

Notes on Studying Religion

These notes are for classroom discussion, not publication.

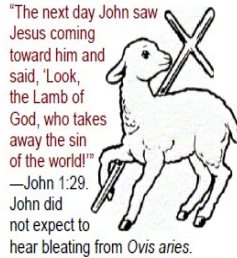
The world of our experience is (biologically, socially, etc) constructed; we do not experience the world as it actually is. (How could we?) But because our world seems ordinary, we normally bracket doubts about that the world could be other than it appears. Science, art and play, and religion (esp. ritual) may remove those brackets for a time.

Six stages or layers of representation (#1 does not represent).

1. **unitive** [mystical], non-dual — episodic experiences, dreams, drugs; TFN s86 Boehme.
2. **enactive** [mimetic], bowing, dancing, multivalent meanings; **KNOWLEDGE HOW**, Yogi Barra; *embody truth w/o knowing it* — bow before “bow.”
3. **narrative** [mythic], uniting opposites, symbols; Navajo sand paintings, Velasquez, Beethoven.
4. **conceptual** [theoretic] — ideas, literal statements, “axial age”; **KNOWLEDGE THAT**; *Puritans prohibit theater*.
5. **modern** [secularistic] — reductionism, fundamentalism, literal statements); **KNOWLEDGE FOR CONTROL**.
6. **post-modern crypto-sacred** — *mythic consciousness*.

“In connection with the rise of modern science the rejection of metaphor, symbol, and myth became explicit.” Bellah 2011, p39. Cf Eliot’s “*dissociation of sensibility*.” With Plato, and developing with 1620 Francis Bacon’s *natura vexata* and 1637 Descartes’ dualism and mathematical paradigms, nature was severed from faith, nature objectified in categories, controlled, and used. Hobbes rejected using “words metaphorically” because they “thereby deceive others.” Words not yet used by the 16th Century *absolute, relative; abstract, concrete; concept; analysis, synthesis*. *System* came into use only in the middle of the 17th century.

Consider the changes from reading aloud, to adding spaces between words in written texts, to reading silently, to movable type, to the spread of literacy, to the Reformation’s focus on the word over sacred images (in extreme cases, actual hostility to such images), to the categories and quantifications of the Enlightenment.



Mythic	Literal
multivalent	monovalent
holistic	broken
why	how
behold	control
dialectic	dualistic
organic	mechanical
quality	quantity
relationship	discrete objects
participation	objectivity
commitment	neutrality
mystery	measuring
together	fragmented
ritual	method
partner	winner
God=world soul	God=world director
implicate	explicit
image	concept
analog	digital
process	mind/body split
(commit-belove-ment)	believe (propo-sition)
integral	category
Christ’s body	bread

Arising from wonder and mystery, expressed in thanksgiving, and matured in service, religion has been seduced by **scientism** to ignore the sacred, and faith is now often also conceived in terms of facticity, categories, partialisms, and literalism, even fundamentalism.

Reformation wars furthered secularization as a way to separate government from religion. No longer would your religion automatically be your ruler’s. Focus on sermon titles indicated which side you are on.

Enlightenment into 19th Century: Natural sciences and social sciences (politics, economics, sociology) plus anthropology and Orientalism; categorical urge and reductionism.

“World Religions”

- 1827 Christianity only was world religion — others were religions of particular geographical areas, lands-religions. A discourse of “othering.” Superiority of Aryan languages over Semitic; Christianity only incidentally related to ancient Israelites, Arabs.
- 1871 J F Clarke: *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology*: Christianity v. ethnic religions
- 1880s Buddhist also a world religion (European)
- 1923 Troeltsch: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism world religions.
- 1893 John Henry Barrows, Pres, Parliament, 1897 “Christianity, the World-Religion”
- 20th C: Great religions v. primal, ancient, archaic
- Late 20th C: East/West “contest” + Pluralism

The Four C’s

Among the many ways of identifying various dimensions of both “everyday” and “transcendent” religion as seeking and responding to the Holy, the “Four C’s” may be a workable scheme—

- CULTUS**: Ritual, worship practices, art, music, architecture (the enactive, mimetic stage of representation) and story (the narrative, mythic stage) shared by a group
- CODE**: Conduct, ethics, moral behavior, etiquette
- COMMUNITY**: the social dimension expressed as a congregation, hierarchy, and other organizational forms
- CREED**: beliefs, concepts, theology (the theoretic stage of representation)

How can I best study other faiths?

see Syllabus Eliade mottoes

Anthropology

- Frazer, Tyler, Robertson Smith: beliefs in invisible powers; animism. Turner: Rites of Passage
- Functionalism: religion is what it does.
- Structuralism: structure of ideas, values, beliefs; Claude Levi-Strauss: *Raw and Cooked*

Psychology

- Freud: religion projection, illusion
- Jung: collective unconscious at root of religion
- Wm James: way to live life in uncertain world, honor mysticism

Sociology

- Durkheim: religion speaks about humans using language about gods — is entirely social
- Weber: religions motivate humans (economics)
- Geertz: religion a system of symbols, etc, organizing life to make sense out of existence

Religious Phenomenology / History of Religions

- Schleiermacher feeling of dependence, infinite
- Otto: *Idea of the Holy — mysterium tremendum et fascinans* — the numinous
- Eliade: the sacred as *sui generis* — what is really real — orienting / holy space, time, etc
- Ninian Smart — empathetic imagination

Technical vocabulary: assimilate, epiphany, homologize, isomorphism, kratophany, myth, profane (chaotic), ritual, sacred, syncretism, valence, valorize.