Components of a Religion
Understanding Religions

• At their base understanding a religion is a set of ideas tied together under the belief in some type of divine being, a guiding set of morality, and a belief in an afterlife
  • Buddhism by definition is not a religion because its lack of a god
  • Guiding principles for follower to live by give direction and how the religion should be practiced
Polytheistic and Monotheistic Religions

• Religions can be divided based on their structure in the belief of one god (monotheism) or their belief in many gods (polytheism)
  • Monotheistic religions offer greater cultural cohesion as cults or sects can develop around different gods within a polytheistic society
    • Example – All followers of Christianity follow just one god, whereas Hinduism has millions of gods
Universalizing and Ethnic Religions

- Religions differ in their ideas on how someone can actually join their religion.
  - Universalizing religions are open to all and will actively seek converts to join their religion
    - Islam and Christianity are main examples and because of this they are also the largest religions worldwide
  - In an Ethnic religion the members are born into it and the religious ideas are connected to their ethnicity. Because of this they tend to be smaller
    - Hinduism and Judaism are common examples of ethnic religions. Judaism remains rather small, whereas Hinduism is quite large due to its large population in India
Folk Religions and Animism

• In Folk cultures that have unique cultures specific to their environment they have often adopted unique religions that are specific to their culture only

• Many are animistic, meaning they attribute supernatural powers to plants, animals, and inanimate objects
  • Example – Mongolian Mythology had a sky god, horse god, etc...
Branches, Denominations, and Sects

• Branch – Large divisions of religions based on structural beliefs (ex. division of Islam between Shi’a and Sunni or Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox)

• Denomination – Further separation of Religious branches (ex. Splitting Orthodox Christianity between Eastern and Greek Orthodox denominations)

• Sect – A further division a religious denomination who develop specific but fundamental differences than the rest of the main practice (Ex. The “Old Believers” in Eastern Orthodox church)
  • Sometimes considered to be derogatory