

Education and Religion

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- the structure and function of education
- the structure and function of religion
- issues in U.S. education and religion

In July 1925, religion and education fought it out in a hot courtroom in Tennessee. Two of the greatest legal minds in the United States, William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow, faced one another over what Bryan called a “contest between evolution and Christianity . . . a duel to the death.”

The trial was held to determine if a science teacher, John Scopes, had broken the law when he taught the theory of evolution in his classroom. At issue was the right of a state to pass a law prohibiting teachers from including certain content because it challenged religious beliefs.

Education and religion are two highly influential social institutions. Both have functions that serve and control society. In this chapter, you will learn about how these institutions function and how societal changes affect both institutions.

Education and Society

Ideas about education can vary enormously, even within a single society. Consider these two:

* “The only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life—by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. . . . He has to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He has to be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past—and he has to be equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort.”

—Ayn Rand

* “Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”

—John F. Kennedy

These two “definitions” reflect very different beliefs about the institution of education. The first characterizes education as “putting in” necessary information and skills. The second restates the ancient ideas of Socrates—that education is “drawing out” what is already within a student. How do “definitions” of education change?

Education in the United States

The first colonists came to America to escape religious persecution. In that mainly agricultural society, children learned values at home, along with farming and home-making skills. Schooling was for children younger than 12 and focused on reading and on the rules of society. Later, young men learned skills such as blacksmithing or woodworking by becoming **apprentices** to experienced workers. An apprentice exchanged his labor for instruction in the trade. In those days, only young men who were to become lawyers, doctors, or members of the clergy required higher education. The table at right includes major developments in the history of American education.

Sociological Views of Education

Sociologists have looked at the contribution of education to social mobility and life chances. They have studied social class differences in educational attainment and have made attempts to explain them. They have described the social systems of schools and called attention to the importance of pupil-teacher interactions. They have looked at the role schools play in cultural transmission. As you can imagine, the different perspectives have different insights to share.

American Education: Major Developments

1640s—The Massachusetts Colony Law of 1647 requires towns of over 50 families to hire a schoolmaster to teach children the principles of religion and the laws of the commonwealth. This is the beginning of the “one-room schoolhouse.”

1900—With increased immigration, there is a push to make schools more like factories that efficiently implant “the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, law and order, and popular government” in immigrant children. Those who can’t be “processed” are “dropped out” like defective pieces on an assembly line—the original “dropouts.”

1785—Schoolmasters add science and arithmetic to the curriculum of religion, spelling, and reading. The one-room schoolhouse flourishes.

Early 1900s—By the end of the 1800s, nearly one-fifth of America’s children between the ages of 10 and 16 are employed. Child labor laws are passed, raising the age at which children can work.

1837—Brilliant educator Horace Mann vows to “educate the masses” in order to reduce poverty and crime. By 1852, the first compulsory education laws are passed, requiring at least minimal schooling for children ages 8 through 14.

1954—In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court declares “separate but equal” schools are “inherently unequal” and unconstitutional.

1862—Land grant colleges are funded by the government to teach advanced courses in agriculture, home economics, and mechanical arts. Higher education is available to everyone, although blacks cannot attend white schools.

1966—The Coleman Report finds that minority students are more affected by the quality of their schools than students from the dominant group. Busing of black students to white schools attempts to provide better academic opportunities for minority students.

1887—In the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the Supreme Court declares that providing “separate but equal” facilities for blacks and whites is constitutional.

1983—The *A Nation at Risk* report from a national commission finds that 23 million Americans are only marginally literate. Comparisons with test results from other countries are used to condemn U.S. education. The push for more rigorous teacher education and educational standards begins.

Functionalist Perspective

According to functionalists, there are **five** primary social functions of education.

- 1. Socialization.** An important function of schools is to teach the knowledge and skills students will need to become contributing members of society. In addition to the skills of reading and mathematical reasoning are such social skills as obedience to authority and cooperation. The knowledge objectives of the modern curriculum barely scratch the surface of what an effective person needs. Increasingly, schools are teaching students problem solving and research skills as the society's knowledge base expands exponentially.
- 2. Cultural Transmission.** Schools teach such core values of the society as patriotism, individualism, and competition. Norms regarding fair play, respecting the law, and assuring individuals' civil rights are passed along from the classroom rules and lessons of the earliest years. Student governments and school newspapers help transmit the ideals of a democracy.
- 3. Assimilation/Social Control.** Schools expose students from different backgrounds to a common curriculum. This helps create a common cultural base. Societal expectations and norms are learned through the culture of the school.

- 4. Social Placement.** Functionalists see education as a way to meet the economy's need for trained workers. As more specialized workers are needed, schools change or add programs to provide appropriate training. Education can encourage upward social mobility. During the 1900s, education expanded the middle class.
- 5. Change and Innovation.** Schools are expected to meet the changing needs of society. Changes in the technology of the society are reflected in the addition of computer literacy to the school curriculum. Courses dealing with AIDS and drugs are a response to changes in the health of the society. Black and Latino studies are a response to changing demographics.

In addition to these functions, schools perform several latent functions in society:

- * **Custodial Care.** Schools free parents to work or pursue other activities.
- * **Development of Social Relationships.** Friendships, romantic relationships, and future job-networking alliances often form during school years.
- * **Keeping Students Out of the Labor Force.** When students are in school, they are not competing for jobs with older workers.

Functionalists maintain that schools provide students with the opportunity to achieve whatever they want in life, provided they are willing to work for it.

Conflict Perspective

Conflict theorists see the educational system less positively. Although they don't claim that education *must* produce social inequality, they point to **five** areas as evidence that the present U.S. education system *does*:

1. School Funding. Americans value the idea of local control of schools. This means we believe that parents and others in a community should be able to hire the teachers and principals and oversee the running of the schools. State governments provide the rules under which this is done. Their laws set the professional standards and establish a system for paying for the schools. In the main, schools are tied to residential communities and are supported by property taxes. Richer communities, therefore, have more money to spend per pupil, so they have better facilities, more experienced teachers, and more resources. In this way, the educational system perpetuates the unequal allocation of resources present in society.

State governments have tried with varying degrees of success to overcome this disparity. In some states, legislators have tried to equalize the funding of schools. However, state legislators are reluctant to take away a community's right to improve its schools when residents are willing to vote to pay higher taxes for improvements. So, it still remains that communities that can afford to pay for them have better schools.

2. Tracking. Children come to school with a wide range of ability and preparation. Schools tend to group children for instruction, rarely tailoring the education they provide to each child's needs. Research has shown that the tracks to which children are assigned mirror social background. Students in middle to upper socioeconomic classes are more likely to be assigned to advanced tracks. Further, research has shown that certain aspects of the tracking system work not to bring all children to the same level of education, but to perpetuate the lack of preparedness of children in the lower tracks.

- * Advanced tracks have better teachers and more resources.
- * Teachers of advanced-track students expect the students to have high ability and give them more opportunity for self-direction, critical thinking, and creativity. Lower-track students are given more drill and practice and less opportunity to make decisions about their learning.

3. Ethnocentric Curriculum. Conflict theorists point out that the curriculum continues to be largely dominated by ideas of the late 19th and early 20th centuries regarding how best to assimilate immigrant children into society. The history taught in schools, they argue, is told from a WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) point of view. It suggests that history is a story of progress in which Europeans brought "advances" to an "uncivilized" hemisphere.



Passing the Test in Korea

The school system in Korea works in part as a gate to the better positions in society. By law, all children are given the opportunity to make it through the gate. The gate is governed by the exams students must take in order to get into the universities. The exams are very tough, and the passing mark is deliberately set high to keep the number who gain admittance fairly small.

Children work at their lessons, memorizing huge parts of their textbooks and studying in the evenings after school in order to pass. Parents, especially mothers, spend much time helping their children study. An industry has developed that provides special weekend and summer schools to help students pass.

Once admitted to a university, students find the work is not overwhelmingly hard, and a very high percent graduate.

Sociologists use the term **ethnocentric** to describe a viewpoint that is centered on one ethnic group's perspective. Today there is a trend toward **multiculturalism** that seeks to offset this point of view by celebrating the multicultural diversity of the different peoples whose histories have forged the modern nation.

4. **Hidden Curriculum.** Conflict theorists argue that a *hidden curriculum* transmitting the dominant values and norms of society fosters obedience and conformity typical of the working class. They insist that the race, class, and gender biases embedded in both the formal and the hidden curriculum undermine the self-esteem of students from lower socioeconomic strata. Ultimately, this affects academic achievement and perpetuates the perception that these students possess less ability.



5. Credentialization. High-paying jobs go to people who achieve good grades and obtain the necessary certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Theoretically, these credentials are available to everyone. In practice, some minority segments of the population are unwilling or financially unable to play the academic game and thus don't receive the credentials necessary for higher-paying jobs.

Some researchers say that schools act as screening devices, filtering out students to fill the blue-collar and service positions needed for the smooth functioning of society. In general, conflict theorists say that education reflects and perpetuates the hierarchical social system of society. This prevents the type of social mobility that education claims to enable.

Interactionist Perspective

Conflict theorists point out large problems with the educational process but shed little light on how individuals interact in that environment. Here are **two** insights from the interactionist perspective.

1. The Pygmalion Effect. This result is named for a king in Greek mythology who fell in love with a statue he had created. It says that teachers like best the students they believe they influence the most. As a teacher spends more time with students she or he believes are more capable, the students' self-esteem grows. The teacher's attention encourages the students, makes them believe they "can do it," and they respond by putting more effort into their learning.

Therefore, the expectations that teachers hold for individual students influence the performance of those students.

Research on systems that label students or place them in tracks supports this theory. Teacher expectations for the lower-level tracks are not high, and in the main these students do not perform well in school. Average kids "get by" but neither fail nor excel. And "advanced" students do in fact advance. Some educators have argued that setting educational standards will force teachers to give the same attention to all students. Standards do little, however, to change a teacher's attitude toward individual student ability.

2. Personal and Social Development.

Schools give students the opportunity to interact with adults and other students and thus to learn to behave within the boundaries of cultural expectations. Students develop attitudes, values, beliefs, and a sense of self that influence them throughout their lives. Students who fail to become a part of the school social environment tend to become alienated and disengaged from academics and are at increased risk of dropping out.

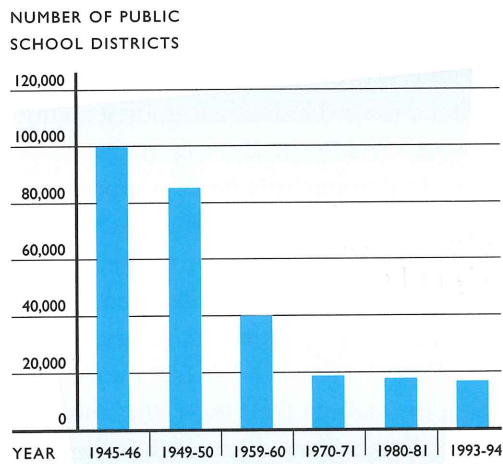
Issues in U.S. Education

Our education system is as complex as our society. It is easy to criticize it. A wise person recognizes that the number of factors influencing any aspect of education make simplistic reforms unlikely to succeed. Some have suggested that a shift from knowledge-centered education to student-centered education may be needed before any substantial change will be seen.

Bureaucratization of Education

One educational issue of concern is the increasing consolidation of school districts and the bureaucratization that results. The graph shows how the number of school districts in the United States decreased in the last half of the 20th century. As the number of districts got smaller, the size of each district got larger.

School District Consolidation



Source: U.S. Department of Education

Advantages of large districts:

- * **Course offerings are the same from school to school.** Uniformity of courses allows easy transfer from one school to another.
- * **A wide variety of courses and subjects is offered.** Students have more options to explore and more opportunities to expand their horizons.

- * **Teachers have a strong background in the subjects they teach.** Larger schools can hire more teachers with specialized training.
- * **Policies and rules are standard.** Parents, students, teachers, and administrators know what to expect. Procedures are in place to express diverse viewpoints, resolve conflicts, and protect people from arbitrary decisions that affect their lives.

Disadvantages of large districts:

- * **The bureaucracy makes parents, teachers, and students feel they have little power or control.** Teachers in particular become frustrated with red tape and demands on their time for activities that have little to do with teaching. They may become disillusioned and experience “burnout.” Some may become authoritarian in dealing with students.
- * **Students are dehumanized.** In a large system, students may be treated as products on a factory’s conveyor belt rather than as individuals.

One solution to the problem of huge bureaucratic districts is a push toward “schools within schools”—smaller units within a large district in which students and teachers stay together over several years.

Opportunity

You have already seen several ways in which children from lower levels of the economic scale can be shortchanged in the educational process. **Two** programs attempt to equalize opportunities for disadvantaged children.



The Digital Divide

The digital divide refers to the growing gap between people with access to computers and the Internet and those without.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce:

- * Households with incomes over \$75,000 are over 20 times more likely to have home Internet access than those at the lowest income levels.
- * Only 6.6 percent of people with an elementary school education or less use the Internet.
- * In rural areas, families in which a parent has a college degree are 11 times more likely to have a home computer and 26 times more likely to have home Internet access than those with only an elementary school education.

1. Head Start. Many students enter school already “behind” due to poor nutrition or the absence of such school readiness activities as learning the ABCs and numbers at home. Head Start is a *compensatory program* that attempts to make up for those deficits by teaching three- and four-year-olds skills and vocabulary that middle-class children learn at home. Classes for parents are part of it too. Since its inception in 1965, Head Start programs have helped 18 million children. Those years have seen dramatic increases in reading achievement in the first three grades. Over time, studies show that when children who were in preschool programs such as Head Start reach ages 9 to 19, they do better in school than peers who were not. They have higher reading scores, are less likely to be held back a grade,

and are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college. They are also less likely to go on welfare or get involved in delinquency and crime.

2. Magnet Schools. In 1985, the U.S. government provided seed money to multi-school districts so that they could create *magnet schools* whose programs would attract students from outside the neighborhood enrollment area. Magnet schools offer specialized programs in humanities, the arts, science, and technology as well as foreign language immersion and career/vocational training. They often employ diverse learning approaches. Magnet schools have been somewhat successful in attracting a diverse student population, although low-income and limited-English-proficient students have been less likely than others to take advantage of them.

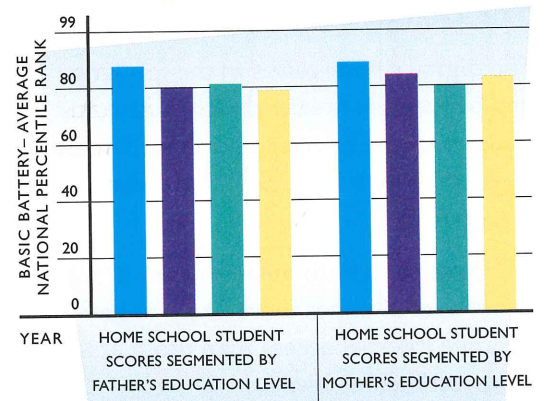
School Choice

With a national dropout rate in excess of 11 percent—a rate that can exceed 70 percent in urban areas—some policy makers look to economic theory to find solutions. They suggest that if schools have to compete for “customers,” they will be forced to improve. This idea has led to **three** proposals for educational reforms.

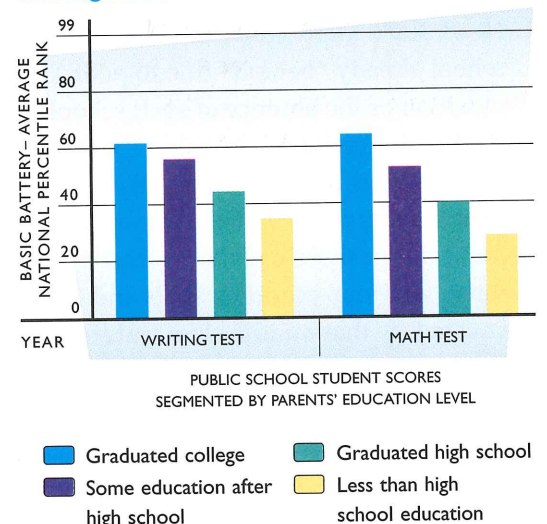
1. **Vouchers.** Public schools are funded by tax dollars. Some reformers suggest that parents should receive public funds in the form of *vouchers* exchangeable for tuition at the school of their choice. This could include private or church-sponsored schools. Opponents argue that by taking money out of the public school system, vouchers will weaken public education. They fear that racial discrimination may be magnified if parents choose schools based on ethnic or racial composition. They also point out that a voucher system could violate the principle of separation of church and state.
2. **Charter Schools.** Another form of school choice is the establishment of charter schools. These schools are private in that they do not answer to local school boards. However, because they are supported by tax dollars, they must prove that they are providing at least as effective an education as public schools. Estimates suggest that by the end of the year 2000, there were nearly 2,000 charter schools serving almost half a million students.

Does Parent Education Level Predict Student Achievement?

Home School Achievement—Basic Battery Test



Public School Achievement—Writing and Math Tests



Source: U.S. Department of Education

3. **Home Schooling.** An increasing number of parents opt to keep their children out of the school system entirely and teach them at home. Many curriculum

programs are now available for home-schooled children. Critics say these children do not have access to the resources available in public schools and miss opportunities to develop social skills. Data like those in the charts opposite seem to indicate that home schooling has benefits. Parents, regardless of education, who are willing to teach their own children spend more time with them, thus making such statistics more complex than they appear.

Accountability

In recent years, business and community groups have demanded that schools be more accountable for their results and meet minimum standards of achievement. This has made assessment a driving force in many schools. This demand includes **two** ideas:

1. It assumes that assessments are a true measure of learning.
2. It assumes that every student should be held accountable for the same material at the same age.

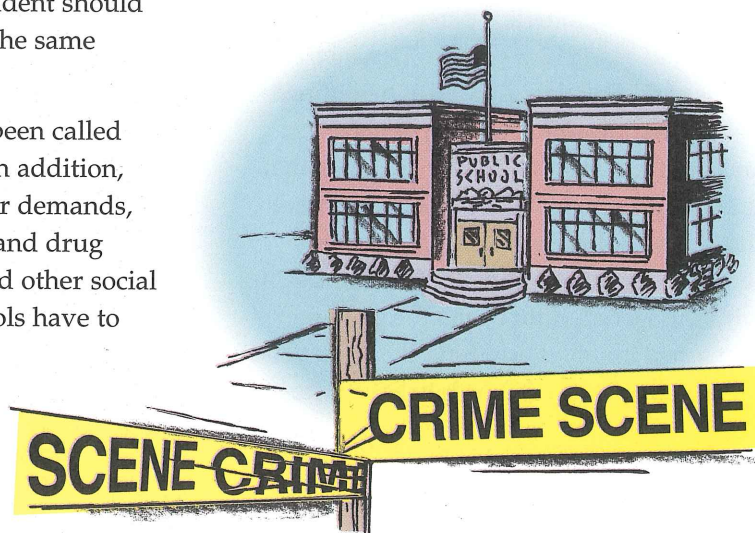
Both assumptions have been called into question by research. In addition, teachers point out that other demands, such as courses on alcohol and drug abuse, pregnancy, AIDS, and other social issues, dilute the time schools have to teach "the basics."

School Violence

Violence in schools mirrors the violence in society. In a typical month, more than 150,000 crimes occur in U.S. schools. Estimates are that more than 100,000 guns are brought to schools daily—a frightening fact.

The American Psychological Association blames much of the increase in school violence on the social isolation many students feel, as well as on easy access to weapons. Some people argue that violence in the media and in video games may make students numb to the real effects of violence.

In 2001, the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University was conducting research that explored the principal issues surrounding school violence. They warned that the problems educators face are "complex, multifaceted, and deeply rooted in the conditions of the dominant culture, which chooses to disregard adolescents, especially the poorest of them." The Center insisted there are no "simplistic, single-shot solutions."



Religion and Society

All societies have religion. Religious beliefs provide answers to the most fundamental questions people have about their existence. Religious practices accompany the most significant events in people's lives: the birth of a child, the transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage, and death.

Religion is not the activity of an individual alone. It is the practice of a community of believers. Even the most solitary hermits have belonged to a community of people with faith. It is precisely because religion is a communal activity that sociologists study it.

Religion as defined by sociologists is a system of shared beliefs and rituals that

surround the realm of the sacred and deal with fundamental questions of life. The world's religions share such features as:

- * **Rituals**—such as prayer, fasting, sacrifice, initiation, and ceremonies of baptism, naming, marriage, and end-of-life.
- * **Symbols**—such as the Star of David, the crucifix, or the crescent moon and star.
- * **Places of Worship**—such as churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and even cities such as Jerusalem and Mecca.
- * **Sacred Writings**—such as the Bible, the Torah, and the Koran.
- * **Sacred Objects**—prayer wheels, statues, holy water, shamanic medicine bundles, and others.

Sociologist's Perspective



Emile Durkheim on Religion

Emile Durkheim wrote the classic statement of the sociological perspective on religion in his 1912 work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Here he defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relating to sacred things that unite into one single moral community all those who adhere to them.” He characterized religion as an institution that deals with the sacred, rather than the profane. The *sacred* involves anything that is beyond the ordinary and for which believers feel

awe or reverence. The *profane* represents ordinary objects and events that people encounter in their daily lives.

Context determines whether an object or event is sacred or profane. For example, eating bread is profane in daily life, but sacred during the Christian rite of Holy Communion and the eating of unleavened bread in Jewish Passover.

Durkheim focused on practices relative to the sacred, and his approach continues to be the basis of sociological understanding of religion.

Types of Religion

The beliefs of the world's many religions can be viewed as falling into **four** categories:

1. **Theism** is the belief in one or more supreme beings whose actions influence human affairs and who deserve to be worshipped. **Polytheism** is the worship of several gods who have varying degrees of power.

EXAMPLE: Hinduism, the world's third largest religion, believes in one divine principal but worships many gods as different aspects of that unity.

Monotheism is the belief in and worship of a single, supreme God.

EXAMPLES: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe in one God who is the creator and absolute ruler of the universe.

2. **Ethicalism** is a belief that moral principles have a sacred quality. These religions do not involve the worship of gods, spirits, or forces.

EXAMPLES: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism have widely different practices and beliefs and can include a belief in the saving grace of higher beings. They are similar in their emphasis on living a right and just life.

3. **Animism**, or spiritism, is the belief in the existence of spirits that occupy the same world as humans, but in a different plane of existence. While some cultures practice an animistic religion

solely, many believers in animistic religions also practice one or another of the major religions.

EXAMPLES: In the **totemism** of many indigenous peoples, **shamans** interact with spirits found in natural objects such as trees or mountains, in birds or animals, or in natural phenomena such as the sun, moon, or lightning. Guardian angels, devils, fairies, ancestral spirits, and demons are all animistic spirits. Seventy percent of Americans polled in the 1990s said they believed in angels.

4. **Supernaturalism** is a belief in the existence of supernatural forces that influence human events for good or evil. These forces don't take any specific form. Like animism, supernaturalism can be the basis of a religion or it may be found in the practices of believers in other religions.

EXAMPLE: Traditional societies in the Pacific Islands believe in a force called *mana* that is neither good nor evil, but is a supernatural energy that some people who have special gifts and knowledge can make work for them.

Sociological Perspectives on Religion

There are primarily two contrasting perspectives on religion in sociological thought, those of the functionalist Emile Durkheim and those of the symbolic interactionist Max Weber. Research since their time tends to follow one or the other of these traditions.

| Membership in World Religions* | |
|--|--------------|
| Religion | Followers |
| 1. Christianity | 2 billion |
| 2. Islam | 1.3 billion |
| 3. Hinduism | 900 million |
| 4. Secular/Nonreligious/ Agnostic/Atheist | 850 million |
| 5. Buddhism | 360 million |
| 6. Chinese traditional religion | 225 million |
| 7. Primal-indigenous | 190 million |
| 8. Sikhism | 23 million |
| 9. Yoruba religion | 20 million |
| 10. Juche | 19 million |
| 11. Spiritism | 14 million |
| 12. Judaism | 14 million |
| 13. Baha'i | 6 million |
| 14. Jainism | 4 million |
| 15. Shinto | 4 million |
| 16. Cao Dai | 3 million |
| 17. Tenrikyo | 2.4 million |
| 18. Neo-Paganism | 1 million |
| 19. Unitarian-Universalism | 800 thousand |
| 20. Scientology | 750 thousand |

*These numbers are approximate estimates. The list accounts for the religions of about 98 percent of the world's population.

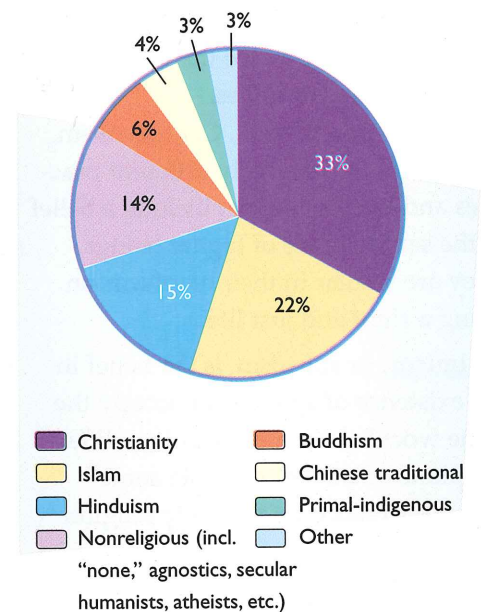
Source: Adherents.com (2001).

Functionalist Perspective

Durkheim was interested in the social functions of religion. These can be grouped around the following **four** needs:

- 1. Social Cohesion.** Religion provides a shared set of values, beliefs, and norms. When people share beliefs and rituals, social bonds form that contribute to the solidarity of the community.
- 2. Comfort and Support.** Religious beliefs often provide consolation in times of personal suffering or natural disaster. The support of others and the rituals surrounding life transitions such as birth, marriage, and death provide a sense of continuity. Strong religious belief can lead people to endure hardships.

World Religions



Source: www.adherents.com

3. Meaning. Religions satisfy the need to understand the world and one's role in it. Religions offer answers to large questions about the meaning of life and death and the ways in which people should lead their lives.

4. Social Control. Religion strengthens conformity to society's norms by defining some of them as sacred. Commandments such as "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not kill" add religious weight to social laws. The Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have others do unto you") encourages helpfulness and cooperation. Laws have even taken on religious names, such as the Good Samaritan Law that protects those who help others during emergencies.

Nonreligious belief systems such as communism, nationalism, fascism, and humanism may meet some of the same needs as religion. These systems draw their power from ideologies that are considered "noble" rather than from the realm of the sacred.

Interactionist Perspective

While Durkheim was interested in the social functions religion perform, Weber was interested in the way religion explained fundamental moral problems of death, suffering, and evil and how religious views operated in a given society's efforts to reach its goals. He described his most important work in this area in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In it he tried to show that the roots of Western capitalism lay in the religious beliefs of Protestants.

Sociologists after Weber looked at postindustrial society. Some saw a severe religious decline, or secularization, and tried to show that it was the result of urbanization and cultural pluralism. Others said that religion was transformed in the 20th century, becoming more accepting of other religious views, more inclusive, and thus different but not undermined.

Religion, because it seeks to understand the human situation, makes great use of symbols, and is fundamentally social.

Religion in the United States

Religion in the fabric of U.S. society is related to our history, to the different cultural groups that make up our population, and to the change we are continually experiencing.

Separation of Church and State

For Puritans, "theology was wedded to politics and politics to the progress of the kingdom of God." They had come to this land to escape religious persecution and planned to establish a "holy commonwealth" to be ruled by church officials. They were not tolerant of diverse opinions within their society.

One hundred fifty years later, during the debates on the articles of the Constitution, the founding fathers recalled the history of religious persecution. They wanted to guarantee religious freedom. In the Constitution, they would have no official state religion and forbade government interference in religious activities. Over time, court rulings have interpreted this to

mean that activities of the church and state must be kept separate. National, state, and local governments must not, therefore, promote any particular religion.

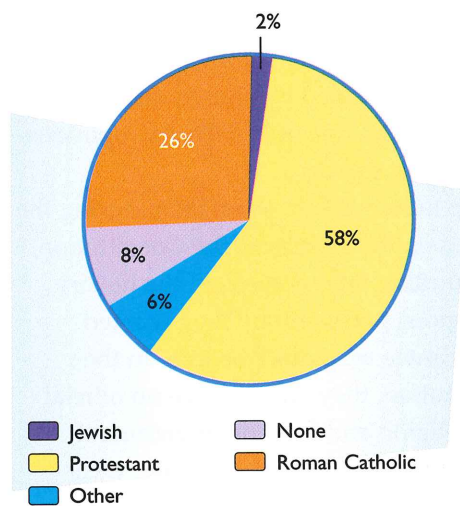
In practice, this separation is incomplete. U.S. currency states "In God We Trust" and the phrase, "under God" is present in the pledge of allegiance. Governmental events frequently open with a prayer, and churches are tax-exempt. Many citizens have no problem with these things as long as all beliefs are treated equally.

Religious Diversity

The United States is one of the most religious nations in the world. Over 90 percent of Americans believe in a "supreme being." More than 50 percent say that religion is "very important" in their lives.

Religious beliefs are extremely diverse, encompassing more than 1,000 denominations, sects, and new religious movements.

Religions in the United States

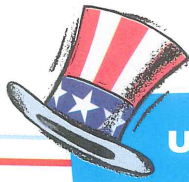


Source: *Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1998*

The graph shows the religious membership of people in the United States. Preferences for "other" religions, such as Buddhism and Islam, have been growing.

Sociologists who have analyzed U.S. religious group membership have found certain generalizations can be made:

- * **Age.** Adults tend to be more active in churches than younger people. Many baby boomers who dropped out of their religions in their teens or 20s have now returned.
- * **Class Differences.** There are noticeable differences among the median incomes of members of different religious denominations. Also, in some communities, the more prestigious members may all belong to the same religion.
- * **Ethnicity.** As you have learned, members of ethnic groups tend to share religious beliefs and practices. Many African Americans are Baptist or Methodist, and many Latinos are Catholic. However, most of the major religious groups have members across the cultural spectrum.
- * **Gender.** Women seem to be more religious than men. In a 1995 study, 69 percent of women said that religion was important to them, compared to 51 percent of men. Women were 20 percent more likely to have attended a church service in a given week than men. Women's religious decisions differ from those of men in other ways. A woman more often converts to a religion because of a personal contact. Men tend to choose religious affiliation based on their own research.



U.S. Culture Connection

Hi-Tech Religion

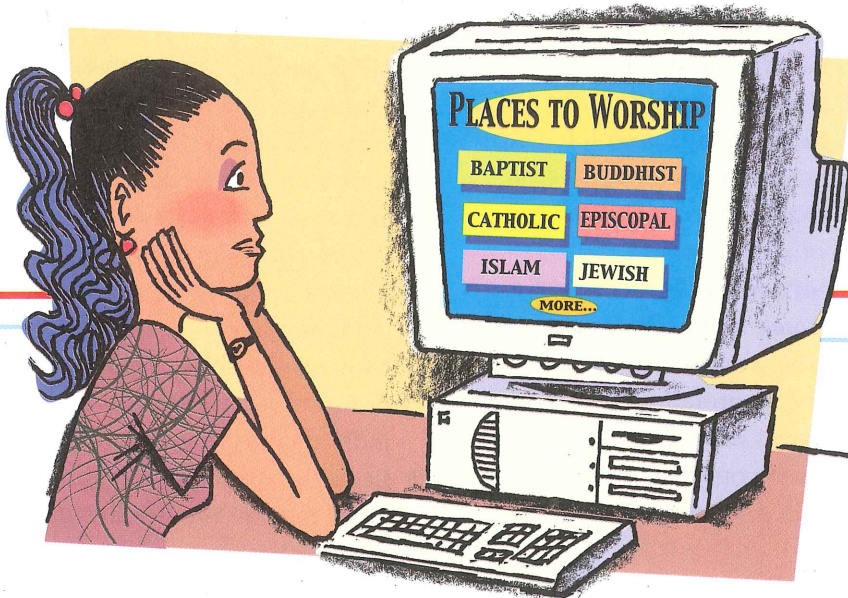
Emerging technologies have added a new dimension to religion. For many years, television ministries and **televangelism**—the zealous preaching of religious doctrine on television—have grown increasingly popular. Services once held in tents are now beamed into living rooms from high-tech “cathedrals.” Evangelical Christians buy more than 90 percent of television time allotted to religion.

Searchable scriptures are available on CDs, and gospel music has its own category of music awards.

Over 10 million Internet sites are devoted to religion. With a click of the mouse, people can jump from a mosque

to a virtual mass to an Inca sun ceremony. They can choose from a selection of Bible verses or join a heated discussion of religious doctrine in an on-line chat room. In the fall of 2000, there were more than 32,000 web sites where people could learn about different faiths and religions, ranging from “African Religions” to “Zoroastrianism.”

Will people use these resources to add to their knowledge of religion or to replace their attendance at live religious services? Some sociologists worry that current trends will lead to isolation and social fragmentation if traditional worship communities are replaced by TV and the Internet.



Changing Beliefs

Several trends are changing the nature of religion in the United States:

- * **Members of different religions are exchanging ideas.** Increasingly, members of religious groups are coming to believe that they have made too much of their differences in the past. In some cases, different Protestant denominations are merging. Among the world's religions, groups of people have come together to share their experiences and understandings of the divine. This **ecumenical** movement represents a major shift away from an insistence on having the only truth and a recognition that there may be more than one expression of truth.
- * **A fundamentalist revival is taking place.** In reaction to what they see as an increasingly liberal and permissive society, some Christian groups have reasserted **fundamentalist** positions, emphasizing a belief in strict rules and a literal interpretation of scripture. Fundamentalist groups, such as the Christian Coalition, have used the voting power of their members to seek changes in society that conform to their views of what is right.
- * **The quality of some religious experience has become more secular and less sacred.** The word *secular* means "worldly," that is, profane. One example is church services offered on television. Sociologists point out that, unlike participating in a solemn religious

service in a place of worship, people can now sit on their sofas munching snacks while "attending" church. There are also "drive-through" funeral parlors, and weddings take place in all sorts of "profane" locations. Some feel this compromises the distinction between the sacred and the profane.

- * **People are seeking religious answers outside the traditional religions.** This recent trend is sometimes called **New Age**. It is a unique blend of magic and religion, ancient and futuristic beliefs, and both practical and mystical philosophies. People who adopt new-age ideas often refer to themselves as spiritual rather than religious, meaning that they are seeking a direct personal connection with "spirit" rather than relying on the traditions and interpretations of organized religion.

Various factors motivate people to search out different religious practices. These include:

- * Major developmental phases, such as adolescence or midlife, in which an individual reexamines his or her identity and basic beliefs.
- * Life crises, such as a crippling accident, that can cause an individual to reevaluate the way in which he or she will live going forward.
- * New relationships, a close friend, or future spouse who introduce the individual to new ways of worship.
- * Disenchantment with organized religions that are run like businesses and seem lacking in spiritual depth.

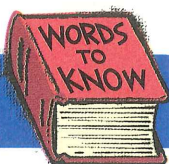
Chapter 10 Wrap-up

EDUCATION AND RELIGION

Education and religion are highly influential institutions. Education performs the functions of socialization, cultural transmission, assimilation/social control, social placement, and change and innovation. Yet conflict theorists say that through some of their practices, U.S. educational institutions maintain social inequalities. Several school programs have addressed these issues.

Religion provides social cohesion, comfort and support, answers to questions about the meaning of life, and social control. Separation of church and state and religious diversity characterize religion in the United States.

Sociology



animism—belief in the existence of spirits that occupy the same world but in a different plane of existence. *p. 195*

apprentice—one who works for an experienced worker, exchanging labor for instruction in a trade. *p. 184*

ecumenical—referring to a movement that promotes unity among religions or churches. *p. 200*

ethicalism—belief that moral principles have a sacred quality. *p. 195*

ethnocentric—centered on a belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group; from the perspective of that group. *p. 188*

fundamentalist—based on basic or fundamental principles; in religion, emphasizing a belief in strict rules and a literal interpretation of scripture. *p. 200*

monotheism—belief in and worship of a single supreme God. *p. 195*

multiculturalism—point of view that includes the perspectives of many cultures within a society rather than in only a mainstream culture. *p. 188*

New Age—blend of magic and religion, ancient and futuristic beliefs, and practical and mystical philosophies. *p. 200*

polytheism—worship of several gods who have varying degrees of power. *p. 195*

religion—system of shared beliefs and rituals that surround the realm of the sacred and deal with fundamental questions of life. *p. 194*

shaman—holy person who interacts with spirits of nature on behalf of others. *p. 195*

supernaturalism—belief in the existence of supernatural forces that influence human events for good or evil. *p. 195*

televangelism—zealous preaching of religious doctrine on television. *p. 199*

theism—belief in one or more supreme beings whose actions influence human affairs and who deserve worship. *p. 195*

totemism—belief in spirits within natural objects such as trees, mountains, animals, or natural phenomena. *p. 195*