

Week 1 Introduction

- Defining religion
 - ⇒ Learned and shared ideas, feelings, behaviours → main characteristics of society
- What is Anthropology
 - ⇒ Scientific investigation of diversity of human religions → study humans not religions
 - ⇒ Observe learned and shared human behaviour
 - ⇒ Focuses on actual members of society
- Methodology
 - ⇒ Fieldwork → travel and live among people of study for a period of time and observing and participating in their lives
 - ⇒ Product of research is a case study or ethnography (in depth and up-close) → account of ways of thinking, feeling and behaving of the people studied
- Issue of language
 - ⇒ Language of the religion is used to study it

Week 2 Anthropology and religion

- Is religion a human universal?
 - ⇒ religion is the belief in something that's not just tangible → present in all human societies
 - ⇒ Ethnocentrism → approach religions from their own religion
 - ⇒ Not all societies equally religious
- Anthropology of religion
 - ⇒ Fieldwork → anthropologists must do their own research (travel)
- Types of study/approaches to anthropology
 - ⇒ Social
 - ⇒ Cultural
 - ⇒ Psychological
 - ⇒ Cognitive
 - ⇒ Neuro-anthropological
 - ⇒ Researcher creates sample of societies
 - ⇒ Research questions or hypotheses are posed and information is sought
- Types of religion
 - ⇒ Different types for identification and comparison
 - ⇒ Prehistoric religion
 - Beliefs and practices of prehistory → archaeological discovery & inference
 - Questions on when religion first appeared, how it occurred and what early religion may have been like
 - ⇒ Ancient religion
 - Belong to past civilizations
 - Religions of Pre-Christians, Romans, Egyptians
 - Ancient religions of India and China still exist
 - Anthropologists lack the research skills or knowledge of languages and scripts needed to do so
 - ⇒ Indigenous religions of small scale societies
 - Known as primitive religions and Tribal societies

- Religions in large-scale societies may include distinctive indigenous traditions or dimensions as well as those associated with one of the world religions
- ⇒ The World Religions
 - Large portion of the world belongs to them
 - Spread beyond their origins
 - Based in part on written texts and have lengthy histories (known to be preaching and competitive)
 - E.g. Islam, Christianity, Judaism
 - Include regional and local divisions and varieties that constantly grow and change
 - Same religion may be interpreted and practiced very differently in differently places
- Religions versus religion
 - ⇒ Assumption- more to reality than is experienced through senses; supernatural beings thought in similar ways between societies
 - ⇒ Studying similarities and differences in religion
 - ⇒ Contrasts among the world religions and among various levels or forms of practice that exist within them

Week 3 Symbols

- All religions offer a view of what the universe is and how it relates to humanity
- Cosmology
 - ⇒ Deals with the order of structure of ultimate reality of the universe
 - ⇒ E.g. Yanomamo's cosmology
 - Interpretation of reality
 - 4- layered reality
 - Highest level was empty
 - 2nd level had animals, plants and dead ancestors living there
 - 3rd level had humans → formed when upper level collapsed
 - Bottom layer 'almost desert' with odd race living there
- Cosmogony
 - ⇒ Deals with the origin of that structure or order (origin of universe structure)
 - ⇒ Dogon of Africa cosmogony
 - God Amma created the sun and moon → art of poetry
 - Amma threw handful of clay- landed on north went down to south forming a flat surface
 - Beginning of history of spirits and humans
 - Grandchildren of Amma → founding ancestors of Dogon people and invented weaving, farming, blacksmithing
- Cosmologies and cosmogonies of different religions may vary
- Religious reality must be made existing for humans to communicate with it and about it through taking concrete forms of both human and non-human
- What are Symbols
 - ⇒ Objects, symbols, images etc. that have meaning
 - ⇒ No necessary connection between a symbol and a particular meaning
 - ⇒ Only cultural habit that brings the 2 together
 - ⇒ Making & using symbols entails the cognitive ability to find and place meaning where it otherwise is not
- Animals

- ⇒ No species is as habitual or as obligate symbol user as humans
- ⇒ Animals figure in religious belief and practice in various ways e.g.
 - As gods from which help is sought or offerings made
 - As objects of taboo → should not be killed or eaten
- ⇒ Animal cults reduce anxiety by creating the illusion of control over important animals through ritual & by creating bonds of solidarity & identification between humans and animals through symbolic practices and imposition of taboo restrictions
- ⇒ Humans are inclined to worship creatures that are powerful
 - E.g. snakes in religious symbolism → divinities, cult icons and other mythical creatures
 - Common meaning of snakes is immortality, they also exemplify power
- ⇒ Emotionalist interpretations- or dangerous animals are good to fear and venerate (worship)
- Colours
 - ⇒ Occur widely in myth
 - ⇒ Basic colour categories acquired religious meanings at an early phase in human cultural evolution
 - E.g. green means nature
 - ⇒ Colours such as saffron, yellow, gold, blue, green, purple are ritually important in various places → also a matter of availability
- Percussion sounds
 - ⇒ Special significance in effort to communicate with supernatural beings
 - ⇒ Drums, gongs, and bells are human artefacts, the sounds they produce aren't exactly natural
 - E.g. drum is associated with human emotion
 - Sounds produced by drums and bells effect on the emotions by reverberating & impacting the body like thunder or canon fire
- Natural symbols and Natural religion
 - ⇒ Natural symbols include the head, eye and skull
 - ⇒ Fundamental needs, desires and problems of humans are the same in world religions
 - ⇒ Formal systems based on either the proposition that gods or divinities care about how humans treat one another & will reward or punish them accordingly
 - ⇒ Or that there exists an impersonal or cosmic law of Karma according to which humans will also be rewarded or punished for their conduct including behaviour to one another
 - ⇒ Most basic of these features concern time and fate
 - ⇒ Religion goes beyond various symbols which might be reoccurring