

Anthropology of Religion
Chapter 2 Lecture Notes

Diversity and Unity in Religions

Religions everywhere make use of the same basic building blocks

I. Supernatural Beliefs

Beliefs that attribute human-like characteristics to non human things

These beliefs do not have immediate practical consequences.

Because these beliefs do not have immediate practical consequences, they can be among the most diverse parts of human cultures.

Deva-Dasi Dancers

Contrast the different ideas about human sexuality in western religions with the treatment of sexuality as a means of experiencing the divine in the 10th – 13th century southern Indian Hinduism..

Pueblo Indians

Survived by gardening in the desert southwest of the U.S. prayed to clouds for rain.

Western Religions Personify God

Although rejecting physical anthropomorphism regarding God, they responds to human languages, feels love and compassion, and make decisions just as humans do.

Dobuans and Yams

Dobuans believe that Yams travel underground at night to visit other gardens much like young men visit neighboring villages at night..

II. Strong Feelings and Emotions

Feelings are often stronger in religious setting than they are in mundane ones.

Awe, reverence, dread of things because they are strange or unusual.

Ringling Stones

Ringling stone in southern California considered sacred.

Waterfalls, Caves

Unusual features of natural environment often treated as places of spiritual power.

Religious settings associated with catharsis-relief from distressful emotions.

18th Century Frontier New York

Religious enthusiasm, swooning, and "bodily exercises at camp revivals.

Holiness Churches of Appalachia

Speaking in tongues, shouting, and swooning remain common today.

III. Ritual Practices

All religions include both personal rituals and ceremonies performed in group settings.

Personal Rituals

Personal Prayer

Ritual for individual performed another individual.

Shoshone Shaman

Shaman would perform a curing ritual

Ritual for group performed by an individual.

Priest

Performance of rites for a congregation by a pastor.

Rituals performed as a group.

Singing Hymns