Keith A. Roberts ▪ David Yamane

RELIGION

in Sociological Perspective

▪ SEVENTH EDITION ▪

Religion in Sociological Perspective

Seventh Edition

In Memory and Honor of
Keith A. Roberts
(1947–2018)

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Preface

DAVID YAMANE

An Invitation to Students

Imagine you just dropped by a large dormitory or apartment complex where hundreds of your fellow students have been gathered all day to relax and socialize. (Some of you will require less imagination than others to conjure up this image.) There are dozens of groups of 3, 5, or 10 friends and acquaintances chatting away, with people constantly breaking off or breaking in to join new conversations. Some are more quiet, some more animated. Some are very diverse—involving people from different genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities, religions, perhaps even speaking different languages. But most are not. Some are, in fact, quite homogenous and exclusive, like those involving people who are let up onto the balconies with the best views or to the best spots at poolside or where the best food is being served.

Wanting to get the broadest and deepest understanding of what is going on, you make your way through the gathering quickly but systematically. You join as many conversations as you can, with as many different people as you can, being careful not to dwell too long in any single one. But you are only one person, and there is only so much time in the day, so you know you are only able to see a part of everything that happened. Try as you might, there are things that you know you missed entirely. But you did your best.

I would like to suggest that this scenario and your role in it is similar to the sociology of religion and my role as a textbook author. The sociology of religion is a large collection of conversations among scholars, some which have been ongoing for decades. Some of these conversations are more privileged than others within the field, as are some voices within each conversation. This can lead to exclusions and omissions. Fortunately, these conversations are dynamic not static. The sociology of religion as a field is constantly evolving as more and new voices join and new aspects of the social world emerge or are discovered.

My role as a textbook author is to get into as many of these conversations as possible. I want to try to grasp and convey what the current state of scholarship is in various parts of the field, how it got to be that way, what might be missing, and where it could or should be going.

Given that I am just one person trying to survey a vast field, I have to try to understand each part fairly quickly, which often means partially. Nevertheless, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* attempts to captures the breadth and depth of these multiple, diverse, and complex conversations as faithfully as possible, even though I know the accumulated knowledge captured here is neither complete nor final. It is in need of updating, even before you read this first page.

As you read and think and talk about the ideas in this textbook, I hope you will imagine yourself becoming part of the ongoing conversations that define the sociology of religion. Although you first need to listen to hear what scholars have been saying about the various issues covered in these 14 chapters, at some point you should develop your own perspective on the material. Of course, I hope you will learn to do this like a good sociologist of religion: in dialogue with past and present scholarship and the contemporary social world.

Resources for Instructors

This textbook is unique among texts in the sociology of religion in providing an instructor's manual and a test bank, as well as ancillary materials for students. All of these are available at edge.sagepub.com/rsp7e. The instructor's manual is designed to provide ideas for creative teaching. Active learning-based teaching strategies are provided for each chapter, including several simulation games, in-class writing exercises, simple class surveys, small group work ideas, film ideas, and discussion questions. We have also partnered with the Association of Religion Data Archives (the ARDA) to connect teaching and learning resources on their website to specific chapters of this book. The test bank includes both essay and multiple-choice test questions for each chapter and essay ideas for a comprehensive final examination. To obtain access to these resources, please contact your SAGE sales representative or visit edge.sagepub.com/rsp7e.

A Unique Program Supporting Teaching of Sociology

The first named author of this textbook, Keith A. Roberts, was instrumental in the founding of a unique program to support and enhance the quality of college teaching. The SAGE Publishing Keith Roberts Teaching Innovations Award is designed to prepare a new generation of scholars within the teaching movement in sociology. Awardees are reimbursed for expenses incurred while attending the daylong American Sociological Association (ASA) Section on Teaching and Learning workshop held annually before the main ASA meetings. The awards are funded through the generosity of SAGE Publishing and many of its authors who donate a portion of their royalties. As of 2019, 300 scholars have received over $300,000 through the program. Graduate students and pre-tenure faculty interested in applying should visit the award page on the SAGE Publishing website.

Thank You, Previous Reviewers

A great many people have improved this textbook over the years by acting as formal reviewers for all or part of it. The reviewers for earlier editions of *Religion in Sociological Perspective* include: Charles Bonjean, David Bromley, Dennis J. Cole, Susan Cox, James D. Davidson, Barbara J. Denison, Gerald Falk, Lori L. Fazzino, Roger Finke, Sharon Georgianna, John W. Hawthorne, Tom Kearin, Fred Kniss, James R. Koch, Lester Kurtz, Martin Laskin, Marty Laubach, Harry LeFever,

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Acknowledgments

The first four editions of this text were a solo "labor of love" by Keith Roberts. When the publisher began asking about a 5th edition over a decade ago, Keith realized he was too involved in continual revisions of his introductory book (*Our Social World*, coauthored with Jeanne Ballantine and Kathleen Korgen) to complete the necessary revisions himself. I was brought on board to handle the revisions for the 5th edition (published in 2012) and 6th edition (published in 2016), but Keith remained as involved as he could and made important contributions to both.

Keith was diagnosed with cancer in late 2016 and succumbed to the disease in July 2018. This delayed the publication of this 7th edition as I could not motivate myself to work on it. Eventually, I saw the work as a way for me to honor Keith Roberts's contributions to the discipline of sociology. As much as I hope students enjoy learning from it, I hope even more that Keith is proud of my effort to keep his considerable legacy alive.

Jeff Lasser, sociology editor at SAGE, has been very patient as I have struggled to complete this revision. Tiara Beatty (editorial assistant), Veronica Stapleton Hooper (production editor), and Exeter Premedia Services Private Ltd (copy editor) also played key roles in getting this book in your hands.

I have been a participant in and observer of the sociology of religion for nearly 30 years now. In that time, I have had more conversation partners than I can name here, though the length of the Bibliography highlights my many intellectual debts.

Through it all, I have been blessed with three wonderful children, Paul, Hannah, and Mark, and a generous and loving wife, Sandy, all of whom make this work possible and meaningful.

If you have suggestions for future editions of this textbook or the supplementary materials, please send them to me at yamaned@wfu.edu.

David Yamane
Wake Forest University

About the Authors

Keith A. Roberts (1947–2018) was professor emeritus of sociology at Hanover College in Indiana. In 2000, he received the Hans O. Mauksch Award for Distinguished Contributions to Undergraduate Sociology from the ASA Section on Teaching and Learning, and in 2010, his work in the scholarship of teaching and learning was recognized with the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award.

David Yamane is professor of sociology at Wake Forest University. He is author, coauthor, or editor of six books in the sociology of religion and is former editor of the journal *Sociology of Religion*. In 2007, he was chosen by Wake Forest students to receive the Kulynych Family Omicron Delta Kappa Award for Contribution to Student Life.

PART

I

Introduction to the Sociology of Religion

Before we delve too deeply into our topic, we must establish some common assumptions and understandings. The reader need not agree with the authors, but at least the reader should know how the authors are approaching the sociological study of religion. This is the purpose of the first three chapters. We are laying the groundwork for a shared investigation.

In Chapter 1, we explore what we mean by religion and the importance of different definitions of "religion" as different "ways of seeing" a complex, multifaceted social phenomenon. Then in Chapter 2, we survey the historical development of the sociology of religion from the founding of the discipline of sociology in the 19th century to today. Last, in Chapter 3, we examine what it means to take a *social scientific* approach to the study of religion, including the unique perspectives and methodological assumptions of sociology as a discipline.

CHAPTER

1

What Do We Mean by the Term *Religion*?

Here are some questions to ponder as you read this chapter:

- What is religion? What makes something "religious"?
- Why might one's definition of religion create blinders that cause one to include some but also exclude other important phenomena?
- What does it mean to think of definitions as "tools" that are not true or false but more or less useful?
- What does the concept of invisible religion add to the conversation about how to define religion?
- How are religion and spirituality similar or different?

What do we mean by the term *religion*? What would seem to be one of the easiest questions to answer is actually one of the most complex. To students who have never studied the sociology of religion, the definition of religion may seem clear. Certainly everyone knows what religion is, right? Let's get on with more important issues! Yet we dare not be so hasty. Some definitions are so narrow and specific as to exclude Buddhism as a religion. Other definitions are so broad and inclusive that many social behaviors may be considered forms of religion—including patriotism, systematic racism, or any other core set of values and beliefs that provides an individual or community with a sense of worth and meaning in life.

We must begin our analysis, then, by exploring the question of what it is we intend to study. What, after all, is religion? We begin to answer this question by recognizing that how we define our subject matter sets boundaries on what are and are not considered legitimate topics or groups for analysis—on what will be included in our studies of "religion" and what will be excluded. In this sense, definitions are "ways of seeing" a complex, multifaceted social reality, and as literary theorist Kenneth Burke observes, "Every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (Burke 1935:70).

An important implication of this approach is that definitions are not mirrors of reality to be judged as "true" or "false," but are *tools* that can been seen by those who use them as more or less *useful* (Berger 1967). As you read and think about the following ways in which social scientists have defined religion, think about which definitions you find more or less useful and why.

Substantive Definitions

Many sociologists employ what are called *substantive* definitions of religion. This approach hinges on identification of the "substance" or "essence" of religion. Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor used this approach in 1873 when he defined religion as "belief in Spiritual Beings" (Tylor [1873] 1958:8). For many people, a reference to God or gods is an essential element in religion. The reason Tylor used the term *spiritual beings* is that many people worship their deceased ancestors. They have little or no concern about gods, as such, but their world is enlivened by many unseen beings. Hence, Tylor saw spiritual beings as a more inclusive term than gods. Some other scholars have reaffirmed Tylor's insistence that religion involves a belief in a Being or beings that are not encountered in normal empirical processes (Spiro 1966).

Trying to define the essence of religion is a difficult task, but it becomes more difficult if our definition is to be applied cross-culturally. In the Western world, we tend to feel that religion is essentially a matter of belief. In fact, some social scientists have attempted to measure the religiosity of people—the extent of their "religiousness"—by determining how orthodox they are. An orthodox person is one who believes in the traditional doctrines of a religion. However, in many cultures, religion is "not so much thought out as danced out" (Marett 1914:xxxi). That is to say, ritual and emotion are primary to religion, and belief is only secondary.

The study of traditional Native American religions shows that these faiths are expressed through tribal practices, prayer, and religious objects, not creeds, dogmas, or theologies (Gill 2004). Scholars studying Orthodox Judaism and Islam also consistently point out that a focus on behavior, rather than on beliefs and attitudes, is characteristic of those faiths (Aslan 2011; Cohen 1983; Moberg 1984). Anthropologists studying non-Western cultures insist that emphasis on belief is a Western bias that causes investigators to miss the underlying thrust of many religions. For example, several observers maintain that any concept of a deity or superhuman beings is peripheral to Buddhism (Benz 1964; Herbrechtsmeier 1993; Zaechner 1967). So a definition that emphasizes a belief in superhuman beings leaves doubt about whether Buddhism is a religion. Strictly speaking, many Buddhist gurus (who are not concerned with superhuman beings) would not be considered to be practicing religion. On the other hand, most common folks around the world who identify themselves as

Buddhists do believe in superhuman beings (Herbrechtsmeier 1993; Orru and Wang 1992; Spiro 1978). What appears at first to be a simple definitional issue on further reflection is very complex.

Another definitional approach that tries to capture the essence of religion but that avoids the requirement of a specific belief was first suggested in 1912 by Émile Durkheim ([1912] 1995), one of the founders of sociology as an academic discipline. Durkheim maintained that a recognition of the division of life into sacred and profane realms allows us to identify religion in any culture. People around the world undergo a psychological shift when engaging in rituals involving sacred objects. This shift involves feelings of awe, fear, and/or majesty. The attitude differs from anything one encounters in the everyday life of these people.

Durkheim recognized that not all individual experiences of awe, fear, or majesty are religious in character. Religion, he maintained, is a communal activity. It involves a social group: "In all history we do not find a single religion without a Church" (Durkheim [1912] 1995:59). The experience of the sacred must fundamentally be a group experience if it is to be identified as religion. Durkheim's formal definition, then, is that "religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim [1912] 1995:62).

This approach is helpful in a great many cases, and it avoids the problem of deciding which specific belief is intrinsically or inherently religious. Yet social scientists who have used this approach have often implied (if not asserted) a dualistic worldview. That is to say, life has a religious (sacred) dimension and a nonreligious (profane) dimension. For example, Durkheim insisted that

> the religious life and the profane life cannot coexist in the same unit of time. It is necessary to assign determined days or periods to the first, from which all profane occupations are excluded.
>
> . . . There is no religion, and, consequently, no society which has not known and practiced this division of time into two distinct parts. (Durkheim [1912] 1995:347)

Historian of religion Mircea Eliade concurred: "For religious [people], space is not homogeneous; he [or she] experiences interruptions in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others" (Eliade 1959:20). These spaces set apart as uniquely special have a sacred character.

While it is true that many people organize their life experience into separate categories, not all do. As we will see later in this chapter, many sociologists of religion have come to question whether a strong distinction between sacred and profane realms of life is useful or whether it creates a false dichotomy in contemporary society. Thomas Luckmann's (1967) concept of invisible religion, Nancy Ammerman's (2014) efforts to find religion in everyday life, and the rediscovery of spirituality (as opposed to or in conjunction with religion) are all ways of challenging the drawing of a bright line between sacred and profane aspects of life.

PHOTO 1.1: Shoes Outside a Mosque

In Islam the inside of the mosque is holy ground, and Muslims recognize this extraordinariness and sacredness by removing their shoes when they enter.

Highlighting the ongoing efforts of sociologists to define their object of study, Christian Smith (2017) has recently offered yet another argument for a substantive definition of religion. Smith focuses not on superhuman *beings* but on superhuman *powers*:

> Religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with these powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding things bad. (Smith 2017:22)

Although Smith does highlight some of what religion *does* (the core of functional definitions, as we will see), his inclusion of superhuman powers limits the practices that can be seen as religious.

An underlying question in this whole debate, then, is whether religion by definition includes only that which has an otherworldly or supernatural or superhuman dimension. What about people whose ultimate value and deepest commitment is to their countries? They have a deep sense of loyalty to their land and will even give their lives to defend it. Their country's way of life provides a profound sense of meaning, purpose, and value. They may shed tears when their national anthem is played. Is this religious behavior? Can nationalism be a form of religion? It is not otherworldly and it is not essentially supernatural (but see Chapter 13 on "civil religion"). Certainly these individuals feel a sort of sacredness toward the nation. Yet this sacredness does not involve the same fear and trembling that Rudolf Otto (1923) and Durkheim ([1912] 1995) describe as part of the sacred attitude. How does the feeling of awe and reverence toward a nation differ from the awe and reverence toward a supernatural being or transcendent realm? Is this difference significant enough to call one experience religious and the other not? These are not easy questions to answer. Some scholars feel that nationalistic behavior as described above *is* religious in character and that a broader definition of religion is appropriate.

This has even caused one prominent scholar to suggest that we simply focus on the sociology of the sacred, even if the behavior is not "religion" in the strictest sense, since anything that is considered "sacred" is likely to interest the sociologist of religion (Demerath 2000).

A major criticism of substantive definitions is that they tend to focus the researcher's attention solely on traditional forms of religion. Substantive definitions direct our attention to the sacred places and practices where we typically expect to find religion. This limits our ability to see people being religious in new ways (like the idea of "lived religion" in this chapter) and to find religion in new places (outside "God boxes," as we say in Chapter 12). Substantive definitions are felt to be too narrow and too tradition-bound, hence blinding researchers to these new modes of religiosity.

Functional Definitions

An alternative to substantive definitions of religion is using functional definitions. These tend to be much more inclusive of diverse forms of "religion" and therefore better able to capture some of the nontraditional forms of religion that the substantive definition misses. Milton Yinger offered one such definition. He suggested that we focus not on what religion essentially *is* but on what it *does* (Yinger 1970). Yinger proposed that we define a social phenomenon as religious if it fulfills the manifest function of religion. (Manifest functions are the *conscious* and *intended* functions of a social pattern or institution; latent functions are unconscious and unintended [Merton 1968].) He asserted that meaning in life is a basic human need, although the nature and intensity of that need will vary among individuals.

Theologian Paul Tillich has described religion as that which is one's "ultimate concern," and Yinger drew on Tillich's understanding in developing his own definition. The underlying conviction is that a fundamental concern of human beings is to understand the purpose of life and the meaning of death, suffering, evil, and injustice (Tillich 1957). In line with this conviction, Yinger wrote, "Religion, then, can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with these ultimate problems of human life" (Yinger 1970:7). Religion helps individuals cope by offering an explanation for these challenges and by providing a strategy to overcome despair, hopelessness, and futility.

Using this type of definition, the range of phenomena that we analyze under the heading *religion* is considerably expanded. Yinger insisted that nontheistic—that is, not involving a god—and even nonsupernatural systems of belief and practice can be appropriate subjects of inquiry for the sociologist of religion. "It is not the nature of *belief*, but the nature of *believing* that requires our study" (Yinger 1970:11). Wherever one sees a closing of the gap between fact and hope, wherever one sees a leap of faith that allows a person to assert that suffering and evil will somehow be defeated, there one sees the manifestations of religion.

Even a secular faith that science and technology will ultimately solve all our problems is, by this definition, a religious phenomenon. Yinger wrote, "A term that already includes, by common consent, the contemplations of a Buddhist monk and

Photo by Bill Branson for National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS)

PHOTO 1.2: Scientists in the Lab

In modern society, a sharp distinction is often drawn between religion and science, but Yinger's broad functional definition of religion suggests that faith in and the practice of science may be a form of religion itself.

the ecstatic visions of a revivalist cult member, human sacrifice, and ethical monotheism may have room in it for science *as a way of life*" (Yinger 1970:12). Intense faith in nationalism, in capitalism, and other objects of deep loyalty may be considered by the student of religion if the object is expected eventually to solve the ultimate human perplexities over the purpose of life and the meaning of death, injustice, and suffering. Yinger argued that if a narrower definition is utilized, one may misidentify (or even miss entirely) religion in a society, particularly in societies undergoing significant cultural change.

This functional definition assumes that all people are to some extent religious. Yinger wrote, "To me, the evidence is decisive: human nature abhors a vacuum in systems of faith. This is not, then, a period of religious decline but is one of religious change" (Yinger 1970:vii). The assumption underlying the functional definition of religion does not really invite the question of whether a society is becoming less religious, but rather asks what new forms religion is taking. The sociologist adopting this approach is less likely to overlook nontraditional or alternative forms of religion or new developments in the ways that people practice religion, especially the younger generations.

Another well-known functional definition of religion is Robert Bellah's view that religion is "a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate [people] to the ultimate conditions of [their] existence" (Bellah 1970c:21). Like Yinger, Bellah's view of religion was influenced by the theologian Tillich's view of "ultimate concern." One problem with these functional definitions is that "ultimate concern" or "ultimate conditions of existence" are difficult phenomena to identify and are even more difficult to

measure using the empirical methods of social science (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, Yinger's and Bellah's definitions suggest that any system of belief and action that addresses the fundamental questions of meaning in life is a religion.

In response to these functional definitions, some scholars have argued that if a definition of religion does not include a supernatural dimension, the term *religion* may become so inclusive that it is virtually meaningless (Stark and Bainbridge 1996; Stark and Finke 2000). They advocate substantive definitions with their limitations for this reason.

Critical Thinking: Consider your own presuppositions: Is a belief in god or the supernatural necessary when you use the term *religion*? Is the fact that something is helping individuals address what is of ultimate concern enough to make that thing a religion?

A Symbolic Definition

You may have noticed that the strengths and weaknesses of substantive and functional definitions of religion are to some extent mirror images of each other. Consequently, some scholars have attempted to offer more comprehensive definitions of religion. Their hope is to capitalize on the strengths of both substantive and functional definitions, and thereby to avoid both of their weaknesses. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1973) symbolic definition of religion is one such effort.

Geertz begins by recognizing that *symbols*—objects, behaviors, or stories that represent or remind one of something else—are powerful forces in human behavior. They are also central to religion. Given the abstract nature of the focal point of religion, symbols become its indispensable medium. Symbols include objects (e.g., the cross, the Star of David), behaviors (e.g., touching the mezuzah on the doorpost of a Jewish home before entering; kneeling, facing Mecca, and praying five times a day), and myths or stories (e.g., Siddhartha Gautama achieving enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree and becoming the Buddha; Jesus washing his disciples' feet). Geertz was impressed with the way in which various levels of meaning can be communicated through symbols. Moreover, symbols are more accessible to observation than subjective experiences of "ultimate concern." Hence, he used symbols as the starting point for his definition of religion (Geertz 1973).

Geertz's full definition is as follows:

> Religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in [people] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1973:90)

This definition is so fully and carefully developed that each of its four components deserves a close examination.

First of all, to say that religion is a "system of symbols which acts" means the symbols provide a blueprint for understanding the world. Symbols provide a model of the world by helping people understand what the world and life really are. Many people believe, for example, that life is actually a testing ground in which God determines one's fitness to live in the heavenly kingdom. These individuals live their lives with reference to this understanding. These symbols not only suggest a model *of* the world, but they also propose a model *for* the world (Geertz 1973:93). The symbol system describes what life *is* and also prescribes what it *ought* to be. Not only do many assert that life is a testing ground, but they claim access to the answers that will help them pass the test.

This system of symbols acts to "establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations" in people. In other words, the symbols affect one's disposition. Religious activity influences two somewhat different types of dispositions: (1) moods and (2) motivations. Geertz suggested that moods involve depth of feeling, whereas motivations provide a direction for behavior. Moods vary in intensity, and they affect our total outlook on life, but they are not aimed at any particular goal. One simply experiences a mood; one does not gain a feeling of obligation about a specific goal to be attained from a mood. Some born-again Christian groups emphasize that to be a Christian is to be joyful, even in the face of adversity. The emphasis is on a pervasive mood that characterizes the believer, regardless of the specific circumstances.

Some religions may emphasize moods as primary (in Buddhism the focus is on mystical experience), while other religions stress motivations and a system of ethics (the Unitarian Universalist Association illustrates this latter focus). Nonetheless, Geertz suggested that in all religions the symbol system produces moods that intensify commitment and motivations to act in specified ways. In another context, Geertz referred to the moods and motivations together as the *ethos* of the religion.

Not only do the symbol systems enhance a particular disposition, but they also act to "formulate conceptions of a general order of existence." A distinguishing characteristic of religion is that it provides a worldview, a mental ordering of concepts such as nature, self, society, and the supernatural. Religion not only creates intense feelings but also establishes a cosmology—an understanding of the origin of the universe and humankind—that satisfies one's intellectual need for reasonable explanations. Geertz emphasized that not all intense feelings of awe are religious. One may be overwhelmed by powerful emotions (moods) in viewing natural beauty or a work of art, but such feelings may be either purely aesthetic or deeply religious. If no explanatory perspective or overview of the meaning of life is involved, the experience is not religious (Geertz 1958).

There are three major challenges to the meaningfulness of life that a religious worldview must resolve: (1) a sense of coherence and reasonableness of life events; (2) a sense of meaning in suffering so that it becomes sufferable; and (3) a sense of moral order in which evil will be overcome and that virtue, goodness, and justice will somehow, someday prevail. Symbol systems, then, attempt to "account for, and even celebrate, the perceived ambiguities, puzzles, and paradoxes in human experience" (Geertz 1973:108). The worldview represents an intellectual process by which people can affirm that life makes sense, that suffering is bearable, and that justice is not a mirage—that in the end, good will be rewarded.

Geertz continued his definition by attempting to answer the question of how a particular worldview or set of concepts comes to be believed. The symbols act to "clothe those conceptions in such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." How is it that despite common sense, everyday experience, and empirical evidence, people will come to believe irrational and unsupportable things? What compels a Christian Scientist to deny the reality of illness, even though the person experiences the symptoms of influenza? Why does a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe that a new revelation was written to Joseph Smith on golden plates, even though no one could read them but Smith? Why do Christians affirm that Jesus is the son of God even though he died in the manner of a criminal 2,000 years ago? Geertz pointed out that religious ritual often creates a situation in which a deeper reality can be reached. Truths are experienced or understood that are more profound than everyday experience provides.

Geertz's definition is both abstract and quite elaborate. In fact, his explanation of the definition is over 40 pages long. A clear strength of his definition, however, is that it contributes to the debate over what distinguishes religion from other cultural phenomena. His central contributions are that religion must include a symbol system that acts to reinforce both a worldview and an ethos and that has a built-in system of believability or plausibility.

In the end, Geertz's analysis is really more than a definition. It is an essay on how religion "works" to reinforce itself and on what religion "does" in the society.

Gerripix/iStock

PHOTO 1.3: Revival Meeting

Religion is communal in character and often involves intense emotional experiences. The photo depicts a congregation worshipping with their pastors at a revival meeting. The intense emotional experience acts to clothe religious concepts in what Clifford Geertz calls "an aura of factuality" that makes these concepts "seem uniquely realistic."

Because of its focus on what religion does, the symbolic definition may be considered as one type of functional definition (Berger 1974), but one which includes a strong substantive component.

Critical Thinking: What symbols elicit strong moods and motivations for you? Are those symbols "religious"? Does Geertz's symbolic definition allow you to distinguish between religious and other motivating symbols?

Invisible Religion

Another definitional issue that emerges in our consideration here is whether private systems of belief are to be called religion. After all, many individuals have beliefs that solve problems of ultimate meaning for them but that are not necessarily shared with others. Yinger insisted, as do most sociologists of religion, that religion is a "social phenomenon: it is shared and takes on many of its most significant aspects only in the interaction of the group" (Yinger 1970:10). An overly social conception of religion, however, runs the risk of overlooking newer forms of religiosity that are not centered on traditional religious groups and organizations.

A number of contemporary scholars have emphasized the modern individualization of religion. Each individual in modern society constructs his or her own meaning system by drawing on many religions. One of the most important works that developed this thesis is not that new, though. In 1967, Thomas Luckmann advocated an extraordinarily broad definition of religion, referring to religion as the "symbolic universes of meaning" that infuse all of life with a sense of transcendent purpose. He emphasized worldview as an elementary and universal manifestation of religion (Luckmann 1967). In this respect, Luckmann's definition of religion is similar to other functional definitions (Yinger 1970). However, rather than limiting religion to macro systems of meaning—meaning systems that address death, suffering, and injustice—he sought to understand worldview at all levels. He insisted that "no single interpretive scheme performs the religious function. It is rather the worldview as a whole, as a unitary matrix of meaning" that defines one's identity and serves as one's religious orientation (Luckmann 1967:55–56). In essence, he pointed to personal identity as "a form of religiosity" (Luckmann 1967:70). People's sense of identity—their values, attitudes, dispositions, and sense of self-worth—is part of their religiosity because all these are related to feelings about what makes life worth living. These are "invisible" forms of religion in that they do not have the social manifestations one normally associates with religion.

Luckmann believed that as society has become increasingly complex and as institutions have become specialized in their sphere of influence, traditional religions have influence over a decreasing range of human behavior and thinking. This combines with the tendency of traditional religions to fix their systems of belief so as to make them seem more eternal, absolute, and unchanging. At the same

time, technological, political, and economic changes continue. Indeed, in the modern world, change occurs at ever increasing rates. Luckmann maintained that this fluidity has caused traditional forms of religion to become irrelevant to the everyday experiences of many people. He denied that this represents a decline of religiosity. Common people are as religious as ever, but their religiosity has taken on new forms. Luckmann insisted that claims of a decline in religiosity are due to the fact that sociologists have usually asked questions that measure only traditional forms of religiosity such as formal affiliation with and worship at religious organizations or reading official scriptures.

In the modern world, people derive their sense of meaning by drawing on a wide range of religious and secular philosophies, each of which competes for the loyalties of individuals who act as consumers in the marketplace of ideas. The product that each philosophy is selling is a worldview—with its own system of values and its own definition of what makes life worth living. The world according to Oprah Winfrey (Lofton 2011), the pop psychology expressed in best-selling books like *The Road Less Traveled,* and the ideals implicit in *The Simpsons* and *South Park* (Feltmate 2017) can all affect a person's sense of the meaning of life and one's individual "philosophy of life."

Photo by Sandra Stroud Yamane

PHOTO 1.4: Self-Improvement Books

Go into most bookstores today, and you will find a large section of books on "self-improvement" or "self-help." Notice how many of these books include religious ideas and ideals like soul, meditation, sacred, and ritual. The tremendous popularity of these books is evidence, from Thomas Luckmann's perspective, of the reality of invisible religion. If we only look at traditional religious organizations, we will miss this distinctively modern form of religion.

Other organizations, social movements, or businesses also compete in the philosophy-of-life marketplace. Objectivism is a philosophical system that exalts the rights of individuals to pursue their own self-interests without interference. Objectivism was developed by Ayn Rand (1905–1982), author of the novels *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* (Burns 2009). At the height of her popularity, Rand published a newsletter that was faithfully read by believers and whose public addresses packed houses with enthusiastic followers. Rand stressed individual initiative and the survival of the fittest and believed that altruism was the worst sort of vice. Selfishness, if one followed the logic of her argument, was the most exalted virtue and would ultimately lead to the best type of society. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, Marxism offers a coherent outlook on life and a constellation of values that promises to bring a better life in the future through collective action and collective consciousness (Ling 1979). Each of these social movements offers a philosophy of life and a set of values that compete with traditional religions in defining the meaning and purpose of life.

Even business enterprises, like Amway Corporation, seek to motivate by stressing the primacy of financial independence, the ultimate value of free-enterprise economics, and the rewards of close friendship with other distributors (Butterfield 1999; Palmisano and Pannofino 2013). In fact, the regular Amway weekend regional rallies can be analyzed as plausibility structures (see Chapter 2) that operate to reinforce the believability of the values and outlook presented by the corporation.

Individualization of religion involves each person developing their own meaning system or philosophy of life by drawing from many sources in modern life, including secular media, the traditional religions, and popular psychology. While Luckmann did not see the process as indicative of a decline in religion, neither did he view it as a particularly healthy trend. When individuals must construct their own meaning systems, those systems may seem less eternal and less compelling. The individual may therefore experience what sociologists call anomie—the condition of lacking social boundaries and direction in life. Further, those who do construct a sustainable meaning system often develop one that is so privatized that it offers meaning only to themselves as individuals—ignoring the larger social structure. Because many privatized meaning systems in modern society exalt the autonomy of the individual (self-realization, individual mobility, etc.), the locus of meaning is in the individual biography (Luckmann 1967). Consequently, individuals may not be likely to make sacrifices on behalf of the larger society. For this reason, the privatization of religiosity could be unhealthy in the long run for the larger society.

Critical Thinking: Readers may find it interesting and worthwhile to reflect on their own sense of meaning and their own system of values. Do all your values evolve out of a traditional religion? Most of them? Some of them? What other sources have affected your outlook on life? Does it make sense to you to refer to personalized systems of meaning as a form of religiosity? Why or why not?

After garnering significant attention following his initial formulation, over the years fewer sociologists have drawn on Luckmann's concept of "invisible religion." The fundamental concern that motivated Luckmann, however, has not gone away. It lives on most clearly in the concept of "lived religion."

Lived Religion

Although there is no single, universally accepted definition of lived religion, sociologist Meredith McGuire centers her understanding on the distinction between "the actual experience of religious persons" and "the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices" (McGuire 2008:12). Lived religion, much like Luckmann's invisible religion, is *a part of* rather than *apart from* everyday life. The "Doing Research on Religion" box shows how one well-known sociologist, Nancy Ammerman (2014), has explored lived religion in the contemporary United States.

DOING RESEARCH ON RELIGION

FINDING RELIGION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In a recent book on finding religion in everyday life, Nancy Ammerman challenges some dichotomies that have dominated sociological thinking including sacred *versus* profane. The way forward she offers centers on the study of lived religion. The idea of lived religion, Ammerman recognizes, has been circulating since the 1990s, but it bears repeating that sociologists need to look for religion "outside the (God) box" (as we say in Chapter 12) and can find it in everyday life, if we have the right sensitizing concepts and methodological tools.

Ammerman argues that religion is sociologically accessible through *spiritual stories* individuals tell about everyday life, and the *spiritual tribes* who are both the audience for and co-creators of those stories. Listening to stories highlights not a monolithic Spirituality (singular), but spiritualities (plural) that are culturally patterned. It also draws attention to the ways in which spirituality manifests itself not only in spiritual practices per se or religious communities, but also at home and work, in public life, and in understandings of health and illness. In an interesting parallel to Luckmann's early ideas about invisible religion, lived religion is literally everywhere.

One reason the sociology of religion emphasizes organized religion so much is that it is easy to study religion there. If we want to study the storied nature of religion outside of organizations—spiritual stories in everyday life—how do we do it? In addition to conducting traditional interviews, Ammerman's research team used photo elicitation interviews (PEIs) and daily diaries. Drawing on Douglas Harper's (2012) work, Ammerman gave disposable cameras to respondents and asked them to photograph at least 5 or 6 places that are important to them. After having the photos developed, the photographers were interviewed about the story behind what was depicted.

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In addition, adapting social scientific research that has used diaries, Ammerman's team gave digital audio recorders to respondents, asking them to record 5- to 15-minute stories about their thoughts and/or experiences daily for a week and giving fairly extensive instructions and story ideas. Most respondents did 2 to 3 weeklong rounds of recording over several months.

The way these methods come together can be seen in the case of Theresa Collins. A 66-year-old Episcopalian in Boston, Collins expresses what Ammerman calls "theistic spirituality" in her narrative interviews, PEIs, and diaries. At one point she tells her digital recorder, "[The rector] gave a really wonderful sermon that will stay with me always. This week I will really enjoy thinking about it in depth as I do my walk in the morning." Later in the book, Ammerman reproduces a photo Collins took of the front gate of her home. This picture gave Collins occasion to talk about how she starts every day by passing through the gate while walking her collie, Digby, saying "Good morning, world" and then starting her prayers. Still later Collins, again recalling her walks, talks about making "a conscientious effort to be a good Christian, um, and to try and develop a relationship" with a "funny little woman who walks around here" (Ammerman 2014:215). From this Ammerman concludes, "Being friendly, even to a difficult person is as much a part of her spiritual practice as the prayers she recites from the Book of Common Prayer" (Ammerman 2014:216).

Photo by Theresa Collins, used by permission of Nancy Tatom Ammerman

PHOTO 1.5: Front Gate of Theresa Collins's Home

Without making any claim that Collins is typical, Ammerman shows in this single example, threaded throughout the book, how spiritual stories are shaped by religious communities (sacred tribes) but also spill over into the world of everyday life, sacralizing the mundane.

Source: Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. 2014. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Scholars have employed the concept of lived religion in a variety of different settings. For example, rather than simply examining Muslims at prayer or reading the Quran, some have examined how young Muslims in London's East End negotiate their identity in a hostile environment or how Somali migrant women understand Islam in relation to healing and illness (Dessing, Jeldtoft, and Woodhead 2013). Others have applied the concept to the cremation movement in late 19th century America and the singing of hymns by the Ojibwe (a Native American tribe) in northern Minnesota (Hall 1997). Still others have explored "transgressive" forms of lived religion in phenomena like the "ex-gay" movement, Queer nuns and celibacy, monogamy and sexual promiscuity, and BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism) (Talvacchia, Larrimore, and Pettinger 2014). That the concept of lived religion appears a number of times in this textbook suggests the usefulness of the idea.

Spiritual but Not Religious?

Another conceptual issue that raises definitional challenges for sociologists studying religion today is that some people consciously reject organized religion in favor of more individualized forms of "spiritual" belief and practice. It is increasingly common to hear people utter the phrase "I am spiritual, not religious." Spirituality in this sense is seen as a quality of an individual whose inner life is oriented toward God, the supernatural, or the sacred. Spirituality is considered primary, more pure, and more directly related to the soul in its relation to the divine, while religion is secondary, dogmatic, and stifling, often distorted by oppressive sociopolitical and socioeconomic forces. Some scholars have argued that in the new millennium, there is a "divorce" between spirituality and religion with more personal forms of spirituality destined to replace traditional, organized forms of religion (Cimino and Lattin 2002). However, the relationship between spirituality and religion is not quite as simple as that.

Robert Wuthnow argued that "at its core, spirituality consists of all the beliefs and activities by which individuals attempt to relate their lives to God or to a divine being or some other conception of a transcendent reality" (Wuthnow 1998:viii). There is nothing in this definition of spirituality that makes it inherently antithetical to religion. To the contrary, spirituality has historically been connected to religion. Even though it is a social phenomenon, individual forms of piety such as prayer, meditation, or other devotions (often with a mystical component) have long been part and parcel of many major religious traditions. Sufism in Islam, Kabbalah in Judaism, and Benedictine, Franciscan, and Dominican spirituality in Roman Catholic Christianity are well-known examples. Given the historical connection between traditional religion and spirituality, it may be better to use the term *unchurched spirituality* to refer to religious beliefs and practices that exist outside of traditional religious institutions (Hamberg 2009).

A second important point to consider is that "unchurched" does not mean "not social." Wuthnow pointed out that "spirituality is not just the creation of individuals; it is shaped by larger social circumstances and by the beliefs and values present in the wider culture" (Wuthnow 1998:viii). That is, we construct our spirituality out of the "toolbox" of cultural resources that is available to us at the time we are living.

Courtney Bender highlights this social dimension of spirituality in her study of contemporary spiritual practitioners in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Spirituality for these individuals is not a purely individual project but is learned and practiced in social organizations, just as religion is (Bender 2010). Some of these social organizations are religious, but Bender also finds spirituality produced in a variety of institutions that are typically considered secular, like medicine, art, and even the market economy. Examples include the Mystical Art and Talent Show and the Whole Health Expo. Spirituality among the "new metaphysicals" Bender studied is also deeply rooted in practices like homeopathic healing, astrology, regression therapy, yoga, Reiki, shamanistic drumming, and spiritual belly dance.

Because of this, Bender suggests that the phrase "spiritual not religious" obscures more than it enlightens. Although they do occupy a different space in the spiritual marketplace than those who dwell in congregational religion, Cambridge's metaphysicals and mystics are inside rather than outside religion. In the end, although it is conceptually distinct, individual spirituality is never far removed from religion. Survey data that investigate the connection between spirituality and religion

Photo by Sandra Stroud Yamane

PHOTO 1.6: Wildlight Wellness Collective

The Wildlight Wellness Collective in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is an example of a social space providing spiritual practices like Courtney Bender analyzes in her book *The New Metaphysical*. The Collective describes itself as "a sacred space to explore and awaken your body, mind, and spirit through the daily offerings of yoga, HIIT [high intensity interval training], meditation, Tai Chi, Ayurveda, and other classroom modalities. We believe that there are many paths to wellness and spiritual growth and honor them all. Our offerings provide students the unique opportunity to explore an eclectic blend of physical, energetic, and mindfulness practices that unleash and inspire individuals to develop their own personal journey to wholeness and their True Nature" (wildlightwellnesscollective.com).

TABLE 1.1 Religious, Spiritual, Both, or Neither?

	2012 (%)	2017 (%)
Religious and Spiritual	59	48
Spiritual But Not Religious	19	27
Neither Religious Nor Spiritual	16	18
Religious But Not Spiritual	6	6

Source: Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz. "More Americans Now Say They're Spiritual but Not Religious" (6 September 2017). *Factank*. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-they-re-spiritual-but-not-religious/

suggest as much. An early survey of baby boomers—individuals born between 1945 and 1963 who are supposed to be on the leading edge of the revolution in spirituality in American society—found that nearly 60% of the respondents identified themselves as *both* spiritual *and* religious. Only 15% of the respondents answered that they were spiritual but not religious (Roof 1999).

More recently, the Pew Research Center has been asking a representative sample of Americans questions similar to Roof's. Rather than asking if people think of themselves as "spiritual not religious," respondents were asked two separate questions: "Do you think of yourself as a religious person, or not?" and "Do you think of yourself as a spiritual person, or not?" When Pew first asked this question in 2012, the responses looked very much like what Roof found a decade earlier (see Table 1.1). Only 18% of the sample considered themselves spiritual but not religious, while 3 times as many (59%) considered themselves both spiritual and religious. Only 16% of respondents did not consider themselves either religious or spiritual. In just 5 years, responses shifted dramatically. The percentage of individuals identifying themselves as spiritual but not religious increased by over 40% and the percentage identifying as religious and spiritual declined by nearly 20%. Although it is easy to imagine this to be a reflection of generational change, there is no difference in the "spiritual but not religious" between those 18 to 29, 30 to 49, and 50 to 64 years of age. About 30% of each of these age groups say spiritual "yes" and religious "no," compared to those older than 65, 17% of whom are spiritual but not religious (Lipka and Gecewicz 2017).

The Concept of Religion as Employed in This Text

In attempting to present a comprehensive sociological perspective on religion, our approach is to be as inclusive as possible. Therefore, rather than dichotomizing religion from nonreligion, sacred from profane, visible from invisible, official from lived, spiritual from religious, we seek to explore anything that provides meaning and purpose in the lives of people. We ask *how* people are religious rather than *whether* they are religious. Hence, the perspective of this book will be most compatible with the comprehensive symbolic definition of Geertz, although we also incorporate the research and insights of those who use a broader functional definition or a more narrow substantive definition of religion.

To summarize, we maintain that religion is an interdependent system by which a community of people are bonded by:

- a shared meaning system (a faith or a worldview);
- a set of myths (beliefs), rituals, and symbol systems that sacralize the meaning system for the members;
- a sense of belonging to some group;
- a system of ethics or values that is directive in the lives of the members; and
- a set of routinized social expectations and patterns.

At the same time, we hope that these criteria for identifying religion are sufficiently broad so that we do not miss the religious significance of nontraditional groups and even less organized spiritual movements. We will be studying Methodists, Muslims, and Moonies, but this approach also allows us to explore belly dancing, skateboarding, and Scientology as religious practices that can impact traditional religion and that may well be emerging as new religions.

A Final Word About Definitions

One's definition of religion is important, for it specifies what are and what are not appropriate objects of investigation for the sociologist of religion. The discussion in this chapter is designed to help the reader understand differences in the ways religion has been defined by scholars. We hope this discussion has stimulated you to think through your own criteria for identifying religion. A consensus among us would be convenient, but a lack of agreement need not cause problems for the empirical study of religion (Lechner 2003). The purpose of this text is not to convert readers to the authors' theoretical persuasion but to help you think more clearly about the relationship between religion, culture, and society.

Before going further, it would be helpful to consider (1) your own assumptions regarding the definition of religion, (2) the defining criteria used by the social scientists discussed in this chapter, and (3) the perspective of the authors. As we noted at the outset of this chapter, and as Yinger has written,

> Definitions are tools; they are to some degree arbitrary. . . . They are abstract, which is to say they are oversimplifications. . . . We must relinquish the idea that there is any one definition that is correct and satisfactory for all. (Yinger 1970:4)

The definition we each use tends to "slice up life" a little differently and causes us to focus on slightly different phenomena as most important. Hence, we have begun by making our assumptions about religion explicit. For an exercise that can help you take a more reflexive approach to your own assumptions, see the "Illustrating Sociological Concepts" box on designing your own religion.

ILLUSTRATING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

DESIGN YOUR OWN RELIGION

Our assumptions about what we mean by the term *religion* are hard for us to see. That, after all, is the nature of assumptions. By outlining various ways of defining religion, as well as highlighting conceptual distinctions between religion and spirituality, this chapter helps students get some critical distance on their assumptions about religion.

An assignment created by Boston University religion professors M. David Eckel and Stephen Prothero offers students an excellent vehicle for further examining their understanding of what religion is, and also what they like and dislike about religion as they understand it. Professors Eckel and Prothero ask students to *design their own new religion* and to present it to their classmates. The class then votes on the best new religion, and the designers of the winning religion earn A's for the presentation portion of the assignment.

If you were to design your own new religion, what would it look like? Professors Eckel and Prothero encourage their students to consider the following questions when undertaking this assignment:

- How does your religion incorporate different dimensions of religion (ritual, myth, experience and emotion, organization, morals/ethics, doctrine/philosophy, material culture)?
- What holidays does it celebrate?
- How does it deal with birth? Death?
- What are its key symbols? Beliefs? Practices?
- How, if at all, does it deal with the problem of evil?
- Does it have any interesting moral teachings? A political ethic? A sexual ethic?
- Does it have a story of creation or of the end of the world?
- What kinds of institutions or activities does it support?
- Finally, what is your religion really about?

Doing this assignment at the outset of your course—whether in writing, as a presentation to your classmates, or just as a mental exercise—will help you begin to make explicit and engage your assumptions about religion.

At the end of the course, you can also take some time to reflect back on the religion you designed and see what ideas from the course were most helpful in understanding why you designed the religion the way you did. You can also take on some broader questions: Having studied the sociology of religion, what would you change about the religion you designed? What does the particular religion you designed tell you about the current state and future prospects of religion in your society?

Source: Kevin Matthew Taylor, 2016. "What American College Students Want from Religion: Facebookismanity, Lucid Dreaming, and Bodhisattva Tupac Shakur." *Implicit Religion* 19(2):237–65.

Although there is no consensus on the definition of religion, there is agreement among sociologists that any investigation of religion must be based on empirical methods of investigation. In the next chapter, we explore what it means to take a social scientific approach to studying religion.

SUMMARY AND LOOKING FORWARD

Definitions of religion are usually one of two types: (1) substantive (which focus on the substance or essence of religion) and (2) functional (which focus on what religion does). Substantive definitions usually emphasize a specific belief, such as in spiritual beings or in a supernatural realm, or they stress the distinction between sacred and profane realms of experience. Substantive definitions tend to focus attention on the traditional forms of religiosity. Functional definitions identify religion as that which provides a sense of ultimate meaning in life. Social scientists who are interested in cultural change and new forms of meaning that are emergent tend to favor functional definitions. Because they are not overly focused on traditional forms of religiosity, they often view religion as changing rather than as declining.

This text is based on the definition of religion as an interdependent system by which a community of people are bonded (a) by a shared meaning system (a faith or a worldview); (b) by a set of myths (beliefs), rituals, and symbol systems that sacralize the meaning system for the members; (c) by a sense of belonging to a reference group; (d) by a system of ethics or values that is directive in the lives of the members; and (e) by a set of routinized social expectations and patterns.

Taking seriously our own idea that definitions are tools to be judged not as true or false but as more or less useful, in this chapter we considered other phenomena that share boundaries with religion (like invisible religion or lived spirituality) and in some cases challenge accepted understandings of what religion is and what it is not. Invisible religion, lived religion, and the relationship between spirituality and religion each remind us of the importance of making conceptual distinctions, but also of being open to new social developments that may challenge our assumptions about what should or should not be considered under the heading "religion." Looking forward, we need to be willing to adapt our understanding of religion—including the very definition of religion we use—in order to capture a complex and ever changing social reality.

Concluding Questions: What do *you* mean by the term *religion* and how does this chapter inform your previous understanding? Looking at the world around you today, is there anything you think of as religion or religion-ish that out to be included in any comprehensive and useful definition?

CHAPTER

2

Historical Development of the Sociology of Religion

Here are some questions to ponder as you read this chapter:

- How did the social changes associated with the Industrial Revolution give rise to the discipline of sociology?
- What were the main contributions of theorists of the classical era to the sociological study of religion?
- How do different theorists understand what "secularization" means and what do their different understandings have in common?
- What are the central differences between the "old" secularization paradigm and the "new" paradigms that arose to challenge it?
- How is the focus of neosecularization theory on the declining scope of religious authority different from the original secularization paradigm and a response to the new paradigms that arose in response to it?
- What are the limitations of the sociology of religion as it has been practiced to date and how are sociologists attempting to move beyond these limitations?

It is difficult—perhaps impossible—for those of us living in the 21st century to fully understand the magnitude of change that the modern industrial social order thrust upon people in the 18th and 19th centuries. British historian Eric Hobsbawm (1990:xi) begins his book on the birth of the Industrial Revolution in a dramatic fashion by declaring, "The industrial revolution marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents." We usually associate this revolution with economic changes. We think of developments such as the movement from agriculture and small-scale craft production to large-scale, steam engine-driven manufacturing. These economic changes were, in fact,

revolutionary in themselves. Rather than owning their own tools or having their own land to cultivate, factory workers became wage laborers. This meant they ate only if they made money, and they made money only if they worked for someone else. This made the lives of factory workers in the early Industrial Revolution very precarious. This already highlights how the social changes associated with the Industrial Revolution went beyond the economics of production.

Industrial production also took place in larger and larger factories, which meant greater and greater concentrations of people in the same places. Large cities (for the time) sprung up very quickly with the arrival of people uprooted from their rural homes seeking employment. A city of 50,000 people would be considered small to most of us today, but it was incomprehensibly large to most rural peasants living in the 17th and 18th centuries. And the rates of growth were astonishing. A major early industrial city, Manchester in England, grew from 90,000 people in 1801 to 237,000 in 1831 to 400,000 in 1851. On top of the shock of simply adjusting to urban life, the expansion of the cities produced a seemingly endless list of social problems: overcrowding, pollution, noise, traffic, disease, and so forth.

Hobsbawm (1990:85) observes that the very rhythm of life in industrial society was profoundly different than before. Living in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, we all take for granted what Hobsbawm calls the "tyranny of the clock." On farms, seconds and minutes and even hours are irrelevant units of time when it comes to

From the Royal Collection Via Wikimedia Commons

PHOTO 2.1: Manchester from Kersal Moor (1852)

This photo of William Wyld's 1852, "Manchester from Kersal Moor," highlights the stark contrast between the rapidly urbanizing industrial city of Manchester, England, and the idyllic countryside outside the city. Manchester was known as "Cottonopolis" because of the central role it played in the cotton industry, a primary driver of the Industrial Revolution.

planting and harvesting agricultural crops. But in a factory, just like your college classrooms, seconds and minutes count. If you are like our students and your class begins at 12:00, you want to arrive as close to 12:00 as possible, and if it ends at 1:15, you want to leave no later than 1:15. Because that is all you get "paid" for, you may sit and watch the clock for 75 minutes every class. But the flip side of that coin is that you are responsible for being in that same place and time for 75 minutes whether you want to be or not. The clock owns you in a way that it was completely irrelevant to those living an agrarian lifestyle.

This is why Hobsbawm concludes that, although these revolutionary developments were driven by industrial capitalism, they were not simply economic. They also entailed "a new relationship between [people], . . . a new rhythm of life, a new society, a new historical era" (Hobsbawm 1990:43). Sociology emerged as a discipline because of a desire to understand and control these revolutionary social changes taking place in 19th-century Europe. In contemporary social theorist Charles Lemert's words, "we may say that the first professional theorists were individuals who could not have done social theory without the new society" (Lemert 2016:4).

Without the Industrial Revolution and the transformation of life it entailed, there would have been no felt need to theorize about society, and hence no development of sociology.

The changing place of religion in this new society was an important concern of these theorists in what we call the "classical era." It is important to think some about this because contemporary sociologists often work within the intellectual frameworks established by the classics (Alexander 1987). The sociology of religion developed within the intellectual perspectives the classical theorists established, and the field continues to develop as scholars engage in dialogue with existing schools of thought, with each other, and with the evolving social world.

The Classical Era

Although the classical era of sociological theorizing (1848–1919) cannot be reduced to the work of three individuals (Lemert 2016), due to space constraints here we limit our discussion to the three widely acknowledged "founding fathers" of sociology: Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Marx, Durkheim, and Weber all believed that there was something fundamentally different about the emerging modern world in contrast to premodern society and developed conceptual frameworks that explained the differences between the two. This included the changing place of religion in the course of societal modernization.

Marx's analysis centers on the transition from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production. Feudalism and capitalism are similar insofar as they are both societies in which one class exploits another. In these societies, religion serves to pacify the exploited classes and keep them from rising up against their oppressors. In a famous phrase you may have heard, religion "is the opium of the people" (Marx [1844] 1977:131). Where modern society differs for Marx is in the extent of the social disruption associated with industrial capitalism. As conditions get worse and worse for the working class, the narcotic effect of religion is overcome. Workers gain the

true, revolutionary consciousness necessary to recognize and act on their own interests in establishing an exploitation-free society. In Marx's view, this society will also be religion-free because the subjective illusion of religion disappears with the objective conditions of oppression.

Durkheim was centrally concerned with the shifting sources of solidarity in modern society. In premodern societies, solidarity is based on a commonality of beliefs and sentiments among members of society. In ritual celebrations, a "collective effervescence" is felt, which enlivens the collective consciousness. As societies grow larger and more diverse, the collective consciousness wanes and individualism rises. In the transition, Durkheim ([1912] 1995:429) observed, "the former gods are growing old or dying." But because "religion is, in a sense, indispensable," it is destined to be reborn in modern society. Durkheim ([1898] 1973:51) recognized that "the religion of yesterday could not be the religion of tomorrow," so he looked for the specific ways in which religion is transformed. Religion survives in two related forms: as "moral individualism, the cult of the individual," which recognizes the sacredness of the human person (Durkheim [1906] 1953:59), and as civil religious ideals (Durkheim [1912] 1995), both of which are enlivened by national ritual celebrations.

Weber's perspective on modern society is much less unidimensional than Marx's or Durkheim's but has been understood as centering on the process of rationalization. Rationalization entails a growing divide between religion and other spheres of society, both at the intellectual and institutional level (Gorski and Ates 2008). Intellectually, rationalization leads to a "disenchantment of the world" wherein people increasingly look to reason rather than "mysterious incalculable forces" to understand the world (Weber [1917] 1946:155,139). Institutionally, politics, economics, art, and other "value-spheres" increasingly operate according to their own logics ("rationalities"), distinct from religion. This is exemplified by Weber's famous characterization of modern capitalism as an "iron cage" of rationality (Weber [1905] 1958a:181). Although a religiously inspired ethic helped give rise to rational capitalism, once it is established the economic system operates on its own and according to its own logic, without any need for that religious ethic. It is important to note, however, that Weber is arguing that religion becomes a separate sphere in modern society, not that it disappears entirely.

Marx, Durkheim, and Weber set the intellectual boundaries within which later sociological work flowed. Taken together, these classical theorists established the dominant perspective for sociology's understanding of religion: modernity is a secularizing force. At the same time, the transformations of religion they predicted represent different understandings of what secularization means. Like Marx, those working in the Marxist tradition equated modernization with the (eventual) disappearance of religion. By contrast, those following Weber and Durkheim theorized various transformations of religion but not its complete decline or disappearance in modern society. Those predicting the transformation, not disappearance of religion, became the dominant group of scholars studying religion in the third quarter of the 20th century. They established what been called the "secularization paradigm" (Tschannen 1991).

Generally, a paradigm can be understood as a school of scholarship in which members are in fundamental agreement about key theoretical presuppositions, concepts,

empirical procedures, and exemplary studies. The concept of scientific paradigms was developed by philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1970) in his landmark book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* In fact, the level of consensus that Kuhn finds in scientific fields such as physics does not exist in the sociology of religion, much less in sociology generally. In Kuhn's terms, sociology is actually a "pre-paradigmatic" field. As this chapter and this textbook demonstrates, the sociology of religion is composed of competing schools of scholarship that disagree about key theoretical presuppositions, conceptual definitions, what constitutes significant data, and even on the very definition of their object of inquiry, "religion" (as we saw in Chapter 1). This fact notwithstanding, we use the term *paradigm* here to describe key approaches to the study of religion as the term has been employed by many sociologists of religion to describe their work.

The Secularization Paradigm

The dominant paradigm for studying religion in sociology has its roots in the classical era of the discipline, in the ideas of its founding fathers, and centers on the concept of secularization. The term *secularization* was initially used, according to Daniel Bell (1980:331–332),

> to denote the removal of territory or property from the control of ecclesiastical authorities. In this sense, secularization means the disengagement of religion from political life—the classic instance is the separation of Church and State—and the sundering of religion from aesthetics so that art need no longer bend to moral norms, but can follow its own impulses, wherever they lead. In short, it is the shrinkage of institutional authority over the spheres of public life, the retreat to a private world where religions have authority only over their followers, and not over any other section of the polity or society.

Secularization theorists in the field of sociology retained this understanding in thinking about the changing place of religion in modern society. No individual theorist embodies the entire paradigm and there are important differences between them, but the work of Peter Berger and Robert Bellah offer two significant approaches within the paradigm.

Peter Berger (1967) begins by arguing that unlike many animals, humans are "unfinished" at birth due to our underspecialized and undirected instinctual structure. Consequently, we must make a "world" for ourselves that renders our environment stable and predictable. Berger uses the term *nomos* to denote this cultural world, including both a worldview (the intellectual framework and knowledge that explains the world) and an ethos (its moral attitude toward living in the world). Over time, this nomos that we as human beings created in the first place becomes seen as something that exists independently of us. Society then socializes individuals into this nomos, helping to create a stable social order (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Berger argues that this process of "world construction" is fundamentally religious because the nomos cannot be seen as optional or arbitrary. Religion legitimizes

the nomos by clothing it in an aura of sacredness and absoluteness, establishing that it is eternal not arbitrary. The nomos may be thought to reflect some sacred cosmos or the will of a god or gods. Regardless of how it is ultimately grounded, the stability and predictability that humans needs in their environment is provided by this "sacred canopy" covering society. The sacred canopy is supported by what Berger calls "plausibility structures"—organizations, rituals, symbols, music, architecture, and more—that reinforce the taken-for-grantedness of the nomos.

Over time, Berger observes, the sacred canopy is less able to create a common world of meaning that binds all members of a society. The pluralism of worldviews in the modern world plays a key role in this for Berger. When individuals in society are confronted with worldviews other than their own, their own worldview will seem less absolute. Pluralization of plausibility structures—for example, the growth in the number of different sects of Christianity following the Protestant Reformation—weakens the sacred canopy as well. This, for Berger, is secularization. Like Bell, Berger (1967:107) defines secularization as "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."

Secularization has important consequences for religious belief. Individuals become aware of the plurality of possible religious views—each potentially legitimate—from which they must choose. The fact that one consciously selects a religious orientation (rather than being compelled by the conviction that there is only one possible view) makes the choice less than certain. Berger did not view this situation as one in which the individual is *free* to choose—an option now available to individuals. Rather, each person *must* choose; that is, one is compelled to do so. Berger called this the "heretical imperative," because the Greek root of heresy (*herein*) means "to choose." The net effect, he believed, is a diminishing of the power of religion in the lives of people (Berger 1979). To use Clifford Geertz's phrase, it is the difference "between holding a belief and being held by one" (Geertz 1968:17).

Berger also saw consequences of secularization for religious organizations. He concluded that a modern religious organization has two options. First, it can accommodate, "play the game of religious free enterprise," and "modify its product in accordance with consumer demand." Second, it can entrench itself and maintain its worldview behind whatever socioreligious plausibility structures it can construct (Berger 1967:153). A religious organization that takes the first course tends to become secularized from within and to lose its sense of transcendence or sacredness. It focuses on "marketing" the faith to a clientele that is no longer required to "buy." In the process, the faith may be severely compromised. A group that takes the second course, by contrast, may uphold the sanctity of their worldview, but at the cost of being an "irrelevant" minority faith that exists separate from society.

A contemporary of Peter Berger's and the second major secularization theorist we will consider is Robert Bellah. As a secularization theorist, Bellah agreed with Berger that religious institutions exert less direct influence on secular institutions than in the past. But his explanation of the process of secularization differs somewhat from Berger's. Bellah focuses on what he calls "religious evolution." Religious evolution is the process by which religious symbols become more complex over time in response to the greater complexity of social organization.

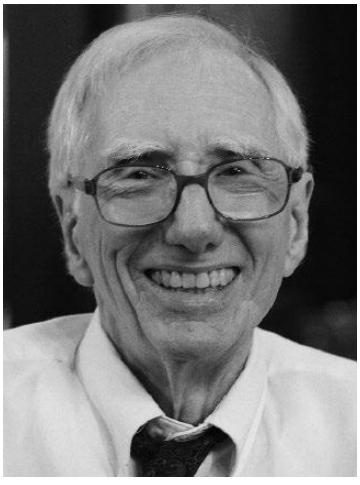

PHOTO 2.2: Robert N. Bellah

One of the most distinguished sociologists of the post–World War II era, Robert N. Bellah began theorizing the role of religion in the societal modernization in the 1950s. Part of his unfinished magnum opus was published posthumously in 2017 as *Religion in Human Evolution.*

Bellah specified five stages of religious evolution: (1) primitive (e.g., Australian Aborigines), (2) archaic (e.g., Native American), (3) historic (e.g., Ancient Judaism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, Early Palestinian Christianity), (4) early modern (e.g., Protestant Christianity), and (5) modern (religious individualism). He argued that beginning with the single cosmos of the primitive religious worldview in which life is a "one possibility thing" (Bellah 1970c:29), evolution in the religious sphere is toward the increasing differentiation and complexity of symbol systems. In the modern stage of religious evolution, the symbol system is "infinitely multiplex" (Bellah 1970c:40).

In the midst of this transformation, new forms of religiosity are emerging. These new forms are less dualistic (with the material world, which is evil, opposing spiritual existence, which is good) and involve more this-worldly spiritualities, which offer a more individualized symbol system that "relates people to the ultimate condition of their existence" (recall Bellah's definition of religion in Chapter 1). The attempts discussed in Chapter 1 to discover "invisible religions" or "lived religion" is in keeping with this emphasis on new, more individualized forms of religion.

Furthermore, individuals have more autonomy in being able to think for themselves and to create their own personalized system of meaning. In this post-traditional situation, the individual confronts life not as a "one possibility thing" but as an "infinite possibility thing" (Bellah 1970c:40). Each person is "capable, within limits, of continual self-transformation and . . . of remaking the world, including the very symbolic forms . . . that [shape] his own existence" (Bellah 1970c:42). Bellah and his colleagues would later give a prime example of this concept in

their best-selling book, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* A young nurse they interviewed, Sheila Larson (a pseudonym), told them the following:

> I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice. (Bellah et al. 1985:221)

Noting that Sheilaism raises the possibility of as many religions in the United States as there are people—an "infinite possibility thing," indeed—the authors conclude that "'Sheilaism' somehow seems a perfectly natural expression of current American religious life" (Bellah et al. 1985:221).

Much more could be said about the complexity of the secularization paradigm (Goldstein 2009; Tschannen 1991), but highlighting the separation or differentiation of other institutions from religion and the rise of personal autonomy for individuals relative to religion suggests a sort of bottom-line understanding of secularization as a theory of religious change in modern society. The primary direction of this change is toward "the diminution in the social significance of . . . religious institutions, actions, and consciousness" (Wilson 1982:149). Which is not to say, as Marx had hoped, the disappearance of religion entirely. Both Berger and Bellah develop Weber's idea of different value-spheres emerging in society, each with its own rationality (Gorski and Guhin 2017). In a differentiated society, the norms, values, and practices of the religious sphere have only an indirect influence on other spheres such as business, politics, leisure, and education (Wilson 1982). Similarly, Berger and Bellah both recognize the importance of the rise of personal autonomy in modern society, following Durkheim. Personal autonomy in religion is not the same as irreligion. As Bellah concludes, "The analysis of modern [humanity] as secular, materialistic, dehumanized, and in the deepest sense areligious seems to me fundamentally misguided" (Bellah 1970c:40).

Critical Thinking: Provide evidence from your own life or the broader social world that supports Berger's idea of "the heretical imperative" and Bellah's "infinite possibility thing." What about evidence *against* both?

New Religious Developments

At the same time secularization theory was being established as the dominant post-classical era paradigm in sociology, religion surged back into public and scholarly consciousness in ways that secularization theorists had not anticipated. Beginning in the 1960s, scholars noticed an increase in the prominence of nonconventional religious groups known as "new religious movements" (NRMs) (see Chapter 6). Among the earliest studied were Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (the "Moonies"), the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON, a.k.a.,

"Hare Krishnas"), Divine Light Mission, the Children of God, Jesus People, UFO cults, Scientology, and Soka Gakkai. Some speculated that these NRMs were part of a much broader cultural shift that included more diffuse quasi-religious phenomena like the human potential movement, astrology, and mysticism. In the 1970s, it appeared that an entire "New Age" movement was emerging as an alternative both to secular modernity and to the established churches of Christianity. In contrast to the expectations of secularization theory, these developments were characterized as a great awakening or consciousness reformation (Wuthnow 1976).

In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars were also confronted by the dramatic appearance of religion in the public sphere. The decisive moment was the 1979 revolution in Iran that established an Islamic republic under religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. The murder of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero while saying mass in 1980 drew attention to Liberation Theology as a movement within the Catholic Church in Latin America. The Solidarity movement, founded in 1980 in Poland, received support and encouragement from the Catholic Church, especially Pope John Paul II (a former Archbishop of Kraków). The mobilization of conservative Christians in the United States by the Moral Majority, which was credited with helping Ronald Reagan win the presidency in 1980, enlivened interest in the politics of the "New Christian Right." All this forced the rediscovery of a connection between politics and religion globally rather than the differentiation of religion from politics predicted by secularization theory.

Along with these cultural and political developments, sociologists of religion paid increasing attention to ever more available demographic data that did not seem to fit the dominant narrative of secularization. The religious movements least accommodated to secular modernity appeared to be the very ones that were growing the fastest. An explosion of Pentecostalism was observed not only in Latin America, Africa, and Asia in the 1970s and 1980s, but also in the United States. Simultaneously, the more liberal churches of the American Protestant establishment were declining in membership while the more conservative churches of evangelical Protestantism surged. Access to more and better quality survey data also conveyed a strong sense that religion was alive and well, and confounded secularization theory's expectations about what types of religion would be attractive to people in modern society.

Critical Thinking: As you look at society today, both near to you and in distant parts of the globe, do you see signs of religious vitality? In what ways does this vitality challenge secularization theory?

The outburst of religion on the social scene globally challenged the secularization paradigm, but no alternative paradigm existed to organize this flourishing diversity of studies. Near the end of the 1980s, Robert Wuthnow observed that the sociology of religion "has grown more rapidly in inductive empirical research and in subspecializations than it has in attempts to identify theoretically integrative concepts" (Wuthnow 1988:500) Not long after Wuthnow's lament, however, several competing frameworks emerged to replace what was increasingly called the "old paradigm" of secularization.

New Paradigms

The reality of secularization was so taken for granted for so long that into the 1980s it was "part of the conventional sociological wisdom" (Lechner 1991b:1103). By the end of the 1990s, the idea that secularization was *not* inevitable became a contending position in the sociology of religion—a "new paradigm," as Warner (1993) called it (at least in the United States). One critic of the secularization paradigm went so far as to claim that secularization theory was dead (Stark 2000b). Although we argue in this chapter that reports of the death of secularization theory were greatly exaggerated, we definitely observe the rise of new paradigms for the sociological study of religion over the past three decades.

In 1993, R. Stephen Warner announced that a new paradigm was emerging in the sociology of religion. Unlike the old secularization paradigm, whose assumptions were inherited from the classical theorists' focus on the European experience, this new paradigm centered on the seemingly very different religious history of the United States. The open market, facilitated by the disestablishment of religion at the nation's founding, created a paradigmatic situation of competition, rather than the religious monopoly that stifled religion in Europe. As a result, the master function of religion in the United States is to create social space for cultural pluralism (Warner 1993), like that seen in the new religious movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Warner (1993) also made three corollary observations. First, religious organizational forms in the United States are malleable and decentralized. This encourages innovations we discuss throughout this textbook such as storefront startups, seeker churches, and megachurches, as well as special purpose religious groups, such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Promise Keepers, and Habitat for Humanity. Second, religion is not privatized and individualized but instead remains a source of individual and group empowerment. Religious organizations provide both material and ideological resources for political mobilization, as seen in the Civil Rights Movement, Clergy and Laity Concerned about War, the New Christian Right, Sojourners, and many others. Third, religion in America exemplifies an energetic "new voluntarism" characterized by religious mobility (conversion, switching, apostasy), creative syncretism, religious seeking, and flowering spirituality. Under Warner's new paradigm, the religious ferment of the preceding decades is viewed as normal rather than exceptional.

Another theoretical perspective codified in the late 1980s and early 1990s in opposition to the secularization paradigm was the religious economies model (Stark and Iannaccone 1994). Although it is sometimes considered part of Warner's new paradigm, the rational choice assumptions built into the religious economies model are quite different than Warner's. Rational choice theory (RCT) applies economic principles of behavior to all areas of social life. RCT begins with the assumption that "humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and try to avoid what they perceive to be costs" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:5). This is known in economics as "utility maximization." Religious behavior is driven by this utility-maximizing calculus in the same way that any consumer behavior is (Iannaccone 1995). The benefits, of course, are nonmaterial when it comes to religious choices—a sense of meaning, assurance of an afterlife, feeling of communion with God, and so forth. This approach views

religiously engaged people as consumers of "products" that provide these benefits and religious organizations (churches, sects, denominations, NRMs) as "firms" competing with each other in the religious marketplace to supply those products (Finke and Stark 2005; Stark and Bainbridge 1996).

One of the key insights of this paradigm is the idea that, like commercial economies, religious economies thrive when they are allowed to operate without government interference. Finke (1990) summarizes the logic of the model: Deregulation of religious economies → pluralism → competition → specialization of products (catering to a market niche) and aggressive recruitment → higher demand → greater participation. Thus, as a "natural" consequence of the invisible hand of the market operating unencumbered by state regulation, "over time the diversity of the religious market will reflect the very diversity of the population itself" (Finke 1990:622).

In the breakthrough article for the economics of religion, Finke and Stark tested perhaps the central hypothesis derived from the religious economies model, namely that "religious pluralism" contributes to higher levels of religious participation (what they call "religious mobilization"). Using quantitative data from the 1906 Census of Religious Bodies, Finke and Stark (1988) studied the impact of "adherence" (their indicator of mobilization) on "pluralism" and found a positive relationship. While Finke

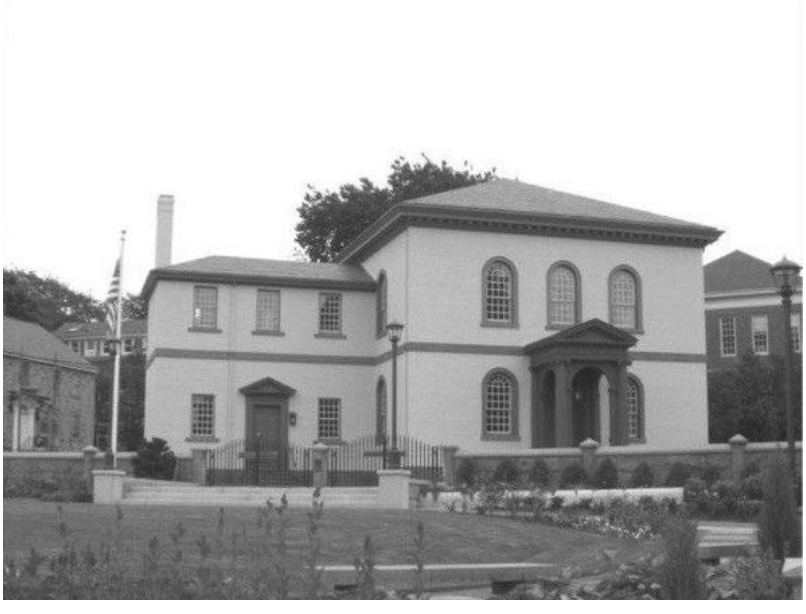

Photo by Keith Roberts

PHOTO 2.3: Tuoro Synagogue

The oldest Jewish synagogue in the United States is in Newport, Rhode Island, where separation of church and state and tolerance of other religious traditions was a founding principle. After George Washington was elected president of the new nation, he received a letter from this synagogue asking about his policies of pluralism. In 1790, Touro Synagogue received a handwritten letter signed by President Washington (prominently displayed in the synagogue to this day) embracing an open and "liberal" policy to all American citizens, regardless of origins or religious affiliation. In this letter, George Washington affirmed a policy of religious pluralism early in the country's existence as a nation.

and Stark (1988) provided empirical support for the religious economies perspective, the data on which the support is built do not give any evidence for a trend over time. Thus, the empirical jewel in the religious economies crown is the award-winning book, *The Churching of America*. Among other things, in this book Finke and Stark (2005) argue that between 1776 and 2000, religious "adherence" in the United States grew from 17% to 62% and that this linear, upward slope is exactly the opposite of what is predicted by secularization theory.

Thus, contrary to Peter Berger's thesis, rational choice theorists argue that pluralism actually makes the religious market competitive, and therefore invigorates religious participation. They do not believe it undermines plausibility or commitment. Recent research, however, has questioned the positive connection between pluralism and participation in the religious economies model (Norris and Inglehart 2011). This controversy is discussed in the "Doing Research on Religion" feature.

Critical Thinking: Some scholars maintain that ascription (being born into a religion) makes for stronger religious commitment; others argue that achievement (choosing one's faith in a competitive marketplace) makes one's faith stronger. With which position do you agree? Why?

DOING RESEARCH ON RELIGION

THE CONTROVERSY OVER SECULARIZATION AND PLURALISM

One of the hotly contested points in the secularization debate is whether pluralism undermines religious commitment by making the faith position seem relative and less than certain—as Berger argued—or whether pluralism leads to higher levels of religious mobilization—as rational choice theorists assert. The latter argue that religious pluralism creates more options for people so that they can choose from an array of religious products. Further, pluralism generates more vitality and energy among "religious entrepreneurs" as each tries to recruit members. The competition makes the entrepreneurs hungry and aggressive, thereby leading to new niches in the market. Pluralism prevents religious leaders from becoming complacent, which happens where competition is missing. Pluralism, therefore, creates religious vigor according to rational choice theorists.

In 1988, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark published a major article in support of the idea that pluralism and participation are positively related. They examined data from the 1906 U.S. Census of Religious Bodies on the 150 largest cities in the United States to test the following hypothesis: "The more pluralism, the greater the religious mobilization of the population—the more people there who will be committed to a faith" (Finke and Stark 1988:43). Their independent variable, pluralism, was measured using a religious diversity index that accounts for the number and size of different denominations. Using advanced statistical analyses (called multiple regression), Finke and Stark found a strong, positive relationship between religious diversity and religious participation leading them to criticize the secularization thesis.

Sociologist Kevin Breault responded to Finke and Stark's work using more recent data—1980 data on churches and church membership from the Glenmary Research Center—in which he found the exact opposite: "a highly significant, consistently negative relationship between religious pluralism and religious participation" (Breault 1989a:1049). In a comment on Breault's article, Finke and Stark rejected Breault's findings. They noted that they asked a colleague—fellow rational choice theorist Laurence Iannaccone—to replicate Breault's statistical models using the same Glenmary data and that Iannaccone found a highly significant *positive* relationship between pluralism and participation (correlation of 0.21) (Finke and Stark 1989). For his part, Breault replied with a defense of his methodology and conclusions. He, too, recalculated the pluralism index and religious adherence rates and again found a relationship of almost exactly the same magnitude as Iannaccone's, only *negative* (correlation of –0.22). The exchange ended at an impasse (Breault 1989b).

Almost a decade later, something very interesting happened. Another sociologist interested in the debate over pluralism and participation, Daniel Olson, tried to replicate the findings and found his results exactly in line with Breault's: a negative relationship (correlation of –0.22) between pluralism and participation (Olson 1998). How could Finke/Stark/Iannaccone and Breault/Olson come to the opposite conclusions using the same data and methods? Olson explained that when he inspected the statistical analysis software program files that Iannaccone used—which were provided to Olson by Iannaccone in the spirit of scientific objectivity and empiricism that we discuss in Chapter 3—he discovered a simple mathematical error in the programming language. The relationship between pluralism and participation in the 1980 Glenmary data was in fact negative.

Does the preponderance of the data support a positive or negative relationship between pluralism and participation? By extension, does the evidence support the old secularization paradigm or the new paradigm perspective on the effect of pluralism on religion more generally? Mark Chaves and Philip Gorski have done a secondary analysis of 193 empirical tests of the relationship. After a careful critique of the methods of research in each study, they concluded that the large majority of studies indicate that pluralism in itself does *not* increase religious vigor or commitment in most social settings (Chaves and Gorski 2001). On the other hand, competition due to a plurality of religious groups does seem to increase religious commitment in *some* situations. More research is needed to understand the circumstances that create a growth situation and those that do not. Still, this review of an extensive body of empirical literature does indicate that no dependable *general law* can be supported that identifies pluralism as a consistent cause of religious vitality or of decline.

A third emerging paradigm is what Smilde and May (2010) have called the "strong program" in the sociology of religion. Unlike Warner's new paradigm and the religious economies paradigm, the strong program has not been pursued self-consciously. Rather, it emerged as a distinctive style of empirical research conducted by many scholars in the 1980s and 1990s and remains a prominent approach today. By strong program, Smilde and May mean an approach that treats religion not as a dependent variable (something to be explained) but as an independent variable (something that has explanatory power itself). Since the early 1980s, published articles on religion in sociology journals that analyze religious processes as a primary causal variable have outnumbered those that see social processes as primary.

Smilde and May (2015) also show an increasing tendency for the outcomes predicted by religion to be positive or pro-social. The strong program can be seen very clearly in studies that have repeatedly found positive effects of religious involvement on many health outcomes, especially for disadvantaged social groups.

Sociologists have found that religion promotes more healthy lifestyles, such as abstinence from or moderation in consumption of alcohol, drugs, and other risky behaviors. Religion also connects people in a deep and meaningful way, facilitating friendships and other networks of social support, both material and emotional. It provides mechanisms (both beliefs and practices) for coping with the stressors that reduce physical and mental well-being. It enhances feelings of self-esteem and efficacy, and encourages healthy emotions like forgiveness and hope. The central, causal role of religion in the strong program challenges the old secularization paradigm idea that religion will lose its social significance in modern society.

Neosecularization Theory

In the face of these challenges, some scholars in the 1990s attempted to breathe new life into the "old paradigm" of secularization theory. This "neosecularization" perspective refocuses the theory around its core concepts while jettisoning peripheral concerns and unsustainable claims (Yamane 1997). (*Neo-* is a prefix meaning "new," from the Greek word for young.) Connecting back to the original meaning of the term and core principles of the secularization paradigm, Chaves (1994:750) argues that secularization "is best understood not as the decline of religion, but as the declining scope of religious authority" at the societal (macro), organizational (meso), and individual (micro) levels of analysis.

Similarly, Casanova (1994) reasserts the Weberian primacy of differentiation of secular spheres from religious norms as the core of secularization and rejects the Marxist idea that religion is destined to disappear in the course of societal modernization. He extends the theory by observing that the privatization of religion—the removal of religion from public life—is an historical option that plays out differently in different contexts. In some countries, such as France and Canada, religion is highly privatized. In other countries, such as Poland and the United States, it plays a very public role.

Although secularization theory views religion on three levels of analysis (Dobbelaere 1981), the most important is the macro level (Tschannen 1991). Therefore, the neosecularization paradigm emphasizes the centrality of institutional differentiation at the societal level. Institutional differentiation refers to the process by which "specialized institutions develop or arise to handle specific features or functions previously embodied in, or carried out by, one institution" (Wallis and Bruce 1991:4). As a consequence, in a highly differentiated society, the norms, values, and practices of the religious sphere have only an indirect influence on other spheres such as business, politics, leisure, and education (Wilson 1976). It is for this reason that we can point to differentiation as leading to a decline in the scope of religious authority: specifically religious institutions have only a limited (or no) control over other institutional spheres.

This can be seen in the decline of "blue laws" in the United States. Blue laws are also called "Sunday statutes" or "Sunday closing laws," because they typically prescribe certain activities (especially the sale of alcohol) or require certain businesses to be closed (notably car dealerships) on Sundays. In their origins these prohibitions are government-enforced religious codes and so may be better called "Sabbath laws." The term *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word meaning rest (*shabbat*), and notably

appears as the third of Ten Commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). God created the heavens, earth, and humankind in six days, and "on the seventh day he rested" (Genesis 2:2). In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath is observed from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. The dominance of Christianity in Europe when these laws took on their current form dictated that they would apply to Sunday, the traditional Christian day of worship. In colonial America, the Sunday statutes were supposed to have been written on blue paper giving rise to the term *blue laws* (Laband and Heinbuch 1987).

Over time, many blue laws in the United States have been repealed, some only recently. For example, the law banning hunting on Sunday in Virginia was repealed in 2014 and the sale of alcohol on Sundays in Minnesota was approved in 2017. In most places today, commercial and recreational activity is governed by economic, not religious, norms. As we explore further in Chapter 12, sporting events that were once prohibited now dominate Sundays in many communities.

Sunday statutes still exist in a number of places. A few examples are Illinois banning horse racing, Minnesota banning car sales, Maine banning hunting, and Arkansas banning most alcohol sales. The continued existence of these laws highlights the fact that the process of societal-level secularization is not uniform or inevitable. It is often the consequence of struggles between groups over how much religious versus secular authority should control the functioning of other social institutions (Smith 2003). Today, any private business can *voluntarily choose* to be closed on Sunday, for religious or secular reasons. Most do not, but see the "Illustrating Sociological Concepts" box for a prominent exception.

Photo by Sandra Stroud Yamane

PHOTO 2.4: Hobby Lobby Store Hours Sign

Along with Chick-fil-A, Hobby Lobby is the best-known national retail chain that is closed on Sunday. The store hours sign pictured here makes clear why. The company's motivation is further elaborated in its statement of purpose: "Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating the company in a manner consistent with Biblical principles" (https://www.hobbylobby.com/about-us/our-story).

ILLUSTRATING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

WHY CHICK-FIL-A IS CLOSED ON SUNDAYS (AND FEW OTHER BUSINESSES ARE)

S. Truett Cathy died in 2014 a rich man. The 93-year-old was a billionaire, in fact, but he could have been even richer had he opened his Georgia-based chain of nearly 2,000 Chick-fil-A restaurants on Sundays. The company had $5 billion in revenues in 2013 operating just 6 days a week.

According to the company's website (chick-fil-a.com), "Our founder, Truett Cathy, made the decision to close on Sundays in 1946 when he opened his first restaurant in Hapeville, Georgia. He has often shared that his decision was as much practical as spiritual." However, the company's official obituary emphasizes the religious origins of the company policy much more:

> Cathy was a devout Southern Baptist who taught Sunday school to 13-year-old boys for more than 50 years. As an extension of the founder's faith and the clearest example of incorporating biblical principles into the workplace, all Chick-fil-A restaurants—without exception—operate with a "Closed-on-Sunday" policy. Rare within the food service industry, this policy allows employees a day for family, worship, fellowship or rest, and also underscores Cathy's desire to put principles and people ahead of profits.

Chick-fil-A's claim to be exceptional in this respect is not just a public relations stunt. No other national food chain closes uniformly on Sundays. To the contrary, food service and other retail businesses are among the interests that have fought "blue laws" most vigorously.

The waning influence of governmentally enforced Sabbath restrictions is evidence of macro-level secularization. Business enterprises are free to operate according to their own institutional norms, which in a capitalist economy center on the pursuit of profit. Of course, the societal-level secularization represented by the institutional differentiation of religion from the economy does not mechanically lead to meso-level secularization. Organizations are free to choose whether to operate according to religious or secular principles, or some combination of the two.

Still, there is pressure for organizations to mimic other organizations in their institutional sphere (called "institutional isomorphism"). So, in the same way that religious colleges and hospitals have become more and more like secular colleges and hospitals, we might expect Chick-fil-A's religiously motivated business practices to decline now that Truett Cathy has passed. In the company's obituary for its founder, Chick-fil-A declared its restaurants "will remain privately held and closed on Sundays." Time will tell.

Source: Chick-fil-A Press Room, "Truett Cathy, Chick-fil-A Founder and Chairman Emeritus, Dies at Age 93" (September 19, 2014). Retrieved from thechickenwire.chick-fil-a.com/News/Truett-Cathy-ChickfilA-Founder-and-Chairman-Emeritus-Dies-at-Age-93