

Elements of religious tradition



**ASSIGN
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Elements of Religious Traditions Paper Defining a religion can be a difficult task and there is no simple definition that can completely describe it.

Every culture and society has some form of religion and some maybe specific to that culture and not practiced anywhere else in the world (Fontaine, 2013; Molloy, 2010). The vast diversity of religious traditions can be discerned by examining their understanding of what is sacred. For example, many religions believe in a single deity that is held sacred.

Other religious traditions do not place emphasis on deities, but believe that the world itself is the sacred (2010). In spite of this diversity, all religious traditions share broad components: what does a religious tradition communicate, how is it performed, and how is it organized. When anthropologists and sociologists choose to study various religious traditions, they can encounter a number of issues that can impact their study, such as, incomplete religious texts, and traditions that are passed on orally (2010).

Components of Religious Traditions

The first component is what does a religious tradition communicate? These are the various teachings, texts, stories, and myths. Religious teachings are the ideas and principles passed on that describe core beliefs, values, morals, etc. of a religious tradition (Molloy, 2010). These can be expressed through stories or myths. Religious teachings can be passed orally between members or written in a sacred text. Religious teachings attempt to communicate an understanding of the sacred within the tradition to its members.

In Christian traditions, the basic ideas revolve around the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was the embodiment of the sacred within these traditions (Woodhead, 2009). For the Igbo people of Nigeria, there main

beliefs involve the Earth as being sacred and that the world is comprised of a number of different realms (Molloy, 2010). These contrasting examples show the diverse nature of religious traditions and how they share the common component of what is communicated by a particular religious tradition. The second element is how a religious tradition is performed?

This is accomplished through prayer, worship, the undertaking of a pilgrimage to a holy site, or the performance of a ritual. The specific ceremonies observed for a specific religious tradition is based on the religious teachings for that particular tradition. What all of these have in common is that each ceremony is meant to bring the individual closer to the sacred within reach tradition. For example, in Islamic traditions it is a worshiper's duty to make a pilgrimage to Mecca (Brown, 2009). In Christian traditions, worshipers pray to Jesus in a church or throughout their day (Woodhead, 2009).

In many Native American religious traditions, a rite of passage is performed through a vision quest; where the individual attempts to find spiritual guidance and meaning (Molloy, 2010). All of these traditions attempt to move the individual closer to the sacred and attempt to connect in a meaningful way. The final aspect is how is a religious tradition organized. This describes the structure of it, for example, the leadership and how members relate to one another. Once again, this is based on that religious tradition's teachings. The organization describes how members of the tradition relate to the sacred.

Specifically, does an ordained individual need to act as an intermediate between the sacred and the individual or who are the individuals that decide

what is considered sacred within a religious tradition. In many religious traditions, the priest, priestess, and other high religious figures are held with the highest regard (Molloy, 2010). In Catholicism, the Pope is viewed as the absolute head of that religious tradition and his word is essentially law (Balmer & Pullella, 2013). In a number of religious traditions, a shaman is viewed as a person with vast wisdom.

He or she has the powers to communicate directly with the sacred and acts as an intermediate for various individuals (Molloy, 2010). In the ancient Greek tradition, the Oracle of Delphi was an important woman, individuals from all around the Greek world would come seeking her advice and to communicate with the Gods (Legon, 2013). Ultimately, an important component of a religious tradition is how it is organized. This organization has the important role of stating the power structure and how members can communicate with the sacred. Critical Issues in Religious Studies

There are a number of different critical issues that one needs to consider when studying religious traditions. The first is that some religious texts might be incomplete or entirely missing (Molloy, 2010). This can be extremely troublesome when a person is attempting to understand a given tradition that might be lacking important components. For example, a sacred text written on a stone tablet might be missing large sections of the text, which could contain important rituals or principles for that tradition. This is extremely difficult with ancient religious traditions such as the Egyptian, Roman, and Greek traditions (2010).

This leads into the second critical issue is that the religious tradition might not have a sacred text or any written record, because traditions, stories, and

myths might be passed orally. This is extremely trouble some for many people studying religions (Molloy, 2010). For example, there might be a limited amount of individuals that have the traditions. This is the case with many Native American religious traditions, because members passed on these important teachings orally and may people have may stopped practicing.

This can cause a religious tradition to be lost (2010). Also, oral traditions can be corrupted with time and might not resemble the original story that was originally told. A storyteller might change aspects or merge it with other stories from another religious tradition. All of these are important issues to consider when studying religious traditions. Conclusion In spite of this diversity, all religious traditions share several broad components: what does a religious tradition communicate, how is it performed, and how is it organized.

Every religious tradition shares these common principles and this allows individuals the ability to understand each religious tradition and how they compare with one another. Also, studying religious traditions can have a number of critical issues that have to be addressed in order to full appreciate the vast collection of human religion. Reference Balmer, C. , & Pullella, P. (2013, March 14). New pope urges church to return to its gospel roots. Reuters. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/14/us-pope-idUSBRE92D05P20130314> Brown, D. (2009).

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