Contagious magic
 - i.e., adding someone’s hair to a potion

Everyday magic

- Lucky pencils; lucky underwear
- Movie magic
- Rituals?
- Language?
- Charms?
- Pop culture?

Functional explanations

- Religion serves an emotional need
- Religion helps explain the unexplainable
- Religion makes an awfully good pansy!
- Religion is good medicine

Religion and Ritual

- Rituals are formal AND social
 - Stylized
 - Repetitive
 - Stereotypes
 - Examples!
 - Baseball ritual
 - Test-taking ritual
 - Marriage
 - Childbirth

Rites of Passage

- Moving from one social place/stage of life to another
- Ex: from a boy to a man
- From a woman to a wife or mother
- From a child to a brother
- From an outsider to an insider

Phases of Rites of Passage

- Phase 1: Separation
 - Withdraw from the “home team”
- Phase 2: Liminality
 - “in-between” stage, in limbo, one foot on one side, one in the other
- Phase 3: Incorporation
 - Reentering society/group as a different individual

The liminal period

- Very ambiguous stage!
- May include role reversals
- May include more than one person
 - Collective liminality (EXAMPLES)
 - Graduating classes
 - Confirmation groups
- **Enduring** liminal groups and symbols
 - A “neverending” rite (think priests, nuns, moose/Masons)