INTRODUCTION OVERVIEW

Chapter Outline and Unit Summaries

I. Introduction: Why Study Religion?

A. World Religions are Intrinsically Interesting

B. Understanding Religion is Simply Necessary for Understanding the Contemporary World
   1. Understanding Literature and Art
   2. Understanding History
   3. Understanding Politics and Conflicts

C. Peace Among Nations, Cultures, Religions Requires Knowing and Respecting Religious Differences
   1. The Globalization of the World Economy, Media, and Culture Confronts People with Different Religions
      a. Formerly Exotic Religions Have Become Present in Everyday Life
      b. September 11, 2001 Illustrates that Ignorance of the World’s Religions is No Longer an Option
   2. Peace is Possible Only if We First Possess an Understanding of How Religion Can Exacerbate and Ameliorate Global and Regional Conflicts

II. A Definition of Religion

A. Many Problems with Defining a Complex Subject
   1. Religion (Latin: religio): “the fear and awe one feels in the presence of a spirit or a god”
      a. Many Religions Do Not Believe in gods or spirits
      b. Many Religions Emphasis Ethics, not Fear and Awe
   2. Religion as “Ultimate Concern”: Useful but Too Broad
   3. Is "Religion" a Concept Too Large for Any One Definition?
   4. The Necessity of Selectivity and Generalization
B. The Six Bases of Selection used for *Religions of the World*

1. Religions that usually, but not always, deal in some way with people’s relationship to the unseen world of spirits, ancestor, gods, and demons

2. Religions that usually have developed a system of myths about the unseen world and rituals designed for communing with or propitiating the spirits

3. Religions that usually have developed a system of organized rituals, temples, priests, and scriptures at some point in their history

4. Religions that usually have some statement about life beyond death, either as survival in some shadowy hades, in some version of heaven and hell, or through reincarnation

5. Religions that usually have developed a code of conduct or moral order

6. Religions that generally have attracted large followings, either currently or at some time in the past

C. The Four Major Points Considered for Each Religion

1. What culture produced this religion?

2. If there was a founder, and if anything can be known of the founder’s life, what factors caused this person to found this religion?

3. If there are scriptures or sacred texts, what do they tell us about this religion?

4. What have been the major historical developments of this religion?

III. The Universality of Religion

A. Wherever There are People, There Too is Religion

B. Religion is the Most Pervasive Phenomenon in All Societies Across Time and Geography
IV. Theories of the Origin of Religions

A. Animistic Theories

1. Primary Advocate: Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917)

2. So-called “Primitive” People Develop Sense of Other-World and Souls (Latin: *anima*) from Experiences of Death and Dreams

3. All Things Contained Souls, and Some Could be Helpful or Harmful to People

4. Souls Generally Required Some Kind of Appeasement

5. Origins of Ancestor Worship and Polytheism from Animism

6. Theory of *Mana*: Supernatural Power Belonging to the Region of the Unseen Experienced Emotionally

B. The Nature-Worship Theory

1. Primary Advocate: Max Müller (1823-1900)

2. Humans Develop Religions from Observing the Forces of Nature in General, not Simply Death and Dreams

3. Religion is the Personification of Natural Forces
   a. Names of gods / goddesses in Mythology Tend to Correspond with Names of Objects in Nature
   b. All Indo-European Religions Originate in Myths about the Sun

C. The Theory of Original Monotheism

1. Primary Advocate: Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954)

2. Earliest Religions Not Animistic or Naturalistic, but Based on One Distant High God
   a. Primitive Religions Generally Presupposed Monotheism, i.e., the Existence of a Great Creator / Parent God Above all Others
   b. High God Transcends Finite / Temporal World
c. High God Gives Moral Laws but Generally is Uninvolved in Affairs of Humans Until End of Time When Returns as Judge

d. Original Monotheistic Worship was Too Difficult to Sustain for Primitive Peoples and Polytheistic Religion Eventually Corrupted It

e. Advanced Religions Recovered True Monotheism

D. The Magic Theory

1. Primary Advocate: James George Frazer (1854-1941)

2. Evolutionary Interpretation of the Development of Religion

   a. Phase One: People Attempt to Control Nature With Magic, but Consistently Fail
   b. Phase Two: People Use Religion to Implore Nature to Cooperate with Them, but Consistently Fail
   c. Phase Three: People Use Science to Control Nature and Generally Succeed

E. Theories of Religion as Projections of Human Needs

1. Primary Advocates: Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

2. Religions Essentially Express Humanity’s Dreams and Fantasies about an Ideal Life

   a. Religions Express Humanity’s Sense of Powerlessness and Failure
   b. Maturity, Mental Health, and Political / Economic Justice Requires Facing and Changing Reality and Abandoning the Wishful Thinking of Religion
   c. Feuerbach: Religion is Projection of Human Ideals onto Distant Heaven, and Therefore Source of Humanity’s Disrespect for Itself
   d. Marx on Religion: an “opium of the people” Religion is Perpetuated by the Wealthy Few to Prevent Impoverished Many from Facing and Changing the Reality of their Exploitation
   e. Freud: Oedipus Myth as the Base of all Human Religion; Mature People Do Not Need Illusions of Religion to Cope with Guilt and Problems of Life
V. Types of Religions

A. Basic Religions

1. Religions of Contemporary People Whose Religious Ideas are not Preserved in Written Form

2. Religions of Prehistoric Peoples, Of Whom We Know Little

3. Animism is Most Common Form of Basic Religion

B. Religions Originating in India

1. Hinduism
2. Jainism
3. Buddhism
4. Sikhism
5. Unifying Ultimate Concern: Release from Cycle of Life, Death, Rebirth

C. Religions Originating in China and Japan

1. Taoism
2. Confucianism
3. Shinto
4. Commonalities
   a. Belief in Many gods
   b. Worship of Nature
   c. Veneration of Ancestors

D. Religions Originating in the Middle East

1. Zoroastrianism
2. Judaism
3. Christianity
4. Islam
5. Commonalities
   a. Believe in Supreme Creator God
   b. Each Person Lives Only One Earthly Life
   c. Linear View of Time
   d. Eventual Divine Judgment of World
### Key Names, Concepts, and Terms

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