

Elements of Religion

Overview of the range of human activity that religion involves.

- human thought
 - feeling
 - action
 - social existence
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Substance or Function?

Functionalist Definition of Religion

- Focuses on the role religion plays in the lives of persons and groups.
- Might focus on the ways religion enables people to sustain hope in the face of difficult circumstances.

Substantive Definition of Religion

- Attempts to limit the phenomena that may be characterized as religious.
- Seeks to identify what it is that makes certain responses to death and suffering religious and others not.

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Substance and Function (16 ff)

- Considerations of function are necessary but not sufficient to the task of defining religion.
 - But an adequate definition of religion must include a substantive component.
 - Thus, any adequate definition of religion must account for both the function and substance of religion.
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A Proposed Definition of Religion (20 ff)

Religion signifies those ways of viewing the world that refer to:

- 1 a notion of sacred reality
- 2 made manifest in human experience
- 3 in such a way as to produce long-lasting ways of thinking, feeling, and acting
- 4 with respect to problems of ordering and understanding existence

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The Sacred

A Notion of Sacred Reality

- A notion of sacred reality establishes a boundary between religion and non-religion.
- “Sacred” indicates a reality that is somehow distinct, “set apart,” “other” than ordinary.
- “Sacred reality” includes the God of the Bible, the Qur’anic Allah, the Brahman of Hinduism, Buddhism’s Nirvana, the kami of Shinto.

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Manifest in Human Experience

- Although the sacred is “set apart” from the ordinary, it nevertheless may be experienced, thought about, and acted upon.
- Thus, all religion has to do with “the element of the sacred” manifesting itself in various ways: in rituals, persons, and natural phenomena.

- Muslims = the sacred reality (Allah) is made manifest through prophecy
- Buddhists = the goal of Nirvana “comes to life” in the life and teaching of the Buddha
- Navaho = the story of the Navaho people makes wisdom available for those who seek harmony between all things.

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Long-Lasting Ways of Thinking and Feeling

- Religious ways develop over time. And they come to constitute traditions that may be identified with the history of particular communities.
- For example, the prophecy of Muhammad is the beginning of the tradition of Islam.
- Islam’s message and the story of its revelation in seventh-century Arabia have produced characteristic modes of thought, feeling, and action among a large percentage of the world’s population.

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Ordering and Understanding Existence

- Stresses the way in which notions of sacred reality are related to problems of suffering and death.
- Also stresses the way in which notions of sacred reality are related to other problems—such as the ordering of political or economic life.

Vocabulary for ch. 2-3

- immanence / Transcendence
- sacred as “really real” (27)
- Qur’an as speech of God (29)
- nirvana
- dharma (33)
- hierophany
- bodhisattva (42)
- logos
- linear time
- cosmology
- cyclical time
- samsara (47)
- moksha
- Ka’ba
- shaman

https://youtu.be/WC1zyHnV_dM

An example of the sacred

<https://youtu.be/nrG5Yuwpapc>



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3 patterns of understanding the appearance of the sacred

- **Prophetic** (stress on belief, society, and morality—all centered on revelation) Moses. Mohammed. A prophet is a person who receives a revelation that deals with historical life of community.
- **Sacramental** (stress on sacred objects and ritual as vehicles for the sacred), Jesus. The

presence of sacred through an aspect of material reality or objects; stresses role of priests.

- **Mystical** (stress on states of consciousness, feeling, and experience) the Buddha. Emphasis on a state of being or consciousness, such as enlightenment or contact with God.

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these 3 patterns shape how one understands the 4 types of sacred media:

- **person—prophet** (prophetic), **God incarnate** (sacramental), and **sage** (mystical),
- **objects—texts** (prophetic), bread, wine & material objects (sacramental), breathing & tea (mystical)
- **time—linear/historical** (prophetic) v. **cyclical** (often mystical) [sacramental can be either]
- **space—places of revelations**, places of worship, stupa, and nature (note how all 3 patterns apply)

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Concepts (26)

- **Manifest**—to show, reveal, or make known
- **Hierophany**—a revelation of the holy,
- **Prophet** [one who speaks with the authority of another]: one who speaks with the authority of God or the sacred; a spokesperson for the sacred based upon a received revelation or contact with the sacred.
- **Sacrament** a sign and instrument of the sacred; a sign that causes or makes effective the reality to which it points
- **Cosmology** worldview; an account of the meaning and order of the universe and the relationships between its different parts.
- opposite of “profane”
- something set apart (*hagios*) (*kadosh*) (*sanctus*) (cf. “sanctuary”)
- the “really real”

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4 elements of the sacred

1. “set apart”
2. to some extent beyond the volitional control of human beings
3. prominent with respect to human welfare
4. “determinative of various aspects of human existence” (33)

Uzzah and ark (beyond volitional control of humans) (30)

(cf. 2 Sam 6)

- The Israelites witness the power of the sacred ark. Its possession affected the outcome of war.
- **prayer** or **sacrifice** might be seen as an attempt to influence the sacred (31)
- **kut** rituals of Korean folk religion, sacred affected by the dance of a female **shaman** (“control” the spirits?)

Practice of Buddhism (34)

- One practices Buddhism in order to attain Nirvana
 - “all else if illusion”
 - ultimate falsehood = the self
 - to attain Nirvana is to see the truth
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egs. of hierophany (38)

- revelation of Qur'an
- enlightenment to Gautama Buddha

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Persons

- Moses
- Buddha as teacher (41 incl. Siddhartha)

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Things

- Qur'an (people of the Book)
- tea in Zen Buddhism (45)
- Catholic tradition, sacramental bread and wine

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Time

- participating in the cosmology when retelling the narrative
- cf. Jewish seder, Christian Eucharist

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Space

- Ka'ba
- Shinto shrines
- **stupa** "burial mound" in Buddhism