

# RELIGION AND SOCIETY INTRODUCTION

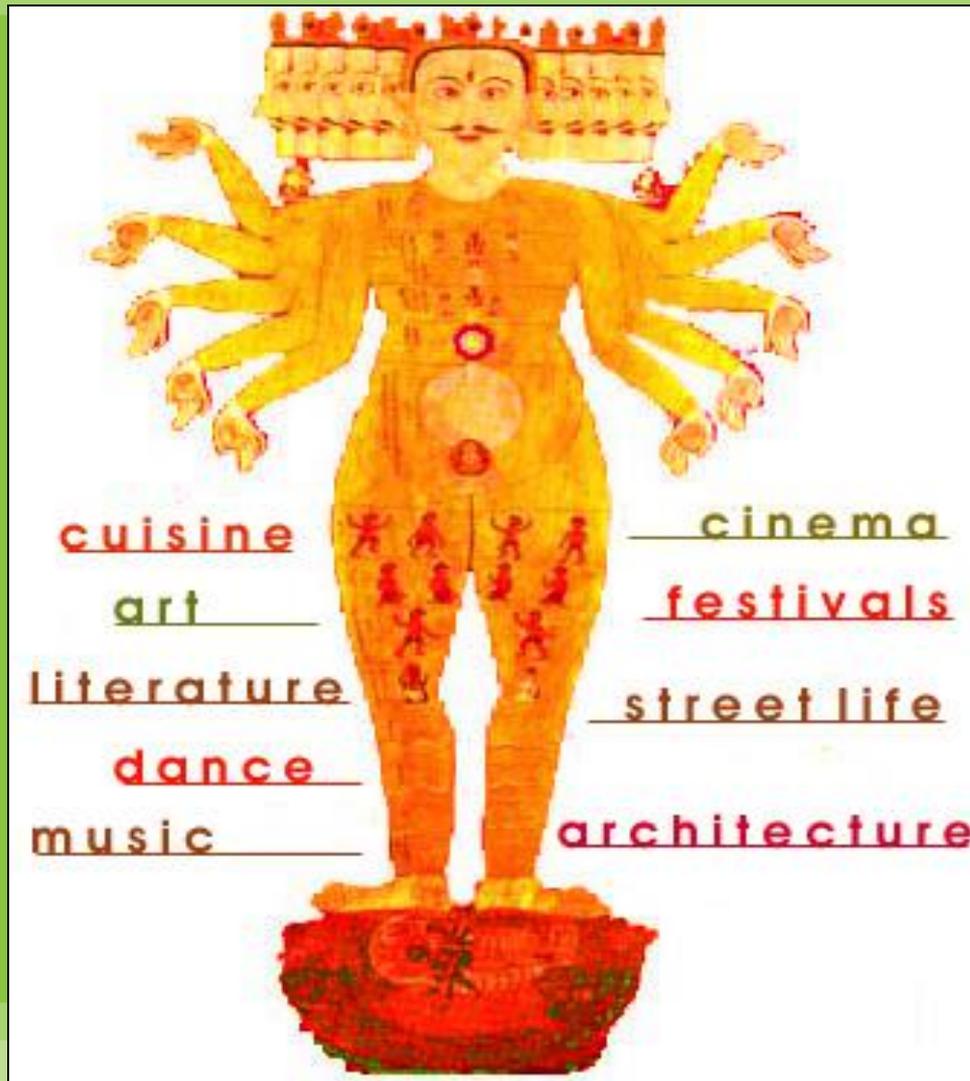


# CULURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- Holistic
- The comparative study of human cultural diversity in all places and throughout history.
- Looks at how humans organize their lives as members of societies.
- Concerned with how humans make their lives meaningful as cultural individuals.
- This necessitates historical overviews for comprehensive understanding.
- More emphasis is placed on diversity and individual case studies than on developing generalizations.



# CULTURE



- ☀ A whole way of life.
- ☀ A system of meanings embedded in symbols.
- ☀ The learned values, beliefs, and rules of conduct shared to some extent by the members of a society that govern their behavior with one another.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

- Shared
- Transmitted
- Learned
- Arbitrary
- Taken for granted
- Always changing
- Always debated
- Always involves relations of power



# SOCIETY

- **People living in organized groups who share a geographical location, social institutions, and expectations of behavior.**



Colombian Civilians commemorating on 26 June, International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

# **IDEAS ABOUT RELIGION YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD BEFORE...**

- **“Religion is the heart in a heartless world.”**
- **“Religion is the opiate of the masses.”**
- **“Science has killed religion.”**

ED STATES OF



IN GOD WE TRUST

ONE DOLLAR

THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

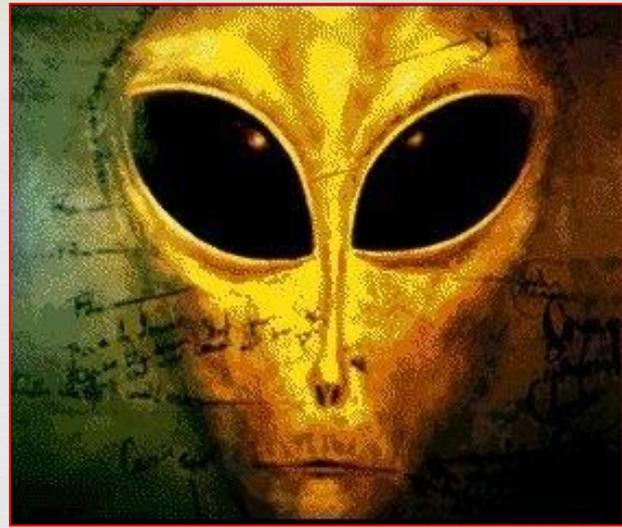
APRIL 2, 1966

# TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

**Is  
God  
Dead?**

VOL. 87 NO. 14



**IS THERE A TRUE RELIGION?  
DOES GOD EXIST?  
DO ANGELS, DEMONS, OR GHOSTS EXIST?**

# ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

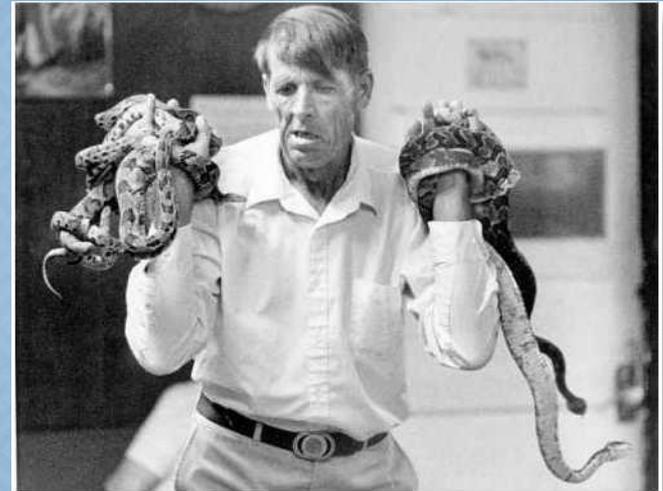


**ULURU,  
SACRED  
TO THE  
ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLES OF  
AUSTRALIA**

- \* **DEFINITION OF RELIGION:** Any set of beliefs and practices involving the supernatural.
- \* Many cultures do not make a sharp distinction between the “natural” and the “supernatural.”
- \* **PERSPECTIVES:**
  - \* Holistic
  - \* Objective
  - \* Relativistic
  - \* Comparative
  - \* Interdisciplinary
  - \* Ethnographic
  - \* Methodologically and theoretically diverse

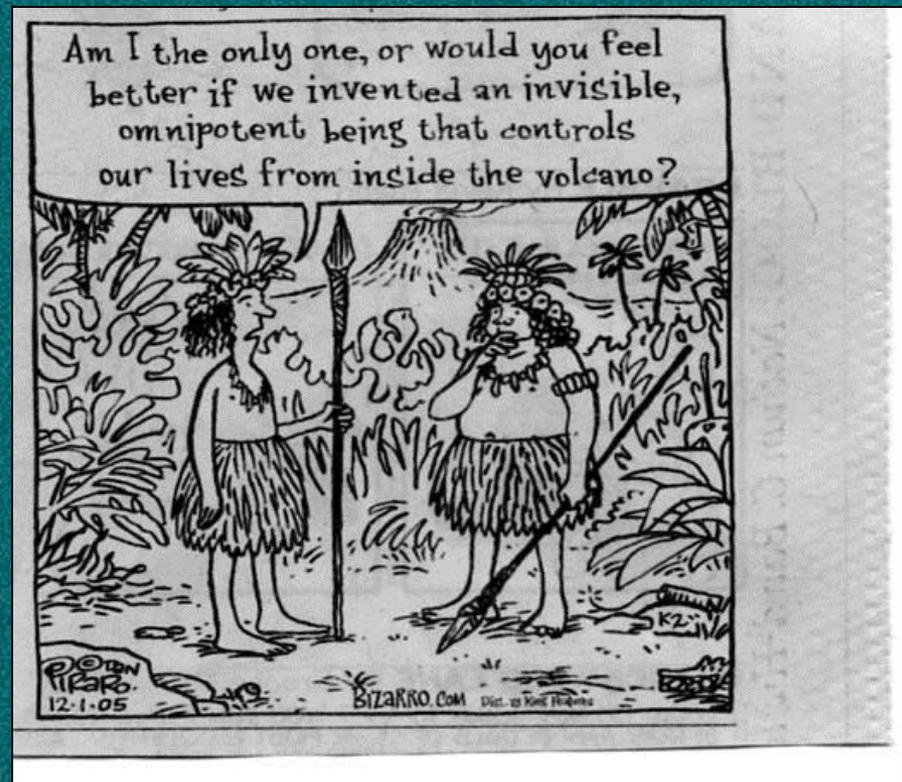
# CULTURAL RELATIVISM

- There are no “universal” standards by which all social and cultural groups can be evaluated.
- No one religion is superior to another.
- People’s religious beliefs and practices must be studied within the framework of their own culture and history.
- All religions are equally meaningful to their adherents.
- This is in contrast to **ETHNOCENTRISM**: The concept that one’s own culture or religion is superior to others and should be judged from that perspective.



# ANTHROPOLOGY SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND

- The range and diversity of human beliefs and practices.
- What makes beliefs and practices meaningful to people.
- What the roles religion plays in the organization of cultures and societies.



# From these perspectives we will investigate:

- ⌘ Why religion is so widespread amongst human societies?
- ⌘ The diversity of religions across cultures.
- ⌘ Religion, gender, and sexuality.
- ⌘ How religions contribute to the maintenance of social order.
- ⌘ Religious beliefs and practices, and why they change.
- ⌘ What part religions play in cultural and social transformation.
- ⌘ The role of religions in transnationalism and globalization.

# THE WORLD RELIGIONS

- ⦿ Religions that are not tied to a particular culture or location. Colonialism, trade, missionaries, migration, etc., have spread world religions throughout the globe.
- ⦿ There are many localized variations of the world religions, and vernacular or folk beliefs and practices that are closely connected to a specific culture or location.
  - **Buddhism**
  - **Hinduism**
  - **Islam**
  - **Judaism**
  - **Christianity**

# INDIGENOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

- Many indigenous groups have distinct religious systems of beliefs and practices in the same way that they have their own languages and cultures.

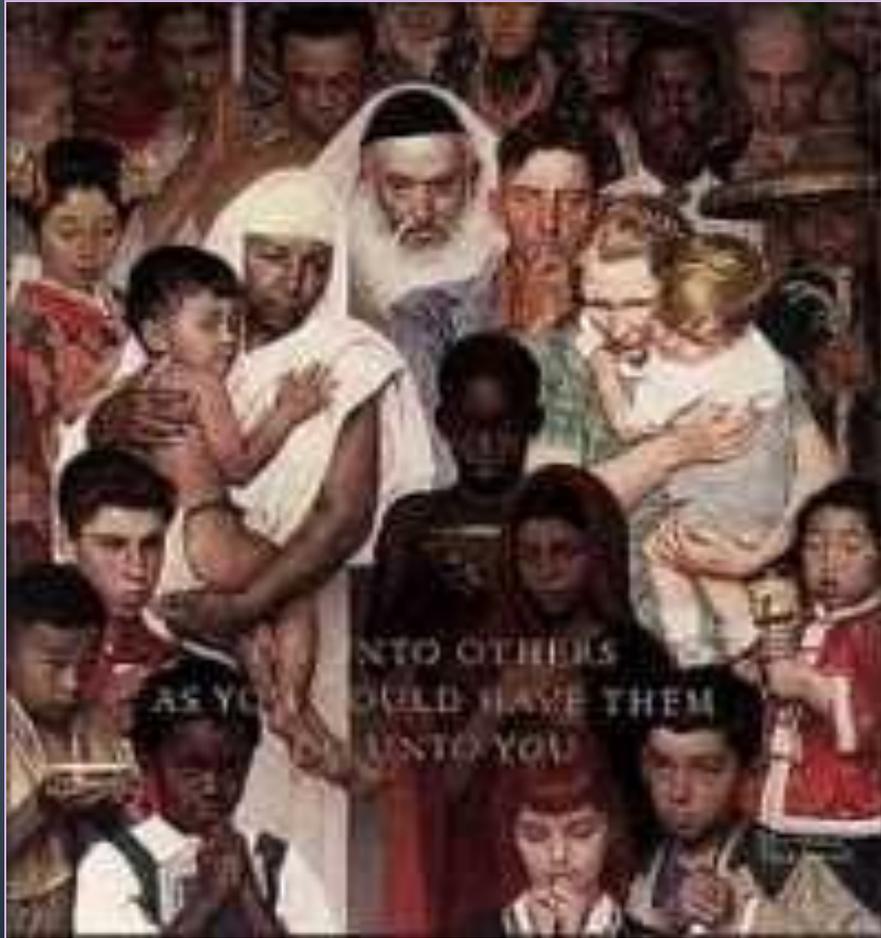


# RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM



- Through time a culture's religious beliefs and practices persist, but also change through incorporating new elements.
- Religions are adopted and transformed.
- **FOR EXAMPLE:** Early Christianity incorporated European paganism so that "Christ's Mass" became integrated with pre Christian symbols and practices.

# RELIGIONS FULFILL SOCIAL NEEDS

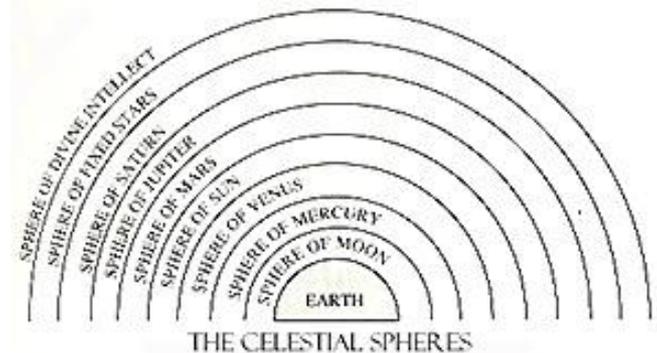


- They provide meaning in peoples' lives.
- They help people manage anxiety and increase their sense of personal order.
- They reinforce the social order.
- They instigate social and cultural change.

# RELIGIONS PROVIDE A “COSMOLOGY”

A COSMOLOGY is a set of principles and/or beliefs about:

- The nature of life and death.
- How the universe was created.
- The origin of society.
- The relationship of individuals and groups to one another.
- The relationship of humans to nature.



## NAVAHO SAND PAINTING

**WHEN A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY BECOMES ILL OR ALIENATED A SHAMAN CREATES A SAND PAINTING DEPICTING NAVAHO COSMOLOGY. WITH THE COMMUNITY WITNESSING, THE SHAMAN PERFORMS A CEREMONY, THE SAND PAINTING IS DESTROYED, AND THE DISTRESSED MEMBER IS CURED AND REINCORPORATED INTO NAVAHO SOCIETY. THIS REINFORCES SOLIDARITY FOR ALL INVOLVED.**

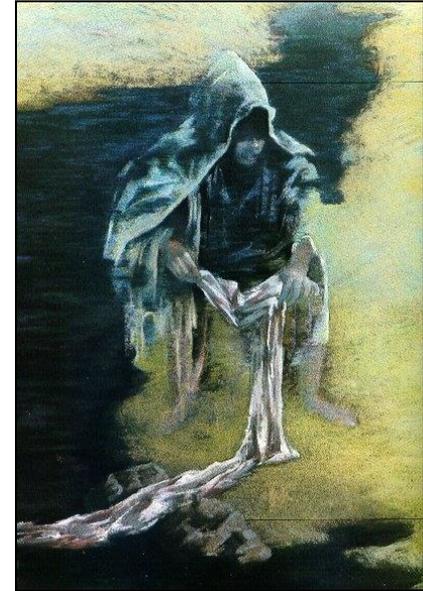


# CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGION

- **SACRED NARRATIVES**
- **SYMBOLS**
- **SPIRITS**
- **SACRED POWERS**
- **RITUALS**
- **ADDRESSING THE SUPERNATURAL**

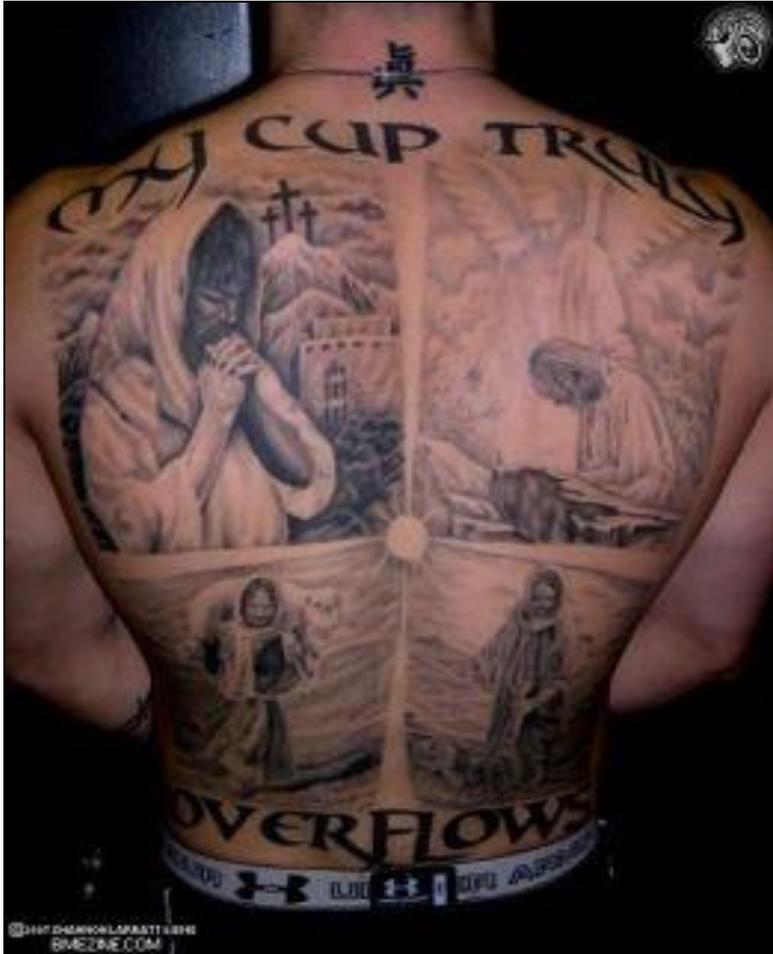


# SACRED NARRATIVES



- “Myths” that recount historical events, heroes, gods, spirits, and the origin of all things.
- Anthropology defines “myth” as realities lived and stories told.
- Sacred narratives are integral to a society’s rituals, moral code, and organization.

# RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS



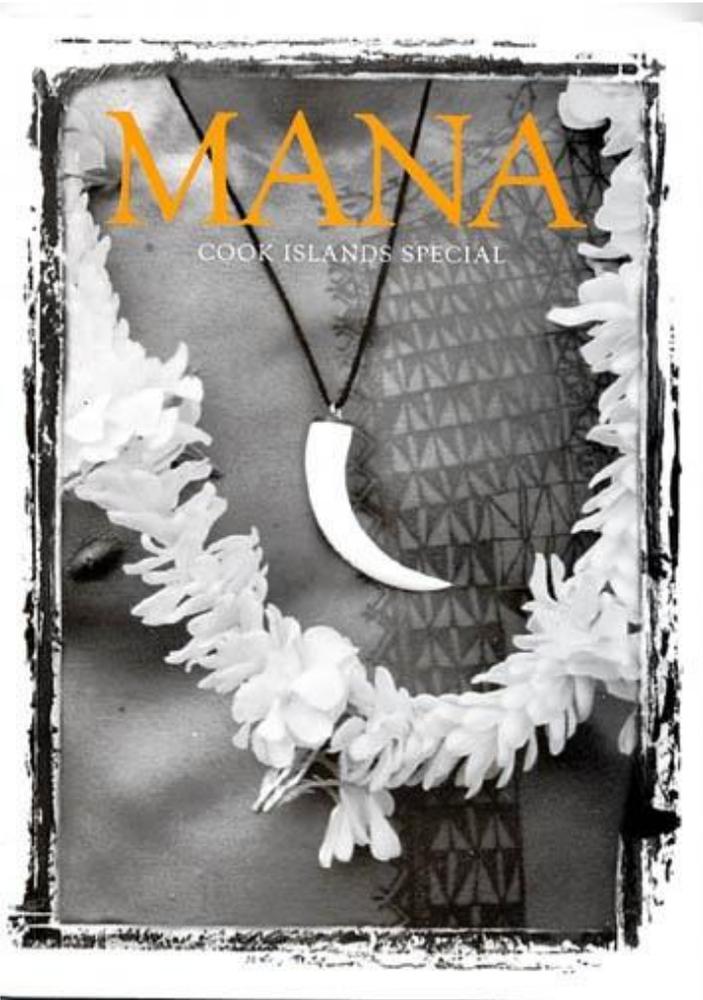
 183	 200	 300	 131	 71	 410	 100	 248	 99
 197	 208	 96	 200	 100	 270	 182	 119	 131
 231	 100	 229	 150	 160	 216	 271	 327	
 116	 226	 101	 100	 216	 100	 220		

# SPIRITS

- **Most religions assert the world is filled with beings and powers that have life and consciousness separate from humans', but whose existence cannot be scientifically validated.**
- **GOD: A spirit that is believed to have created the world, or who exerts control over the world.**
- **TRICKSTER: A spirit that does not always act in the best interest of humans.**



# SACRED POWERS



- **MANA:** A special kind of sacred power or energy that infuses the universe.
- Mana can be concentrated in humans, other creatures, spirits, and objects.
- Integral to many different religions across cultures.

# RITUALS

- Rituals are ceremonial acts with repeated, stylized gestures that manipulate religious symbols for specific purposes.
- People enact and reinforce their religious beliefs through these ritualized practices.



# COMMUNING WITH THE SUPERNATURAL



- The majority of rituals are designed to commune with and/or control supernatural spirits and powers through a combination of:
  - **PRAYER**
  - **SACRIFICE**
  - **MAGIC**

# RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS

- **SHAMAN:** An average member of a community who is socially recognized as having the ability to mediate between humans and spirits.
- **PRIEST:** A person who is formally elected, appointed, or hired to a full-time religious office.



# WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY

- Witchcraft and sorcery are very common elements of religious beliefs and practices in many cultures.
- **Based in earlier anthropologists' research among "non Western" cultures: WITCHCRAFT is**
  - The ability to harm others by harboring malevolent thoughts about them.
  - **SORCERY** is the conscious and intentional use of magic.
- Witchcraft based in "Western" cultures is the intentional use of magic to aid or harm others, society, and the environment, and thus comparable to sorcery.



**AZANDE  
OF AFRICA**

# MAGIC



- Belief that supernatural powers can be influenced through the use of ritual formulas.
  - **Sympathetic magic** uses representational objects, such as dolls.
  - **Contagious magic** is a direct relationship between ritual and the body, such as use of the subject's hair or fingernails.