AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY
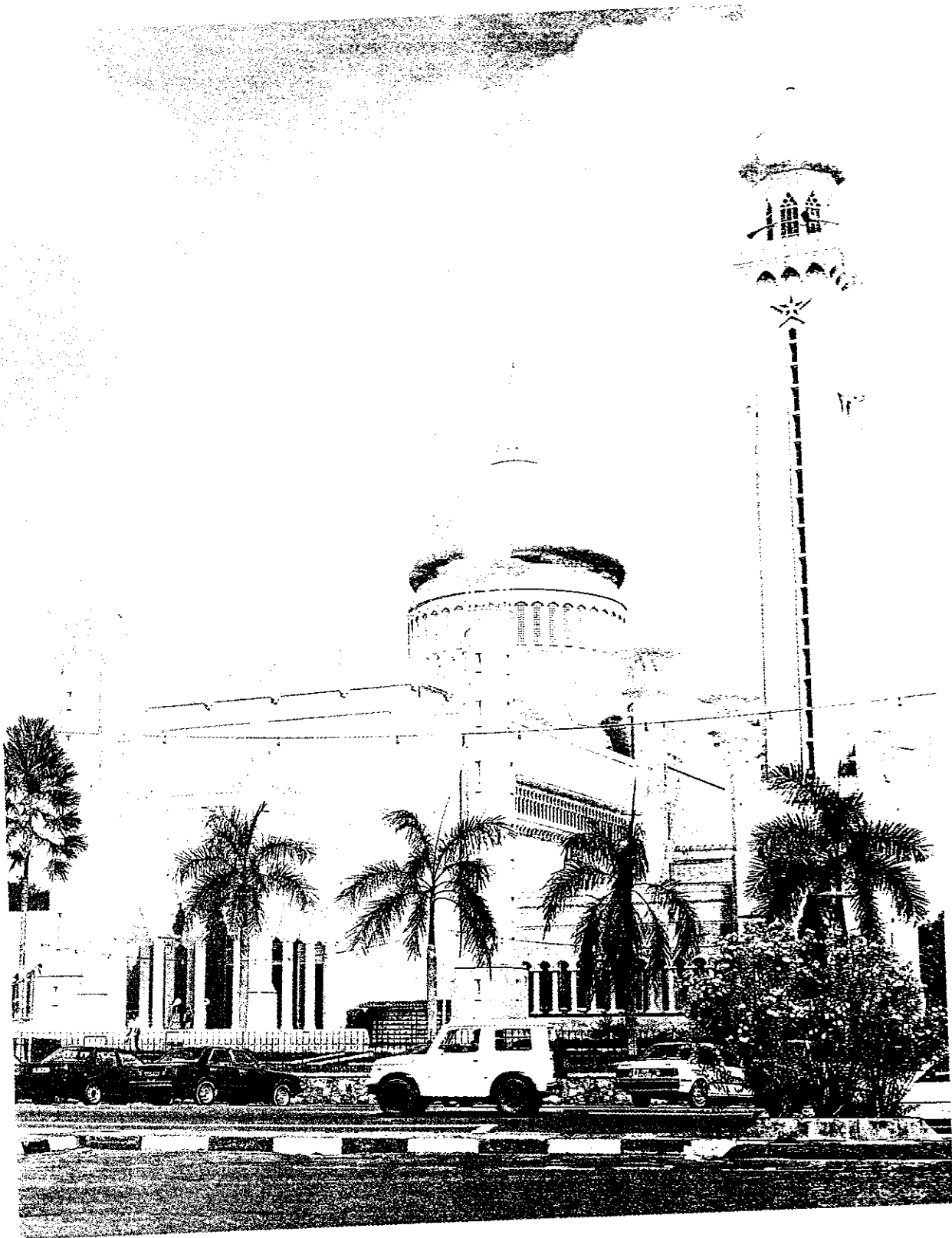
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INTRODUCTION

As a social phenomenon both in culture and in people's lives, religion often plays unique and dramatic roles. Religious beliefs and attitudes may influence behaviour and beliefs in a multitude of direct or indirect ways. Social psychologists have paid close attention to these subjective and emotional elements of human life. Other sociologists concentrate on religion's institutional dimensions, realizing that these organizational structures hold varying degrees of power among other institutions and over vast numbers of people. Consequently, this chapter discusses religion both as a social psychological set of experiences and as an organizational or institutional force in society and the world. Moreover, it highlights five important perspectives in the study of religion: structural-functional theories, dysfunctionalism and conflict theories, social exchange theories, attribution theories (as part of social psychology), and typological theories.

Neither sociology nor any other science can make statements about the existence or nonexistence of God or any other supernatural beings or forces that religions worship. Furthermore, social scientists cannot comment on any powers or actions that these supernatural figures or forces allegedly possess or perform. Science has these limitations because it can study and draw conclusions about the natural world only. Religion, in contrast, presupposes the existence of a supernatural realm — a realm (if it exists) whose contents are beyond scientific scrutiny. Nonetheless, people's *beliefs* about deity are empirical phenomena that can be studied, as are the organizations that propagate such beliefs. Likewise, sociologists are able to learn about the beliefs held by people in different kinds of societies and how these belief systems and their related symbols, myths, and rituals affect individual and collective lives.

SYMBOLS, MYTHS, AND RITUALS IN RELIGION

Emotions and feelings play a key role in religion; they range from awe and reverence to fear and dread. When we talk about such emotions, we use **connotative language**, which is the language of feeling and of poetry (Fromm, 1951). "[L]ay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew, 6.20; references are to the Authorized Version) for example, is a connotative statement, since it uses arbitrary symbols whose meanings are *evocative* and emerge out of the rich complex of meanings and feelings that these words (*treasures* and *heaven*) bring to mind. In contrast, **denotative language** involves precise definition and is the type of communication that we use in scientific discourse. It utilizes signs, symbols, arbitrary sounds (words), and marks (writing) that have precise meanings — as, for example, in scientific formulae.

The distinction between the two types of language is important for identifying the power of religious imagery, such as occurs, for instance, in the Christian statement that "Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins." While many Christians take this statement to be factual, its evocative significance is even more important for the sociologist of religion.

When religions use objects and images in rituals and myths, these objects and images gain emotional significance. To use more Christian examples, the cross for Protestants and the crucifix for Catholics evoke the connotations of the sacrificial death of Christ, who is their tradition's central religious figure. For Catholics, the image of the Virgin Mary connotes feelings of purity, compassion, understanding, and the hope of supernatural intercession in times of need. The Protestant immersion baptismal font symbolizes (1) the grave in which the old self is buried; (2) the womb, from which a new "saved" self is born; and (3) the purification of a person thought to be spiritually cleansed by the water (Eliade, 1958: 120; Warner, 1961: 265–340).

These religious symbols (the cross or crucifix, the Virgin Mary, the baptismal font) derive their emotional significance from religious accounts that sociologists call "myths." A myth is not a fairy story. Rather, it is a nonhistorical account whose emotionally dramatic content addresses questions that are fundamental to a culture and its people. For Jews and Christians, for example,

the early chapters of Genesis provide a myth that answers questions concerning the origins of the universe, animal and plant species, humankind, suffering, and death. Specifically for Christians, the first four books of the New Testament answer additional questions about the nature of God and humanity, sin, and salvation.

Other traditions use objects and images in rituals that hold powerful meanings for their adherents. For Moslems on pilgrimage to Mecca, the large, black cube-shaped structure called the Ka'ba represents the tradition's connection to Abraham, who they believe built the edifice (Koran 22.26; see Lewis, 1976: 45). Devout Jews are powerfully moved by praying and reciting Torah at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, which is the remnant of the Temple begun by King Solomon and destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 (Noss, 1969: 410). Sri Lankan Buddhists undertake ritual pilgrimages to a mountain called Adam's Peak, where they venerate an alleged footprint of the Buddha, which is "a trace of his mythic visit to the sacred island" (Smart, 1977: 36–37). Tibetan monks spin prayer wheels as visible symbols of the Buddha's message, which supposedly "set the wheel of the Law in motion" (Smart, 1977: 93). Eastern Orthodox Christians often kiss holy pictures or icons as a means of showing "affection and respect . . . to the visible representation of the unseen, angelic world" (Smart, 1977: 94). As these diverse examples suggest, sacred symbols derive their significance from religious myths of which they are important components.

Rituals that use sacred symbols also derive their significance from the religious myth system that they partially re-enact. Catholicism provides recognizable examples in its Mass. The Mass both celebrates and symbolically re-enacts what many believe was the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross in order to atone for humanity's sins. Catholic theology claims that this mythic sacrifice and atonement make possible the opportunity for repentant people to go to heaven. The priest who conducts the Mass says, "Christ is crucified again," and the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation holds that the wine and bread of the communion wafers are transformed miraculously into the actual blood and body of Christ (see Warner, 1961, for a fuller discussion).

Contemporary analyses of rituals emphasize the extent to which participation in them empowers participants. Put succinctly, "ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations" (Bell, 1992: 197). The logic behind this insight is that "the person who has prayed to his or her god, appropriating the social schemes of the hegemonic order in terms of an individual redemption, may be stronger because these acts are the very definitions of power, personhood, and the capacity to act" (Bell, 1992: 218).

Not to be neglected, however, are examples of rituals that actually disempower participants to the extent that they reproduce socially sanctioned patterns of domination, subservience, passivity, and sexism. Moreover, on interpersonal levels, ritual leaders may use their claims of ceremonial superiority or hegemony to manipulate or abuse fellow participants in the name of a higher, religious justification.

The use of rituals to empower or disempower indicates that after religious symbols come into existence they can be used for a variety of purposes. They can comfort the dying or bereaved; they can attempt to ward off evil; and they can claim God's support during war or election campaigns. Likewise, they can increase people's confidence in the likely success of a venture, as when a bishop blesses either a fishing fleet at the beginning of the season or an army on the eve of a battle. In short, the humanly constructed nature of religious symbols allows us to (re)mould or (re)assign them in arbitrary ways, even when they contradict the meanings assigned to them by other authorities and traditions.

DEFINITIONS AND DIMENSIONS OF RELIGION

Sociologists use various definitions of religion, and these definitions allow researchers to examine a wide range of groups, activities, and behaviours. Common to most of the definitions is

recognition that religion claims to be involved with a supernatural realm. Any definition that speaks about this (presumably) supernatural realm is a **substantive** one, since it claims that the *substance* or essence of religion is its members' belief in some form of otherworldliness. Thus, a basic example of a substantive definition is the one that the British anthropologist E.B. Tylor offered more than a century ago: religion is "the belief in Spiritual Beings" (Tylor, 1871: 8). Contemporary substantivists often expand the definition to say that religion is "belief in spiritual *forces*" (which, of course, would include beings), since not all belief systems that people generally agree are religions (such as Theravada Buddhism) postulate heavenly entities of any kind (Spiro, 1967).

Other types of sociological definitions of religion examine the functions provided by religion in society's creation and maintenance of meaning and order. These are called **functional definitions,** and they do not necessarily make supernatural claims about religious phenomena. Under these definitions, any activities that provide participants with large, embracing systems of meaning and order are, at least in a sociologically functional sense, religious. In this spirit, such mundane activities as hockey watching (Sinclair-Faulkner, 1977) and such secular groups as motorcycle gangs (Watson, 1982) are functionally religious because of the overriding importance that some participants place on them.

The most useful definitions of religion, however, combine substantive claims about the nature of religion (that it allegedly involves supernatural forces or beings) with discussions about how religions serve (or function) to provide meaning and order to their adherents. These definitions emphasize the collective nature of religion, but in addition they recognize that religion allows people to place their joys, sorrows, and uncertainties in a comprehensive framework (as we are about to see).

An influential definition of religion appeared in the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who argued that religion was "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, 1965 [1912]: 62).

This definition implies three things. First, **the sacred** is anything that society (or some of its members) believe is antagonistic to the profane world and superior in dignity and power. Second, religion comprises a social system that integrates beliefs and practices. Third, religion is a social (and not merely an individual) phenomenon. That is to say, a group of people adhere to a particular set of beliefs and practices in a setting that (for convenience) Durkheim called a "church," but which includes any formal social organization (such as a synagogue, mosque, temple, etc.).

Broad definitions of religion such as Durkheim's are adequate for much sociological research, but studies into the range, depth, and scope of religiosity have caused researchers to highlight different aspects in their definitional preferences. Charles Glock (1962), for example, specified five dimensions to religiosity or religious belief; these dimensions are especially useful for researchers who want a definition that provides measurable traits. The first dimension is *experiential* — the extent to which a person either claims to have direct knowledge of a deity or supernatural force, or experiences profoundly religious emotion. (Keep in mind, however, that perceptions and identifications of religious emotion differ from religion to religion.)

The second dimension is *ideological* — the extent to which a person holds certain beliefs. Thus, religions usually have basic sets of beliefs or creeds that members profess; researchers can measure the degrees of agreement with them. The third dimension, which is closely related to the second one, is *intellectual* — the extent to which a person is informed and knowledgeable about the basic beliefs of the religion and its reputedly sacred scriptures.

The fourth measurable dimension of religion is *ritualistic* — the extent to which a person performs those specifically religious practices that are expected of the faithful. Rituals of this nature often include prayer, offerings, religious fasting, ceremonies at birth, marriage, and death, and so on.

The fifth and last dimension is *consequential* — the effects of religion on the behaviour of people and the extent to which it *makes a difference* in their lives. Sociologists are able to measure the extent to which religious beliefs affect secular activities, such as choice of occupations, levels of income, selection of marriage partners, and political orientations.

In Canada, for example, geographer Al Hecht concluded that "the [religious] influence works itself through in part on where people decide to live; what kind of occupations they pursue or don't pursue; to what extent they pursue education; whether they speak English at home, and a whole host of things" (cited in Simone, 1992: C8). Specifically regarding his own religious group, the Mennonites, Hecht determined that "religion does have an impact on income, and that impact was most pronounced in the Mennonite group, which tended to be lower than average, even after other variables such as education and area of residence were worked into the statistical analysis" (cited in Simone, 1992: C8). To Mennonites themselves, however, their tendency "to have lower income is not necessarily a bad thing — it may simply reflect the group putting its priorities on other areas of life" along with their "attitudes about the afterlife and the relationship between the accumulation of earthly wealth and the afterlife" (cited in Simone, 1992: C8).

THEORIES OF RELIGION

As a human enterprise, religion has existed in virtually all societies over a vast expanse of human history. Its pervasiveness suggests that it serves important and often vital functions for societies and the people who live in them.

• STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM

Structural-functional theory assumes that religion and other major structures (groupings or organizations) of society have important, perhaps necessary, functions or consequences for the survival of society. According to this theory, society could not survive without the structures of family, government, economic organizations, and religion, because all of them contribute to the survival of society as a unit. Structural-functional analyses have led sociologists of religion to identify at least six functions of religion in society. Together they help explain why religion has operated so widely throughout the world's cultures.

The broadest, and probably the most important of these vital functions is that *religion makes life meaningful* to many people because it addresses issues that are central (if not basic) to their lives. Many religious teachings, for example, include **cosmologies** that explain the origins of the world as well as its ultimate fate. Included in these cosmologies are directives about the manner in which individuals (and sometimes the groups to which they belong) are supposed to live their lives. Believers in each religious tradition are then able to view their lives as part of a grand divine plan, thereby feeling part of a vast and sometimes personal unfolding of cosmological forces.

The second and next most important function of religion involves the *comfort* that it provides to the sick, bereaved, suffering, aged, and poor. The ability of religion to provide comfort is the result of its attempt to answer fundamental human questions that involve life, death, and suffering. Such questions appear in the forefront of people's minds in times of crisis or despair, such as when loved ones are hurt or die. Such crises may make people wonder about the purpose or value of human life, so all successful religions must deal with the threats to meaning posed by suffering and evil in the world. Thus, one researcher concluded that "what a religion has to say about suffering reveals, in many ways more than anything else, what it believes the nature and purpose of existence to be" (Bowker, 1970: 2). The answers to these and similar questions of meaning are called **theodicies** (see Weber, 1956 [1922]: 138–39), and their interpretations allow people to continue experiencing life as meaningful and desirable.

Different theodicies operate among the world's religions, and they may vary in different historical periods or cultural settings within the same religious traditions. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theodicies, for example, include the expectation that a messianic figure soon will arrive to alleviate worldly distress, along with other beliefs that people will attain their appropriate eternal rewards in heaven or hell (see Weber, 1956 [1922]: 138–44). Moreover, some Christian traditions (most notably those related to Calvinism) additionally claim that God has predestined or "decreed not only human fate on earth but also human destiny after death" (Weber, 1956 [1922]: 143).

In contrast to these varied Western theodicies, both Hinduism and Buddhism assert that people's current life situations are a direct result of what they earned while living during *previous* lives (called karma), so that persons who suffer misfortunes are paying for deeds that they committed in other lifetimes (Weber, 1956 [1922]: 145). Finally, some dualistic religious traditions (such as Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and forms of Gnosticism) explain evil as the product of dark forces that compete in the world for dominance against the forces of goodness and light (Weber, 1956 [1922]: 144–45).

Prominent and specially trained religious figures in each religious tradition put believers in touch with their tradition's cosmologies and interpret their theodicies to adherents in ways that provide solace and comfort in difficult times. These activities fall within the realm of pastoral care, which (in basic terms) is "the religious cultivation of the individual" (Weber, 1956 [1922]: 75). In essence, providing followers with both meaning and doctrinal interpretations are **priestly functions**, since they involve persons with special training (such as is received by priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, etc.).

In contrast to religion's priestly or comfort functions are the third type, **prophetic functions**, which are carried out when religious leaders criticize or condemn people or entire societies for their alleged moral or religious transgressions. The term *prophet* comes from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament figures who condemned the political, moral, and religious conditions of the societies in which they lived. They based their condemnations upon values that they believed were divinely inspired, thereby elevating their criticisms to the level of godly directives. Weber's classic analysis of religious figures distinguished between an "ethical prophet" such as Zoroaster and Muhammad who claimed to be "an instrument for the proclamation of a god and his will," and an "exemplary prophet" such as the Buddha "who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation" (Weber, 1956 [1922]: 55).

A fourth function that religion serves is that of *providing communities* in which people involve themselves. These communities provide social settings for people to acquire friends and social contacts among fellow members who supposedly share the same basic values. Were it not for religion, for example, immigrants or rural migrants to cities probably would become members of what David Reisman called *The Lonely Crowd:* isolated urban dwellers with few if any local family or friends.

Religion's provision of community is aptly demonstrated by the functions of some religious organizations in Alberta during the first part of the 20th century. Numerous sectarian groups in Edmonton and Calgary "assisted in the adjustment of people of rural background to an urban environment" (Mann, 1955: 154). More broadly, "in both urban and rural areas, the sects' interest in newcomers, and their many weekday activities and status conferring offices, enabled them to draw marginal people into a fairly close-knit socio-religious community. In a province characterized by a high incidence of social marginality, this sectarian function contributed significantly to social integration" (Mann, 1955: 155). Similarly, in a sweeping study of the role of religion in Canada from 1760 to the late 1940s, S.D. Clark concluded that "the religious institution as an integral part of the whole institutional complex of the community served as one of the means of entering into social relationships and of becoming a part of a recognized group life" (Clark, 1948: 433).

A fifth important function that religion serves for some people is that it *provides a source of identity*. People may see themselves as inseparable from the religion to which they belong. Close

identifications of this kind are especially likely to occur either when people have to make important sacrifices to remain members of the faith or when they are isolated from mainstream society in significant ways. Religions such as the Hutterites, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons are obvious examples of groups that demand sacrifices from members who in turn identify strongly with their respective religious traditions.

Hutterite commitment to their colonies, for example, is based on the principle of the "community of goods," which

> governs not only the production and distribution of resources so that "one person must not have abundance and another suffer want," but also the control of the natural appetites. Carnal desires are believed to express themselves in the adornment of the body and in activities that cater to gratification — "the lusts of the eye" — such as movies, television shows, dancing, recreation in public places, excessive drinking, and worldly music. Curling, a common form of recreation in Canadian towns, and skiing are also viewed as a great waste of time and money and are forbidden. Such manifestations are not legitimate "needs" and are not part of the consumption pattern of either the individual or the colony (Hostetler, 1974: 194–95).

Avoidance of these habits and activities combines with isolation from the secular community and extensive communal activities in order to form religiously based self-identities among Hutterite members.

Contemporary Mormons, in contrast, rarely live in colonies, but their identity formation (especially for men) involves sacrifice and distance from the outside world. As do members of some other religious organizations, devout Mormons give 10 percent of their incomes to the church (Gottlieb and Wiley, 1984: 97). Mormon men (and increasingly, women) usually serve as missionaries for two years under the strict control of church officials, with their families paying their expenses. Persons whose missionary plans require language training may attend the Missionary Training Center (originally called the Language Training Mission [LTM]) in Provo, Utah. The diary of one young man from that program recorded that the training he underwent there "meant a transition to a new kind of identity." "I was the creature of the LTM," he wrote. "It had created me. Outside it, my existence had no context, no purpose, and no meaning" (quoted in Gottlieb and Wiley, 1984: 130). In essence, his religious organization had formed for him a new identity.

operate within the doctrinal confines of (what one sociologist called) "ideological absolutism," which teaches the Witnesses "to owe exclusive loyalty" to Jehovah as revealed through the corporate body. If members adhere to the ideology as the organization intends, then it "is able to prescribe detailed moral regulations for them" (Beckford, 1975: 199). Behavioural prescriptions dictate that a member

> must not join a political party, vote for public officials, perform jury duty, attend bull fights, fence, stand for the national anthem, salute the flag, offer toasts, smoke, chew tobacco, use hallucinogenic drugs, celebrate holidays, engage in improper sexual relations (as defined by the [organization]), accept a blood transfusion, or . . . participate in certain types of dancing or listen to certain types of music (Penton, 1985: 280).

In sum, many religions provide identities for their members that require individuals to commit themselves to the adherence of organizationally prescribed and proscribed attitudes and behaviour, usually involving substantial sacrifices of time and resources.

Finally, society itself also may utilize religion *to legitimize its collective identity*. National mythologies, for example, often connect the origins of countries with the will of a divine figure. The most readily available examples come from the experience of the United States, whose earliest permanent European settlers, the Pilgrims, envisioned their efforts in the so-called New World as a covenant with God. A respected modern historian of the Pilgrims, Perry Miller, surmised,

"this much is indubitable, that when New England was settled the two covenants, the religious and the political, had become one in the minds of the leaders. No political writing of seventeenth century Massachusetts and Connecticut can be fully understood without reference to the whole system" (Miller, 1939: 414). Perceptions of the United States as "the promised land" continue to permeate that country's national thinking through the modern period, and appear in conceptions of America as "one nation, under God" in that country's pledge of allegiance to its flag.

• CIVIL RELIGIONS

Closely related both to religion's legitimation of collective identities and to its frequent sanctification of existing structural arrangements in society is its use as *a justification for the actions that nations undertake.* Throughout history societies have seen their activities as the performance of God's work on earth. In essence, civic actions may become religious in the eyes of society's members and leaders. Robert Bellah (1967) termed this phenomenon **civil religion,** in which societies mix religious and patriotic symbols and impute divine support to the purposes and officials of the state.

Currently nations from a variety of religious backgrounds — Jewish, Christian, and Islamic — invoke the blessings of their respective deities for their social and political actions. The United States, for example, prints the words "In God We Trust" on its coins, and many of its politicians' speeches are laced with religious language. President John Kennedy's inauguration speech in 1960 even had the tone and phrases of a religious sermon:

> Now the trumpet summons us again — not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need — not as a call to battle, though embattled we are — but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation" — a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself . . .
>
> Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own (reproduced in Copeland and Lamm, 1973: 741–42).

Sociologists have recognized how easily civil religion can sanctify economic colonialism, and one particularly socially conscious academic, C. Wright Mills, protested to his fellow American citizens that people "of religious congregations do evil; [and] ministers of God make them feel good about it" (Mills, 1958: 200).

Although researchers seemingly have discovered civil religions in several countries (Bellah and Hammond, 1980), by no means does one exist for Canada. Unlike its southern neighbour, Canada never rebelled from its parent country, and so Canada never had the need to sanctify national acts of revolution. Nor has it had a national crisis on a scale with the American Civil War that might have forced it to mythologize its past. Furthermore, different regional histories and economies fostered in the country a staunch regionalism that mitigates the appeal of national symbols. Some commentators, however, argue that the solemnity of Remembrance Day services in all cities across the country indicates at least a minimal level of civil-religious attitudes.

Most fundamentally, early Canada's two very different religious cultures of French-speaking Catholicism in Quebec and English-speaking Anglicanism in Upper Canada shared only the broadest dimensions of Christian symbolism, clouded by different ethnic and historic allegiances. Even after World War II, Quebec's Catholicism "encouraged, legitimated, and sustained state conservatism, authoritarianism, and reaction even to the point of flirtation with neo-Fascism" (O'Toole, 1982: 184). Nineteenth-century Anglicanism's political agenda was very different, proclaiming:

that the Anglo-Saxon burden of [British] Empire, monarchy, aristocracy, and British constitutionalism were part of a sacred scenario; and by the same token, its condemnation of mass democracy, egalitarianism, republicanism, and revolution as the work of the devil, left an indelible mark on English-Canadian political life (O'Toole, 1982: 185).

Consequently, each culture may have formed largely incompatible regional civil religions, and in the process produced few religiously based symbols that politicians could appropriate on a national scale. Nevertheless, nostalgic lamentations for return to the mythic "virtues of the British tradition" (Blumstock, 1993) occasionally appear in some contemporary Canadian discourse and even may colour the political positions taken by the Reform Party (see Harrison, 1993: 133–44).

• CONFLICT THEORY

Mills's lament about ministers sanctifying allegedly evil acts by the American nation suggests that religion can contribute to societal or global dysfunction just as readily as it does to society's smooth and necessary operations. The challenge to structural-functional theory comes from **conflict theory**, whose assumptions trace back to the work of Karl Marx, who coined the memorable phrase that religion is "the opium of the people" (Marx, 1964 [1844]: 42). Whereas structural-functionalists see religion as essential to human survival, conflict theorists see religion as a powerful social vehicle for subjugating and exploiting populations. From a conflict perspective, religious doctrines about a heavenly afterlife are merely tools of oppression used by the powerful to ensure obedience to self-serving authority.

Historical examples of religion's oppressive functions are easy to find. They include the alliance between the Czar and the Orthodox Church in Russia that sanctioned the power and wealth of the royal family while most of the population remained peasants (see Ziryanov. 1988: 166–67). Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church signed "concordats" or treaties with two dictatorial regimes earlier in this century — Mussolini's Italy and Franco's Spain (Hanson, 1987: 43. 93). In present times, some commentators see the forces of conservatism at work in the efforts of Pope John Paul II to restrain the "liberation theology" movement within the Latin American Catholic Church.

As conflict theorists insist, powerful social groups can use supernatural claims to control people's behaviour in manners that preserve social and political privileges. These social groups will claim either that their privileges are divinely ordained or that people should minimize the importance of worldly affairs and seek rewards in an afterlife.

One of the most famous examples of religion sanctifying the social privileges of the elite in a particular society occurs in the ancient Indian scriptures called the Rig Veda, in which one hymn (10.90) portrays society as having emanated from various parts of a god's sacrificed body. The social and religious elite (called Brahmins or priests) emanated from the god Purusha's mouth; the warriors from his arms; the peasants from his thighs, and the serfs from his feet (see Bose, 1966: 285). This hierarchy of privilege and social tasks forms the basis for India's caste system, and the system's claim of supernatural origin has contributed to its fundamental stability over countless centuries. As the renowned Indologist A.L. Basham deduced, "By the end of the R[i]g Vedic period [at approximately 1000 B.C.] society was divided into four great classes, and this fourfold division was given religious sanction and looked on as fundamental" (Basham, 1959 [1954]: 35).

Not only have religious hymns and myths sanctified what might best be called class position and power, but they have also sanctified male patriarchy in the major religions of the world. The noted religious comparativist Geoffrey Parrinder observed that "in all living religions, and many ancient and prehistoric religions, men have been dominant, because physically stronger, and women have been subordinate" (Parrinder, 1980: 244). Scholars certainly would dispute his interpreta-

tion of male domination based upon average differences in physical strength, and others might point out a few "new" religions that seemingly practise equality or female dominance, but no one would dispute Parrinder's central observation concerning the prevalence of patriarchy.

These examples suggest that religion's *sacralizing* or *legitimizing power* may receive both functional and dysfunctional interpretations, depending upon one's set of values. Sacralization or legitimation means that people are able to justify their actions through divine claims and to sanctify their behaviours by asserting divine guidance or destiny for them. Thus, Weber (1930 [1920a]) realized that certain Puritan groups in 17th-century England felt that worldly success was a probable sign of their eternal salvation. Likewise, royalty, especially in earlier periods of history, argued that their hegemonic position was divinely sanctioned. As elaborated in the British theory of the Divine Right of Kings, monarchy claimed to be "a divinely ordained institution" whose kings were "accountable to God alone," thereby making "resistance to a king . . . a sin" (Figgis, 1965 [1914]: 5, 6).

Additional dysfunctions of religion may occur in the area of community involvement, in direct contrast to the experience of persons who see religion's provision of a community in a positive, functionalist light. Persons may feel constrained and constricted by their religious communities, even to the point that they denounce the restrictions and controlled lives that they had lived for years. For example, two former Canadian Jehovah's Witnesses, Heather and Gary Botting (1984), launched a bitter attack on their former religious community, equating their lives in it with George Orwell's description of totalitarianism in his novel, *1984.*

Not only may religious communities become restrictive social environments, but also they may develop attitudes toward persons outside of their communities that are hostile, demeaning, and racist. A recent study of Canadian racism, for example, isolated the role of religion in the constellation of racist and anti-Semitic attitudes, behaviours, and organizations that the author identified across the country:

> Theological racism not only supposedly explains why whites are superior and non-whites are inferior (God made us that way) but it also has the capacity to accommodate all the other significant strands in the white supremacist's belief system: communism is anti-Christian, homosexuality is an abomination before God, and the white man's Western civilization is coterminous with Christian civilization. Furthermore, there is a specific strand in the white supremacist's belief system, intrinsically linked to Christianity, that is the most potent of all: anti-Semitism. Jews are said to be Satan's children, the killers of Christ. Interracial mixing, communism, drugs, abortion, social change

Box 13.1 RELIGIOUS DYSFUNCTION

No example in Canadian history more dramatically illustrates religious dysfunction than the case of Roch Theriault. By the late 1970s, the charismatic and dynamic Theriault had gathered around him a small band of followers. In 1978 he ordered them to escape to a remote valley in Quebec so that they would survive the impending Armageddon (end of the world). After arriving there, he declared himself to be God's emissary, and ordered his followers to sever contacts with the outside world and assume biblical names.

Living in almost complete social isolation, the group fell under Theriault's abusive control — a control that entrapped members by his divine claims and drunken rages. For over a decade his followers suffered severe beatings, exhausting labour, sexual exploitation, child abuse, abuse of a corpse, and medical violence. His botched medical operations cost the lives of two members, while a third person lost an arm. Even after he pleaded guilty to second-degree murder while serving time on other charges, several of his former communal wives remained devoted to him. Recently one gave birth to another of his many children, conceived during a conjugal prison visit.

Source: Kaihla et al. (1993).

in general — all of these are supposedly promoted by Jews, providing evidence of the insidious international conspiracy . . . Anti-Semitism constituted the radical right's theoretical system or paradigm (Barrett, 1987: 337).

All of the religiously based anti-Semitic themes that Barrett identified swirled into public view during the two trials of Jim Keegstra (in 1984 and 1992), whose charges (and eventual conviction) stemmed from having taught high-school students in Eckville, Alberta, "paranoid fantasies about a Jewish world-conspiracy bent on controlling, and then destroying, Christianity" (Bercuson and Wertheimer, 1985: x; see Mertl and Ward, 1985; Barrett, 1987: 215–60). As Barrett concluded, however, "the single most important factor . . . that makes Keegstra tick [is] his orientation to religion" (Barrett, 1987: 215).

Religious ideology, therefore, often plays a primary role in the propagation of attitudes and behaviours that probably are dysfunctional to major segments of society or significant numbers of people. Religious institutions, moreover, may provide social opportunities and social networks that unequally advantage some members of society at the expense of others. Evidence for religion's role in the perpetuation of social inequality appears in Clement's (1975) groundbreaking study of Canada's corporate elite. When analyzing their religious backgrounds, he discovered that a disproportionate number of the elite (25.3 percent in 1972) were Anglican, despite the fact that Anglicans made up only 11.8 percent of the population (Clement, 1975: 240). Presbyterians, who were 4 percent of the population, also were overrepresented among the elite at 8 percent. Baptists and "other" Protestants, however, were underrepresented among the elite (2.6 percent), although they constituted almost 8 percent of the population. Likewise, Catholics were poorly represented among the elite (at 12.7 percent), although they were 46.2 percent of the population.

Clement realized the difficulty of interpreting these findings since, for example, the low Catholic percentage may reflect combinations of religious, ethnic, and educational factors. Regarding the high percentage of Anglicans among the elite, however, Clement suggested that the role of educational institutions was central to the explanation. Realizing the fundamental role played by "private schools" (along with private clubs) in "maintaining class opportunities in favour of the privileged" (1975: 7), Clement observed that quite a number of private schools were Anglican affiliated. Attendance at these schools

> promotes association and friendships among the upper class based on common social experiences. It is because Anglican institutions have been established as class institutions and exclusion mechanisms that a disproportionate number of Anglicans appear in the elite and not because there is some "ethnic" [group] associated with this denomination which creates elites (Clement, 1975: 240).

In sum, institutional religion can contribute to social disparity and selective privilege by fostering social elitism and class exclusion through educational structures.

• SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Traditionally, psychology has stressed the importance of examining the feelings, experiences, and cognitive processes of individuals. Sociology, in contrast, has insisted that the significant focus of research must be the groups and other social influences that provide the cognitive and emotional contexts that limit and direct individuals' feelings, perceptions, and life possibilities. A common ground between the disciplines is **social psychology,** which acknowledges that individuals' experiences are important to research partly because they are heavily influenced by their social environments. In the study of religion, significant promise lies in insights provided by social psychological interpretations of humanity's claims concerning experiences of the supernatural or divine (see Hunsberger, 1980).

Social psychological examinations of religion have addressed such diverse phenomena as children's religious socialization, drug and meditational experiences, possible relationships between religious dogmatism and authoritarianism, religion and sexuality, religion and the fear of death, and religious motivations for secular behaviour (see Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). We shall concentrate on one aspect of religious experience — conversion — in order to show the interpretive power of social psychology.

Sociologists realize that diverse patterns exist regarding the processes by which people adopt a belief system. Not only are individuals' experiences frequently different regarding conversion to the same group, but also the groups themselves have distinct requirements that converts must follow. For example, evangelical Christians emphasize an emotional experience involving "the acceptance of Jesus into the heart" as a "born-again" experience. Conversion to either Judaism or Jehovah's Witnesses involves doctrinal acceptance that occurs throughout extended periods of study (Wilson, 1978: 503; Lofland and Skonovd, 1981). Other conversion experiences are sudden and dramatic, occurring after participation in emotionally charged ceremonies or services requiring behaviours and actions outside the boundaries of normal life. Such behaviours include "speaking in tongues" (or *glossolalia*), when people allegedly speak in languages that are spiritual rather than human) or rapid chanting, often in foreign languages that the chanters do not understand. Some religions require people to reveal emotionally uncomfortable and painful events from their lives. All of these groups attain deeply committed converts, usually after participation in such emotionally charged and culturally unique social activities.

Social psychological theories about **attribution processes** help explain why these emotionally charged forms of conversion take place. Attribution theories (for there are more than one) examine the processes by which individuals assign or *attribute* meaning to events that affect their emotions, their self-perceptions, and their motivations (see Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975). Religious ideologies — with their explanations for suffering, death, and the purpose of life — provide meaning systems that individuals use to interpret their lives. Conversions frequently occur, therefore, after emotionally charged religious services because the groups' religious ideologies provide participants with supposedly supernaturally based interpretations that make sense out of events for which they have no interpretive framework. In essence, religion provides meaning to otherwise meaningless situations (see McGuire, 1992), even when religious groups create the otherwise meaningless events in the first place.

Attribution theories also may explain why some people become more religious in response to various life crises. Religious groups design events and experiences for which potential converts have no interpretive context; life crises present situations that people may not be able to integrate into their existing personal interpretive frameworks. Common to all life crises — such as facing death, struggling with disease, mourning the loss of loved ones, or entering new phases of life — is the breakdown of ordinary cognitive systems of action and rules for the resolution of conflict. Religious systems are particularly attractive at such times because they are total systems, providing comprehensive interpretations of experience. Consequently, these systems pre-empt, and thus render relatively insignificant, the conflicts and cares of mundane life (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 325).

As an interpretive system, therefore, religion is unique among ideologies in its ability to provide untestable, unverifiable, and supposedly supernatural answers and explanations for many of life's fundamental questions. Its explanations include assertions about the supernatural that are difficult if not impossible to *dis*prove, thereby giving adherents an overriding sense of certainty concerning the explanations.

Not all conversions, however, occur simply because people misattribute supernatural powers to groups or their leaders. Many individuals' decisions to join groups are influenced significantly by the quality of social bonds that they have with group members in comparison to those that they have with people who are not part of the group. If family or friends already are members, then a person's chances of converting increase dramatically. These chances increase even further for

people who are personally predisposed to value religion in their lives. Conversion, in short, occurs because religiously predisposed people meet groups at appropriate periods in their lives.

Two sociologists, John Lofland and Rodney Stark, clarified the relationship between predisposing factors and what they called the "situational contingencies" of conversion in a study that they carried out in a city on the American west coast in the early 1960s. Their work took on an unforeseen importance since the group that they studied contained the first members of the Unification Church (i.e., the Moonies) in North America. For a conversion to take place, Lofland and Stark argued, the three following *predisposing factors* must apply. Individuals must

1. be experiencing enduring, acutely felt tensions in their lives;
2. have the perspective that theirs is a religious problem (as opposed to merely a psychological or economic problem, for example); and
3. see themselves as *religious seekers.*

In addition, the three following *situational contingencies* must occur. Individuals must

4. meet one or more group members at turning points or crises in their lives;
5. develop strong attachments to them; and at the same time
6. diminish if not eliminate nongroup (often family) relationships.

Unless individuals progress through each of these stages (although not necessarily in this order), they are unlikely to convert (Lofland and Stark, 1965).

As Lofland and Stark's study implies, conversions almost never take place spontaneously, but are the result of people working to make them happen. Evangelists are specialists at this type of "conversion work," and the most successful of them is Billy Graham. As a study of the 1974 Billy Graham Crusade in Phoenix, Arizona, makes clear (Altheide and Johnson, 1977), the conversions that he achieves are not solely a result of his preaching effectiveness.

Planning for the Phoenix crusade took a full year, and perhaps 6000 people were involved in various parts of the project (Altheide and Johnson, 1977: 325). These volunteers included 3000 choir members and 1500 counsellors; the latter filled out information cards on the people who responded to this call. These counsellors were scattered throughout the auditorium, and when Graham instructed people to come forward and accept Jesus into their hearts they stood up and slowly walked to the front. By doing so they created the impression that they were responding to Graham's call, thereby making it much easier for nonvolunteers to come forward (Altheide and Johnson, 1977: 332). The size of this evangelical organization is indicated by its 1974 budget, which was over $20 million (Altheide and Johnson, 1977: 324), and it maintains offices in many countries around the world.

One might think that most people join evangelical or conservative churches because they are converted to that form of Christianity. A study of new members joining twenty conservative churches in Calgary (Bibby and Brinkerhoff, 1973) found, however, that the largest number of "converts" (72 percent) were people who transferred their memberships from other conservative churches. Those who had been born to parents who were members of conservative churches constituted 18 percent of the "converts," and only 9 percent were new to the conservative tradition. The reason for joining was unknown for 1 percent. Conversion to conservative churches, therefore, primarily involved a circulation of members rather than an infusion of new people.

Beginning with William James's psychological classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), many investigators have explored the diversity of situations that give rise to religious feelings and experiences. Earlier in our discussion of attribution theory, we mentioned one set of circumstances in which groups create religious feelings by giving people supernatural interpretations of otherwise meaningless or unique occurrences and events. People have religious feelings, however, in a wide variety of circumstances and under a vast array of situations. Social

psychologists would stress in each one the importance of people's cultural backgrounds in influencing their experiences and then their supernatural interpretations of them. In addition to the socially constructed attributional situations that we already have discussed, five sources of religious experience are worth noting.

First and most basic is people's reaction to dramatic sights in the natural or social world. When many contemporary and sophisticated people see something awesome (like an incredible sunset or a sudden view of majestic mountain peaks) or awful (like a vast natural or social disaster), then they may attribute the event to a divine figure or force. Certainly we know that many elements of nonliterate religions were awed responses to events or natural phenomena.

A second source of religious feelings is people's beliefs that they have had a mystical or supernatural experience in which they claim to directly touch, enter, or feel God or the meaning of the universe. Greeley (1974) reports that in a well-conducted survey of a large and random sample of Americans, 76 percent said that they had had some kind of mystical or supernatural experience. James (1902) concluded that the more intense religious experiences typically have four characteristics in common. They are

1. **ineffable** — people cannot describe adequately what the experience was like;
2. **noetic** — people have a feeling of *clarity of understanding* such as they never have had before;
3. **transient** — usually (but not always) the experience or feeling is brief; and
4. **passive** — the experience is *something that happens to people,* but is not something that people can bring about.

Recent debates about alleged mystical accounts insist that they must be understood and interpreted in their appropriate historical and cultural settings, and cannot be viewed as obvious examples of humanity's direct and clear perceptions of God or divinity (Kent, 1987a, 1987b, 1989a).

A third source of religious feelings is the phenomenon of getting "swept up" or "carried away" in ecstatic group experiences that sociologists would examine as collective behaviour. In these circumstances people may lose their sense of individual identity and therefore engage in behaviours that otherwise they would not do. Distressing examples of "getting lost in the crowd" occur in riots, panics, and mobs. In religious contexts, people may get "carried away" in religious services that involve crying, shouting, dancing, and enthusiastically singing, as occurs in Christian Holiness groups (which earned them the nickname "the Holy Rollers"). These emotionally charged collective experiences can be so powerful that Durkheim (1965 [1912]: 249–50, 424–27) believed they constituted the original religious experiences among nonliterate peoples.

Somewhat related to feelings that develop out of collective ecstasy is a fourth source of religious experience, which involves feelings that emerge from a sense of *community*. Particularly for people who are lonely or alienated, the process of being warmly and lovingly accepted into a community may be a religious experience. When, for example, reporters spoke of the Unification Church (i.e., the Moonies) "love-bombing" potential converts in the 1970s, they were acknowledging that the sense of belonging to a caring community often is interpreted in religious terms.

An account from a Moonie convert about recruitment practices in Oakland, California, illustrates the point. The member reported that Onni Durst, who was one of Oakland's directors

> emphasizes not so much the truth at first, but that you must really love people. You must "love-bomb" them. Onni has a staff of about twelve people who are the best "love-bombers" in the whole world. Sometimes when I would be having trouble with one of my guests — they were not responding — I could give one of them a look and they would come over. Their ability wasn't anything they said but it was in loving that person. Finally the person's heart would melt and he or she would sign up for a training session (reproduced in Barker, 1984: 174).

If this account is accurate, then it seems that recruiters heavily influenced many people's conversions to the Oakland branch of the Unification Church by making them feel loved. Analogous processes occur for people converting to other groups.

Fifth and finally, symbols, music, or rituals can stimulate religious experience. As suggested earlier, however, people must be socialized or conditioned to respond to the connotative language with appreciation or awe, or they must be given religious interpretations of otherwise meaningless events and activities. Such things as pilgrimage shrines, relics, and music are not *automatically* inspirational in a religious sense. People must be conditioned or socialized previously into interpreting these items as sources of religious feelings.

• EXCHANGE THEORIES

After individuals have converted to particular faiths, the groups that they have joined face the problem of maintaining the converts' participation for an extended period of time. Converts bring into groups an array of wealth, talent, and enthusiasm that contribute heartily to their new organizations' lives, so they are valuable resources that groups hope to cultivate and use.

Exchange theories postulate that people calculate the probable costs involved in receiving rewards and avoiding punishments for their actions. In a religious context, they assess the likelihood of receiving both the immediate rewards as well as the divine ones supposedly received in heaven or the next life. At the same time, however, they also are trying to avoid parallel sets of immediate and posthumous divine punishments.

Religious groups are uniquely able to motivate and maintain membership because they rest their policies and practices upon *claims of supernatural legitimacy*. No other social institution is able to legitimize its policies in this manner, which helps to explain why so many people throughout history have been willing to sacrifice themselves in the name of their faith. These people believe that the costs they suffer on earth will be amply rewarded in the supernatural realm that they enter upon death (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 5–8, 1987). Conversely, they probably also believe that they risk intense punishment on earth, and perhaps after death, for failure to follow the divine principles of their faith while they still are living. With these claims in mind, we shall examine the unique social control systems that religious groups impose on their members (Kent and Mytrash, 1990).

Social organizations, including religious ones, offer members a range of *rewards*, or *relatively immediate benefits*, in exchange for participating in them. People may receive rewards of *purpose* — they may feel good about their actions or feel that they are working toward a larger goal; *affective* rewards — emotional ties with others, secure images of self-esteem in relation to other members, high status either within the secular community or among other participants; rewards of *wealth* — money, property, subsidized food or shelter; or *bodily-sensual* rewards of sex, sumptuous food, or entertainment. The ability of religious groups to offer these rewards differs little from that of many other social institutions.

Parallel systems of *punishments*, or *relatively immediate inflictions of undesirable sanctions*, exist for most social systems as well, including religious ones. Thus, a group can punish members by charging that they fall short of the group's purposes (e.g., by allegedly being "selfish" or self-centred). Groups may restrict *affective* social contact between deviants and other members or remove items of *wealth* from them as punishment for deviant acts. Finally, groups can inflict pain, fasting, or other forms of *bodily-sensual* restrictions or impositions as harsh forms of punishment for transgressions. To greater or lesser degrees, all groups engage in social forms of punishment such as these.

Religion, however, introduces an entirely unique dimension of rewards and punishments in exchange for various commitments by the devout. By convincing their members that spiritual or

supernatural realms exist, religious groups have at their disposal a vast array of motivators and threats that other social groups cannot devise. In essence, religious groups can promise their members the eternal rewards of an afterlife or the endless punishments of divine retribution.

These supernaturally asserted rewards and punishments cannot be either proven or disproven by ordinary scientific tests, so members must accept them on faith. They are not expected to occur relatively soon (as are earthly rewards or punishments), but in an unverifiable future (i.e., heaven, hell, rebirth). These supernaturally sanctified promises and punishments have real consequences in people's lives, regardless of the objective reality of their existence. In essence, they *compensate* for immediate rewards and punishments by promising eventual fulfilment in a supposedly inevitable supernatural realm. Thus, these compensatory reward and punishment systems parallel the immediate reward and punishment systems that are commonplace for most secular groups.

In *purposive* areas religion can promise the compensation of heaven or higher rebirth, or threaten the compensatory punishment of eternal separation from God or lower rebirth. In *socioemotional* areas religion can promise the eternal bonding of loved ones or threaten the eternal loss of cherished friends and relatives. In areas related to *wealth*, religion can promise either an eventual reversal of a disprivileged economic position ("Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" [Matthew 5.5]) or a divine justification for socioeconomic privilege. Conversely, it can threaten one's offspring and progeny with repeated economic hardship. Finally, religion can offer unverifiable promises in *bodily-sensual* areas such as perfect bodies in heaven or an abundance of heavenly foods, or threaten deviant members with divinely based eternal pain (in, for example, a fiery hell). In the face of these promises and threats, we begin to understand why people are willing to exchange their time, wealth, health, and independence for the demands of a religious life.

• MESSIANISM AND CHARISMA

Many devout people (especially in Western countries) are willing to commit enormous resources to religious groups if they believe that they are living in the final days before the occurrence of a religious event of profound importance. Most commonly, the devout may expect the imminent return of the messiah, who then supposedly will reign for an eternity. In some historic and contemporary instances, however, groups become convinced that the messiah has already arrived. In both cases, social scientists use the term **millenarianism** to mean *the imminent collapse of existing society and social order and their replacement with a divinely directed one.*

Millenarianism has five characteristics for its adherents that appear (with slight variations) in nearly all of its expressions throughout history. It is (1) "collective" (rather than merely to be experienced by an individual); (2) "terrestrial" (as opposed to heavenly); (3) "imminent" (occurring "soon and suddenly" if not already begun); (4) "total" (in the sense that it will completely transform life on earth); and (5) "miraculous" (in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies) (Cohn, 1976: 5).

The supernatural being who believers expect to rule during the millennium is a messiah or saviour, and as a figure in Western religious traditions he (the sexist pronoun is deliberate) first appeared in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and then in the apocalyptic Book of Daniel (7.13–14). From these sources, messianism entered both Christianity and Islam. Christianity, for example, is messianic to its core, believing that Jesus was the messiah who, as Christ, will return again to subdue Satan and judge the eternal fate of the living and the dead. Along similar lines, many Shi'ite Muslims believe that the twelfth successor of Muhammad (the Twelfth Imam) is in occultation or concealment from people's eyes, waiting "until the day when he will manifest himself again by God's permission" (Momen, 1985: 165) and vanquish his foes in an apocalyptic battle (Momen, 1985: 166).

Some devout Jews wait expectantly for the messiah, and the translation of their belief into political actions concerning the state of Israel is having dramatic and damaging effects on the Israeli–Palestinian problem (see Friedman, 1990). Some believe, for example, that their messiah will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, but before he will return and do so they must remove two Islamic holy sites, the Al Aksa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, which stand on the Temple's ruins (Friedman, 1990: 41). The situation is explosive, since damage to these two Islamic sites could ignite the entire region in war.

Adherents of Hinduism and Buddhism have comparatively minor traditions involving the return of their respective religious leaders. Tradition records that Vishnu's final incarnation will be Kalki or Kalkin (see O'Flaherty, 1975: 235–37), and the Buddha apparently predicted his own return as Maitreya (*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta*, trans. in Rhys Davids, 1965 [1921]: 73–74). Neither of these messianic figures, however, receives much attention in these traditions, probably because of the emphasis that both religions place upon suffering as an inevitable part of existence from which one should attempt to escape by asceticism or devotion.

Messianic claimants, who themselves claim to provide escape from suffering, have appeared throughout Western history. They are the most dramatic examples of what Weber (1956 [1922]) called **charismatic leaders**. Charismatic leaders claim to have unique qualities as the result of allegedly possessing special, supernatural gifts, and as a result of their alleged possession of these gifts they attract a devoted following. As Weber offered,

> the term "charisma" will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a "leader" (Weber, 1978 [1968]: 240).

Charismatic leadership, therefore, contains three aspects: (1) leaders who claim to possess divinely bestowed gifts and (2) followers who believe the claim, and who (3) continually reinforce one another's devotion (see Cartwright and Kent, 1992: 335–36 n. 19). History is replete with examples of charismatic, often messianic, leaders attracting around themselves hundreds if not thousands of followers.

As the Moon example (Box 13.2) illustrates, charismatic leaders can motivate extraordinary acts of commitment and devotion in followers, especially when these leaders make messianic claims that their followers believe.

• TYPOLOGICAL THEORIES

Except perhaps for belief systems in isolated cultures, religions in every society undergo development and change. As one would expect, therefore, all the world's great religious traditions have complex, often schismatic, histories. For example, Buddhism emerged out of Hinduism and in turn eventually divided into Hinayana and Mahayana. Out of Judaism (which now has at least three major branches) evolved Christianity and Islam. Christianity divided into Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and various forms of Protestantism, and Protestantism itself gave rise to innumerable offshoots. Islam divided into Sunni and Shi'ite traditions. Sociologists have tried to bring some order to this confusing religious variety by creating logical **typologies** or sets of classifications for religious organizations, although, regrettably, most of them are based upon Western religious examples. Among the most basic typologies is one that distinguishes among churches, denominations, sects, and cults.

A **church** enjoys universal support in a society and claims to be inclusive of all society's members. It is conservative, which means that it supports the social order, and accommodates

MESSIANIC CLAIMANT SUN MYUNG MOON

Box 13.2

A current example of a religious leader whose messianic claims serve as the basis for his charisma is Reverend Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church. Although Unification teachings stop short of stating his messianic status, "there is . . . no doubt in the minds of the overwhelming majority of Moonies that Sun Myung Moon is the Messiah" (Barker, 1984: 83). Moon himself probably believes that he is, since in a 1982 court case he testified that "he had met and had conversations with Jesus, Moses and Buddha. 'I have the possibility of becoming the real Messiah,' he said" (Chambers, 1982: A1). On the basis of charismatic claims such as this one, many Moonies who were engaged in activities for their church (such as fundraising) worked (according to disgruntled former members) "frenetic hyperactive eighteen-hour days" (Bromley and Shupe, 1979: 122). Indeed, U.S. District Court Judge Richard Owen allowed Moon to testify in the 1982 case because he realized that members' commitment to Moon and his organization derived from their belief in his charismatic assertions:

I have heard testimony during this trial from college graduates who said they spent two to three years fundraising on the streets, who have been told that the witness here [Reverend Moon] is their personal Messiah and that he is responsible for their well-being on this earth and the hereafter.

It is on the basis of this that these young people follow him, doing incredible acts of almost self slavery, selling flowers from buckets from 8 A.M. to 11 P.M. year after year. Mr. Galen [the alleged abductor and "deprogrammer" who was on trial] has been charged with trying to interrupt this life. And so we want to know whether this is a bona fide religion or not (quoted in Chambers, 1982: B8).

itself to the secular world. Examples of churches include Islam in many Arab countries and European Catholicism throughout much of the Middle Ages.

A **denomination** is an organization that operates in a society among religious competitors and has relinquished claims to inclusiveness. Consequently, it acknowledges the validity of other religious groups. Like the church, the denomination has accommodated to society. Examples include most contemporary Protestant churches, since they agree that salvation may be achieved through many religious bodies and are generally supportive of the values of their host countries.

A **sect** is a religious organization composed of persons who aspire to spiritual perfection and fellowship with other members. Members think of themselves as "saved." Typically, the group is indifferent or hostile to the rest of society, which its members see as spiritually decadent and "lost." A sect claims that it alone of all the competing religions in society practises the true religion. By this claim it excludes most of society's members. Examples probably would include groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons.

A **cult** is a loose association of persons with a private, eclectic (borrowed from many sources) sets of beliefs and practices. Typically, cults are not exclusive, and they do not object if their members belong to other religious bodies. Examples include the Theosophical Society and Self Realization Fellowship, both of which claim to facilitate people's inner spiritual development. (Note that this sociological definition differs from the pejorative connotation that the term *cult* has in the popular press, where it is applied to a group that observers consider to be destructive or harmful.)

From a related perspective, Glock (1964) classified religious organizations according to the human needs that he felt they served. He claimed, for example, that people who are economically deprived establish *sects*. Those who are socially deprived or alienated join *churches*. When people have persistent illnesses or bodily handicaps they tend to join groups emphasizing faith healing. Similarly, people who have psychic problems (which Glock [1964: 212] defines as being "without a meaningful system of values") may be attracted to the "new ideologies" that *cults* allegedly offer. Finally, when people are preoccupied with ethical issues they are most likely to join or establish reform movements in their own religious organizations and attempt to modify them from within.

An early attempt to extend Weber's original study of sectarian Puritanism was H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929), which discussed the impact of race and ethnicity, social class, war, and the frontier on the development of American religion. His analysis was especially insightful about the effects of social class on the origins of sects and their evolution into denominations. He described, for example, how middle-class Protestant denominations, which emphasized "Sunday best" appearance and "good taste" in worship style, felt alien to lower-class people. The lower classes responded by establishing their own "store-front" religions. These sects chose ministers from among their own congregants, and they preached messages that sanctified their own class and criticized the wealthy. Consequently, these lay preachers would emphasize such New Testament passages as "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6.20) and "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19.24). Moreover, these sects had emotionally charged ("enthusiastic") sermons and ceremonies, in contrast to the restrained and unemotional services of their wealthier counterparts.

Over time, however, external, secularizing influences and internal developments pressured these sectarian congregations to diminish their hostility toward wealth and worldly success. Some of the original members, for example, became relatively successful in the secular world (which occurs in societies that allow social mobility) and contributed significant sums to the sectarian group. Likewise, the group was likely to systematize its doctrines in an attempt to transmit them to the children of first-generation members (see Niebuhr, 1929: 19–20). In response, preachers toned down their diatribes against the rich. "Blessed are you poor" (Luke 6.20) was replaced with "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5.3), because preachers did not want to alienate members who were covering significant amounts of their groups' expenses. Moreover, the preachers themselves faced pressures to institutionalize and obtain formal training in an effort to ensure that they possessed the theological and educational skills necessary to digest, interpret, and transmit their group's formalizing doctrines (see Niebuhr, 1929: 20).

If, over time, many members rise in class position as the organization itself formalizes, then the enthusiastic sect probably will evolve into the kind of middle-class denomination against which it initially had separated. As this transformation occurs, however, a new group of socially disadvantaged people will feel alienated from the restrained forms of worship and will break away and form a new enthusiastic sect. As this happens, the cycle of "denominationalism and sect formation" continues.

Recent work on sects, cults, and new religions in Canada focuses on the intense debates that occur among religious groups and their opponents attempting to have themselves defined as societally tolerable and their opponents considered intolerable (Kent, 1990; see also Kent, 1993a). This perspective realizes that many religions are outside of Canada's historically normative faiths (Catholicism, Anglicanism, and the United Church); thus they must carve for themselves a niche in the country's religious landscape. Many of these same groups, however, hold doctrines or engage in activities that are controversial, so they find themselves in pitched public-relations battles with opponents. In these battles, both sides engage in "efforts to get . . . opponents socially labelled as intolerably deviant through allegations of illegal, immoral, and unethical practices" (Kent, 1990: 396). These positive and negative labels greatly determine the kind and amount of resources (wealth, tax benefits, members, status, etc.) that religious organizations obtain (Kent, 1990: 408).

THE EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON SOCIETY

Max Weber and many other sociologists have been aware of the intimate interweaving of religion and politics throughout history. The potent combination of religion's supposedly supernatural rewards and punishments with the polity's immediate incentives and retributions makes

them formidable partners. In essence, people can strive for worldly, political power in the name of God.

• HISTORICAL EFFECTS

When identifying religion's effects upon society, sociologists often refer to the most widely read study in the sociology of religion — Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930 [1920a]). Weber examined particular forms of Protestantism in an attempt to determine what factors contributed to the appearance and development of rational, systematic money making (called "rational capitalism") in the West rather than in other parts of the world. He concluded that unique, religiously driven attitudes toward work and living held by various English Puritan groups unintentionally provided the mental and emotional discipline as well as comportment that early modern capitalism later would require among its workers and entrepreneurs. Puritan groups, particularly Calvinists and Quakers, cultivated frugal, honest, hardworking lives among their members, who often laboured in small businesses and trades. Weber characterized their lives as ascetic (i.e., self-denying) yet *inner-worldly* (i.e., they held occupations in society, in contrast to the monastic lives of Catholic monks and nuns). The **inner-worldly asceticism** of the Calvinists grew out of the psychologically stressful theological doctrine of predestination, which stated that God, at the beginning of time and creation, had selected only a few people for eternal salvation while damning all others. Because (as the theology insisted) mere mortals could not know the will of God, no one could be certain about one's eternal fate.

Traumatized by this uncertainty, Calvinists sought some relief from the severe psychological stress of predestination by believing that they probably could receive signs about their eternal fate by their degree of worldly success. In what today we would call a self-fulfilling prophecy. Calvinists worked hard, reinvested their profits into their businesses, practised honesty in their business dealings, and avoided drunkenness and idleness in an effort to create the very occupational success that they interpreted as favourable signs of their eternal state.

Groups such as Quakers, in contrast, rejected the doctrine of predestination. Nonetheless, their religion motivated them to demonstrate their (presumed) salvation to their Calvinist contemporaries, and this motivation, along with their desire (shared with Calvinists) to glorify God, also drove them to live inner-worldly ascetic lives (see Kent, 1983, 1989b).

From the asceticism that these groups practised, which stressed the godly value of work in a calling or occupation, a new ethic evolved in society at large that rewarded industriousness and prized job commitment. Puritans had no way of imagining that these same work values would be essential for the development of early modern rational capitalism, which first emerged in the Puritans' homeland, England. Tawney (1928) and others have argued against Weber that additional, nonreligious factors contributed significantly to the rise of capitalism, but Weber himself made this point in some of his writings.

Having determined religious bases for behaviours that were to contribute to the rise of early modern capitalism, Weber also examined religious bases for the hindrance of early capitalist development in other world cultures. He concluded that countries (most notably India) that were dominated by Hinduism and/or Buddhism did not develop attitudes about life and work that could have aided early capitalist development because their primary religious ideals involved **other-worldly** (in contrast with Puritan inner-worldly) **asceticism**. Buddhist monks aspired to escape the cycle of rebirth, which in a practical sense diminished worldly activities as mere distractions from spirituality. Moreover, the Hindu doctrines of karma and rebirth provided ordinary people little hope of social mobility or worldly progress in *this* life. The most one could hope to achieve was a life that earned good karma by strictly following caste regulations about purity and appropriate behaviour. Consequently, the culture stifled innovation of any kind among the masses by cultivating among them the hope of higher rebirth (and eventual worldly release) as the result of

THE EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON CANADA: THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT

Around the period of World War I, a religiously-based social movement began growing in Canada. Known as the Social Gospel, it emphasized "one aspect of Christian belief — the responsibility of each person for his neighbours and for the development of just social and political institutions" (Crysdale, 1976: 426). To establish these just institutions required "a fundamental change in the social structure, namely the transfer of ownership of natural and capital resources from private into public hands" (Crysdale, 1976: 426). The movement became especially strong in Saskatchewan, where its political expression, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), was voted into power in 1944. Its articulate and skilful leader, Tommy Douglas, was a Baptist minister who redirected his considerable oratorical and campaigning skills into politics. The CCF's most lasting social legacy may be the creation of the continent's first program of universal medical coverage. Subsequently the CCF gave birth to the New Democratic Party. The CCF's influence still is felt among many contemporary religious groups that involve themselves in political justice issues (see Hewitt, 1993: 258).

strict adherence to caste constraints. As Weber concluded, "the orthodox or heterodox Hinduistic and Buddhistic educated classes found the true sphere of their interests quite outside the things of this world. This was the search for mythic, timeless salvation of the soul, and the escape from the senseless mechanism of the 'wheel' of existence" (Weber, 1958 [1920c]: 338).

China's Confucianism, Weber concluded, also stifled the development of attitudes toward the world that could have fostered early modern capitalism. Its emphasis on "propriety" in all aspects of life (see Weber, 1951 [1920b]: 156) combined with ancestor worship (see Weber, 1951 [1920b]: 168, 229) to bind people to traditionalism. Consequently, the possibility of economic innovation was eliminated, since worldly activity had value only to the extent that it reproduced reputedly timeless, Confucian-valued patterns. In this culture, Weber concluded, "there was no leverage for influencing conduct through inner forces freed of tradition and convention" (Weber, 1951 [1920b]: 236). Weber concluded, therefore, that religion had facilitated economic development in parts of the West while inhibiting it throughout the East. It is notable that one of Asia's most technological countries, Singapore, is trying to re-emphasize Confucianism as providing foundational principles upon which to build a modernized social ethic (Pan, 1989).

• MODERN EFFECTS

The recent worldwide upsurge in religious fundamentalism dramatically illustrates the dynamism of the combination of religion and politics yet at the same time hints at some of the limitations on religion in the political sphere. Diverse in its particulars, **fundamentalism is**

> the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced (Lawrence, 1989: 27).

Fundamentalist movements exist among (to name a few groups) American Christians; Latin American Protestants; Israeli Jews; Egyptian and Sudanese Sunni Muslims; Iranian, Iraqi, and Lebanese Shi'ite Muslims; Indian Hindus and Sikhs; Sri Lankan Buddhists; Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims; and Japanese Shintoists (see Marty and Appleby, 1991). Adherents to these movements around the world tend to be

> (1) minority advocates of scriptural idealism who are (2) oppositional to the dominant ethos . . . Their leaders and followers tend to be (3) secondary-level male elites who are bound to one another by (4) a religious ideology that relies on insider, technical language (5) [the adherents are] only to be found in the Technical Age as tenacious opponents of modernist ideologies that challenge their scriptural ideals and spiritual loyalties (Lawrence, 1989: 236).

Despite a "divinely driven" fervour that adherents feel, the secular demands of the world inevitably dampen or destroy the religious doctrinalism of fundamentalist groups in power. Indeed, one student of fundamentalism predicts that "in the long run, fundamentalists will not be able to control the tone of discourse or activity in the public sphere of any major nation-state" (Lawrence, 1989: 240). A segment of Canadian political history bears this out.

In the 1930s a political party in Alberta known as Social Credit gained office on a platform that combined economic and political policies with religious doctrinalism. Based upon ideas developed in the early 1920s by an English engineer, Major C.H. Douglas (1859–1952), Social Credit argued that a discrepancy existed between workers' purchasing power and the higher total of production costs. Consequently, workers were unable to buy all that they produced, thereby requiring (so the argument went) governments to distribute money to citizens in order to extend their ability to consume (see Elliott and Miller, 1987: 98; Irving, 1959: 5; Morley, 1988: 2024). Alberta's fiery radio preacher William Aberhart (1878–1943) became attracted to Social Credit in the autumn of 1932, proffering it in his weekly broadcasts as the province's means to escape the Great Depression.

Aberhart's involvement with and preaching about Social Credit was "a radical departure from his previous theology, a theology that can best be described as highly sectarian, separatist, apolitical, other-worldly, and eschatologically oriented" (Elliott and Miller, 1987: 118). Nevertheless, he saw his new emphasis solidly within a religious context. In a 1933 letter Aberhart stated, "One thing that appeals to me and I believe will appeal to every thinking Christian, in the Douglas system of Economics [i.e., Social Credit], is the fact that from beginning to end it was based on the principles of God's great economy" (quoted in Elliott and Miller, 1987: 116). In 1934 he went further, boldly pronouncing that "one of the finest and greatest exponents of Social Credit was Jesus Christ Himself. His one mission in life was to feed and clothe His people . . ." (quoted in Elliott and Miller, 1987: 167).

As public interest grew and no existing political party would embrace the ideology, Aberhart formed his own movement and was elected provincial premier in 1935. Once in office, however, Aberhart was able to translate almost no Social Credit doctrines into viable policies, and by 1939 "Social Credit was quickly disappearing from the government's agenda" (Elliott and Miller, 1987: 283). Aberhart remained in office until his death in 1943, at which time his protégé, Ernest Manning, assumed the premier's office. He held it until 1971 (Morley, 1988: 2024).

• SECULARIZATION AND THE EFFECTS OF SOCIETY ON RELIGION

Much of Social Credit's appeal stemmed from Aberhart's ability to weave religion into politics and economics. As an early study of the movement observed, "Aberhart had no hesitation in presenting Social Credit to Albertans as a Divine Plan for the salvation of society, the parallel in the economic sphere of the Divine Plan for the salvation of the individual" (Irving, 1959: 338). The party remained in power for such a long time, however, largely because it abandoned both religious and economic doctrinalism and replaced them with "conservative financial and social policies which even bankers could applaud" (Morley, 1988: 2024). This loss of religious ideology within the polity after pressure from secular institutions is one example of what sociologists call secularization — a general term covering all forms of religion's decline in influence in the modern world.

Religion is unique among social institutions in its ability to motivate human behaviour through a combination of secular and allegedly supernatural promises and threats, but considerable evidence exists that fewer and fewer people in Canada allow religion to provide primary meaning to their lives. A twofold decline of religion seems to be occurring, both of whose elements are indicators of secularization. First, according to survey research conducted by University of Lethbridge sociologist Reginald Bibby, a clear trend exists regarding Canadians' decreasing involvement in

religious institutions. Using a standard measure of religiosity as "weekly church attendance," Bibby's research indicates that fewer Canadians (28 percent as opposed to 67 percent) attended services in 1981 than in 1946 (Bibby, 1983: 15). Second, only a small percentage of people use religious interpretations when trying to answer life's "mysteries" (notably, death, the meaning of existence, the purpose of suffering). As Bibby concluded, Canadian "life is increasingly not meaningful in terms of religion but rather in terms of tangibles such as money and career, family and friends, recreation and entertainment, social and personal causes" (Bibby, 1983: 15).

In contrast to Bibby's second finding, other researchers argue that the advance of secularization in industrialized societies is self-limiting, with new religions or "cults abound[ing] where the churches are weak" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 471). These new religions provide new sets of meaning and order to people who have little contact with traditional denominations. Bibby, however, insists that membership in these new religions is small, and that the existence of such groups does little to mitigate the overall secularization trend. "As the century draws to a close," he concludes, "people in greater and greater numbers are drawing upon religion as consumers, adopting a belief here and a practice there. Additionally, they are calling on clergy to perform various rites of passage relating primarily to birth, marriage, and death" (Bibby, 1987: 80).

An earlier study in which Bibby was involved indicated that the patterns of religious consumerism among adults was being replicated, through socialization, among teens. "This general pattern of 'polite detachment' yet ongoing identification with and consumer-like use of religious organizations mirrors dramatically the nature of adult religion in Canada" (Bibby and Posterski, 1985: 127).

Within this general pattern of secularization, however, specific patterns of affiliation and religious preference appear. In 1981, 47 percent of the Canadian population reported *affiliation* (which is different, of course, from attendance) with Catholicism, and this figure grew to 50.5 percent of the population by 1985 (Mori, 1987: 13, 14). Also in 1981, 40 percent of Canadians were affiliated with Protestant denominations, which indicated a proportional decline from previous years (Mori, 1987: 13). Significantly, the data also indicated that "the secularization trend which first became evident in the 1971 Census also showed no sign of letting up in the early 1980s." Between 1981 and 1985, "the percentage of the population aged 15 and over reporting no religious preference increased from 7 percent in 1981 to 10 percent in 1985" (Mori, 1987: 14). Canadian religion, in sum, is becoming another consumer item for which increasing numbers of Canadians have little use, except perhaps at transitional moments in life.

It seems doubtful that Canadian immigration patterns will have any long-term effects on the general secularization trend. Mullins (1989) identified cultural and structural assimilation patterns of Japanese churches and their members in Canada and concluded that "without new immigrants to replenish the ethnic membership base, the probable end of the minority church life-cycle appears to be either organizational dissolution or transformation into a multi-ethnic church" (Mullins, 1989: 179). Quickly scanning evidence about the fate of other ethnically based churches in the country, he added that "these findings alone demonstrate that assimilation takes its toll upon the ethnic churches of other minorities in Canada" (Mullins, 1989: 182). Since the pattern of ethnic churches involves either transformation into multiethnic denominations or assimilation into existing non-ethnic religious bodies, we can surmise that within three generations people from ethnic backgrounds will find themselves replicating the general pattern of secularization.

DEVELOPING ISSUES IN THE CANADIAN SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

In spite of the secularization of Canadian society — itself a topic in the sociology of religion — the religious scene in Canada continues to present an expanding field of sociological study. Long-established mainstream religions as well as recent arrivals have been held up to scrutiny. They have been joined by newly publicized quasi-religious manifestations seen as deviant. The evolution of the Canadian state and constitutional practice has raised the issue of government

intervention in religious matters. Finally, the social activism of religious bodies has attracted research attention, especially at a time of economic and social uncertainty.

First, regardless of the eventual fate of ethnic religions, the fact remains that Canada is likely to see the appearance of many new faiths on its shores, all of which require study. The appearance of these faiths will have significant implications for Canada, each of which presents sociologists and other researchers with unique research opportunities.

Canadians should expect an influx of religions from Hong Kong as immigrants leave in anticipation of the colony's repatriation to China in 1997. Transplanted faiths such as these often bring in their theologies unresolved social and political issues, as well as implicit cultural patterns of behaviour that reflect life in the home country. Consequently, Canadians are likely to find that some of the country's newest members are embroiled in issues that heretofore seemed distant or remote.

A dramatic example of a social and political agenda being interwoven with theology occurred among Canada's Sikh community, in which a substantial number of fundamentalists — concentrating in British Columbia (Mulgrew, 1988: 105) — "began to use Canada as an overseas base for their fight in India" for a homeland (Mulgrew, 1988: 106). As money and personnel flowed back to the Punjab, many Canadian Sikh temples became embroiled in bitter disputes between moderates and fundamentalists. Sometimes the results were deadly (Mulgrew, 1988: 104, 107). Even moderate Sikhs, however, encountered problems with the Canadian establishment, as some turban-wearing men were barred from Canadian Legion halls and others fought for (and eventually received) permission to wear their religiously obligatory turbans while serving as members of the RCMP (*The Edmonton Sun*, 1990: 16) and carry their ceremonial knives (called *kirpans*) in school (*The Globe and Mail*, 1990: A16). Other clashes of (religious) cultures seem likely as immigration patterns continue to reflect world crises.

Second, the convictions of Catholic priests for sexual assaults against children (see Harris, 1990) and the exposure of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools for native children sponsored by numerous mainstream religious organizations (York, 1989) provide tragic research opportunities for studying the ways agents of social control contribute to deviance and societal dysfunction. For example, the commission that inquired into sexual abuse of children by some members of the clergy of St. John's, Newfoundland, placed joint blame for the abuse on both the offenders and the Catholic Church organization:

> The Commission thus concluded that the events which occurred in the Archdiocese cannot be passed off as the manifestation of a disease: both the offenders and the Church management must be held accountable. The Church administration in the archdiocese chose to deny the abuses and discount the victims' disclosures of criminal activity. Rather than reporting the allegations to civil authorities, the Archdiocesan administration chose to accept repeated denials of the allegations and allowed the abuses to continue (Winter, 1990, 1: 138–39).

Almost certainly the perpetrators and their denominational sponsors must share the blame for the abuses in residential schools. In both cases, normative religious institutions permitted deviance on an astounding scale. There is much here to be sociologically explored, partly as an attempt to prevent the recurrence of similar abuses.

Third, researchers in Canada and elsewhere in the Western world will continue to debate the puzzle of allegations concerning satanism and ritual crimes. Allegations of ritual crimes received national attention in the mid-1980s in relation to an eighteen-month trial held in the Hamilton-Wentworth Unified Family Court. Beginning in October 1985, the custody battle raged over two young sisters who had disclosed allegations of sexual abuse, pornography, cannibalism, and ritual murder to their foster mother. Children's Aid Society officials concluded that the children were telling the truth, but police failed to uncover any evidence to substantiate criminal charges against

the alleged perpetrators. As in similar cases throughout the Western world, opinions were divided over the truth of the girls' satanic accounts.

Kevin Marron, a reporter who covered the story, concluded that

> in the absence of other credible explanations, we cannot afford to dismiss the possibility that these allegations point to the activities of groups engaged in satanic ritual, or pornography, or both, and that there may be some communication or connection between such groups (Marron, 1988: 239).

Yet another writer, who also attended the trial, heard the same evidence and concluded that "what is really at issue here is not that children are being abused, but that a plethora of out-of-context facts and figures distorts our legal and psychological perspectives and leads inevitably to the institutionalization of injustice" (Kendrick, 1988: 137). In essence, two investigators heard the same evidence and drew opposite conclusions about the reality of satanic crimes.

The debate over the reality of satanic abuse continues into the 1990s. Research has carefully separated the flourishing practices of paganism and various occult groups from the satanic debate, since these groups claim inspiration from non-Christian sources rather than from the anti-Christianity alleged to lie behind much satanic activity (Marron, 1989). Even within these more precise boundaries, sociologists still disagree over the reality of satanic abuse claims. The widely accepted sociological article that reviewed Canadian newspaper articles on the subject during the 1980s concluded that

> the construction of Satanism as a social problem in Canada has been made possible by various claims-makers, particularly American experts and the Canadian news media. The efforts of these and other dominant claims-makers can be seen as a symbolic crusade against perceived threats to their conservative ideology and way of life (Lippert, 1990: 436).

This "moral panic" position is challenged by another sociologist who argues that many of the intergenerational abuse accounts (involving children, their parents, and possibly their grandparents or other relatives) may be true. In essence, social deviants may "either develop satanic rituals from material that exists in easily accessible mainstream religious texts, or sanctify their violence by framing it within passages in otherwise normative scriptures" (Kent, 1993b: 231; see Kent, 1993c).

Fourth, increasing sociological attention should be paid to debates between the regulatory state and various religious denominations. Issues involving health care for children in groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, fundamentalist Mennonites, and Christian Science spring up periodically across North America. The spate of American cases involving these and other groups suggests that Canada will see additional delicate legal battles over the limits of religious freedom and practice. Currently, for example, cases before Supreme Court of Canada will decide the extent to which a noncustodial parent has the right to teach his or her children religious beliefs about which the custodial parent disapproves. On another religious topic related to the law, Canada may become a haven for Mormon-affiliated polygamists, since legal experts apparently concluded that "the section of the Criminal Code of Canada pertaining to polygamy was unconstitutional" (Hunter, 1992: 1). Finally, sociologists of religion are well advised to pay continued attention to the uncomfortable relationship between religious broadcasters and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), since continued advances in telecommunications, reception, and delivery are likely to lead to a repetition of the recent war between the Commission and Christian "pirate" stations (Cernetig, 1991: A1).

Fifth and finally, sociologists of religion should continue to monitor the extent to which religious bodies mobilize on social issues. Cuneo's (1989) study of Revivalist Catholics in the antiabortion movement provides a blueprint for scholarship of this kind. We may see greater

mobilization in the years to come on issues involving day-care facilities, government expenditures on religious and private schools, care of AIDS patients, homosexual marriages and adoptions, and the right to die.

Secularization may be an inexorable force in Canadian life. Nonetheless, religion is alive in multifaceted forms throughout the country, and its study remains a challenging and demanding sociological enterprise. Researchers discover that the sociology of religion may be the most eye-opening field in the entire discipline, especially when they do qualitative research involving interviews with the faithful. Certainly the religious topics that these researchers examine are among sociology's most unusual, since all manner of human actions are undertaken in the name of God.

SUMMARY

- Connotative language — the language of feeling and poetry — uses images in myths to evoke strong feelings and emotions about religion.
- Rituals partially re-enact myths through the use of sacred symbols. Depending upon the circumstances, rituals may either empower or disempower participants.
- Substantive definitions of religion claim that some form of otherworldliness (a being or a force, for example) is central to members' beliefs; functional definitions claim that religion creates meaning and order in society.
- Sociologist Charles Glock identified five dimensions of religiosity as

  1. experiential — the extent to which a person either claims to have direct knowledge of a deity or supernatural force, or experiences profoundly religious emotion;
  2. ideological — the extent to which a person holds certain beliefs;
  3. intellectual — the extent to which a person is informed and knowledgeable about the basic beliefs of the religion and its reputedly sacred scriptures;
  4. ritualistic — the extent to which a person performs those specifically religious practices that are expected of the faithful; and
  5. consequential — the extent to which people's lives are affected by their religious beliefs and practices in such secular activities as the selection of marriage partners, political orientation, and so on.

- Structural-functional theory assumes that religions (along with other major social structures) have important if not necessary functions or consequences for societies. These functions or consequences include

  1. making life meaningful through cosmologies;
  2. comforting people in distress by providing theodicies or answers to questions about why suffering exists in the world (the priestly functions of religious leaders include providing meaning through doctrinal interpretations);
  3. providing outlets for religious leaders to criticize people or entire societies for their alleged moral transgressions through religion's prophetic functions;
  4. providing communities in which people involve themselves; and
  5. providing a source of identity.

- Society itself may use religion to legitimize its collective identity, especially through civil religions that claim divine support for the purposes and officials of the state. A civil-religious tradition, however, is very weak in Canada.
- Conflict theory views religion as a powerful social vehicle for subjugating and exploiting populations. Subjugation and exploitation come through

1. myths that sanctify social inequality;
2. patriarchal mythologies and theologies;
3. claims of the supposedly divine origins of one's own social position or the position of royalty;
4. restrictions and constraints placed on people by authoritarian religious communities;
5. theologically based attitudes toward persons outside the religious community that are hostile, demeaning, and racist; and
6. provision of social opportunities in areas such as education that advantage some members of society at the expense of others.

- Social psychologically based attribution theories argue that religious conversions occur in emotionally charged settings. The groups' religious ideologies provide participants with supposedly supernatural interpretations of events for which participants have no interpretive framework.
- Sociologists have identified conversions that occur at the end of a multistage process, in which religiously predisposed individuals encounter specific situations for religious involvement with particular groups.
- The numerous conversions to conservative Christian churches actually involve large numbers of transfers from other churches rather than recruitment of many new people from other traditions.
- Religious feelings can be inspired by such conditions as

1. dramatic natural or social events;
2. experiences that people define as mystical, but which are located in appropriate historical and cultural settings;
3. intense involvement in ecstatic and highly charged group experiences;
4. participation in a community, especially after periods of loneliness or alienation; and
5. experience of highly evocative symbols, music, or rituals.

- Exchange theories propose that religious behaviour involves calculating the likelihood of receiving immediate rewards as well as supposedly divine ones in heaven or the next life, and at the same time attempting to avoid immediate and otherworldly divine punishments.
- Religions are unique among social institutions in their ability to motivate and maintain membership by claiming supernatural legitimacy.
- Millenarianism is "the imminent collapse of the existing society and social order and their replacement with a divinely directed one."
- Various religious traditions (especially Western ones) expect messiahs or saviours to rule during the millennium.
- Messiahs are the most dramatic examples of charismatic leaders who claim to possess divinely bestowed gifts and have followers who believe the claims and continually reinforce one another's devotion.
- Typological theories classify religious organizations (especially Western ones) into

1. churches, which include all of society's members;
2. denominations, which see themselves operating amidst other groups;
3. sects, which comprise persons who aspire to spiritual perfection and fellowship with other aspirants; and
4. cults, which are loose associations whose members borrow eclectically from many traditions.

- Particular Puritan sects inspired among their adherents inner-worldly ascetic behaviour that became crucial for work attitudes in England's development of rational capitalism.
- Religious fundamentalism around the world probably will fail in its efforts to offset global and national secularization trends (at least in industrialized countries).

KEY CONCEPTS

Attribution processes
Charismatic leader
Church/denomination/sect/cult typology
Civil religion
Conflict theory
Connotative language
Cosmology
Denotative language
Exchange theories
Functional definition
Fundamentalism
Inner-worldly asceticism
Messianism
Millenarianism
Other-worldly asceticism
Priestly functions
Prophetic functions
Ritual
The sacred
Secularization
Social psychology
Structural-functional theory
Substantive definition
Theodicy

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the necessary elements in substantive definitions of religion, and what are the necessary elements in functional definitions?
2. What types of functions does religion serve for its followers?
3. How would you define "theodicies"? Give examples for various world religions.
4. How would you distinguish between religion's priestly functions and its prophetic functions?
5. Why is the civil religion tradition so weak in Canada?
6. What uses of religion cause conflict theorists to criticize it as a tool of oppression?

7. How would you describe religion through the eyes of an exchange theorist?
8. How are the concepts "messianism" and "charisma" related?
9. How would a typologist define churches, denominations, sects, and cults?
10. How did Weber describe the emergence of the so-called Protestant work ethic?
11. What evidence can be cited to support secularization claims?

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