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Among the Mentawai of Indonesia, shamans read the entrails of chickens and pigs to diagnose and then cure illness.

**THINKING POINT:** In 1932, Leonard Howell returned to his native Jamaica from a time spent working for the U.S. Army. Once there, he had a prophetic revelation. He declared that the 1930 coronation of Ras (Duke) Tafari as Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia fulfilled biblical prophecies. Haile Selassie was the messiah and the hope of freedom for all black people.

—[See pages 308–309 for details.]

## {chapter 13}

# Religion

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In Trinidad, before harvesting, farmers make sacrifices to the *di*, the spirits of the first owners of their fields. They believe that failure to do so will result in a poor harvest. Because many fields are owned by absentee landlords, they also set aside a portion of the harvest to pay rent. Most people from industrialized societies would say that sacrifices to the *di* are supernatural and rent payments are part of the natural world. But is it really so simple? After all, as anthropologist Morton Klass (1995) points out, the farmer may have never seen a *di* or the landlord. He knows of people who have been evicted because they failed to pay the rent, but he also knows people whose crops have failed when they did not sacrifice to the *di*. Some people say that the *di* do not really exist, but others say that landlords really do not exist and everyone has a right to the land they live on and work. If we assume that the payments the farmer makes to the *di* are part of religion and those he makes to the landlord have nothing to do with religion, we seem to miss something essential.

All societies have spiritual beliefs and practices and anthropologists generally refer to these as religion; yet as Klass's example of the *di* and the landlord suggests, because not all societies distinguish between the natural and supernatural the way most Americans do, defining religion is surprisingly difficult. It is unlikely that any single belief is shared by all the world's people. Differences vary from issues as grand as the nature of life itself (whether we live once, as the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition teaches, or repeatedly, as the Hindu and Buddhist traditions teach) to issues as specific as sexual relations between men (discouraged by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition but compulsory among the Sambia of Papua New Guinea [Herdt 1987]).

Despite the bewildering variety of religious beliefs and practices, in every society there is something that anthropologists (though not necessarily the members of the society) >>

identify as **religion**. It is very difficult to formulate a concise definition of religion, but all religions share at least six common characteristics. First, religions are composed of stories that members believe are important. Second, religions make extensive use of symbols and symbolism. Third, religions propose the existence of beings, powers, states, places, and qualities that cannot be measured by any agreed upon scientific means—they are nonempirical. Fourth, religions include rituals and specific means of addressing the supernatural. Fifth, in all societies there are individuals who are particularly expert in the practice of religion. And, lastly, like other aspects of culture, all religions are subject to change.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many anthropologists were concerned with trying to find the origin of religion and trace its development. E. B. Tylor, one of the founders of anthropology, saw religion as beginning with **animism**, the notion that all objects (living and nonliving) are imbued with spirit, and evolving through polytheism to monotheism. Tylor and many of his contemporaries believed the evolution of religion was part of the more general human progression toward logic and rationality. This view of religion has long been discredited; no religion is any more or less logical than any other and none is more evolved than another. Although some anthropologists today still puzzle over the origins of religion, most are more concerned with the ways in which it operates in societies and ways in which it creates meaning in human life. In this chapter, we will briefly discuss some of the things that religion does in society and then turn to a more thorough examination of each of the six points enumerated above. <<

## What Religion Does in Society

Religion has many functions in a society. It may provide meaning and order in people's lives. It may reduce social anxiety and give people a sense of control over their destinies. It may promote and reinforce the status quo. But it does not always do these things. In some cases religion may make people profoundly disquiet or fearful. It may be an important force resisting the status quo and it may catalyze radical politics and, on occasion, murderous violence.

### Searching for Order and Meaning

From a purely materialist, objective point of view, the world appears to lack any purpose or meaning. However, human beings seem ill suited to live in such a world.

**religion** A social institution characterized by sacred stories; symbols and symbolism; the proposed existence of immeasurable beings, powers, states, places, and qualities; rituals and means of addressing the supernatural; specific practitioners; and change.

**animism** The notion that all objects, living and nonliving, are imbued with spirits.

**cosmology** A system of beliefs that deals with fundamental questions in the religious and social order.

Even in desperate situations, in which all hope and reason seem gone, humans strive to find meaning and survive better when they do find it.

For example, psychologist Victor Frankl, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, found that those whose lives retained meaning, even in those camps, were more likely to retain their sanity and to survive than those whose lives lose meaning. Frankl came to believe that taking responsibility for finding meaning under all circumstances was a central task of life (1962:113).

Although there are many possible ways to give one's life meaning, historically and cross-culturally, religion is the principal means that people have used. In a sense, religions are symbolic images of reality that serve as a framework for interpreting events and experiences. Through religion, humans impose order and meaning on their world and often gain the feeling that they have some measure of control over it.

Although there is no single question answered by every religion, belief systems all provide responses to some of the central concerns of their believers. A key way they do so is by explaining aspects of the physical and social environment. Religions provide **cosmologies**—sets of principles or beliefs about the nature of life and death, the creation of the universe, the origin of society, the relationship of individuals and groups to one another, and the relation of humankind to nature. Such cosmologies give meaning to the lives of believers.



Religions provide a sense of order and meaning in a world that often seems chaotic. In hectic Bangkok, ethnic Chinese Thais offer prayer at Chi Se Ma Chinese temple.

By defining the place of the individual in society and through the establishment of moral codes, religions provide people with a sense of personal identity, belonging, and meaning. When people suffer a profound personal loss or when life loses meaning because of radically changed circumstances, religion can supply a new identity and become the basis for personal and cultural survival.

All of the above may sound like religion is a force for peace and tranquility, and indeed, often it is. However, this is clearly not always the case. Beliefs give meaning to people's lives in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes these involve denying the physical reality or importance of the material world, even to the point of suicidal individual or group action (as in the cases of Jonestown, Heaven's Gate, the Branch Davidians, and many other groups). Sometimes models of meaning include unspeakable violence practiced on other peoples. Sometimes meaning is found in oppressing others or murdering them. The meanings that religion creates can be a chaotic wilderness of violence and destruction.

### Reducing Anxiety and Increasing Control

Many religious practices are aimed at ensuring success in human activities. Prayers, sacrifice, and magic are used in the hope that they will aid a particular person or community. Rituals are performed to call on supernatural beings and to control forces that appear to be unpredictable. Although such practices are widespread, their presence is usually related to risk. The less predictable an outcome is, the greater likelihood prayer, magic, and sacrifice will be used. For example, if you have studied for a test and know the material well, you are unlikely to spend much time praying for success. You are more likely to pray if you have not studied, and you may even bring your lucky pencil or another charm to the test.

Prayer and magic are prevalent in sports and games of chance. Anthropologist and former minor league ball player George Gmelch (2000) notes that professional baseball players are likely to use magic for the least predictable aspects of the game, hitting and pitching. Fielding has little uncertainty, and few magical practices are connected with it.

The efficacy of prayer and magic has never been demonstrated by convincing scientific experiments (see Flamm 2002, Tessman and Tessman 2000). Despite this, prayer and magic can be effective in achieving results indirectly. They may alter the emotional state of those who practice them (or whom they are practiced upon), reducing or increasing their anxiety and perhaps creating other psychological states as well. In many cultures worldwide, much of prayer and magic concerns curing disease or creating it in others. There is surely a strong connection between our psychological and physiological states but it is poorly understood.

### Reinforcing or Modifying the Social Order

Religion is closely connected with the survival of society and generally works to preserve the social order. Through religion, beliefs about good and evil are reinforced by supernatural means of social control. Sacred stories and rituals provide a rationale for the present social order and give social values sacred authority. Religious ritual also intensifies social solidarity by creating an atmosphere in which people experience their common identity in emotionally moving ways. Finally, religion is an important educational institution, inculcating the values and understandings central to the culture. Initiation rites, for example, almost always include transmission of information about cultural practices and tradition.

In reinforcing the social order, religion generally serves the interests of the powerful. However, religion may serve the powerless as well. At times, religion provides an escape from a grim political reality. Through the religious belief in a glorious future or the coming of a savior, powerless people who live in harsh and deprived circumstances can create an illusion of power. Under such conditions, religion provides an outlet for frustration, resentment, and anger. It can serve to drain off energy that might otherwise be turned against the social system. In this way, religion contributes indirectly to maintaining the social order.

Although in most times, religion is a conservative force, validating and reinforcing the historical conditions and beliefs of society, it can, under some circumstances, be a catalyst for social change. When the image of the social order that a religion presents fails to correspond to the daily experience of its followers, prophets may emerge who create new religious ideas or call for a purification of existing practices. Sometimes prophecies encourage people to invest themselves in purely magical practices that have little real effect on the social order. At other times, however, prophets call on their followers to pursue their goals through political or military means, which may result in rapid social change. The American civil rights movement, the Iranian revolution, the rise of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, and the conflict between Pakistan and India over the state of Kashmir are all examples of social movements in which religion has played a critical role.

## Characteristics of Religion

Anthropologists may attempt to analyze what religion does in a society. However, members of the society do not experience religion in these terms. They experience it through their beliefs and practices.

# Anthropology Makes a Difference

## Religion and Fertility

Most preindustrial and industrializing societies have very high rates of population growth. For example, in many African nations, women have, on the average, between six and seven children each.

In wealthier countries such as Canada, Italy, and Spain, the rate is between one and two children per woman. This shift from high to low rates of fertility is known as the “demographic transition.” Because high levels of population growth are often linked to poverty, land scarcity, migration, and the loss of culture, anthropologists, economists, and experts on international poverty have been extremely concerned with the demographic transition.

Some experts believe that a basic understanding of mathematics is part of the demographic transition. They argue that in many societies, people simply do not think about numbers and therefore have few notions about the size of their families, how many children the average woman has, or

how many children they desire. Because they do not count, they do not believe they have any control over these factors. If these beliefs are correct, the first step to limiting population growth is to teach people to count their children and understand that they can decide on the number of children they want. For example, Etienne van de Walle, a past president of the Population Association of America, has argued that numeracy about children is central to population control and that “A fertility decline is not very far away when people start conceptualizing their family size, and it cannot take place without such conceptualizing” (1992:501).

Anthropologist Sarah Castle, on the other hand, argues that the idea that people do not count their children is often based on a failure to understand that statements people make about fertility and family size are often based on religious ideas. Castle found that among the Fulani, a herd-

ing and farming society in Mali, West Africa, women rarely give numeric answers when asked how many children they want, frequently answering that it is “up to God.” They do not count their children, or even point at them to confirm that they are theirs. Not only that, but they seem to show a lack of regard for their children, describing them as “not at all nice,” “ugly,” or “useless.” Children are sometimes dressed in rags and straw; bits of broken gourd are woven into their hair. Mothers often appear indifferent to their fate, seeming not to care when their children are sick and grieving little if they die. Given these observations, it is easy for outsiders to conclude that Fulani do not care deeply for their children and take an extremely fatalistic view of them, believing that whether or not they have children, the number of their children and their survival rate are matters strictly in God’s hands.

## Stories, Sacred Narratives, and Myths

At a fundamental level, all religions consist of a series of stories told by members of a group. **Sacred narratives** are powerful ways of communicating religious ideas. These narratives are not merely explanatory stories of the cosmos, but sometimes have a sacred power in themselves. This power is evoked when they are told or acted out. Sacred narratives may recall historic events, although these are often clothed in poetic and sometimes esoteric language. Anthropologists study the meanings and structure of these narratives.

Sacred stories or narratives are often called **myths**, but this is problematic. In some ways it is appropriate to use the term myth. When we think of myth, we think of stories of great deeds, explanations of origins of people,

the world, or particular practices in it; stories of heroes such as Athena or Hercules; stories where time is compressed or expanded and reality is composed of many levels. These are indeed characteristics of religious stories. However, it is also true we use the word myth to denote a false belief, or a religious belief we do not share. Thus, we are likely to claim that our own religion is composed of history and sacred story, but other people have myths. For example, we may say that Christians, Jews, and Muslims have Bible stories, but Native Americans have myths. Clearly, we should apply the same terminology to others’ religious beliefs that we apply to our own.

By explaining that things came to be the way they are through the activities of sacred beings, sacred narratives validate or legitimize beliefs, values, and customs, particularly those having to do with ethical relations. As Bronislaw Malinowski pointed out, there is an intimate connection between the sacred tales of a society and its ritual acts, moral deeds, and social organization. These stories are not merely idle tales, wrote Malinowski, “but a hard-worked active force; the function of myth, briefly, is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater

**sacred narratives** Stories held to be holy and true by members of a religious tradition.

**myths** Sacred stories or narratives.

Castle argues, however, that understanding the statements and actions of Fulani parents requires knowledge of their belief system. Fulani actions do not indicate an inability to count children or a lack of caring for them, but their reverse. Understanding Fulani beliefs about the supernatural world and beliefs about proper conduct is critical to analyzing their behavior.

The Fulani believe many aspects of the supernatural world are dangerous. There are sorcerers who inhabit human forms and those who are invisible or take animal shape. There are other spirits that are hostile to humankind. Critically, these sorcerers and spirits attack anything present in excess. As a result, it is very important that children (and other things as well) not be counted. For counting may show excess and draw the attention of spirits and sorcerers. Counting one's children or saying that one wants a certain number may cause the spirit world to reclaim them or prevent

their births (Castle 2001:1836). It is critical that children not be praised as beautiful, smart, or helpful because that too is likely to draw the attention of spirits who might then make them ill or kill them. Castle found that families keep careful track of the average number of children women have in their communities. When communities experience more child deaths than expected, people become particularly cautious, taking measures to make sure their children do not draw the attention of spirits. Calling children ugly or worthless, dressing them in rags, or in some cases, hobbling them at night as one would a donkey are, in fact, measures to keep children from the attention of sorcerers and spirits and make sure they survive.

Similarly, parents' show of indifference might camouflage their feelings rather than demonstrating them. Fulani believe in a code of honor they call *pulaaku*. One aspect of this is to appear self-controlled and

stoic at all occasions, including the sickness and death of a child. Thus, parents who appear extremely indifferent to a sick child will be understood by members of their community to be telegraphing their concern, demonstrating that they are deeply worried about the risks their child runs (Castle 2001:1836).

Castle's findings, and others like them, are critically important. If the high birth rate among the Fulani is not based on an inability to count and plan for children but is intended to counter the frequent deaths of children, programs to educate them about family planning, fertility, and conception will fail. Among the Fulani, and perhaps the vast majority of people in poor nations, reducing family size is linked to reducing the high rate of child mortality and improving economic conditions. This will lead to a short-term rise in family size but a long-term decline.



Religions narratives legitimize beliefs and social arrangements. In this image from the Temple of Osiris at Abydos, the Pharaoh Seti I (ruled 1294–1279 BCE) is confirmed in kingship by the Horus, the god of order (right) and Seth, the god of chaos (left). Egyptians believed that the spirit of Horus entered the Pharaoh and acted as his guide.

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value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events" (1992:146).

A clear example of what Malinowski meant is provided by a portion of the origin narrative of the Hopi, an agricultural people who live in Arizona and New Mexico. Traditionally, blue corn was the staple of their diet. Blue corn is more difficult to grow than most other varieties, but it is a strong, resistant strain. Hopi life is difficult; the Hopi say "it is hard to be a Hopi but good to be a Hopi" (Loftin 1991:5). Through the growing of blue corn, the Hopi re-experience the creation of their world.

According to Hopi belief, in earlier, imperfect creations they lived underground. Just before the Hopi appeared on the Earth's surface, they were given their choice of subsistence activities. They chose blue corn and were given the *sooya*, or digging stick, to plant it. The techniques for the farming of blue corn were established by the god Maasaw, who taught the Hopi to treat the earth respectfully, as a relative. The Hopi believe

that doing so recreates the feelings of humility and harmony that the ancestors chose when they selected the blue corn. Before the 20th century, the Hopi farmed their fields in work groups made up of clan members. Because their tradition holds that clans were given land to farm together as they became members of the tribe, Hopi re-experience the settlement of their land by various clans as they farm (Loftin 1991:5–9). It is easy to see how the Hopi creation story serves as a charter for society. The Hopi live their religious understanding of their world as they grow blue corn. The telling of such stories, as well as the actions that accompany them or are implied in them, reinforce social tradition and enhance solidarity.

## Symbols and Symbolism

As the story recounted in the previous section shows, religious stories make critical use of symbolism. Religious symbolism may also be expressed in material objects such as the cross, the Star of David, and the crescent moon and star of Islam. Masks, statues, paintings, costumes, body decorations, or objects in the physical environment may also be used as symbols. In addition, religions frequently use verbal symbols. The names for gods and spirits, and certain words, phrases, or songs themselves are often believed to be powerful.

Religious symbols are intrinsically **multivalent**. That is to say, they pack many different and sometimes contradictory meanings into a single word, idea, or object. Consider the Christian cross. Christians have been pondering the meaning of the cross for most of the last 2000 years. Among its meanings are death, love, sacrifice, identity, history, power, weakness, wealth, poverty, and many more. It means all these things simultaneously.

Because it carries so many meanings, the cross has enormous emotional and intellectual power for Christians. As a result it can be used in leadership. For example, the cross has been a critical military symbol from 312 CE when the Roman Emperor Constantine ordered his soldiers to paint it on their shields (Nicholson 2000:158), until the 20th century when it was a frequent feature of military insignia and propaganda in World Wars I and II. Desecration of the cross may inflame passions and provoke very strong reactions as well.

Symbolic representation allows people to grasp the often complex and abstract ideas of religion without much concern for the specifics of the theology that underlie them. The Christian ritual of the communion service, for example, symbolizes the New Testament story of the Last Supper, which communicates the abstract idea of commu-

nion with god. This idea is present in other religions but is represented by different symbolism. In Hinduism, for example, one of the most popular representations of communion with god is the love between the divine Krishna, in the form of a cowherd, and the *gopis*, or milkmaids, who are devoted to him. In the dramatic enactment of the stories of Krishna and in the singing of songs to him, the Hindu religion offers a path to communion with god that ordinary people can understand.

## Supernatural Beings, Powers, States, and Qualities

A great many important religious narratives and symbols concern the world of spirits and sacred powers. Although many religions do not separate the natural from the supernatural, all propose that there are important beings, powers, states, or qualities that exist apart from human beings. These beings, powers, states, and qualities are nonempirical. That is to say that there is no scientifically agreed upon way to measure their presence. Consider the god of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic tradition. Many religious people claim to see proof of god's existence everywhere. However, there is nothing that members of all religious traditions as well as those who do not believe could agree upon to measure to demonstrate the presence of god. Thus, science, which depends on such empirical measurement, can neither prove nor disprove the existence of god. God is nonempirical.

Most religions populate the world with nonempirical beings or spirits. Such spirits may be anthropomorphic, or human in form; zoomorphic, with the form of an animal; or naturalistic, associated with features of the natural environment. They are generally anthropopsychic; that is, they have features of personality similar to those of human beings.

Spirits can act in the material world. They can be happy or unhappy, stingy or generous, or can experience any other human emotion. The understanding of the spirits and souls of animals in hunting societies provides a good illustration. Among the Netsilik Inuit, the souls of bear, caribou, and seal were particularly important. The Netsilik believed that if the soul of an animal they killed received the proper religious attention, it would be pleased. Such an animal would reincarnate in another animal body and let itself be killed again by the same hunter. In this sense, a hunter who treated the spirits of the animals he killed properly would always hunt and kill the same animals. An animal soul that did not receive proper attention, however, would be angered and would not let itself be killed a second time. As a result, the hunt would fail. Particularly offended animal souls might become bloodthirsty monsters and terrorize people (Balicki 1970:200–201).

The term **god** is generally used for a named spirit who is believed to have created or to control some aspect

**multivalent** Containing many different and sometimes contradictory meanings in a single word, idea, or object.

**god** A named spirit who is believed to have created or to control some aspect of the world.



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In religious ceremonies, humans may be transformed into supernatural beings. This masked dancer from the Côte d'Ivoire is not simply a person wearing a mask, but a person who has become a supernatural being.

of the world. In some religions, gods are of central importance, but this is not always the case. High gods—that is, gods understood as the creator of the world and as the ultimate power in it—are present in only about half of all societies (Levinson 1996:229). In about one-third of these societies, such gods are distant and withdrawn, having little interest in people, and prayer to them is unnecessary. An example is the creator god of the Igbo of Nigeria. Like other remote gods, he is accessible only through prayer to lesser spirits (Uchendu 1965:94).

A religion may be **polytheistic** (having many gods) or **monotheistic** (having only one god). However, the difference between them is not always clear-cut. In polytheistic religions, the many gods may really be different aspects of one god. In India, for example, it is said that there are literally millions of gods; yet all Indians understand that in some way they are all aspects of one divine essence. Conversely, in monotheistic religions, the one god may have several aspects. In Roman Catholicism, for example,

there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; yet these are all part of a single, unitary god.

One class of spirit that may be singled out for special treatment is the **trickster**. Trickster spirits come in many guises, but their key characteristic is that they are interested in their own benefit, not that of human beings. Some tricksters, such as the Christian Devil, are personifications of evil. Others are much more sympathetic. They often combine attributes such as greed, lust, and envy with humor and wisdom. Tricksters are powerful, but they themselves are often fooled. In African religions, monkey and hyena spirits are often tricksters. In many Native American cultures, the key trickster spirit is Coyote.

In addition to nonempirical or supernatural beings, religions also posit the existence of states, qualities, or powers whose existence cannot be scientifically measured. Enlightenment, in the Buddhist tradition, is a state of being that is not subject to measurement and verification. Similarly, groups such as the Society for Ethical Humanism search for Truth, a quality whose objective description has eluded philosophers for millennia.

Religious beliefs often include the notion of an impersonal spiritual force that infuses the universe. In the early 20th century, R. R. Marett coined the term **animatism** to refer to this force. Today, it is probably best known as **mana**. Mana may be concentrated in individuals or in objects. For example, as noted in Chapter 11, chiefs in Tahiti had a much higher degree of mana than ordinary people. Mana gives one spiritual power, but it can also be dangerous and therefore mana is often associated with an elaborate system of taboos, or prohibitions. Mana is like electricity; it is a powerful force, but it can be dangerous when not approached with the proper caution.

Mana is most often found in areas (spatial, temporal, verbal, or physical) that are the boundaries between clear-cut categories. Hair, for example, is believed to contain supernatural power in many different cultures (as in the Old Testament story of Samson and Delilah). Hair is a symbol of the boundary between the self and the not-

**polytheism** Belief in many gods.

**monotheism** Belief in a single god.

**trickster** A supernatural entity that does not act in the best interests of humans.

**animatism** Belief in an impersonal spiritual force that infuses the universe.

**mana** Religious power or energy that is concentrated in individuals or objects.



self, both part of a person and separable from the person. Doorways and gates—which separate the inside from the outside and can thus serve as symbols of moral categories such as good and evil, pure and impure—are also widespread symbols of power. Because these boundary symbols contain supernatural power, they are often used in religious ritual and surrounded by taboos.

## Rituals and Ways of Addressing the Supernatural

Sacred narratives, symbols, spirits, and sacred power all find their place in religious ritual. A **ritual** is a ceremonial act or a repeated stylized gesture used for specific occasions (Cunningham et al. 1995). A religious ritual is one that involves the use of religious symbols. Through ritual, people enact their religion. Rituals may involve the telling or acting out of sacred stories as well as the use of music, dance, drugs, or pain to move worshippers to an ecstatic state of trance.

The specific content of religious rituals—the stories and symbols they use, and the spirits and powers they address—varies enormously from culture to culture. However, certain patterns of religious behavior are extremely widespread, if not universal. Most religious rituals involve a combination of prayer, sacrifices, and magic to contact and control supernatural spirits and powers. In addition, rites of passage and rites of intensification are found in almost all cultures.

### The Power of the Liminal

The word “**liminal**” refers to those objects, places, people, and statuses that are understood as existing in an indeterminate state, between clear-cut categories. Objects that are liminal, such as the hair and doorways described earlier, often play important roles in religious ritual.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) wrote that rituals frequently generate liminal states and statuses in which the structured and hierarchical classifications that

**ritual** A patterned act that involves the manipulation of religious symbols.

**liminal** Objects, places, people, and statuses that are understood as existing in an indeterminate state, between clear-cut categories.

**communitas** A state of perceived solidarity, equality, and unity among people sharing a religious ritual, often characterized by intense emotion.

**antistructure** The socially sanctioned use of behavior that radically violates social norms. Antistructure is frequently found in religious ritual.

**rite of passage** A ritual that marks a person's transition from one status to another.

normally separate people into groups such as caste, class, or kinship categories are dissolved. Because of this, in ritual, people can behave in ways that would be clearly unacceptable under other circumstances. In some cases this includes role reversals. For example, many Japanese festivals included ritual transvestism, where community members dance in the clothing of the opposite sex (Norbeck 1974:51). In the Wubwang'u ritual among the Ndembu of Zambia, men and women publicly insult each other's sexual abilities and extol their own, but no one is allowed to take offense (V. Turner 1969:78–79). Ritual role reversals include class as well as gender. In Holi, the Hindu harvest festival, members of the lower class and castes throw colored powder (and in the old days, excrement and urine) at males of the middle and upper classes.

More controversially, Turner argued that in liminal states people experienced a state of equality and oneness he called **communitas**. In **communitas**, the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the powerless are, for a short time, all equals. In the United States one example of **communitas** is the incredibly diverse crowd of over a million people who gather on New Year's Eve to watch the falling of the illuminated ball in the center of Times Square.

In state-level societies, institutionalized liminal statuses sometimes emerge. Organizations such as monasteries and convents where people live permanently as members of a religious community embody liminality.

Anthropologists often refer to rituals and statuses involving liminality as **antistructure**. Although all societies must be structured to provide order and meaning, according to Turner (1969:131) antistructure—the temporary ritual dissolution of the established order—is also important, helping people to more fully realize the oneness of the self and the other.

Though Turner's ideas are provocative, in reality people in higher statuses may experience the unity of **communitas** more than the powerless. The powerless may use liminal symbols and rituals of reversal to subvert the social order (even if temporarily), expressing feelings not of oneness, but of conflict with the powerful. Further, where liminal groups exist, either temporarily, during rituals or religious festivals, or permanently, associated with certain occupations, they frequently have low status and an ambiguous nature. This, paradoxically, is the source of their supernatural power and their perceived subversion of the social order, as illustrated by the hijras of India (see the “Ethnography” section in Chapter 10), whose sexual ambiguity contains the power both to bless and to curse.

### Rites of Passage

Public events that mark the transition of a person from one social status to another are known as **rites of passage**. Rites of passage almost always mark birth, puberty, mar-



At the Hindu festival of Holi, some social rules are relaxed. Members of the lower class and castes throw colored powder (and in the old days, excrement and urine) at males of the middle and upper classes.

© Reuters/Jayanta Shaw/Landov

ends with a large ceremony that reintegrates the recruits—now soldiers—into society with a new identity.

## Rites of Intensification

In addition to rites of passage, most societies have **rites of intensification**. These are rituals directed toward the welfare of the group or community rather than the individual. These rituals are structured to reinforce the values and norms of the community and to strengthen group identity. Through rites of intensification, the community maintains continuity with the past, enhances the feeling of social unity in the present, and renews the sentiments on which cohesion depends (Elkin 1967).

In some groups, rites of intensification are connected with totems. A **totem** is an object, an animal species, or a feature of the natural world that is associated with a particular descent group. **Totemism** is a prominent feature of the religious of the Australian aborigines. In Aboriginal society, people are grouped into societies or lodges, each of which is linked with some species in their natural environment that is its totem. Under most circumstances, members of a group are prohibited from eating the group's totem and in religious rituals, members of societies or lodges come together to celebrate their totems. The ceremonies explain the origin of the totem (and hence, of the group) and reenact the time of the ancestors. Through singing and dancing, both performers and onlookers are transported to an ecstatic state. In a classic description, French sociologist Émile Durkheim wrote:

When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. . . . [O]n every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls, and deafening noises of every sort. . . . One can readily conceive how, when arrived at this state. . . . a man does not recognize himself any longer. . . . [and feels] himself dominated and carried away by some sort of external power. . . . [E]verything is just as though he really were transported into a special world (1961:247–251/1915).

riage, and death and may include many other transitions as well. Rites of passage involve three phases (van Gennep 1960/1909). The first phase is separation, in which the person or group is detached from a former status. The second phase is transition and is often characterized by liminality. The individuals in this phase have been detached from their old statuses but not yet attached to a new one. The third stage is reincorporation, in which the passage from one status to another is symbolically completed. After reincorporation, the person takes on the rights and obligations of his or her new social status.

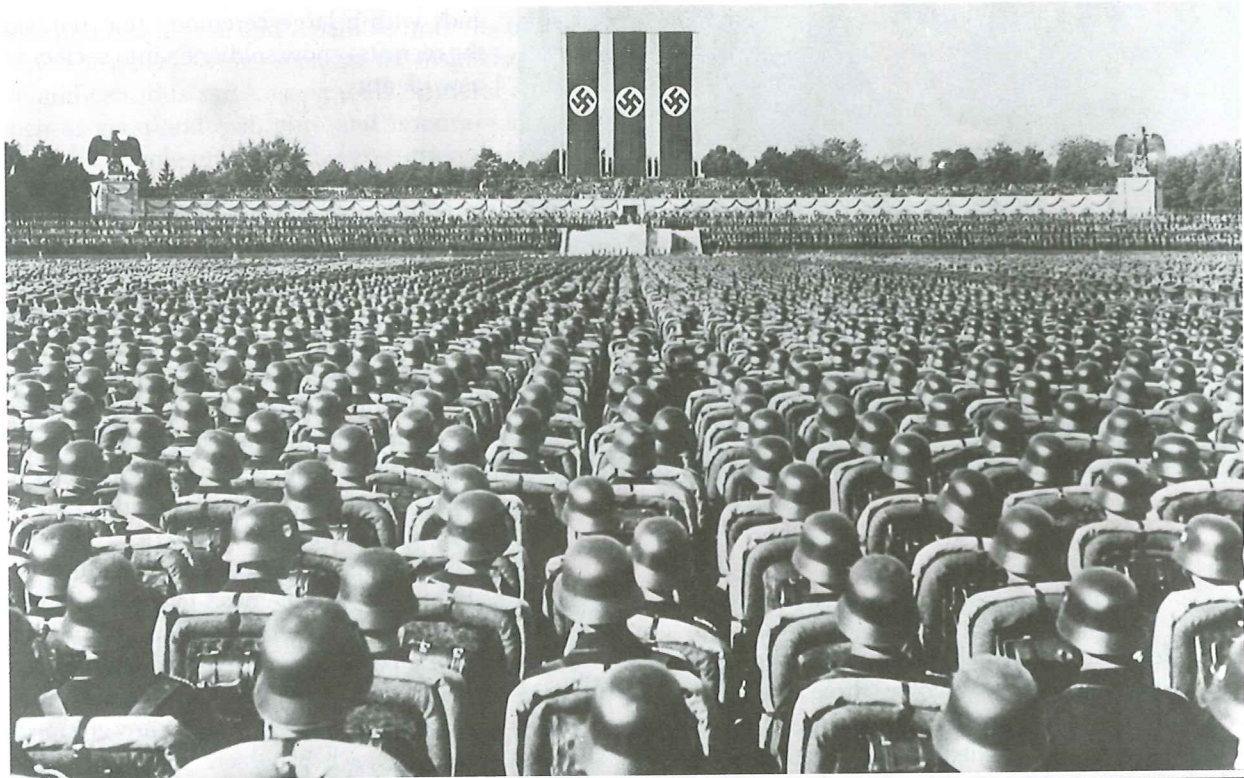
The rites of initiation for boys and girls described in Chapter 10 are good examples of rites of passage. Before these rituals, the boys and girls have the public status of children. Afterward, they have the public status of grown men and women. Other rites of passage effect similar changes of status. Baptisms and other ceremonies around birth move the new child from the status of not-a-community-member to membership in the community. Quinceañeras mediate between the status of childhood and that of young womanhood, eligible for dating. Marriages mediate between single and couple status. Funerals mediate between the living and the dead.

Basic training for military service is an example of a rite of passage with which many Americans are familiar. In basic training, recruits are separated from their friends and families and places of origin. They are taken to a military post, where they are given identical haircuts and identical uniforms. All signs of differences among them are minimized. No matter their position in life before joining the military, ideally they are treated identically during training. Training itself involves a wide variety of rigorous exercises and tasks designed to impart knowledge and build trust and camaraderie. In this state, they experience *communitas*, a shared identity along with the breaking down of barriers between individuals. Training

**rite of intensification** A ritual structured to reinforce the values and norms of a community and to strengthen group identity.

**totem** An animal, plant, or other aspect of the natural world held to be ancestral or to have other intimate relationships with members of a group.

**totemism** Religious practices centered around animals, plants, or other aspects of the natural world held to be ancestral or to have other intimate relationships with members of a group.



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Rites of intensification create and reinforce group identity. They can be used for religious, political, or economic purposes. The Nazi Nuremberg rally, held annually from 1933 to 1938, was designed to reinforce enthusiasm for the Nazi party and showcase its power.

Thus, in dance and worship, the aborigines achieved an ecstatic religious experience of their shared identity. Durkheim argued that such experiences helped to bind the members of their society together. For Durkheim, totems were symbols of common social identity. When people worshipped them, they were, at the same time, worshipping the moral and social order of their society.

The religious rituals of the Australian aborigines may seem exotic, but Americans participate in similar observances all the time—and to the same effect. Some American rites of intensification are religious, but many are secular. One with which most students are familiar is the college football game and the rallies associated with it. If the game is “good” or the school has “spirit,” these gatherings produce enormous excitement among their fans and transport them to “a special world,” as Durkheim called it. They also increase collective identity. If you are a fan, you will probably feel intense identification with your school and your team at such an event. Identification with your team and the excitement of sporting events will help to keep you “loyal” to your school (and

hopefully encourage you to donate to it as an alumnus/a). Schools have totems (animal mascots) as well.

## Prayer

Any conversation held with spirits and gods is **prayer**. In prayer, people petition, invoke, praise, give thanks, dedicate, supplicate, intercede, confess, repent, and bless (Levinson 1996). A critical feature of prayer is that people believe that its results depend on the will of the spirit world rather than on actions humans perform. Prayer may be done without any expectation of a particular response from the beings or forces prayed to. When prayer involves requests, the failure of a spirit to respond to a request is understood as resulting from its disinclination rather than from improper human action.

When Westerners think of prayer, most probably think of words that are recited aloud or silently. However, there are many forms of prayer. For example, in Buddhist tradition, people may pray by hoisting flags or spinning wheels with prayers written inside them. Words addressed to gods and spirits are not always humble compliments either. For example, Benedict (1961:221/1934) reported that among the Northwest Coast tribes of North America when calamities fell or their prayers were not answered, people vented their anger against the gods by saying, “You are a great slave.”

**prayer** Any communication between people and spirits or gods in which people praise, plead, or request without assurance of results.

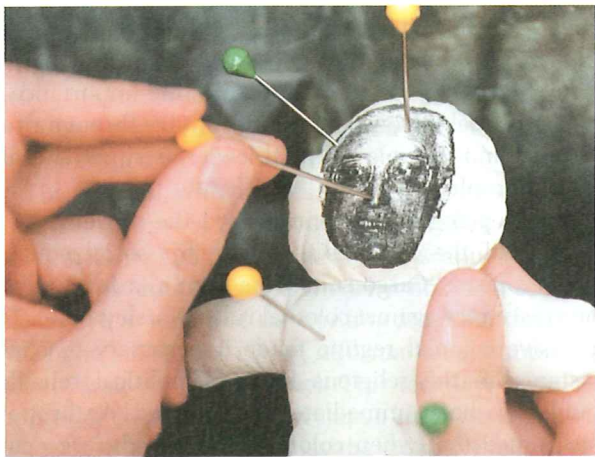
## Sacrifice

Sacrifice occurs when people make offerings to gods or spirits to increase their spiritual purity or the efficacy of their prayers. People may **sacrifice** the first fruits of a harvest, animal lives or, on occasion, human lives. Changes in behavior are often offered as sacrifices. Many Americans are familiar with the practice of giving up something for the Christian holiday of Lent, a form of sacrifice intended to help the worshipper identify with Jesus, show devotion, and increase purity. In many religions, including Christianity, it is common to make a vow to carry out a certain kind of behavior, such as going on a pilgrimage or building a place of worship, if a request for divine assistance is answered.

Some sacrifices may have important material functions. For example, the essence of the East African cattle complex as practiced by groups such as the Nuer and the Pokot is that cattle are killed and eaten only in a ritual context. This is clearly adaptive. In the absence of refrigeration, animals must be consumed rapidly after they are slaughtered. One family could not consume a whole steer by itself, but this problem is solved by offering it to the community in a ceremonial setting. Cattle sacrifices happen in community feasts that occur about once a week. Because the portions are distributed according to age and sex by a rigid formula, meat can be shared without quarreling over the supply (Schneider 1973). Furthermore, the religious taboo that a person who eats ritually slaughtered meat may not take milk on the same day has the effect of making milk more available to those who have no meat.

## Magic

Magic is an attempt to mechanistically control supernatural forces. When people do **magic**, they believe that their words and actions compel the spirit world to behave in



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A voodoo doll is an example of both imitative and contagious magic.

certain ways. Failure of a magical request is understood as resulting from incorrect performance of the ritual rather than the refusal of spirits to act.

Two of the most common magical practices are imitation and contagion. In **imitative magic**, the procedure performed resembles the result desired. A voodoo doll is a form of imitative magic with which many people are familiar. The principle is that mistreatment of a doll-like image of a person will cause injury to that person. The Christian practice of baptism can also be seen as a form of imitative magic. Most Christians believe that in baptism, original sin, often ritually compared with dirt or a stain, is washed away with holy water. Christians generally do not see themselves as compelling God in the baptism ritual, but they do believe that if the ceremony is done properly by duly constituted authority, God will not fail to remove original sin from the child.

With **contagious magic**, the idea is that an object that has been in contact with a person retains a magical connection with that person. For example, a person might attempt to increase the effectiveness of a voodoo doll by attaching a piece of clothing, hair, or other object belonging to the person they wish to injure. People in the United States often attribute special power and meaning to objects that have come in contact with famous or notorious people. Signed baseballs, bits of costumes worn by movie stars, and pens used to sign famous documents all become collectors' items and are imbued with special power and importance.

In many cultures, magical practices accompany most human activities. Among the people who live along the upper Asaro River in Papua New Guinea, when a child is born, its umbilical cord is buried so that it cannot later be used by a sorcerer to cause harm. To prevent the infant's crying at night, a bundle of sweet-smelling grass is placed on the mother's head, and her wish for uninterrupted sleep is blown into the grass. The grass is then crushed over the head of the child who, in breathing its aroma, also breathes in the mother's command not to cry. When a young boy kills his first animal, his hand is magically "locked" into the position of the successful kill. When he later tries to court a girl, he will use love magic, which in a particularly powerful form will make him appear in front of her with the face of another man to whom she is

**sacrifice** An offering made to increase the efficacy of a prayer or the religious purity of an individual.

**magic** An attempt to mechanistically control supernatural forces. The belief that certain words, actions, and states of mind compel the supernatural to behave in predictable ways.

**imitative magic** The belief that imitating an action in a religious ritual will cause the action to happen in the material world.

**contagious magic** The belief that things once in contact with a person or object retain an invisible connection with that person or object.

known to be attracted. Both magical and technical skills are used to make gardens and pigs grow. One technique is to blow smoke into the ear of a wild pig to tame it. This is based on the belief that the smoke cools and dries the pig's "hot" disposition. Magical techniques are used to treat serious illness: blowing smoke over the patient to cool a fever (which is hot) or administering sweet smelling leaves with a command for the illness to depart (Newman 1977:413).

**Cargo Cults, Colonialism, and Magic** Cargo cults are religions known for their focus on rituals that involve the use of magic to acquire consumer goods. They were originally described on the islands of Melanesia, including the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea where Western culture has been spreading for the past several hundred years. Initially, Melanesians were receptive to Western culture, which reached them primarily through trade goods, called "cargo" in pidgin English. Islanders believed that welcoming missionaries and colonial governments would bring them cargo and riches. However, not only did Melanesians fail to gain wealth and power but, in many cases, they grew poorer and were more deeply oppressed.

In Melanesian society, secret knowledge and ritual action were major sources of power. Unsurprisingly, many Melanesians concluded that these were the source of the wealth and power of the whites as well. Melanesians observed that whites did not seem to work (at least as Melanesians understood work) but instead made "secret signs" on scraps of paper, built strange structures, and behaved in seemingly unusual ways. For example, they built airports and seaports with towers and wires and they drilled soldiers to march in formation. When the whites

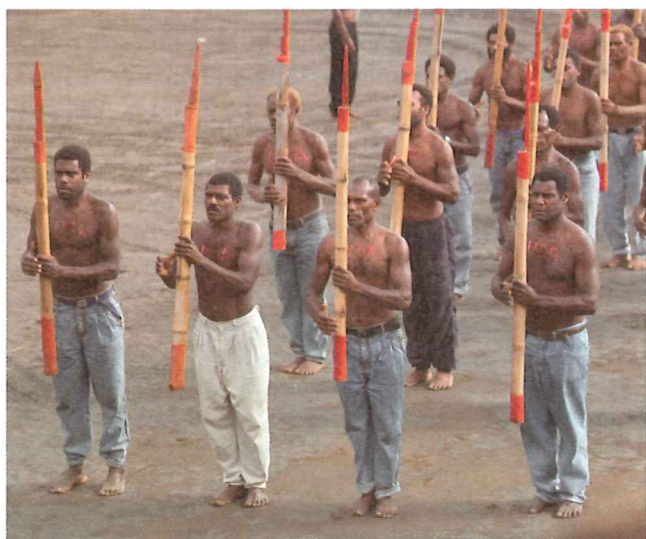
did these things, planes and ships arrived, disgorging a seemingly endless supply of material goods. Melanesians, who did so much hard physical labor, got nothing. Plainly, the whites' actions were a kind of secret knowledge and if Melanesians could learn it they could rid their societies of oppressive colonial governments and gain access to immense wealth.

So-called cargo cults appeared all over Melanesia. Though there was some variety, the cults shared certain common features. A local prophet announced that the world was about to end in a terrible catastrophe, after which God (or the ancestors, or a local culture hero) would appear, and a paradise on earth would begin. The end of the world could be caused or hastened by the performance of ritual that copied what they had observed the whites to do. In some places the faithful sat around tables dressed in European clothes, making signs on paper. In others they drilled with wooden rifles and built wharves, storehouses, airfields, and lookout towers in the hopes that such ritual would cause planes to land or ships to dock and disgorge cargo.

The first Europeans to write about cargo cults were colonial administrators, who saw them as the irrational beliefs and activities of primitive people who had succumbed to a kind of "madness." This view explicitly opposed Melanesian irrationality to European rationality and justified the Australian colonial administration's control over New Guinea (Buck 1989; Lindstrom 1993).

Anthropologists, who began describing cargo cults in the 1950s, attempted to understand their logic from the Melanesian perspective. They pointed out that cargo cults were based in the experience of Melanesians, particularly during World War II, when they witnessed Americans, Japanese, and others arrive and engage in seemingly odd ritualistic behavior. Such behavior was followed by planes and ships bearing an apparently endless supply of goods and by cataclysmic battles. Thus, Melanesians were not irrational, but rather working with the objective knowledge derived from their limited experiences. Furthermore, anthropologists pointed out that these observations and practices dovetailed neatly with central themes in Melanesian culture: the importance of wealth, the seeking of economic advantage through ritual activities, and the role of ritual leader as supernaturally inspired prophet.

Anthropologists also interpreted the movements as symbolic of the Melanesian desire for social equality with Europeans. Cargo cults were seen as a form of religious resistance against colonial rule (Worsley 1959). The repressive colonial regime made it necessary to clothe resistance in the religious form, as political rebellion would have been immediately suppressed. Anthropologists argued that when colonial rule ended, cargo cults would as well. Although they have not entirely disappeared, cargo cults have certainly declined in importance since independence.



On Vanatu, John Frum worshippers celebrate by marching in military formation. The letters USA are painted in red on their chests.

© Steve Axford

Numerous aspects of American society have similarities to cargo cults. One good example is prosperity theology, or the Word-Faith Movement. The central tenet of prosperity theology is that God wants Christians to be wealthy. If they give money to churches (the more the better) and pray with enough sincerity, devotion, and frequency, God will reward them with material wealth in the form of cash or objects such as cars and houses. In other words, if they perform the correct rituals, they will receive cargo. Conversely, if they are poor, it is because they have failed to properly ask God for wealth.

Prosperity theology has become extremely popular in the United States and in Latin America. Oral Roberts was one of its best-known earlier promoters. Prosperity theology preachers such as Jan and Paul Crouch, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, and Kenneth Copeland appear on hundreds of television stations in the United States and abroad. The prosperity theology-based Universal Church of God's Kingdom, headquartered in Brazil, claims 3 million followers in that country and another 3 million worldwide. Officials of Copeland's ministry estimate its annual revenue at about \$70 million. The Crouches own TBN, the Trinity Broadcast Network, with an annual income greater than \$100 million.

Some scholars have also wondered if the American economic system itself is a bit like a cargo cult. Lamont Lindstrom (1993) argues that Westerners are obsessed with cargo, with desire for wealth and material goods, and that they increasingly turn to ritual strategies to obtain them. The endless desire for consumer goods and beliefs that purchases of specific brands of cars, drinks, or clothing will make us forever young, sexy, and powerful may not create happiness or give us the lifestyles featured in advertisements, but they do serve the market well.

## Divination

A ritual practice directed toward obtaining useful information from a supernatural authority, **divination** is found in many societies. Divination discovers the unknown or the hidden. It may be used to predict the future, diagnose disease, find hidden objects, or discover something about the past. In many cultures, divination is used to discover who committed a crime.

The Naskapi, who hunt caribou on the Labrador Peninsula, use a form of divination called scapulomancy. In this divination ritual, a shoulder blade (scapula) of a caribou or other animal is scorched by fire. The scorched bone is used as a map of the hunting area, and the cracks in the bone are read as giving information about the best place to hunt (O. Moore 1969). This technique was also used in ancient China and Japan (de Waal Malefijt 1968:220). Scapulomancy may be adaptive because it randomizes the choices of hunting sites, a strategy that modern game theorists know results in the least chance of repeated failures.

Most Americans are familiar with a wide variety of divination techniques. Tarot cards, palmistry, flipping coins, and reading auras are all forms of divination. Some farmers use a divination technique called water witching or dowsing to find sources of well water. In one technique, the dowser holds a forked willow branch (a willow is a tree found by river banks and is "sympathetic" to water) in his hands as he walks over a property. When he stands above water, the wand is supposed to bend downward. Although dowsing has a wide following in the United States, when subject to scientific testing, dowsing does no better than chance (Vogt and Hyman 2000:xvii).

The practice of divination makes people more confident in their choices when they do not have all the information they need or when several alternative courses of action appear equal. Divination may also be practiced when a group decision has to be made and there is disagreement. If the choice is made by divination, no member of the group feels rejected.

Prayer, sacrifice, and magic can be found in most religious traditions, and the distinctions between them are more a matter of degree than of exclusive classification. For example, a great many prayers contain elements of sacrifice, and most magical practitioners agree that, in theory, it is possible that the spirit world will not honor their request, although they argue that in practice it does not happen.

## Religious Practitioners

Every society has people who are considered to have a special relationship with the religious world. These religious practitioners are charged with organizing and leading major ritual events. There are many different kinds of religious practitioners, but anthropologists generally organize them into two broad categories: shamans and priests.

### Shamans

Shamans are part-time practitioners. In many respects, **shamans** are average members of the community; they must hunt, gather, garden, or get up and go to work like anyone else. Their shamanic activities are reserved for specific ceremonies, times of illness, or crisis.

**divination** A religious ritual performed to find hidden objects or information.

**shaman** An individual who is socially recognized as having the ability to mediate between the world of humanity and the world of gods or spirits but who is not a recognized official of any religious organization.

Although learning to be a shaman may involve arduous training, such study is never sufficient. To be a shaman, one must have direct personal experiences of the supernatural that other members of the community accept as authentic. Shamans believe they are chosen by the spirit world and able to enter into it. They use prayer, meditation, song, dance, pain, drugs, or any combination of techniques to achieve trance states in which they understand themselves (and are understood by their followers) as able to enter into the supernatural world. They may use such contact to bring guidance to themselves or their group, heal sick people, or divine the future. Almost all societies have some shamans, but they are likely to be the only religious practitioners in band and tribal societies.

**Vision Quest** In some cultures, almost every adult may be expected to achieve direct contact with the supernatural. The **vision quest**, common among many Native American groups, was an example of this. In these cultures, a person was expected to develop a special relationship with a particular spirit that would give the person power and knowledge. The spirit acted as a personal protector or guardian. People seeking visions had very strong expectations of success and used fasting, isolation in a lonely spot, or self-mutilation to move themselves to an ecstatic religious state in which such a vision was possible.

For example, among the Thompson Indians of western Canada a boy would begin to search for guardian spirits between the ages of 12 and 16. He would prepare himself with ordeals such as running until exhausted and diving into ice-cold water. He would paint his face and wear special clothing. The nights before the quest were spent in dancing, singing, and praying around a fire on a nearby mountain peak.

The boy then went on lonely pilgrimages into the mountains, eating nothing for several days on end. He intensified his physical suffering by sweating himself with heated rocks over which he threw water and by whipping his body with nettles. This strenuous regimen continued until the boy had a religious experience. In an ecstatic state, he would experience meeting with his guardian spirit, usually an animal or bird, and receiving various forms of instruction. The guardian spirit would teach the boy a spirit song by which he could be called. He would learn how to prepare a medicine bundle of powerful magical objects (Pettitt 1972).

Although the vision quest was an intensely individual experience, it was shaped by culture. Among the Crow Indians, for example, several informants related the same vision and interpretation to the anthropolo-

gist Robert Lowie (1963). They told Lowie that they saw a spirit or several spirits riding along and how the rocks and trees around the riders turned into enemies who attacked them but were unable to do any harm. They interpreted this to mean that the spirits were making them invulnerable. This motif is common in Crow religious narratives, and the vision seekers worked it unconsciously into their experience. Another cultural influence is that most Crow Indians obtained their spiritual blessing on the fourth night of their seclusion, and four is considered a mystical number among the Crow.

**Shamanic Curing** Before the advent of modern technological medicine, illness was treated by means that we would today consider spiritual. Shamans frequently played important roles in curing. Illnesses were often thought to be caused by broken taboos, sorcery, witchcraft, or actions that caused the ill person to fall out of spiritual balance. In shamanic curing, the shaman, usually in a trance, travels into the supernatural world to discover the source of illness and what might be done to cure it. The following description of a Netsilik Inuit curing performance shows the shaman battling with evil spirits:

The shaman, adorned with his paraphernalia, crouched in a corner of the igloo. . . . and covered himself with a caribou skin. The lamps were extinguished. A protective spirit called by the shaman entered his body and, through his mouth, started to speak very rapidly. . . . While the shaman was in trance, the tupiliq [an evil spirit believed to be round in shape and filled with blood] left the patient's body and hid outside the igloo. The shaman then dispatched his protective spirits after the tupiliqs; they. . . . drove the tupiliqs back into the igloo through the entrance; the audience encouraged the evil spirits, shouting: "Come in, come in, somebody is here waiting for you." No sooner had the tupiliqs entered the igloo than the shaman, with his snow knife, attacked them and killed as many as he could; his successful fight was evidenced by the evil spirits' blood on his hands (Balikci 1970:226–227).

If the patient died, it was said that the tupiliqs were too numerous for the shaman to kill or that after the performance evil spirits again attacked the patient.

In the modern world, shamanic curing often exists alongside modern technological medicine. People go to shamans for healing when they have diseases that are not recognized by technological medicine, they lack money to pay for modern medical treatment, or they have tried such treatment and it has failed.

Shamanistic curing does have important therapeutic effects. First, shamans generally do treat their patients

**vision quest** A practice common among many Native American groups in which individuals seek to achieve direct contact with the supernatural.



In many societies, shamans act as curers, often traveling into the supernatural to discover the source and treatment of a disease. In this picture, a shaman treats a child in Ladakh, India.

© Chris Lisle/Corbis

with drugs. All traditional cultures have a **pharmacopoeia**, or collection of preparations used as medication. Scientific testing has shown that some (though not all) traditional medicines are effective (Fábrega 1997:144). Second, shamanic curing ritual uses story, symbolism, and dramatic action to bring together cultural beliefs and religious practices in a way that enables patients to understand the source of their illness. In other words, such rituals present a coherent model of sickness and health, explaining how the patient got ill and how he or she may become well again. These models can exert a powerful curative force (Roberts et al. 1993). Curing rituals express and reinforce the values of a culture and the solidarity of a society. They often involve participation by the audience, whose members may experience various degrees of ecstasy themselves. Shamanic curing ceremonies work by cultivating an awareness that “one’s body is located at a central intersection within a system of relations. Illness ruptures this pattern, and healing restores the perception of harmony” (Glucklich 1997:95). The ceremonies are cathartic in the sense that they release the anxiety caused by various disturbing events. The natural and supernatural forces that have the power to do evil in a society are brought under control, and seemingly inexplicable misfortunes are given meaning within the traditional cultural pattern.

## Priests

In most state societies, religion is bureaucratized; that is, it is an established institution consisting of a series of ranked offices that exist independently of the people who

fill them. Anthropologists use the term **priest** to refer to a person who is formally elected, appointed, or hired to a full-time religious office. Priests are responsible for performing certain rituals on behalf of individuals, groups, or the entire community.

Priests are most often associated with gods who are believed to have great power. They may be members of a religion that worships several high gods, as in the religions of the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans, or only one high god, as in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. Where priests exist, there is a division between the lay and priestly roles. Laypeople participate in ritual largely as passive respondents or audience rather than as managers or performers.

People generally become priests through training and apprenticeship. For example, to become a cleric in any mainstream American religion, you would enter the training program (usually a seminary) of the appropriate religion. If you were successful, at graduation you would be certified by the religious body (or church) and generally given an assignment. However, priestly authority derives from certification by the religious institution the priest represents and this may sometimes be given with little or no training. For example, in Europe in the medieval and renaissance church, men often attained high positions because of their family and political connections rather than their piety or training.

In most mainstream religions in the United States, it is not considered essential for priests to have ecstatic religious experiences. However, this is not the case in all priestly religions. Although ultimately the priests’ authority derives from certification, such status may give a person the right to seek direct contact with gods and spirits. For example, in ancient Maya states, priests were members of a ranked bureaucracy. In many cases, they were also political leaders and as such exercised both priestly and political authority. Their religious and political positions gave them the right to use ecstatic techniques to travel in the spiritual world. At the dedication of buildings consecrated to the royal lineage, priests, including the king and other nobles, take hallucinogenic drugs and let blood by perforating their penises and other body parts with special lancets. These methods created ecstatic states in which they would travel to the supernatural underworld to inform their ancestors of the new building and invite the souls of these former rulers

**pharmacopoeia** A collection of preparations used as medications.

**priest** One who is formally elected or appointed to a full-time religious office.



to inhabit it. A Mayan ritual might have looked like this:

Against a backdrop of terraced architecture, elaborately costumed dancers, musicians, warriors, and nobles entered the courts in long processions. . . . A crowd of participants wearing bloodletting paper or cloth tied in triple knots sat on platforms and terraces around the plaza. . . . [T]hese people would have prepared themselves with days of fasting, abstinence and ritual steam baths. Well into the ceremony, the ruler and his wife would emerge from within a building high above the court, and in full public view, he would lacerate his penis, she her tongue. Ropes drawn through their wounds carried the flowing blood to paper strips. The saturated paper. . . . [was] placed in large plates, then carried to braziers and burned, creating columns of black smoke. The participants, already dazed through deprivation, public hysteria and massive blood loss, were culturally conditioned to expect a hallucinatory experience (Schele and Miller 1986:178).

As among the Maya, priests in state societies may pursue ecstatic religious experience. However, states generally attempt to suppress independent shamans or bring them under bureaucratic control. Shamans claim the ability to directly contact the supernatural without certification by any institutionalized religion, and this challenges the authority of church and state.

### Witches and Sorcerers

Although not universal, belief in the existence of witches and sorcerers is a common element of many of the world's cultures.

**What Are Witchcraft and Sorcery?** In some societies, **witchcraft** is understood as a physical aspect of a person. People are witches because their bodies contain a magical witchcraft substance. They generally acquire this substance through inheritance and may not even be conscious that they possess it. If a person's body contains the witchcraft substance, his or her malevolent thoughts will cause ill to befall those around him or her. For example, the Azande, an East African group, believe that witches' bodies contain a substance called *mangu*, which allows them to cause misfortune and death to others (Evans-

**witchcraft** The ability to harm others by harboring malevolent thoughts about them; the practice of sorcery.

**sorcery** The conscious and intentional use of magic.



Mayan temples were elaborate stages for rituals during which priests and rulers used dramatic techniques to travel into the supernatural world.

Courtesy of Serena Nanda

Pritchard 1958/1937). This sort of witchcraft is always understood as causing evil to others. It is only thoughts such as jealousy, envy, and rage that cause disease and ill fortune. A witch's positive thoughts do not help others. People are suspected of having the witchcraft substance when evil befalls those around them, particularly family members. Such witches are generally believed to be unable to prevent themselves from causing evil.

The conscious manipulation of words and ritual objects with the intent of magically causing either harm or good is **sorcery**. Bone pointing, a magical technique of sorcery in Melanesia, is a good example of the use of sorcery to cause illness. The sorcerer first makes a magical arrow of a pointed object. Then he catches sight of his victim and viciously stabs the air as if to wound his victim and twist the point in the wound. Malinowski (1984/1922:75) reports that "This, if carried out properly and not counteracted by a still more powerful magician, will never fail to kill a man."

Cases of death from sorcery have been observed by anthropologists in many parts of the world. In a study of such reports, Walter Cannon (1942) argued that an individual who was psychologically vulnerable to begin with and aware that he or she was being attacked by sorcery would exhibit an extreme stress reaction that would have profound physiological effects. Such an individual may despair, lose his or her appetite, and slowly starve to death, unable to overcome the inertia caused by the belief that he or she is a victim. Persistent terror and the weakening effects of hunger may make the victim vulnerable to infectious agents as well as stroke and heart attack. Much work in biomedicine in the past 60 years confirms

Cannon's ideas and details the specific biochemical pathways through which such reactions may occur (Sternberg 2002).

**Accusations of Witchcraft or Sorcery** Although people do actually practice witchcraft and sorcery, their main effects on society are probably through accusations. Leveling witchcraft or sorcery accusations against friends and neighbors is common in many cultures and serves various purposes.

The most frequent form of witchcraft accusation serves to stigmatize differences. People who do not fit into conventional social categories are often suspected of witchcraft. The European and American image of the witch as an evil old hag dressed in black is a good example. In traditional Western European society, social norms dictated that women should have husbands and children (or alternatively, they might become nuns). Impoverished women who remained in the community yet were unmarried or widowed without children violated this social convention and might be subject to witchcraft accusations. It is they who would have appeared as old hags dressed in black (Brain 1989; Horsley 1979). Those accused of witchcraft because they fail to conform may be ostracized and harassed but are unlikely to be killed or driven out of the community. They are valuable as negative role models, examples of what not to be. The lesson that a young girl might derive from the witch is: get married and have children or you might end up a witch.

Witchcraft and sorcery accusations may also be used to scapegoat. In times of great social change, when war, disease, calamity, or technological change undermines the social order, people's lives lose meaning. Under such circumstances, they may well turn to accusations of witchcraft. They may conclude that witches and sorcerers are responsible for their misfortunes and must be found and destroyed for their own lives to be improved.

Although we often think of witch-hunting as belonging to the Middle Ages, during that era the social order remained stable and accusations of witchcraft were fairly rare. The witch craze belongs to the 1500s and 1600s, a time of great artistic and technological achievement but social disaster. Plague swept repeatedly through Europe, and the medieval social and religious order collapsed in war and chaos. Where governments and religious institutions remained strong, witchcraft accusations were relatively scarce. However, in areas where these institutions collapsed, accusations were frequent (Behringer 2004). Under conditions of instability, people were willing to believe that witches were the cause of their misery and pursue reprisals against people they suspected of witchcraft. The accused witch who is a social deviant may be scorned and ostracized, but witches who are believed responsible for wide-scale social disaster are more likely to



Modern-day Wiccans are members of a religion of nature worship. In this picture, Gypsy Ravish, of Salem, Mass., a high priestess of Wicca, holds a ritual drum. The drum is used to raise energy during Wiccan ceremonies.

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be killed or banished. Current scholarship estimates that about 50,000 Europeans were murdered as witches, half of these within the borders of current-day Germany (Behringer 2004:149–150).

**Modern Witches, Wiccans, and Neopagans** Recent times in Europe and the United States have seen the emergence of religious worshippers who call themselves witches, **Wiccans**, or neopagans. A basic principle of most Wiccan belief is the threefold law, which proclaims that whatever good or ill people do in the world returns to them three times. Wiccans are no more likely to commit evil acts than are members of more mainstream religions.

Many Wiccan beliefs are derived from the work of 19th and 20th-century authors, particularly Gerald Gardner. Gardner claimed to have rediscovered the ancient beliefs of an aboriginal fairy race, and many Wiccans today say that they practice an ancient pre-Christian religion of nature worship. However, most scholars believe that Gardner composed his religion from a variety of modern sources (Hutton 1999; A. Kelly 1991; Orion 1995). This doesn't matter much to most Wiccans. For example, Diotima Mantincia, associate editor of the *Witch's Voice* website (<http://www.witchvox.com>), says: "It doesn't matter to me how old Wicca is because when I connect with Deity as Lady and Lord I know I am connecting with something much larger and vaster than I can fully comprehend" (in Allen, 2001).

**Wiccan (or neopagan)** A member of a new religion that claims descent from pre-Christian nature worship. A modern-day witch.

It is not clear how many Wiccans and neopagans there are. Many current estimates put the figure at somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000. The majority of Wiccans and neopagans live in the wealthy countries of North America and Europe. The majority, perhaps about two-thirds, are female and they have a higher than average level of education (Orion 1995:66).

## Religion and Change

As we have seen, religion is generally a force that preserves the social order. This may be particularly evident in stratified societies where the elite invoke religious authority to control the poor. In such situations, religion acts as a way of maintaining social, economic, and political inequality. However, even when religion does not support oppression, it is usually a conservative force, promoting the idea that the way that society has historically been ordered is right and proper.

Most religions contain implicit or explicit visions of the ideal society—images of the way a correct, just social order should look. No society actually achieves its vision; people never live exactly the way they are supposed to. However, most of the time religion validates society. The image of society as it should be is not so different from life in society as it is. As a result, most people feel that the society they live in is reasonably good (or the best available). If it hasn't achieved the perfection their beliefs tell them to strive for, it is at least on the right path.

However, if societies change very rapidly (as a result of colonization, disease, or technological change) or if groups are systematically enslaved and oppressed, the vision of the ideal world painted by people's religious beliefs may move far from their daily experience. People may feel that they are lost, that their vision of the ideal cannot be attained, or that, in light of new developments, it is simply wrong. Under these conditions, prophets may emerge, and new religions may be created. Religious movements vary in the effectiveness with which they bring social and political change. Even those that fail in these respects may create powerful new identities among their members.

In the United States, rapid cultural and economic change, economic oppression, powerlessness, and anomie experienced by different social groups have frequently led to new religious movements, sometimes with dire results. The prophecies of People's Temple leader

Jim Jones or the Branch Davidian David Koresh provided new lives for their followers, giving them consistent and meaningful (if, in others' view, misguided) ways of understanding the world. However, these prophecies also led to the deaths of Jones, Koresh, and most of their followers.

Religion offers a series of principles, encapsulated in story, symbol, and interpretation. Believers organize their lives around these, with varying results. Religion can be a powerful force for social change, providing people with the rationale and motivation for political involvement and personal renewal. From the Iranian Revolution and the Taliban to the Christian Coalition and the 700 Club, religious leaders can have a powerful political impact. However, prophets may also give their followers convincing models that cannot exist in our material, social, and political world. When that happens, the results may be explosive.

## Varieties of Religious Prophecy

To begin a new religion or create a substantial modification in an existing religion, prophets must have a code that consists of at least three elements: they must identify what is wrong with the world, present a vision of what a better world to come might look like, and describe a method of transition from the existing world to the better world. Religious movements can, to some degree, be characterized by the nature of their understanding of the world to come and the methods for achieving that world.

Many religious movements are either nativistic or vitalistic. A **nativistic** movement aims to restore what its followers believe is a golden age of the past. The nativistic message is generally that things in the past were far better than at present. The reason things have degenerated is because the people have fallen away from the ways of the ancestors. The glorious past may be regained if certain practices are followed. The Ghost Dance, described in the next section, is a good example of a nativistic prophesy.

A **vitalistic** prophesy looks to the future rather than the past. For the vitalist, the past is seen as either evil or neutral. The golden age is in the future and can be achieved following the teachings of the prophet. The Rastafarian religion described in the "Ethnography" section in this chapter is a good example of a vitalist religion. Though it is not specifically religious, another example of a vitalism with which most Americans are familiar is Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. In that speech, King describes a future where "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood" and where children "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." King thus looks ahead to a then unprecedented chapter in American history.

**nativism** Focusing on the return of society to an earlier time that believers understand as better, more holy, than the current era.

**vitalism** Looking toward the creation of a utopian future that does not resemble a past golden age.

Often, the poor and powerless in a society create religions that challenge those of the mainstream. Such religions may rationalize their lower social position and emphasize an afterlife in which their suffering will be rewarded. In some cases, these religions have a **messianic** outlook; they focus on the coming of a special individual who will usher in a utopian world. Other religions are **millenarian**; they look to a future cataclysm or disaster that will destroy the current world and establish in its wake a world characterized by their version of justice. In many messianic and millenarian religions, members participate in rituals that give individuals direct access to supernatural power. They experience states of ecstasy heightened by singing, dancing, handling dangerous objects such as snakes, or using drugs.

The holiness churches common in Appalachia among coal miners and other rural poor who lead difficult and dangerous lives are a good example of a religion that has emerged in response to poverty and hardship. In church services, loud music, singing, and dancing cause some members to experience “being filled with the Holy Spirit.” In this ecstatic state, they handle poisonous snakes, frequently throwing them at each other. Snake handlers are frequently bit and sometimes die. However, for members, snake handling proves that “Jesus has the power to deliver them from death here and now” (Daugherty 1993:344). For holiness congregation members, practices such as snake handling, faith healing, and glossolalia (speaking in tongues) are daily demonstrations of their ability to gain access to God’s power. The fact that social elites are rarely members of such groups is proof that holiness members have access to forms of power that social elites lack (T. Burton 1993; Covington 1995).

Religious **syncretism** is often found among deeply oppressed people. In syncretism, people merge two or more religious traditions, hiding the beliefs, symbols, and practices of one behind similar attributes of the other. Santeria, an African-based religion originating in Cuba, is a good example (J. Murphy 1989). Santeria emerged from slave society. Europeans attempted to suppress African religions, but the slaves resisted by combining African religion, Catholicism, and French spiritualism to create a new religion (Lefever 1996). They identified African deities, called **orichas**, with Catholic saints and used them for traditional purposes: curing, casting spells, and influencing other aspects of the worshipper’s life. In this way, they could appear to practice Catholicism to their masters as they continued to practice their own religions as well. Each **oricha**-saint has distinct attributes and is believed to control a specific aspect of human life. For example, Orunmila, identified with Saint Francis of Assisi, is believed to know each person’s destiny and can therefore give guidance about how to improve one’s fate. Santeria has spread through the Spanish Caribbean, Brazil, and North America, taking different forms in different locations.



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Santeria is a syncretic religion that combines elements of the Yoruba religion from Africa with elements of Catholicism. In Santeria, Yoruba **orichas** are combined with Catholic saints. In this picture from Cuba, a Santeria devotee holds a saint’s image during a ceremony.

## Religious Change in Native North America

The history of native North America provides a particularly good example of religious innovation. The European and (involuntary) African invasion brought disaster to Native American societies. Disease, warfare, and technological change undermined traditional native lifeways and belief systems. In this situation, a series of prophetic and religious movements emerged. These included the prophetic movements of Handsome Lake, the Delaware Prophet, the Shawnee Prophet, and the Ghost Dance movement. As with the Rastafarian movement described in the “Ethnography” box, the timing and particular beliefs of these movements were closely tied to the social and political positions of their followers.

The visions of the **Ghost Dance** prophets of the second half of the 19th century were directly related to the expansion of Euro-American power. In the late 1860s, Wodziwab, a Northern Paiute Indian living in the Sierra Nevada, became the first Ghost Dance prophet. Wovoka,

**messianic** Focusing on the coming of an individual who will usher in a utopian world.

**millenarian** Focusing on a coming catastrophe will signal the beginning of a new age and the eventual establishment of paradise.

**syncretism** The merging of elements of two or more religious traditions to produce a new religion.

**oricha** An African deity identified with a Catholic saint in Voodoo and Santeria.

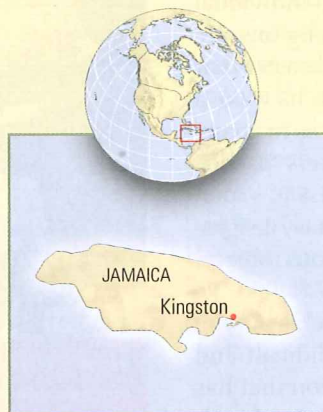
**Ghost Dance** A Native American religious movement of the late 19th century.

## The Rastafari: Religion and Resistance to Domination

The Rastafari religion began on the Caribbean island of Jamaica in the 1930s, a time when much of the Jamaican peasantry was being incorporated into the emerging capitalist economy as wage labor. Since that time, the Rastafari have spread throughout the Caribbean, into parts of the African states of Kenya and Ethiopia, and to the urban centers of the United States, England, and Canada. The Rastafari are an example of the successful emergence of a new religion that resists the culture that surrounds it.

In the 19th century, after slavery had ended in Jamaica, a peasant economy developed, organized around a system of localized, small-scale exchanges involving interpersonal networks of extended kin. But by the 1920s, capitalism, primarily in the form of the American United Fruit Company, had considerably undermined the peasant economy. Some Jamaicans benefited, but there was substantial racial stratification. Whites and mulattos accumulated wealth at the expense of black peasants. Lacking land or wages, these peasants soon found themselves penniless. As Jamaica became increasingly tied to the capital provided by the international economy, the pool of landless unemployed grew. By the mid-1930s, they numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

It was out of this milieu that the Rastafarians emerged. In 1930, Ras (Duke) Tafari was crowned emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. In Jamaica, the splendid coronation ceremonies, during which Ras Tafari was proclaimed “King of Kings” and “Lion of Judah,” included a retinue of European dignitaries paying homage to the emperor and drew enormous publicity. Shortly after this event, Leonard Howell, a former cook in the U.S. Army (Lewis 1998), had a prophetic revelation. Born in 1898, Howell lived in the



United States from 1918 to 1932. Probably influenced by Trinidadian black nationalist George Padmore (Chevannes 1994), on his return to Jamaica in 1932 Howell declared that the coronation of Haile Selassie fulfilled biblical prophecies: Haile Selassie was the messiah and the hope of freedom for all black people. Howell proclaimed:

People, you are poor but you are rich, because God planted mines of diamonds and gold for you in Africa, your homeland. Our King has come to redeem you home to your motherland, Africa. (W. Lewis 1993)

Although Howell is generally credited with being the first preacher of Rastafari, others had similar visions—among them, Robert Hinds, Joseph (Teacher) Hibbert, and Archibald Dunkley.

The Rasta leaders founded communities in and around Kingston, Jamaica, that emphasized what they understood as traditional African values. Haile Selassie became their central symbol, embodying the value of cooperative work efforts, respect for life, and the unity of all peoples of African descent. Through their belief that he is the messiah (a faith that his overthrow and

assassination in 1974 did nothing to diminish), the Rastas affirm blackness and their African roots. Through him, they proclaim their rejection of the values of capitalist society and the competitive marketplace.

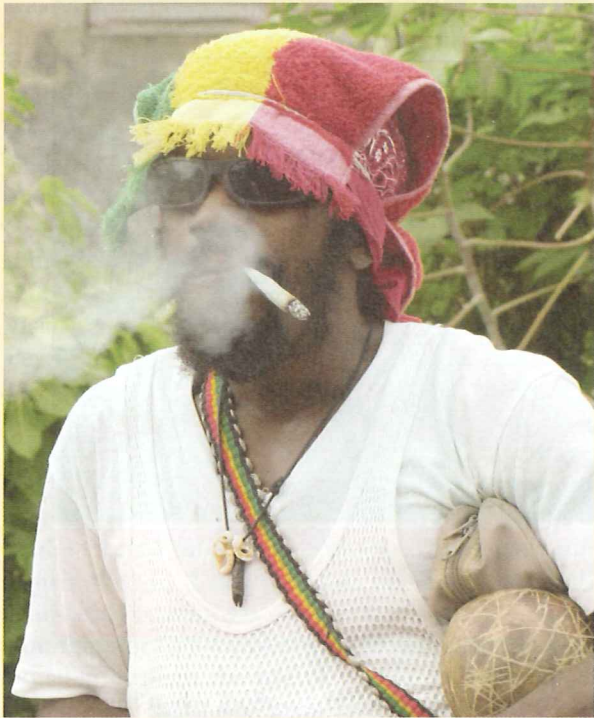
A central theme in Rasta philosophy is return to Africa. The concept of return has several meanings. It may mean a literal passage to Africa, and some Rastas did actually move to Africa (though with little economic or social success). Alternatively, return may be interpreted as a call to live what Rastafarians believe are African lifestyles in whichever country they find themselves.

Two other important symbols of Rastafarian culture are the use of marijuana and a special vocabulary. The use of ganja (marijuana) has been common on Jamaican agricultural estates since the turn of the century and is considered a legitimate part of Jamaican working-class life. Although it was illegal, the upper classes approved of ganja use because it acted as a stimulant and an incentive to work. Rastafari, however, have reversed these meanings. To them, ganja is a tool of illumination. They use it to stimulate discussion at “reasoning sessions,” where they gather to interpret biblical passages and to share beliefs about freedom, slavery, colonialism, and racism. Ganja, they believe, allows them to see through the evils of the bourgeois world, understand the roots of their oppression, and verify the authenticity of the Rasta lifestyle. Thus, whereas traditional use of ganja in Jamaica supported the dominant society, Rasta use subverts it.

In addition, the illegal sale of marijuana is part of the underground economy of many Rasta groups. The networks for growing it, preparing it for sale, and distributing

the second Ghost Dance prophet, was the son of an early follower of Wodziwab and had probably seen the Ghost Dance and heard its prophecies as a boy. Both prophets foresaw that the ancestors would return on an immense train. Following this event, a cataclysm would swallow

up all the whites but leave their goods behind for the Native Americans who became his followers. Heaven on earth would follow, and the Great Spirit would return to live with the people (de Waal Malefijt 1968:344; Mooney 1973:771/1896). Wodziwab and Wovoka taught that the



Rastafarians are members of a religion of resistance that started in the 1930s.

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suffixes, such as *ital* for *vital*; and the replacement of such diminutive prefixes as *under-* and *sub-* by their opposites. For example, *understand* is rendered *overstand*. For Rastas, the use of *I*-centered words focuses attention on the radical equality of all people and their identity with God. As one said:

Who is you? There is no you. There is only I, I and I. I is you, I is God, I is I. . . . We are all each other and one with God because it is the same life energy that flows within all of us (in Homiak 1998:167).

Rejecting aspirations of social mobility and participation in wage labor, the Rastas fashion a livelihood by forming networks of cooperation. In Jamaica,

they engage in fishing, handicrafts, and hustling in the cities and, in the rural areas, in family-based subsistence agriculture with minimal involvement in the market economy. The small group of Rastas living in Shashemane, Ethiopia, rely on their agricultural produce and financial donations from abroad. In urban England, Canada, and the United States, Rasta economic activities tend to be small-scale cooperative businesses such as eateries, craft shops, small clothing stores, and the illegal sale of marijuana. All of these enterprises are based on the productivity of extended family networks, and Rastafari circulate their wealth through the community in

the form of gifts, loans, parties, and many other personalized relationships.

The Rastas draw boundaries around themselves to exclude the outside world from participation in their economic and social relationships. There is strong solidarity against outsiders, particularly those in positions of authority. Rastas have rejected much of the social and psychological orientation of modern society, which they call Babylon. Although much of Rastafarian culture reflects the milieu out of which it emerged, including sources in the Hebrew and Christian testaments, Rastas have created a new religion and culture that allow them to survive in a manner consistent with their own worldview.

#### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. The Rasta movement arose in Jamaica but has gained enormous popularity worldwide. What sorts of people are likely to be attracted to the Rasta message, and what elements of that message are likely to be particularly appealing to them?
2. Rastafarians are probably better known worldwide for their association with reggae music than with specific religious beliefs. Consider a reggae song by a major artist such as Bob Marley, Burning Spear, or Peter Tosh (do some research if you are not familiar with any of these artists). How do the lyrics reflect Rasta religious belief?
3. There are many new religions in the United States. Are any of them similar to the Rasta movement? In what ways are they similar?

Source: Adapted with permission from William F. Lewis, *Soul Rebels: The Rastafari*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1993.

it are all based on friendship, alliances, and reciprocity. Although the Rastas have encountered difficulties with law enforcement in connection with their use and sale of marijuana, ganja has provided the Rastas with a livelihood that allows them independence and freedom from the capitalist system, a position they value highly. Ultimately, many Rastafarians hope that their world will become more and more based on reciprocity and redistribution and that money as a medium of exchange will disappear from their community.

Rastafarian linguistic usages include the invention of *I*-centered words, phrases, and

arrival of paradise could be hastened by specific rituals, including a series of dances, songs, and, in the case of Wovoka, the wearing of special clothing painted with designs he saw in his visions. Some of Wovoka's followers believed that these shirts had the power to protect

them from bullets. Although Wovoka called for peace with the whites, he also taught that the whites would either be carried away by high winds or become Indians (Lesser 1933), and he urged Indians to return to their traditional practices.



© The Granger Collection

Some followers of the ghost dance prophet Wovoka believed that special ghost shirts would protect them from gunfire, but 350 Indian men, women, and children died at the massacre at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, including the individual who wore this ghost shirt.

The Ghost Dance prophecy was welcomed by many Native Americans who sent representatives to speak with Wovoka and learn the rituals of the Ghost Dance. The tribes heard the Ghost Dance vision in diverse ways, but it received its most radical interpretation among the Sioux, for whom the conditions of conquest and reservation life were particularly oppressive. Although the Sioux had defeated Custer at the Little Big Horn in 1876, they were eventually forced into submission. Starved and expected to survive by agriculture on nonproductive lands, they found a vision that promised the disappearance of their oppressors and the return of traditional ways extremely appealing.

During the fall of 1890, Ghost Dancing spread among the Sioux. Government agents were frightened by the popularity of the dance and the Sioux belief that the whites would shortly disappear. They ordered the Sioux to stop the dance; some but not all Sioux groups obeyed. The government tried to suppress the remaining dancers, but they fled into the badlands to perform the Ghost Dance ceremonies and await the cataclysm that would sweep the oppressors from the plains. A complex series of moves followed as the government tried to force an end to the Ghost Dance. The final act of the drama oc-

curred on December 28 and 29, 1890, when the Seventh Cavalry, the same unit that had been destroyed by the Sioux at the Little Bighorn, captured the last remaining band of Ghost Dancers. In the battle that ensued at Wounded Knee, about 350 Sioux Ghost Dancers, including many women and children, were killed, and the notion that doing Ghost Dance rituals would hasten the disappearance of the whites or protect Native Americans from them lost credibility.

The Ghost Dance religion did not end with the battle at Wounded Knee. Especially in Oklahoma, people continued to do the Ghost Dance into the 1930s, and one group of adherents continued to practice until the 1960s (Kehoe 1989). However, after Wounded Knee, the Ghost Dance declined, and by the first years of the 20th century, few people practiced it.

Another religion that appeared at about the same time as the Ghost Dance, however, prospered and has become a major force in Native American communities. The **Native American Church**, sometimes known as the peyote religion, now has between 250,000 and 500,000 members in the United States and Canada (“For Indian Church” 1995; “Field Full of Buttons” 1999).

A small, hallucinogenic cactus, peyote grows only in south Texas and northern Mexico. Although peyote has long been used in religious rituals by indigenous peoples in Mexico and South Texas, until the late 19th century it did not spread from this area. The spread of the modern peyote ceremony was due largely to the ef-

**Native American Church** A religious revitalization movement among Native Americans, also known as the peyote religion.

forts of Comanche, Kiowa, and Caddo leaders, including Quannah Parker, Apiaton (Wooden Lance), and John Wilson. Some of them had visited Wovoka, the Ghost Dance prophet, but all had rejected his teachings (Stewart 1987:80). Peyote leaders (called Roadmen) taught that God was accessible to Indians through the sacrament of peyote. In all-night meetings, members of the Native American Church chew peyote, pray and sing, and experience the presence of God. Quannah Parker said, "When an Indian Peyotist goes to [a peyote ceremonial meeting] he talks to God, and not about what man has written in the scriptures about what God said" (quoted in Brito 1989:14).

Although the use of a hallucinogen to achieve communion with the supernatural may seem an affront to mainstream American society, church leaders preached a vision they called the **Peyote Road**. The elements of the Peyote Road include abstinence from alcohol, attentiveness to family obligations, marital fidelity, self-support, helpfulness among members of the group, and attempting to live at peace with all peoples (Brito 1989; Stewart 1987). These are all values that are likely to be supported by Americans of any ethnic origin. The teachings of the Native American Church provide a pathway through which Native Americans can operate successfully in mainstream American society. At the same time, the notion that, for Native Americans, communion with God is possible through the use of peyote and the rituals surrounding it separates them from other Americans and allows them to affirm their identity. Thus, the church has been successful because it simultaneously allows its members to reinforce their identity and adapt to the demands of the larger society.

## Fundamentalism and Religious Change

In the past two decades, there has been an increase in religious fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism is implicated in the attacks of 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, attacks in London and Madrid, the continuing violence in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank, as well as numerous other conflicts around the world. Membership in American Christian denominations that describe themselves as fundamentalist has ballooned. For example, between 1960 and 2000, membership in various Pentecostal churches rose from about 2 million to about 12 million. At the same time membership in less conservative churches fell. The Episcopal Church, for example, had about 3.5 million members in 1960 but had fallen to about 2 million by 2000. Jewish ultraorthodox groups such as the Lubavitch Hassidim have also been growing. Christian fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism are most in the news in the United States, but other fundamentalisms have been growing in importance as well. For example, in India, there are numerous Hindu fundamentalist organizations including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which plays a very important role in national politics.

Although members of fundamentalist groups sometimes see their religious beliefs as unchanging, the rise of fundamentalism is an important religious change. Further, fundamentalist movements tend to have specific original leaders and points of origin. For example, much of the American fundamentalist movement began with the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, a series of books published between 1910 and 1915. More than 3 million copies of these books were given to American Christian religious leaders. Modern Islamic fundamentalism is associated with the work of Sayyid Qutb (born in the Egyptian village of Musha described in Chapter 6) and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The rise of fundamentalism raises important questions for anthropologists. Three questions seem particularly critical. First, it is clear that the people we call fundamentalist have greatly varying beliefs. Hindu and Christian fundamentalists will find little to agree upon. Despite differences in belief, do fundamentalist groups have commonalities? Second, have these groups emerged in response to purely local forces or are there global forces at work that have encouraged the development of fundamentalism in so many different locations? Finally, is fundamentalism a problem and if so, what should be done about it? None of these questions can be answered easily or definitively, but we can propose some partial explanations.

Scholars have shown that fundamentalisms throughout the world have similar properties. Fundamentalists tend to see religion as the basis for both personal and communal identity. They tend to believe that there is a single unified truth and that they can possess and understand it. They tend to envision themselves as fighting in a cosmic struggle of good against evil. In this battle, demonizing the opposition is a perfectly appropriate tactic. Fundamentalists tend to perceive themselves as a persecuted minority even when this is not the case. They are selective about which parts of their tradition they emphasize and which parts of modernity they accept and reject (Almond, Sivan, and Appleby 1995; Haddon and Shupe 1989).

Determining the reasons for the surge in the popularity of fundamentalism is enormously difficult. To some degree, the pattern of emergence fits the model described in this chapter. In the past 50 years, the world has faced truly revolutionary changes. The forces of technology and global capitalism have permeated societies and brought people of disparate cultures together in a vast global network. However, this process has not been peaceful and has not produced equity. Traditional livelihoods, from cloth dying in West Africa to family farming

**Peyote Road** The moral principles followed by members of the Native American Church.



in the Midwestern United States, have been undermined. The gap between the wealthy and the poor, both within societies and between them, has grown. Governments that seemed to offer the possibility of peace and prosperity have been discredited. Faced with profound change, people look for stability and certainty. For some, fundamentalism of various kinds seems to hold this promise. Much (but not all) fundamentalism is nativistic; it presents a call to purification, to a return to the society and values of an earlier time, a time that believers understand as better, more holy, than the current era. However, it is also true that specific local histories play an extremely important role in the emergence of fundamentalisms. It would be impossible, for example, to explain the appearance of the fundamentalist radical group Hamas without reference to specific aspects of the long Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Similarly, the development of the Taliban is directly related to the events surrounding the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

The forces that create rich ground for fundamentalism do not seem likely to abate any time soon. In fact, continual political and technological change seems likely to create even more extreme dislocations in the future.

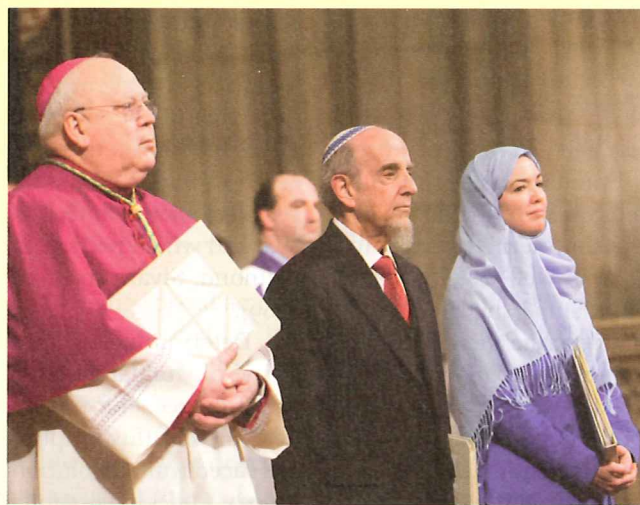
The various fundamentalisms will probably continue to experience strong growth. This poses an extraordinarily difficult problem. On the one hand, people are surely entitled to their religious beliefs. The vast majority of people who might be classified as fundamentalist are innocent of any wrongdoing; they neither promote nor condone violence. They live peacefully with neighbors of different religious beliefs. On the other hand, fundamentalist beliefs have been repeatedly implicated in murderous violence: from the bombings of abortion clinics and the Olympic Games in Atlanta to the 9/11 attacks on the United States to the repeated anti-Muslim and anti-Sikh violence perpetrated by Hindu fundamentalists in India.

There is no doubt that much violence is enflamed by the harsh political and economic conditions of life and by the subversion of long-standing cultural practices. Promoting prosperity, more equitable distribution of resources, greater cultural sensitivity, and more responsive and honest government will certainly reduce popular support for violence. However, a small percentage of believers in all fundamentalist traditions understand the world in absolutist terms and see violence as a divinely ordained response.

## The Global and the Local: The Globalization of Religion in America

Although many people think of the United States as having an extremely secular culture, it is actually one of the world's most religious industrialized nations. When the French traveler and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1831, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck his attention (1956: 319/1835–1840). Additionally, America has a long history of religious diversity. In that same era, the French diplomat Talleyrand is reported to have complained that the United States had 32 religions but only one sauce (Smith 2002).

Today, 96 percent of Americans say they believe in God. Church attendance has risen steadily in recent years (Warner 2005). In 1940, only about 37 percent of



The Most Rev. Francisco González, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, and Dr. Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America, join others including Dr. Uma Mysorekar, president of the Hindu Temple Society of North America, and Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, at the Presidential Inaugural prayer service in January 2009.

Americans attended church regularly; today, according to the world values survey (Morin 1998), 44 percent do. This compares with 27 percent in Great Britain, 21 percent in France, and 4 percent in Sweden.

Not only are more Americans participating in religion, but religious diversity is increasing. There have been Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities in America for more than a century, but these groups have grown enormously over the past several decades. In *A New Religious America* (2001) Diana Eck of Harvard University's Pluralism Project reports

that the changes in U.S. immigration policies that have drawn new immigrants from India, Pakistan, China, Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere have resulted in large in-

creases in minority religions. These religions have drawn new American converts as well.

In the 1970s, members of non-Judeo-Christian religions accounted for less than 1 percent of the U.S. population. By the early 2000s, that number had grown to about 2.5 percent. Estimates of the membership of many religions are highly controversial, but in rough numbers, the Buddhist population is currently about 2.3 million and the Hindu population about 1.1 million (Smith 2002). According to Eck (2003:38), Los Angeles, home to many Asian immigrants, is “the most complex Buddhist city on Earth.” Estimates of the Muslim population range from about 2 million (Smith 2001) to more than twice that number.

One result of the growth of these religions has been an explosion in the construction of places of worship. There are Buddhist and Hindu temples, mosques, and Islamic learning centers in most large American cities. Although these celebrate their respective traditions, they have in many cases become quite Americanized, offering classes, youth programs, and scout troops, programs similar to those often offered by churches and synagogues.

Eck points out that as religions expand they often meet with hostility. Thus, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists have frequently faced opposition from local groups and corporations. Zoning boards have sometimes denied them permission to build places of worship, and corporations sometimes tried to prohibit traditional garb such as head scarves. The conservative Christian Family Research Council attacked the U.S. House of Representatives for allowing a Hindu to offer the daily prayer. Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition, has repeatedly attacked Islam, calling it a religion that seeks to control, dominate, or, if need be, destroy others.

Despite some incidents of bigotry, most Americans have responded with tolerance. A good indication of this

was the public reaction to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Although in the month that followed the attack there were about 700 hate crimes committed against Muslims and Hindus, the overwhelming majority of Americans rejected hatred and reacted with support. In one incident, an attack on a mosque in Toledo, a Christian radio station called for people to come to the mosque and pray in solidarity with its members. More than 1500 individuals of all faiths came to join hands around the mosque. Around the nation, political and religious leaders from all groups and parties called for tolerance and support for the American Muslim community.

Mosques and temples are increasingly joining churches and synagogues on the American landscape. But if the acceptance of religious diversity holds a promise for members of minority religions, it hides a danger as well. Pressures for assimilation are strong, and it is difficult for members of minority religions to preserve their beliefs, practices, and identity. For example, the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey showed that Asian Americans are substantially more likely to indicate no religious identity than other racial or ethnic groups (Kosmin and Keysar 2009).

### Key Questions

1. Do you believe the increasing diversity of religion in America will result in meaningful changes in American politics?
2. In many countries, religious groups have fought each other. Thus far, this has not happened in the United States. Why do you think this is the case? Will there be religious violence in the American future?
3. How have religions in America influenced each other? Have you incorporated beliefs and practices from various religions in your own beliefs? Will you?

## Summary

1. **What characteristics do all religions have in common?** The enormous variety in people’s beliefs and practices worldwide makes religion difficult to define. However, all religions are composed of stories, make extensive use of symbols, have immeasurable beings, powers, and states, have rituals, have specific practitioners, and undergo change.
2. **Describe several functions of religion.** Through religion, people create meaning and order in their world. Religion has many functions. Some of the most significant are explaining aspects of the physical and social environment, reducing anxiety in risky situations, increasing social solidarity, educating, ensuring conformity, maintaining social inequalities, and regulating the re-

lationship of a group of people to their natural environment.

3. **What are sacred narratives and what roles do they play in religion?** Sacred narratives, sometimes called myths, are stories that express religious ideas. Sacred narratives explain and validate or legitimize beliefs, values, and customs.
4. **What is the importance of symbols in religion?** Religious symbols are a means by which abstract ideas can be expressed in terms that most people can grasp.
5. **What roles do supernatural beings and powers play in religion?** Most religions assume the world to be populated with nonempirical beings. Religions teach that such

beings have life, personality, and power. Some common forms are gods, spirits, and tricksters. Additionally, religions usually postulate that people, objects, or places may be imbued with spiritual power, or mana.

6. **What is liminality and what is its importance in religion?** Many rituals involve liminality, or “betweenness.” In states of liminality normal social rules may be overturned and people may experience temporary states of equality and oneness, or *communitas*.
7. **What is a rite of passage?** A rite of passage is a public ritual that marks a person’s transition from one status to another. Examples of rites of passage include initiation rituals, marriages, and funerals.
8. **What is a rite of intensification?** A rite of intensification is a ritual that strengthens group identity and reinforces the values and norms of the community. Rites of intensification often involve the use of totems, animals, plants, or other aspects of the natural world that are held to be ancestral to a group or have a strong relationship with it.
9. **What are prayer, sacrifice, and magic? What are critical differences among them?** Prayer, sacrifice, and magic are rituals used by individuals and groups to interact with the world of the supernatural. Most religions include examples of all three. The key difference between the three is the degree to which people believe their own actions determine outcomes. Also common is the use of divination, a religious technique to discover the hidden.
10. **What are shamans and where are they found?** Shamans are religious practitioners whose legitimacy depends on their ability to achieve direct contact with the supernatural world. They are not members of bureaucracies and often mediate between their communities and the supernatural world. Shamans are found in most societies.
11. **What are priests and where are they found?** Priests are professional religious specialists who hold offices in bureaucracies. Although priests’ authority depends on their official positions, they may also use ecstatic techniques to contact the supernatural. Priests are typical of socially stratified societies.
12. **What is the difference between witchcraft and sorcery?** Witchcraft and sorcery are common elements of belief in many societies. Some anthropologists differentiate between witches and sorcerers. Witches are people who unconsciously use their evil thoughts to harm people. Sorcerers use magic for both good and evil purposes.
13. **What are the critical functions of accusations of witchcraft and sorcery?** Although people do perform magic, accusations that others are sorcerers or witches probably have a greater effect on society. Such accusations may function to promote conformity and explain catastrophic events.
14. **What are the varieties of religious prophecy and under what conditions are they most likely to occur?** Prophecies can be described as looking back to a previous time (nativistic), looking forward to a utopian future (vitalistic), or merging elements of two or more religious systems (syncretic). Prophecies are most likely to be successful under conditions of oppression, radical change, and loss of identity.
15. **What was the Ghost Dance and what is the Native American Church?** The Ghost Dance was a Native American religious movement of the late 19th century. Ghost Dance prophets envisioned the restoration of Native American power in the western United States. The Native American Church is a religious movement originating in the 19th century and teaching that God is accessible to Native Americans through the use of peyote.
16. **Under what conditions does fundamentalism occur and what are its characteristics?** Fundamentalism tends to occur in times of rapid change. Fundamentalists view religion as the basis for both personal and communal identity and believe that there is a single truth that they can know. They understand the world as a battle between good and evil and believe they are a persecuted minority even when this is not the case. Fundamentalists are selective about the parts of their tradition they emphasize and the parts of modernity they reject.

## Key Terms

animatism	millenarian	rite of passage
animism	monotheism	ritual
antistructure	multivalent	sacred narratives
communitas	myths	sacrifice
contagious magic	Native American Church	shaman
cosmology	nativism	sorcery
divination	<i>oricha</i>	syncretism
Ghost Dance	Peyote Road	totem
god	pharmacopoeia	totemism
imitative magic	polytheism	trickster
liminal	prayer	vision quest
magic	priest	vitalism
mana	religion	Wiccan (or neopagan)
messianic	rite of intensification	witchcraft

## Suggested Readings

Brown, Karen McCarthy. 2001. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press. This outstanding person-centered account illustrates that ethnography is a human relationship and introduces a fascinating religion to the reader.

Covington, Dennis. 1995. *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. This powerful account of a snake-handling church in Alabama gives readers a sense of the meaning of holiness worship and raises important questions.

Fadiman, Anne. 1998. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. In this engrossing and

tragic book Fadiman explores the conflicts between spiritual and scientific understandings of disease. Lia Lee, an infant Hmong immigrant, has seizures. Western doctors diagnosed the problem as epilepsy, but her parents understood her illness as caused by her soul wandering.

Warms, Richard L. James Garber, and R. Jon McGee. 2009 *Sacred Realms: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. A comprehensive reader on the anthropology of religion including essays on religion and society, altered state experiences, healing and bewitching, and new religious movements.