Religious Myths and Symbols
Religion is a realm of symbolism.

I. Multi-Layered symbolism
Most religious symbols have multiple layers of meaning.

Christian Baptism

II. Recurrent Symbolism
A religion's most important meanings are conveyed by recurrent symbolic expressions.

Mormon Creation Story
Freedom of choice becomes a recurring element.

Aztec Religion
The effemerality of existence, interplay of life and death symbolism.

Nezahualcoyotl’s Poem

III. Cosmology
Anthropomorphic beings and powers and their relation to humans

Yanomamo
South American. The creation story.

Gnostic Godhead
The effemerality of existence, interplay of life and death symbolism.

The cosmology of many societies share common elements.
Relating to basic human concerns and conflicts such as economic, biological, social and sexual needs.

Foraging Societies
Use animal deities such as Shoshone Coyote

Agricultural Societies
Use fertility dieties such as European Ceres and Persepone
IV. Myths
Malinwoski: A sacred character that codifies belief. Leviticus: “God is holy, be thou also holy.

Mythic symbols play and important role in interpreting myths.

Star Trek
Bones is like the Id. Spock is the Superego. Kirk is the Ego.

Quetzalcoatl

Structural Meaning vs. Storyline.

Star Trek
Quest into the unknown, discovery of paradise, the god has feet of clay, Kirk overcomes the god, and the quest continues.

Mythemes
Units of meaning conveyed by repetitive symbolism.

Legends
Larger-than-life heroes who embody the values that society should emulate (and their opposites).

V. Limits of Variability

Supreme Being
Makes sense when there is political supremacy.

Polytheism
Specialization in social life.

Ancestral Spirits
When group is descended in a family line from ancestors who controlled the same means of livelihood.

Reincarnation
Identity based on membership in small, continuing local groups

Personal Soul
Versus “great spirit”
Gods who sanction morality

Sorcery and witchcraft

Navajo witchcraft

VI. Artifacts as Symbols

Cathedrals and Temples

Holy Water

Keris Knives

Clerical Collars

Southwest Indian Katchinas

Balanes Masks

Barong (Lord of the Forest) versus Rangda (Queen of Death)