SOCIOLOGY RELIGION

AN INTRODUCTION
HOW DO WE EXPLAIN RELIGION?

What is its origins?
What are its processes
What are some theoretical positions on religion? (paradigms)
RELIGION AND MEANING

*Meaning—refers to the interpretation of situations and events in terms of some broader framework.
Three things seem to **distinguish** man from all living creatures:

1. The systematic use of **tools**
2. The use of abstract **language**
3. **Religion**
RELIGION AND NATURE

Although some observers have detected the parallels of ritual in some birds, mammals and other organisms, no one has seriously suggest the presence of myth or theology.
RELIGION AND COMMUNISM

Even Communist society before parstoka was not without religion.

There is evidence that traditional religion remained in the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1989.
ELEMENTARY FORMS

The most pertinent sociology study of religion was E. Durkheim’s, *The Elementary Forms of Religion Life*. As soon as human society forms—religion is present...

*The totem* is a collective representation of the tribe.
When we look at definitions of religion they vary in nature and content but they usually fall into two categories:

1. Individual
2. Societal
PSYCHOLOGICAL/INDIVIDUAL

William James in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,

(Individualistic definition)
He claimed that, "religion involves feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine"
"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them”

(1982, p. 129 [excerpt from *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life]*)
MYTH VS. THEOLOGY

Myth—stories or belief systems that help people understand the nature of the cosmos, the purpose or meaning of life, or the role or origin of human suffering.

Theology—religious explanations that provide meaning to believers of certain faith.
HOW DO WE EXPLAIN RELIGION?

Not an easy task...no societal phenomenon is more resistant to scientific explanation than religion...There are generally two errors committed when attempting to explain religion...

Emotional and Rationalistic Bias
EMOTIONAL BIAS

The first is known as the emotional bias.

The view that there is only one true religion, his or her own, that is the highest and the best.

Parochialism, Parochial Thinking
RATIONALISTIC BIAS

In other words, the rationalist contends that religion is simply the product of ignorance, and that its need will be eliminated when man becomes completely rational....(Hegel)
DURKHEIM,

Durkheim, religion was a "social thing" par excellence outside of each individual, waiting for him/her at birth to help mould the individual into society.

He saw religion as related to a radical division of all human experiences
1. The "profane". This is the realm of routine experience, the secular, everyday world of work, toil and domestic duties. It is the sphere of adaptive behaviour, and is essentially utilitarian.
2. The "sacred". This is the realm of human experience that is residual to, and other than, this work-a-day sphere. It lays somewhere beyond the profane sphere, and evokes an attitude of <s>awe</s> and <s>reverence</s>. Durkheim saw seven main characteristics of
RELIGION IS FUNCTIONAL

Religion is able to reaffirm collective morals and beliefs in the minds of all members of society.

Durkheim developed his notion of "collective conscience" from this fact.

See Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (1960)
RELIGIOUS ACTION

Broadly speaking religion is made up of a series of acts and observances. These acts and observances take place in a social context.

As members of a given group, family, class and community, we have roles to play in carrying out these observances.
Early anthropologist set out to study primitive religions with that bias, to observe how far apart primitive were from regular church-going, Biblical reading etc.... (evolutionism, ethnocentricism)
The problem of defining religion is that religions do not usually lend themselves to simple characterization on either the level of the individual or social.
WESTERN MONOTHEISM

For example, in the West the idea of God predominates— the relationship between man and the divine is Man and God-----ie. In God we Trust
But in other religions, particularly in the east God is not present... A.C Bouquett Comparative Religions, says that the further east one goes religion is not ontological but rather a movement.... See Harvey Cox, Turning East
BUDDHISM

ie. Buddhism (eight fold path),
Japanese nationalist religion rooted in Confucianism value -talks about religion being `The Way'
RELIGIONS: EAST TO WEST

Confucianism - Found in Far East
Confucian culture
Based upon philosophy of Confucious
Pragmatic
Inner worldly
More of a `way of life’
BUDDHISM

Other-worldly mystical
Fleeing the world through mystical contemplation
Seek Nirvana
HINDUISM

The religion of the Brahman
Religion of India’s high priests- Brahmanism becomes the way of life of the Hindu followers.
Hinduism – Karma (fate) leads to caste system
ISLAMIC

Followers of Mohammed
Believe in prayers and daily worship
Other worldly path of enlightenment
Order, devotion, adherence to Koran
Little room for interpretation
JUDAISM

Followers of Moses and the Torah (old testament)
Belief in liberal education through religious teaching
Rational inner world religion of an urban 'pariah people' (Weber, 1926)
Branches Orthodox, Conservative, Reform
CHRISTIANITY

Followers of Christ-Two denominations-
Protestant and Catholic includes Greek orthodox, 
Russian Orthodox etc

Protestant Sects including- Baptist, Presbyterian, United, 
Anglican
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

The scientific study of religion and its role in the development of society’s institutions and function. **Key concepts** - secularization, totem and taboo, religious value orientations, rationalization.
RATIONALIZATION

Rationalization is the process whereby an increasing number of social actions and interactions become based on considerations of efficiency or calculation rather than on motivations derived from custom, tradition, or emotion.
SOCIETAL TYPES

1. Preliterate societies where religious values predominate.

2. Changing preindustrial societies with a combination of religious and secular values.

3. Industrial societies where secular values are ascendent.
SOCIETAL TYPE/FORMS OF AUTHORITY

These societal types correspond to charismatic, traditional and rational legal authority.

They also reflect Weber’s notion of the rationalization of religious ideas and values.

Given an added stimulus by The Protestant Ethic.
MODERNIZATION/RATIONAL LEGAL SOCIETY

It is conceived of as a core part of modernization and as manifested especially in behavior in the capitalist market; rational administration of the state and bureaucracy; the extension of modern science; and the expansion of modern technology
These definitions usually refer to finding religion in the context of a creed, ritual and practice.....emphasis on religion and its connection with the church....which interprets and follows Christ in a certain way...
In the West religion is usually defined in terms of beliefs and creeds associated with a connection to Christ. Christianity is a monotheistic religion that excludes all others.,,,you are either a follower of Christ
One example of a Western scholar of this type is William Robertson Smith 1894 (Lecture on the Religion of the Semites)

"our first business is to search for a creed, and find in it the key to ritual and practice"
THE MALANESIANS

Among the Malanesians of the South Pacific....Religion consists in the persuasion that there is a supernatural power (Mana) religion involves getting this power turned on for their own benefit. The notion of a Supreme Being is entirely foreign to them.
ORTHODOXY

emphasis is that they can vary significantly from group to group and among the orthodox vs less orthodox...

In India, Hindus revere the Cow while among primitive people birds animals and trees may have religious significance....
CULTURAL ACTIONS

Food may or may not be significant ie. pork and shellfish among the orthodox Jews or wine and pork among the Muslims
PARADIGMS ON RELIGION

**STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONAL** - religion is a functional institution in human society...become increasingly compartmentalized in modern society

**CONFLICT** - RELIGION IS THE OPIATE OF THE MASSES...IT PASSIFIES SUBORDINATE GROUPS< KEEPS THEM OPPRESSED

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM** - RELIGION IS A MICRO PROCESS FILLED WITH SIGNS< SYMBOLS< LANGUAGE..
SUMMARY

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION IS IMPORTANT IN SOCIOLOGY

RELIGION IS AT THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN SOCIETY
NO SOCIETIES ARE SET APART FROM RELIGION OF SOME TYPE

RELIGION HAS PLAYED A IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE RATIONALIZATION OF HUMAN SOCIETY
"OUR FIRST BUSINESS IS TO SEARCH FOR A CREED, AND FIND IN IT THE KEY TO RITUAL AND PRACTICE"

THE PROBLEM WITH EMPHASIS ON THINGS THAT ACQUIRE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE IS THAT THEY CAN VARY SIGNIFICANTLY FROM GROUP TO GROUP AND AMONG THE ORTHODOX VS LESS ORTHODOX...

IN INDIA, HINDUS REVERE THE COW WHILE AMONG PRIMITIVE PEOPLE BIRDS, ANIMALS AND TREES MAY HAVE
A.C. BOUQUETT, in his work on COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS, says that the further east one goes, religion is not ontological but rather a movement.

I.e., Buddhism (eightfold path), Japanese nationalist religion rooted in Confucian value — talks about religion being 'the way' among the Malanesians of the South Pacific.... Religion consists in the persuasion that there is a supernatural power (mana). Religion involves getting this power turned on for their own.