



Religion ^[1]

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Religion is an important topic for many anthropologists, especially cultural anthropologists and archaeologists. Religious and spiritual beliefs are interconnected with other cultural elements, and are therefore hugely important to recognize.

Religion is widely considered to be a cultural universal ^[3]. While religion may change in form, all societies have some type of religious beliefs. In fact, many societies and cultures have multiple types of religious beliefs. This is especially true in today's world, where globalization has caused individuals from different cultural groups to live together

Religion is enormously varied, making it a hugely difficult concept to define. However, religious beliefs often address the origin of life, the meaning of life, and ultimately many important questions about the meaning of life. They also often include elements of morality, duty, ritual, and symbolism, among others.

Key Terms

Anthropologists studying religion often use some key terms in their research and discussions. Religions are often referred to as either monotheistic or polytheistic religions. Monotheism describes religions that focus on a single deity or god, whereas polytheism describes religions that focus on multiple deities or gods.

When discussing religion and spiritual beliefs, anthropologists often use the term of animism. Animism describes the idea that natural objects—such as rocks, trees, and animals—possess some type of spiritual essence.

Shamanism is another important concept to know when reading anthropological texts and describing cultural beliefs. Shamanism can greatly vary, but can generally be described as the idea that certain individuals in a culture can communicate with spirits and other non-human agents.

Syncretic beliefs

The interaction of different cultures can create religious and spiritual beliefs that are syncretic. This refers to the inclusion and incorporation of ideas from more than one religion or spiritual tradition into a culture. Syncretic beliefs are a popular area of study in post-colonial studies, since the newly introduced religious beliefs from the colonizers often had an impact on a culture's religious and spiritual traditions.

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