its followers and how much is from traditional Arab culture that is often carried with the religion as it diffuses.

Religious Taboo Lines and Ethical Systems

I will now explore the ethical systems of each of the five major religious traditions, with some attention to the way in which those religious ethics shape and are shaped by social organization and action in various spheres of daily life, economics, and politics. Perhaps the most significant aspect of religious traditions for purposes of this survey is their guidelines for the nature of collective life and the ethical standards that facilitate peaceful coexistence among peoples. Every tradition has an ethical system, often growing out of the relationship with a deity, which emphasizes social relations, with regulations about treating one another with compassion and justice, at least within the community, and often across social boundaries as well.

Hindu Ethics

The Hindu ethical system centers on the concept of dharma, identifying and carrying out one's appropriate duties. In addition to religious duties, individuals must learn to discipline themselves to transcend the profane aspects of life. Various acts are not moral or immoral in and of themselves but appropriate or inappropriate given one's dharma.

A more general code of ethics for all believers stresses the importance of engaging in religious rituals, honoring one's status superiors, giving charity to the poor, avoiding harmful acts against others, not lying, and the like. Because the consequences of engaging in unethical behavior are built into the structure of the universe, one reaps what one sows. According to one rendering of the ancient scriptures, for example, if a non-Brahman kills a Brahman, the penalty is reincarnation as a worm in one's own feces for 10,000 reincarnations. This seems like a stiff penalty, and it raises a number of difficult empirical questions for believer and observer alike: Does such a threat actually deter the killing of Brahmans by non-Brahmans? Certainly such acts have taken place, but perhaps more would have occurred if the threat were not in place. Second, is the punishment really inflicted? (This question is even more difficult to answer.)

An element of Hindu ethics that deserves special attention is sexual behavior. The relationship between religion and sex has been particularly significant in India, where the entire range of sexual activity has played a central role in the search for the sacred. These extremes appear in stories of

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sacred cow in India, which wanders the streets protected by religious taboos, even in the busiest cities. To most visitors, these cows appear bizarre or inconvenient at best, and a scandal at worst, because they may not be slaughtered for sustenance—ironic, given the fact that so many people are malnourished in the same cities and villages. Moreover, cow worship by Hindus has sparked off riots between Hindus and Muslims, who prefer to eat cows rather than revere them.

Anthropologist Marvin Harris (1974) found an explanation for this phenomenon in the small-scale, low-energy economic system of traditional India, based as it has been for centuries on animals. Cows and oxen still provide low-energy substitutes for tractors; for example, a team of bulls pulls around large mowers until they cut a considerable section of grass. The grass is then raked into a pile and consumed by the cow, which converts it into energy for mowing another section. Moreover, India's cattle annually excrete about 700 million tons of recoverable manure, about half of which is used as fertilizer and the remainder as cooking fuel or household flooring and siding. Wandering cows scour the environment for waste products and stubble unfit for human consumption, which they then convert into milk, energy, and other useful products. These ubiquitous cows are not wild animals that wander aimlessly; they are actually owned and tended by individuals who can identify them. Periodic droughts and famine in India threaten the livelihood of nearly everyone, but the Zebu cattle have energy-storing humps on their backs, are efficient, and are capable of existing for long periods of time with little food or water. They provide labor, dung, and, of course, milk and calves (a source of cash for a poor family). During crisis periods, a farmer may be tempted to kill or sell livestock, which might make immediate sense but would be disastrous in the long term. Religious taboos against killing cattle thus help to protect against irrational decisions in difficult times. Compare this rational protection of the cow in India, Harris suggested, to the irrationality of U.S. culture, where the beef industry feeds two thirds of the country's grain to cattle while people go hungry.

Despite its explicitly spiritual rationale, the religious tradition of protecting cows thus has a concrete economic function. This lesson cannot be lost in efforts to construct an ethos for the global village, and it is also the conclusion of Weber's (1904/1958) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Rationality is always drawn from a single viewpoint, and what is irrational from one perspective may be rational from another. Before we condemn any religious beliefs as irrational, we need to explore their hidden logic and benefits, not only from a limited viewpoint but also from multiple perspectives.

Buddhist Ethics

The moral code of the tradition, summarized in the Buddha's Five Precepts of right behavior, provides a means for escaping suffering: Live in such a way as to transcend one's fate and avoid inflicting suffering on others, engage in acts of compassion toward other creatures, and rejoice in their good fortune. The Buddha thus advocates an ethical system that is a mirror image of Western utilitarianism: In Buddhism, one's own interests are served by serving others, whereas in Western utilitarianism everyone's interests are enhanced by pursuing one's own interests. The Five Precepts are as follows:

1. Do not kill.
2. Do not steal.
3. Do not lie.
4. Do not be unchaste (this has different meanings for monks and laity).
5. Do not drink intoxicants.

Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) provided an interesting update on the meaning of these teachings:

1. Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world in my thinking and in my way of life.
2. Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I vow to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.
3. Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

4. Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

5. Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

Source: Reprinted from *For a Future to Be Possible* (1993) by Thich Nhat Hanh with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, www.parallax.org.

Buddhist monks are bound by an extensive set of rules, but the observance of only four (taken from the Five Precepts) is necessary to avoid expulsion from the community: the prohibitions against (1) sexual intercourse, (2) theft, (3) murder, and (4) dishonest claims to spiritual attainment.[2] Laity are expected to (1) follow most of the same rules as monks, (2) provide the monks with food when they make their morning rounds with their begging bowls, and (3) socialize their children into the Buddha's teachings. Traditionally, all Buddhists received some instruction at the monasteries during daily and life cycle rituals and from storytellers, because until recently most of the population was illiterate. Contemporary Buddhists, when they are allowed to, provide copies of the Buddha's teachings in public places such as restaurants as well as in the temples.

Buddhism has a highly practical side as well, as shown in the folk religions that became associated with Buddhist religion. The Gods are considered responsible not only for physical security but also for providing guidance for everyday life in the community. In Jordan's (1985) account of Taiwanese religion, a village is guarded at all four corners by supernatural protectors

who ward off evil. If the guardians are not properly worshiped, evil may enter the village, and special rites are invoked to exorcise it. In the village of Bao-an, a child drowned in the pond, having been "pulled in by a ghost." The child's maligned ghost lingered in the pond and could not be permitted to stay, so two altar tables containing small "divination chairs" for the Gods were placed in front of the temple. The Gods came and advised that people should stop speaking bad words to one another, because the death had disrupted the harmony of the village. Second, they suggested that people should keep children away from the pond.

In Bao-an, as elsewhere, religious rituals and the ethos of a religious tradition provide concrete, as well as general, guidance for a culture's lifeways. Just as kosher laws directly or indirectly keep Jews from contracting trichinosis from bad pork, the Bao-an Gods' words bring harmony to the village by stopping harsh words and thus maintaining order in the community. Other children would be saved from drowning by the divine injunction to keep them away from the pond.

The rituals themselves may appear nonrational to people outside the belief system, but they seem to provide a sense of security and in some ways actually helped to protect the people of Bao-an. Is it mere illusion, mere false consciousness? In traditional Chinese folk religion, those who die are always still present in the form of Gods and ghosts; they continue to have needs in the next world and so are given gifts regularly. One's fate in the next world is thus related to how well one's descendants provide for one after death. One's status in the next world, however, is also determined by the merit accumulated in a terrestrial life. One villager put it this way:

> When we men are good, we have a good report; and when we are bad, we have a bad report. The idea is always the same. Gods are those who have done good deeds as men, those who love virtue and study the ways of the buddhas and after death join the buddhas. . . .
>
> Men of a good nature become gods; men of virtue become gods, and those without it [virtue] become ghosts. (Jordan, 1985, pp. 35–37)

It is not clear, at least in Jordan's (1985) account, how much of one's fate is determined by one's own merit and how heavily one's descendants' actions count, but the rational calculus is not important. Because gaining one's own merit and honoring one's ancestors are essential components of the ethical system, both are connected logically to one's fate in the afterlife.

Although traditionally emphasizing the individual's finding his or her own path to disengage from suffering, Buddhists also have a long tradition

of cultivating compassion in the public sphere, such as King Ashoka's famous public works in ancient South Asia. A recent development is the emergence of a movement of "Engaged Buddhists" who argue for the importance of social activism as an implication of the Buddhist ethic. The Engaged Buddhists are involved in everything from promoting justice and human rights (see Ledgerwood & Un, 2003) to opposing war and excessive consumerism (see, e.g., Barnhill, 2004).

Jewish Ethics

According to rabbinic tradition,

> a heathen once came to Shammai and said, "I will become a proselyte on the condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai chased him away with a builder's measuring stick. When he appeared before Hillel with the same request, Hillel said, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary; go and learn it." (H. Freedman, n.d.)

This parable summarizes the core of Jewish teaching in several ways:

1. Judaism consistently emphasizes social ethics, guidelines for interacting with others.
2. The tradition honors its teachers (rabbis) but also challenges them to think clearly.
3. All necessary knowledge is in the Torah, but the process of understanding it involves continuous revelation, debate, and interpretation.
4. Though religion is to be taken seriously, a good sense of humor can help a person understand the sacred.

The foundation for Jewish ethics is the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, traditionally believed given to the ancient Hebrews by God shortly after their escape from slavery in Egypt (ca. 1300 BCE). In the third month after their escape from the Egyptians, the Hebrews camped before Mt. Sinai. Considerable social unrest emerged at the time, perhaps because of the difficult existence the Jews experienced as refugees, after the relative security of their slavery. At this key moment, according to Jewish tradition, Moses went up onto Mt. Sinai and received a set of stone tablets from God, on which were inscribed the laws that would regulate the community's life. The commandments were as follows:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)
2. Thou shalt not make unto them any graven image, or any likeness of thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in water under the earth. (v. 4)
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain . . . (v. 7)
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (v. 8)
5. Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. (v. 12)
6. Thou shalt not kill. (v. 13)
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery. (v. 14)
8. Thou shalt not steal. (v. 15)
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. (v. 16)
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's. (v. 17)[3]

Note that eight of the Ten Commandments are expressed in the form of taboos, or injunctions; only two are positive (remember the Sabbath and honor your parents). Most of them (commandments 4 through 10) concern social relations rather than direct relations with the deity. This religious tradition did not intend simply to mediate between the people and their deity; it provided a foundation for their collective life.

The events surrounding the introduction of the Decalogue are full of social drama and are equally instructive. After a preparatory period in the camp at Mt. Sinai, Moses established boundaries beyond which only he, his brother Aaron, and later selected leaders from the community could go. The people were not even to touch the border of the mountain where Moses was to talk with God, or, they were warned, they would be put to death. The delegation was allowed to see God (which was usually taboo), but not to climb to the summit with Moses, who stayed there for 40 days. The people left below became restless, made a golden calf out of their jewelry,[4] and began to dance in front of it, turning from the worship of God to the indigenous religious practices of the region. Both Moses and their God were furious; Moses shattered the tablets containing the Law, and God threatened to destroy the Hebrews. When Moses asked the Israelites to choose sides, the tribe of Levi went with Moses, who reported God's instructions to his followers:

> Thus says the Lord God of Israel, "Put every man his sword on his side, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his

> brother and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor." And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. (Exodus 32:27–28)

Moses gave the Levites (as the tribe related to Levi was called) a blessing and intervened with God on behalf of the survivors. God decided not to destroy the remaining Israelites and provided Moses with new tablets. At that point, Moses and the Levites, having eliminated or intimidated all opposition forces that had rebelled by worshiping the golden calf, became priests in full control of their society.

Contained in the story of the ancient Hebraic ethical code is thus also a lesson about the nature of their God (who insists on loyalty and justice, subject to negotiation), the ruthlessness of their leaders' control, and an explanation for the Levites' special authority among the ancient Hebrews. The remarkable violence of the story, which stands in sharp contrast with the taboo against killing in the Decalogue, is almost lost in the narrative. Thus, inherent contradictions are taken for granted as the reader is swept along by the story.

In the third period of what Judaism considered its "salvation history" (after the call of Abraham and Sarah and then the Exodus from Egypt), the prophetic movement (which may have begun as early as 1050 BCE) took the establishment to task for not keeping the covenant with God. Instead of polytheism or idolatry, the prophets exposed injustice and the general faithlessness of the people as well as the emptiness of their religious rituals. As the prophet Amos (ca. 750 BCE) put it, God complained that the people "trample upon the needy, and bring the poor of the land to an end" (Amos 8:4). Consequently, their rituals of worship were no longer pleasing to the deity:

> I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
>
> Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them. . . .
>
> Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
>
> But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. (Amos 5:21–24)

Because the nation had broken the covenant with God by its injustice, Amos said that God would destroy them—a sentiment echoed by other prophets such as Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. God was no longer perceived as

a God who favored only a particular clan or nation but one who insisted on justice for all people and would punish violators of these principles even if they had a special relationship with their deity. This development signaled a significant break with the particularism of both clan and national religious expressions and exhibited a universalism similar to that found in Buddhism. Such a decoupling of the belief system from a particular social structure enabled the system's survival. In 922 BCE, the kingdom split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In 721 BCE, however, the northern kingdom was conquered, and in 586 BCE, more decisively, Jerusalem was crushed by the Babylonians. The temple was destroyed, and much of the nation's elite was carried off into exile in Babylon. Ironically, not only did Judaism survive this debacle, but it was even strengthened by the suffering of this "exilic" period.

Three consequences of the exilic period were as follows:

1. A clear monotheism was established that had only been hinted at in early Judaism (e.g., the Decalogue declares that no other Gods are to be worshipped before the Jewish God), because monotheism seemed to be a plausible explanation for the defeat by the Babylonians: The Jewish God was not weaker than the Babylonian God but was punishing the Hebrews for their sins.

2. The Torah was finally written down, probably for the first time, and the community ceased to rely on oral tradition. The theological and ethical ideas of the exilic and post-exilic tradition were then written back into the earlier history of the people, who reconstructed a sacred past now recorded in the Torah.

3. The very notion of Israel was constructed after the northern and southern kingdoms were destroyed. When Jews began to question their own religious identity, it was more clearly defined. By the time the exiles returned (when the Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539 BCE), the Jews had defined precisely who they were: members of the nation of Israel who had a bloodline from their ancestors and worshiped the One God, whose word was revealed in the Torah.

Thus the conflicts precipitated by dramatic (in some cases quite violent) conflict between Judaism and other socioreligious orders resulted not in the destruction of the tradition but in the re-creation of the faith. Out of these conflicts the notion of monotheism was forged, the scriptures were written down, and Judaism became less bound to specific geographic locations. Over time, the stories of this history held the Jewish community together through centuries of adversity and dispersion throughout the world.

The example of Judaism demonstrates how it is possible to see the way in which religious traditions are constructed to meet sociological and psychological needs. In this sense, the classical theorists such as Freud, Marx, Comte,

and Durkheim were right in regarding religious beliefs and practices as projections of human psychological needs; these theological explanations for the crises of life put a cosmic frame on personal troubles. Just because belief systems are constructed by humans to answer human needs and explain human perceptions does not mean, however—as the early sociological theorists claimed—that the referents of religion do not exist. It simply means that if the Gods do exist, they are perceived by humans in a human way.

Economics in Ancient Judaism

Because of its ethnic–tribal basis, ancient Judaism was closely linked with the economic life of the socioreligious community. The Jewish ethos places its distinctive stamp on economic activity in three ways: (1) Economic activity, like all elements of life, should be conducted on a highly ethical basis, with special attention to problems of injustice within the community. Everyone should be cared for and all should be treated fairly, even those outside the community. (2) Because the earth is a gift from God, humanity is given stewardship over it and should be thankful. Success in business is somehow related to God's grace, and a portion of the profits should be given as an offering. (3) Finally, the emphasis on rational thought and a disciplined life in the Jewish ethos has cultivated an entrepreneurial spirit that has served the community well over the centuries. Ironically, some of the entrepreneurial skills cultivated within the community were an inadvertent consequence of prohibitions against Jews' owning land in many parts of Europe until well into the modern era. Anti-Semitic groups over the centuries have exploited these historical circumstances for their own purposes by making unfounded claims about Jewish financial acumen.

Christian Ethics

At the center of the Christian ethical system is the proposition that God is love. In its more radical forms, the Christian ethic requires one also to love one's enemy, a concept I will explore more fully in the discussion of religion and social conflict in Chapter 8. This emphasis on loving others comes from Jesus's teachings as recorded in the New Testament. When asked what constituted the greatest commandment, Jesus responded with this:

> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37–40)

This link from the Jewish tradition between love of God and love of one's neighbor became a hallmark of the early Christian church, which broke across class and ethnic boundaries and maintained a strict pacifism. Many in the early community sold their worldly possessions, fed the poor, and lived a communal life focused on loving one another as children of God. This radical ethical universalism, as translated into interethnic relationships, must have been shocking to many first-century Jews, who had been taught that God required strict observance of boundaries between the community and others.

Different interpretations of these ideas appeared over time according to their affinities with different social groups. In conservative versions of Christianity, sin is a central and important aspect of human nature. The concept of "original sin," popular in some circles of Christianity especially since the Calvinist movement in 17th-century Europe, suggests that humans are born sinful because of the long lineage of disobedience that can be traced back to the original sinful act of Adam and Eve. We are all, according to the famous American Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards (1741), "sinners in the hands of an angry God."

The idea is not popular among most progressive Christians in the 21st century because of its emphasis on inevitable guilt, which, some then argue, implies a need for tightly bound systems of social control to keep people from sinning. The concept does have some sociological basis, however: Individuals face the consequences of their parents' "sin" from the moment they are born because their own values and life situations are shaped by their social context. This phenomenon can be seen in the cycles of violence in human society—children who suffer abuse from their parents, for example, often abuse their own children, and interethnic feuds can be transmitted across the generations.

The classic consequence of sin in Christian theology is to be damned and sent to hell for punishment in the afterlife. Debates about hell have raged through the centuries in Christian theology. There is little hint in the Gospels about Jesus's own understanding of the concept, and our most famous picture of hell was not provided until 13 centuries later by the Italian poet Dante in his famous *The Divine Comedy.* In the Christian tradition, evil is personified in the figure of the devil, or Satan, an angel created by God whose pride led to his downfall. By the middle of the 20th century, the devil had become a mere metaphor to most people in Western countries, yet popular interest in this figure increased as the end of the second millennium approached and movies like *The Omen* and *The Exorcist* drew large audiences. In the 1980s, Christian traditionalists in the United States saw the workings of Satan behind dangerous cultural trends and international

events. The charismatic movement revived the practice of exorcism to drive out demons. As a sign of the times, Fuller Theological Seminary—the nation's largest Protestant seminary—introduced a course on how to oppose the devil (see Woodward & Gates, 1982).

Widely discredited in secular intellectual culture, then, Satan remains a ubiquitous figure in popular culture and even performs a certain sociological function: The representation of this figure reminds us that evil is a force that exists, like many social forces, above and beyond those individuals who seem to be its instruments. Because demons represent an objectified element of the social construction of reality—that is, something that exists outside individuals—sociologists must at least remain agnostic about these figures as well as about their positive counterparts, angels. Certainly the concepts of demons and angels correspond to many people's experience, whether or not they exist objectively. As Peter Berger (1969) put it, people who reject the idea that Detroit is infested with demons miss a certain element of the reality of Detroit!

Christianity and Economic Ethics

The classic studies of the impact of Christian ethics on the economic functioning of Western society are Max Weber's works in the comparative sociology of religion, beginning with *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904/1958). Weber's research on his lifelong interest in Western rationality and religious phenomena was inaugurated with this study, which examined the impact of a particular religious system's approach to ordering everyday life conduct. According to Weber, the Protestant Reformation produced a religious crisis when people were no longer able to depend upon the formal ecclesiastical institution of Catholicism and its priestly representatives to assure them that they were saved. In Calvinism and Puritanism, a belief in the omniscience (all-knowing characteristic) of God led logically to a belief in predestination. If God knows everything, then God must know whether we are part of the elect, who will be rewarded in heaven for eternity, or part of the damned, who will suffer in hell. Accordingly, people began looking for new kinds of signs that they were part of the elect.

The anxiety that this dilemma created became linked with the idea of a calling in Puritanism and Calvinism: God calls people to a particular vocation; when one follows God's calling and works diligently at it, one will be rewarded. Worldly economic success consequently becomes a secure sign that a person is saved, thus laying the groundwork, Weber argued, for the systematic life control and inner discipline in the workaday world that promoted the rise of capitalism. Religious ideas, Weber concluded, do play a

formative role in history, but the consequences of their impact are not always anticipated. We may also note that although the Protestant ethic has its distinctive elements, the value placed on an individual's working for the good of the collective is a major theme in religious life that runs across traditions.

Religion is often closely tied to economics in a utilitarian way. People, for example, will often appeal to a God for assistance or even intervention in economic activities. From the rain dance and mating rites to facilitate agricultural production to prayer in corporate boardrooms, candles to help people win the lottery, and offerings made at the altar of Kuan Kung, humans have invoked the Gods to assist the process of economic acquisition. Sometimes the appeal is direct and unambiguous, as in the Reverend Gene Ewing's Church by Mail. The Reverend Ewing, a master of the mass-mail market, uses it to entice people to ask God to help them as well as to send money to his organization. His mailings are filled with testimonies of people who have followed his advice and been blessed with "spiritual, physical, and financial blessings." Someone got a check in the mail for $5,000; another person got a new job; someone else was healed of cancer. Modern technologies of television and mass mailings provide a great temptation for people willing to manipulate other people's religious beliefs for personal gain. The Reverend Ewing may be sincere himself, but his methods are open to exploitation.

Membership Tests and Social Control

Jesus contended that only God, not other humans, should judge another person's actions (see Matthew 5), but a religion's ethos creates guidelines for daily life. Elites thus use the religious ethos to legitimate a system of social control that does make judgments so that those who violate normative and legal boundaries can be punished and the existing social order upheld.

The history of the Christian church is replete with the construction of criteria for such judgments. When church and state are closely linked, religious ethical infractions are often punished by law. Often, however, informal controls are just as important to the ordering of daily life. Within a religious community, and especially in Christianity—in which the boundaries of the community are doctrinal more than social—qualification for membership becomes socially significant, and tests are developed for judging an individual's eligibility. In the early Christian church, all a person had to do was give a profession of faith ("Jesus is Lord") and be baptized in order to join the community. The community quickly established stricter standards, however, engaging in considerable debate over what did and did not constitute appropriate signs of membership. Meeting these additional

membership tests was supposed to follow naturally as a voluntary response to the ethical standards of the religious community, including such things as giving away worldly goods to the poor, living communally, and not committing any acts of violence. Soldiers who converted could remain in the military but could not kill anyone.

Such Christian tests of membership, salvation, merit, and the like sometimes led to great disparities between theory and practice. In contemporary Protestant Christianity, for example, a central tenet of the belief system is that each individual has a personal relationship with God with no mediation by church officials (as contrasted with the Catholic practice). Rhetorical and behavioral formulas with little if any biblical basis have emerged, however, that constitute very rigid tests of whether or not one is "truly Christian." In circles where personal faith is most highly valued, conformity to rhetorical standards is strictly enforced: To prove that one has an intense personal relationship with the deity, one must express it in the approved manner that reproduces other believers' equally intense, radically personal encounter with the sacred. In some communities, a Christian is someone who abstains from smoking, drinking, or fornicating (although killing others may be a religious duty, if the act is approved by the right government). In other Christian communities, however, people who approve of killing and disapprove of fornicating are judged as not truly Christian.

Because the ethos of a culture reflects its worldview and a pluralistic culture inevitably engages in struggles over the single acceptable way to define the world and the norms of everyday life, the definition of the family has taken on particular religious importance in the United States. In the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, the structures of the cosmos and the family typically reflect each other: The father who presides over the family mirrors God the Father in control of the universe. The implications of this perspective for the nature of authority in family and society are instructive. In direct (although somewhat obscured) opposition to the democratic norms of modern political culture, this model of authority requires respect for superordinates at both familial and cosmic levels and harsh sanctions against those who do not follow the norms.

The conservative Protestant movement in the United States is attempting to sustain this metaphor against the protests of the gender equality movement. At issue is what Wald, Owen, and Hill (1989) called "authority-mindedness"—that is, a model of social life in the family and the congregation that advocates an unequal division of authority. As Ammerman (1987) put it, "They come to expect groups to be divided between sheep and shepherds. The shepherds are entitled to deference and rewards, while the sheep are entitled to love and care" (p. 128). Within this belief framework, corporal punishment becomes an

important part of maintaining the family's structure, just as God punishes wrongdoers.' Ellison and Bartkowski (1997) contended the following:

> Conservative Protestants are convinced that physical discipline communicates a positive spiritual lesson to their children. In brief, they argue that many children develop and express their understandings of God in parental images, and therefore that children will infer God's view of them based on the treatment they receive from their parents. . . . In this view, parents should teach their children by example that God is loving, merciful, and forgiving. At the same time, however, because God's punishment of sin is understood as both inevitable and consistent, it is vitally important for parental discipline to embody these characteristics as well. (p. 52)

Other Christians contend that this authority-minded model is antithetical to their faith, which posits the brotherhood and sisterhood of all humanity.

Such debates take on heightened importance in the contemporary world, in which religious communities are forced to coexist alongside other groups with differing values and standards. Many of these issues can be seen in sharp relief in the strained relationships between the sibling traditions of Christianity and Islam. The ways in which these problems are debated and resolved are central to the process of constructing an ethos for the global village.

Islamic Ethics

Umar Abd-Allah (2005) claimed that according to the Qur'an, God "designs the world and rules the universe in his aspect as the All-Merciful" (p. 2). The ethical implication of this is that "Islam enjoins its followers to be merciful to themselves, to others, and the whole of creation, teaching a karmalike law of universal reciprocity by which God shows mercy to the merciful and withholds it from those who hold it back from others" (Abd-Allah, 2005, p. 1). Ultimately, everything that happens in the universe—"even temporal deprivation, harm, and evil—will in due course, fall under the rubric of cosmic mercy" (Abd-Allah, 2005, p. 2).

The founder of Islam was known, even by his enemies, as a "prophet of mercy" (Abd-Allah, 2005, p. 1). Abd-Allah (2005) put it this way:

> Although like many prophets, Muhammad engaged in much conflict and even warfare, he was remarkably quick to seek peace and refused to be vengeful when victorious. After the Muslims conquered the city of Mecca—with very little bloodshed—the Prophet refused to punish his conquered enemies who had sought to kill him. He told the city's residents "Go to your houses. You have been set free." (pp. 2–3)

Muslims are thus expected to follow the Prophet's example in promoting a "doctrine of universal, all-embracing mercy" that is to be applied not only to other Muslims but to believers and unbelievers and even "the animate and inanimate: birds and animals, even plants and trees (Abd-Allah, 2005, pp. 4–5). In the end, Abd-Allah (2005) wrote, "The imperative to be merciful—to bring benefit to the world and avert harm—must underlie a Muslim's understanding of reality and attitude toward society" (p. 6).

The ethical and legal code of Islam is institutionalized in the Shari'a, Islamic law intended to encompass all of human life from the most private areas to the public organization of society. Because early Islam made no distinction between the law and religion, the Shari'a is traditionally the law for Islamic society as well as a set of religious ethical guidelines. Its roots lie in Allah's revelations to Muhammad and the Prophet's efforts to create a disciplined, ordered society in the chaotic, warring tribal culture in which he lived. The concept of the Shari'a as all pervasive is an ancient one in Islamic practice and is given more emphasis than most doctrines of the faith. John Williams (1962) has said the following:

> Muslims, consonant with their emphasis on the Law, have been more concerned with what men do than with what they believe, and very slow to reject any group of Muslims for wrong doctrine, unless that doctrine led the group to actively exclude itself, by its deeds, from the Community. (p. 94)

As we will see, however, interpretation of the law is often a matter of dispute.

Islamic Economics

In traditional Islam, following the example of Muhammad, a theocratic system was imposed in which polity and economy were essentially under the direction of the ummah. The Islamic movement spread rapidly during its formative period, and its military expansion led to Muslim control of the Mediterranean and as far as Southern France, North Africa, the Middle East, and well into Asia, in part because of the practice of Muslim traders, known for their skills and ethical business practices. During the period of Western colonial expansion, the authority of the Shari'a was challenged by the conquering European powers, which tried to impose their secularized legal system on Islamic countries. Whereas economic law (of more concern to the colonizers) was placed under secular jurisdiction, the one area of successful resistance in most Islamic colonies was family law, which became a symbol of the struggle with the colonialists, and is still largely controlled by the religious courts.

In postcolonial Islamic societies, many religious leaders have tried to reinstate their authority over economic matters and in some ways have succeeded in the case of smaller-scale entrepreneurs, but now they find that many of the standards of business for larger companies are set by international capitalism. Some of that influence has been bounded by such practices as traditional Islamic hospitality and concern for the poor, including the annual *zakat*, which creates some redistribution of wealth within economic society. As other religious communities have discovered, however, it is difficult to resist the powerful forces of international capital, which often emphasizes profit-making to the exclusion of other ethical standards.

Religion and Sexuality

As one of the most potent aspects of human life, sexuality has a special place in the beliefs, rituals, and institutions of the world's faith traditions. It is, in fact, at the center of Durkheim's theory of religion, which emphasizes the collective conscience and social solidarity as emerging from collective exaltation and orgiastic frenzy in religious rituals. It is difficult to generalize about the relationship between religion and sex because the range of beliefs, rituals, and institutional regulations is so broad, from the celebratory to the celibate, from the tantric and orgiastic to ascetic renunciation. Moreover, the norms about sexual morality—like most ethical teachings—vary both within and between the major traditions (see, e.g., Sherkat, 2002). There are, however, some central themes we can explore in this brief overview.

Weber (1963) understood the importance of this topic when he wrote, "The relationship of religion to sexuality is extraordinarily intimate, though it is partly conscious and partly unconscious, and though it may be indirect as well as direct" (p. 236).[6] Since Weber's time, the relationship between religion and sexuality has transformed further in a direction he saw. With the industrial revolution's differentiation of the family and the economy and the privatization of religious beliefs in heterogeneous societies, issues of sexual morality and the family often became battlegrounds for the **culture wars** of modernity. In the West, with the church losing much of its control over the political sphere, much of its attention turned to personal morality. It did not give up efforts to affect politics, but many within the institution did increasingly attend to the politics of sexuality, with abortion and homosexuality high on the agenda.

Given the power of religious institutions and authorities, of course, there is frequent occasion for abuses of power, with clergy and other authorities (usually men) claiming sexual privileges, with unequal access to members of the

opposite or even the same sex. Recent scandals in American Catholicism regarding priests who took advantage of their positions to assault children sexually may be just the iceberg tip's example of centuries of such power abuse.

Weber (1963) outlined a number of aspects of this phenomenon, from "the intoxication of the sexual orgy" with its "notion that sexual surrender has a religious meritoriousness" (p. 237) to the opposing significance of sexual abstinence, whether a cultic chastity as a temporary abstinence prior to the administration of the sacraments to the permanent abstinence of priests and religious virtuosi. Religion becomes especially involved in sexual matters when the behavior is extraordinary, whether in the Hindu *Kamasutra* and explicit sexual poses on temple walls or the sexual chastity, brahmacharya, practiced by Mahatma Gandhi following the tradition of Hindu ascetics of old. "Chastity, as a highly extraordinary type of behavior," Weber (1963) noted, "is a symptom of charismatic qualities and a source of valuable ecstatic abilities, which qualities and abilities are necessary instruments for the magical control of the god" (p. 238). He speculated that a decisive reason for priestly celibacy in occidental Christianity "was the necessity that the ethical achievement of the priestly incumbents of ecclesiastical office not lag behind that of the ascetic virtuosity of the monks" (Weber, 1963, p. 238) along with the church's efforts to prevent the priests' heirs from inheriting the church's resources.

As Jack Miles (1995) noted in his *God: A Biography*, much of the account of God's relations with humans in the Hebrew scriptures is concerned with sexual issues, starting with the sin of Adam and Eve, the nature of which is revealed by "what happens when the forbidden fruit is eaten: 'Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths" (Genesis 3:7). It is, as Miles (1995) pointed out, not sexual "desire, in and of itself, but knowledge of one's desire that generates shame. Animals desire, but they do not know they desire" (p. 36). Consciousness of sexuality—and God's concern with it—seems to be a foundational part of human nature from that scriptural point of view.

Since relations between humans and God are often linked to social relations, as they are in the Hebrew scriptures, it is not surprising that religious teachings are frequently about sexual morality. The regulation of sexual intercourse—an important component of social organization, especially as society becomes more complex—becomes framed as a spiritual issue, although it may have always been so, since the division between religion and culture we construct in the modern world was rare in antiquity. In today's religious economy, restrictions on sexuality are something of a barometer of the regulation of life generally by religious institutions, and the amount of

individual freedom granted in this sphere is comparable to that in other spheres. Moreover, such issues as chastity or abstinence from premarital sex, abortion, safe sex practice, reproductive rights within marriage, and homosexuality are the lightning rods of many cultural conflicts (see, e.g., Ogy, 2005). Ellingson and Green (2002) observed the following:

> Sexuality is the primary ground on which human relationships are sanctioned as natural and good, or unnatural and wrong. Through ideology, taboo and ritual, sexuality is channeled into those behaviors recognized as licit, as opposed to those seen as illicit. (p. 2)

Consequently, they went on to say, "Sexuality occupies the attention of many religions because it is a powerful way to organize and relate human beings. . . . [It] is a central element in the construction of religious meaning" (Ellingson & Green, 2002, p. 2). It is also, however, "centrally concerned with the use and abuse of power. This is the central dialectic uniting all religious struggles" (Ellingson & Green, 2002, p. 3). For people in power, sexuality is something to be shaped, and religious institutions and rituals are often exploited to do the shaping.

Ideally, the purpose of religious teachings on sexuality is to guide people toward a channeling of sexual—and other libidinal—energies and drives in a direction that enhances spirituality and community, rather than harming or destroying it. Of course, for Sigmund Freud (1898/1961), religion itself is an illusion constructed to compensate humans for the sacrifices they have to make on behalf of civilization, repression, or sublimating libidinal drives in the interests of the social order. The spiritual purposes of sexual morality shape the extremes (celebration and celibacy) driving them toward moderation or explaining sexual virtuosity or abstinence as a sign of special spiritual powers, creating seeming contradictions in the moral teachings of many traditions. Moral injunctions also have social functions, of course, in preserving family organization and social networks by prohibiting sexuality outside of marriage and promoting taboos against incest, which might harm relationships within the family. Similarly, prohibitions against extramarital sex also aim to protect young children by limiting the number of them who are born outside the shelter of the family during their vulnerable early years. Sexuality is also used as a weapon of war and domination (see, e.g., Ellingson & Green, 2002, p. 4).

Religion and Sexuality in the East

Hinduism offers an instructive example of the wide range of sexual mores embedded in the faith traditions. In some ways, both extremes are found in

that tradition, as they are elsewhere. On the one end of the spectrum are the explicit sexual images and symbols found in sacred sites and texts; at the other end is the idea of brahmacharya, an ascetic practice that included celibacy. For the most part, sexual practices were viewed as *kama*, physical pleasure, considered to be of divine origin. Life itself begins with sexual desire, according to the "Hymn of Creation" in the *Rig Veda* and the *Athana Veda*, which includes formations and incantations to help or hinder love-making, as does the famous *Kamasutra*, the "love text" that advises on courtship, lovemaking, and positions for intercourse (see Bullough, 1976, 1995). The pursuit of sexual pleasure is quite appropriate during the house-holder stage of life, when one has different duties (dharma) than in either the student preparation stage or later life when one begins to move toward the end of this lifetime, possibly even becoming a *sanyasi*, who symbolically left life prior to death in order to be devoted entirely to the spiritual realm.

In the Hindu rebirth narratives, sexual intercourse is an essential part of the process, and having a son is an ancient ritual that became transformed in the first millennium BCE. Patrick Olivelle (2005) said the following:

> The self of the deceased person is said to go up as smoke to the sky. It finally reaches the moon and comes down as rain. The individual, now transformed into water, is absorbed into plants and finally becomes food. A man eats that food and transforms it into semen, which he deposits in a woman, giving rise to a new birth of the dead man. (p. 114)

When the idea of renunciation emerges as a major spiritual practice, having children is one of those attachments that is renounced. As it says in the Br.hada-ran.yaka Upanishad (4.4.22), "they gave up the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, and the desire for worlds, and undertook the mendicant life" (Olivelle, 2005, p. 114).

Because there is no sharp divide in Hinduism between the inner and outer worlds and the soul itself is infinite, one's own sexual power is intertwined with the cosmic sexual energies. Bullough (1995) put it like this:

> The yoni—narrowly the vagina, but in a broader sense including pubic hair, the opening or cleft of the labia, and the uterus—is considered to have a life of its own and is a sacred area worthy of reverence and a symbol of the cosmic mysteries. The penis, called the *linga*, is also an object of veneration. (p. 450)

If one transcends passion and the carnal state, copulation itself can bring about supernatural power, and in somewhat obscure tantric sects, sexual activity facilitates spiritual union with the Gods and one is able to

contemplate reality face to face with spiritual ecstasy. The union of male and female brings primordial male and female elements of the cosmos together in a nondual state of Absolute Reality (Bullough, 1995, p. 451). This same sacredness of sexuality leads some to experiments with chastity rather than copulation, however, and that is the path taken by the modern world's most famous Hindu, Mahatma Gandhi.

Steeped in the ancient mysteries of Hindu sexuality, but encountering many other spiritual rivers in his lifetime, Gandhi endeavored through a major part of his life to channel what was an apparently strong sex drive, by his own accounts, into spiritual and activist experiments. Gandhi decided at the age of 38 to take a vow of brahmacharya, which is a commitment to spiritual discipline that involves the renunciation of material pleasures and implies a life of poverty and chastity but has its roots in ancient spiritual practices designed to connect with cosmic powers and channel them in a life of devotion. The mystical aspect of that process is far too complex for a Western-educated American sociologist like myself, but the movement-organizing element makes perfect sense. Gandhi's chastity made it possible for women to become intimately involved in the movements he led without the underlying sexual tension that usually accompanies charismatic leadership. Although his experiments seem to have taken a rather bizarre turn toward the end, when he was apparently sleeping naked with young women to test himself, the practice is not entirely out of step with ancient spiritual practices (see Gier, 2007).

In Buddhism, sexuality is yet another aspect of human life from which one needs to become detached in order to achieve ultimate truth (Satha-Anand, 2001). As in Hinduism, it is not that it is wrong per se, but that detachment from sexuality is part of the journey away from attachment that the spiritual seeker goes through, as did Prince Siddhartha on his path toward Buddhahood. Suwanna Satha-Anand (2001, p. 114) points to three significant occasions in Siddhartha's life as he strove to overcome suffering, having observed old age, sickness, and death, his first encounter with the truth of life. Second, he felt compelled to leave his status as a householder on the night his wife gave birth to their child, and finally, he faced the temptation of the three daughters of Mara. "The Buddha-to-be remained unimpressed by their seductive manifestations and became enlightened moments later" (Satha-Anand, 2001, p. 114).

Religion and Sexuality in the Western Traditions

The first chapter of Genesis, in the ancient Hebrew scriptures that provide the foundation for the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, is rich with

sexual innuendo. The first words God speaks to his new creatures before humans are created are repeated once *homo sapiens* comes on the scene: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1:28). In other words, they are essentially told by God to have sex. According to the story, Adam and Eve are given free rein in paradise and they are naked; they eat of the one forbidden tree, which gives them knowledge of good and evil and makes them ashamed of their nakedness for the first time. As Mark Regnerus (2007) observed, the Hebrew term for knowledge can itself imply sexual intercourse (as in Genesis 4:1, where Adam "knew" Eve; p. 17). From then on—in fact, throughout the Genesis story—much of the explicit interaction between God and God's human creations has to do with their sexuality. In fact, the covenant God makes with Abram, the father of the Western religions, and God's promise of fertility has a price: a piece of Abram's penis. "Circumcision is not the sign of the covenant in some arbitrary and purely external way," Miles (1995, p. 53) contended.

> Abram's penis—and the penises, the sexual potency, of his descendants—is what the covenant is about. God is demanding that Abram concede, symbolically, this his fertility is not his own to exercise without divine let or hindrance. A physical reduction in the literal superabundance of Abram's penis is a sign with an intrinsic relationship to what it signifies. (Miles, 1995, p. 53)

In Leviticus, certain forms of sexual relations are prohibited (see Bullough, 1995), and this sets the stage for Western sexual morality in the subsequent millennia—those with close relationships, to protect the family (incest); those "unnatural" or contrary to physical nature, as it was seen at the time (with animals or in same-sex relations), to foster procreation; and those contrary to law, such as adultery, again to protect the family. By the time religious norms were codified in Deuteronomy, adultery was a capital offense, perhaps not so much because of how God would react but because of its sociological consequences: "If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall purge the evil from Israel" (Deuteronomy 22:22). The punishment was for the restoration of the nation. Although we do not know to what extent it was actually carried out, the severity of the sanction was apparently intended to underscore the seriousness of the taboo.

The drawing of boundaries between the sacred and the profane so characteristic of Judaism (and the rabbi's son Durkheim's sociology of religion) applied to the matter of sexuality as well. Sex within the boundaries was sacred and outside of them clearly profane. Like the Mosaic commandments,

regulations about sex had to do with the dual relations among humans and between humans and their God, and this concept carried on down the line in Judaism's descendant traditions of Christianity and Islam.

Christianity expands the Judaic restrictions on sexuality by adding an ascetic strain, at first rooted perhaps in attitudes of Paul and then the abstinence of Augustine. Biblical author and early church leader Paul of Tarsus considered sexual sin "a serious matter, more grave than most transgressions" because "a person who sins sexually has 'sinned against his own body,' a reference to defiling or degrading what Christ has purified through his atoning death (1 Cor. 6:18)" (Regnerus, 2007, p. 18). The famous North African bishop Augustine's pre-Christian participation in the Manichean movement that made sharp distinctions between good and evil and their parallel spiritual and material aspects of reality (the City of God and the City of Man) affected his conceptions of morality and helped shape Christian morality. Sex was part of the material world to be left behind when becoming godly, in much the same way as the Hindu ascetic or the Buddha renounced attachment to this world in order to transcend it. In at least 11 of 27 books in the New Testment, sexuality—*porneia* in Greek—is denounced.

Islam, according to Bullough (1995) "is a sex-positive religion as contrasted to the sex-negative aspects of traditional Christianity" (p. 447), perhaps in part because the Prophet Muhammad considered sexuality to be one of the joys of life. The basic rules about sex in Islam are that it should occur within the family and that one should avoid excess. Muhammad defended the rights of women and emphasized the importance of treating wives with kindness. Although there were strict prohibitions against sex outside marriage, some laxity emerged to accommodate the desire to do so, at least for men, with the possibility of marrying additional wives or even of having temporary marriages (*Mut'a*), for example, to accommodate traders traveling away from home (Bullough, 1995).

Religion, Sexuality, and Politics

Disputes about sexual mores and doctrines are often lightning rods for deep-seated conflicts on a wide range of issues within societies, such as the debates about abortion and homosexuality that have been so politically potent in recent American political discourse. Opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage become litmus tests for loyalty to one party in a larger cultural conflict over the nature of the nation and its future social organization. "Pro-life" and "pro-family" stances become symbols of a larger stance against the diversity and tolerance of heterogeneous modern society, an issue we take up again in Chapter 8. Such disputes also show how religious and

legal institutions become intertwined even in states where there is a formal separation. Marriage is a type of social organization where, in most societies, religious and legal institutions share responsibility for regulation. Legal restrictions generally reflect cultural and therefore religious norms and values or at least those of a politically powerful group within society.

The discourse around such disputes is sometimes as much religious as it is political or legal, thus revealing how these institutions are woven together in a complex fabric that usually appears whole; it is when the existing arrangements become unraveled that we see the truth of the interplay between religion and politics in people's lives. Debates about sexual morality and the role of the state and religious institutions in regulating them are embedded in a complex context of social change, from the delinking of sex and procreation with birth control technologies to the continually shifting nature and role of the family. Steve Bruce (2010) noted that with the divorce of economics from the home, a profound cultural shift occurred that affects people in their daily lives:

> At work we are supposed to be rational, instrumental, and pragmatic. We are also supposed to be universalistic: to treat customers alike, paying attention only to the matter in hand. The private sphere, by contrast, is taken to be expressive, indulgent, and emotional. (p. 128)

One of the most divisive political issues at the turn of the millennium was the question of homosexuality, from the issue of same-sex marriage to the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy.

Homosexuality

In his introduction to *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia*, Jeffrey Siker (2007) observed the following:

> If the three traditional taboos for polite conversation include sex, politics, and religion, then the topic of homosexuality and religion is guaranteed to provoke strong reactions, polarizing rhetoric, and a series of conflicting claims that draw variously upon peoples' experience, sacred texts, established traditions and human reason. (p. ix)

Indeed, it has been a major issue for debate in public discourse but also scholarly research in recent years (see, e.g., Boswell, 1980; Bullough, 1976, 1979; Cadge, 2007; Foucault, 1988; Halperin, 2002; Kuefler, 2006; McNeill, 1976). In the United States, where there is often more heat than light on the issue in public discourse, some mainline religious institutions

have cautiously begun to support civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals (LGBT) but have still been indecisive about the morality of LGBT sexual orientations or the role of openly gay or lesbian clergy in the churches. Moreover, although some church leaders have led the fight for rights, individuals and institutions within the church have been the most vociferous opponents of same-sex marriage and sometimes even LGBT rights.

Cadge (2007, p. 20) noted that there has been a dramatic shift in public attitudes toward homosexuality in recent decades. Prior to the middle of the 20th century, it was generally defined in the United States as a sin or disease, but in the 1970s, first the American Psychiatric Association (in 1973) and then the American Psychological Association (in 1975) declared it not to be a mental disease or disorder. While the debates continue to rage in many mainline churches, public opinion quietly shifted; although close to 70% of the American public believed that same-sex relations were always wrong, only 56% agreed with that opinion in the 1998 General Social Survey, and 31% did not think it was wrong at all. Moreover, regardless of their opinions about homosexual behavior, a majority of Americans—65% in a 2000 *Los Angeles Times* poll—supported protection from discrimination for gay and lesbian citizens. And, in May 2011, Gallup reported that "for the first time in Gallup's tracking of the issue, a majority of Americans (53%) believe same-sex marriage should be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages" (Newport, 2011).

A May 2011 Pew poll showed the following:

> While the public is divided over same-sex marriage, a majority of Americans (58%) say that homosexuality should be accepted, rather than discouraged, by society. . . . Among younger people in particular, there is broad support for societal acceptance of homosexuality. More than six-in-ten (63%) of those younger than age 50 . . . say that homosexuality should be accepted. (Pew Research Center, 2011)

One of the most important developments in the scholarly study of homosexuality and religion has been efforts to reexamine the true history of the relationship between Christianity and homosexuality. The landmark book is John E. Boswell's (1980) *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe From the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, which has generated considerable debate but has also set a high standard of historical scholarship in the field.

In assessing the debates that followed in the subsequent 25 years, Mathew Kuefler (2006) succinctly summarized what he called the Boswell Thesis:

> There were four main points that form the narrative for the book: First, that Christianity had come into existence in an atmosphere of Greek and Roman tolerance for same-sex eroticism. Second, that nothing in the Christian scriptures or early tradition required a hostile assessment of homosexuality; rather, that such assessments represented a misreading of scripture. Third, that early medieval Christians showed no real animosity toward same-sex eroticism. Fourth, that it was only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that Christian writers formulated a significant hostility toward homosexuality, and then read that hostility back into their scriptures and early tradition. (p. 2; cf. Hubbard, 2003)

By placing the debate in a much broader historical context, Boswell managed to deflate some of the anti-LGBT rhetoric within American Christianity, although his efforts to address what is also a deep affective moral issue on purely rational grounds were far from convincing to many who disputed his claims.

Another important element of the debate over sexual orientation is to look at it in a comparative perspective. Although obviously this will not persuade anyone with an exclusivist theology who also believes same-sex relations to be immoral, it does provide an important perspective in our religious and culturally diverse world.

At least one branch of Hinduism, for example, has a somewhat unique position on homosexuality; according to Anil Bhanot, general secretary of the Hindu Council of the United Kingdom, Hindu scriptures define the homosexual condition to be a "biological one, and although the scripture gives guidance to parents on how to avoid procreating a homosexual child, it does not condemn the child as unnatural" ("Hinduism Does Not Condemn Homosexuality," 2009). Whether one is homosexual or not depends on the timing of insemination and its relation to the menstruation cycle, Bhanot claimed. On the 11th and 13th nights of the menstruation cycle, the fire and water elements are equally balanced, which results in a homosexual conception, according to Bhanot ("Hinduism Does Not Condemn Homosexuality," 2009).

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has often taken controversial stances, especially in favor of LGBT rights, and it has produced considerable backfire among participating churches. One orthodox priest reportedly said, "If we allow gay churches in [churches with gay priests in them], then what's next? The alcoholic church? The gambling church?" and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia expressed his concerns to WCC general secretary Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit when he met the Patriarch in Moscow in June 2010 (Hutt, 2010).

Clearly the issue of sexuality will continue to be a volatile issue in religious and political circles over the coming years, especially with cultural shifts such as the practice of casual sex and "hooking up" becoming a norm on many college campuses in the United States, raising questions about the role of religious institutions in influencing definitions of morality in this area. It is, of course, just one of many controversies surrounding the interaction between religion and politics.

Religion and Politics

A final dimension of the religious ethos and its impact on collective life is the crucial sphere of politics. I will now look briefly at a few examples of how religious traditions play a role in various political orders and movements.

Hinduism and Politics

The relationship between Hinduism and the political sphere is extremely complex in modern India. Religious pluralism apparently thrived on the subcontinent without major disruption until the invasion of the Muslims in the eighth century. The exclusivist claims of Islam, however, were never reconciled with the theologically tolerant Hindu beliefs. Muslim rulers found the worship of the various Gods idolatrous and made their condemnation part of the process of conquering the region. Consequently, a virulent form of anti-Muslim Hindu fanaticism also developed over time and has become a major factor in contemporary political conflict, both inside and outside the country. Ongoing territorial disputes with Pakistan and lingering memories of atrocities on all sides following the religiously based partition of British India at the time of independence have kept the flames fanned.

Despite efforts to establish a secular independent state after a century of British colonial rule, India continues to be racked by ethnic and religious strife, and the relationship between Hindu and Muslim sectors of the population is often the source of political rifts. Until fairly recently, the Indian state was virtually a one-party democracy, ruled by the diverse Congress Party that led the freedom movement and drew on the heroic status of its former leaders (notably Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru) to maintain its control. A breakdown of that rule occurred following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and again after the assassination of her son, Rajiv Gandhi.

In recent Indian politics, the Muslim–Hindu cleavage has become a central theme, recalling ancient divisions and resentments. In the city of

Ayodhya is a site cherished as the birthplace of the Hindu God Ram. When the Muslims invaded in the eighth century CE, they tore down the temple there and constructed a mosque. In 1990, the prominent Hindu nationalist leader L. K. Advani mounted a campaign to raze the mosque and construct a temple in honor of Ram. The controversy brought down the Indian government in 1990, and a group of Hindus attacked the mosque in 1992, touching off a series of Hindu–Muslim riots throughout the country.

Buddhism and Politics

Buddhist tolerance of other religions and its custom of private worship tended to promote a general lack of specific alliance with political elites. An exception was Tibet, where a theocracy was established around the figure of the Dalai Lama. Even when Buddhism was aligned with the state, however, its lack of exclusivism often had a broadening, rather than constricting, effect on the political culture—that is, it encouraged a tolerant and inclusive ethos that cultivated the lowering rather than the erecting of boundaries between groups.

One of the most interesting early developments in Buddhism was the conversion of the Indian Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE. After the bloody conquest of most of South Asia, he became a Buddhist. Horrified at the consequences of the wars he had conducted, Ashoka became legendary for his support of Buddhist institutions, his efforts to lead a nonviolent life, and most of all for his "Golden Age" rule, which promoted religious tolerance and high ethical standards. Although not a strict pacifist, Ashoka was opposed to warfare and animal sacrifice and became a vegetarian. Of particular importance is his famous Twelfth Rock Edict, which declared the following:

> One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour others' religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking "I will glorify my own religion." But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely. So concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others. (Gard, 1962, pp. 18–19)

This edict, now almost 2,300 years old, provides a remarkable testimony to the possibility of religious tolerance in a pluralistic cultural context.