

## CSK - SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION TEXT

### CHAP 1: BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION - SUMMARY NOTES,

P. 3:

- Thrust of the text is on examples, illustrations, changes in religion in the U.S. since 1960.
- At the same time there is a need for an increase in globalization, international, and cross-cultural awareness: the world is increasingly “a single place.”
- At the same time, the world is apprehended and acted upon in strikingly different ways by different people – it is *almost* not worth stating that Baghdad, Iraq, is very much *not* the same place to Marine corporal Malcolm Adams from West Liberty, Ohio, temporarily there on combat duty as it is to Malmoud Afti, a Shi’ite who has lived his whole life in the Sadar section of the city.

P. 4:

- Sociology of religion has been central to the development of sociology itself—religion has been a preoccupation, although in decidedly different ways, of most of the classical and founding theorists in the discipline: Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Talcott Parsons.
- They have variously viewed religion in terms of oppression, order, equilibrium, and change.

P. 5:

- In its contemporary expressions, religion is varied and different, even when it seems to belong to the same sect or denomination. Simultaneously both universal and exceedingly diverse, religion thus presents a formidable challenge to both study and understanding.
- Even its definition provokes disagreement; there is no single, widely-accepted definition in the field of the sociology of religion. CSK contrast Durkheim’s oft-quoted definition with that of Weber, and argue for the acceptance of the latter (although I think this is a specious contest).

P. 7:

- CSK argue for a distinction between the sociology of *religion* and the sociology of *religions*. This is comparable to the distinction that Thomas Luckmann makes between the fundamental and profound questions of the sociology of religion and what he calls “parish sociology” or “a rather narrowly conceived sociography of the churches.” (We shall return to this distinction later.)
- **Side Note:** Even so, CSK identify prayer as “the most universal religious action.”
- CSK want to distinguish between a number of different theoretical approaches to the sociology of religion:  
(1) functional [see Durkheim]

- (2) substantive [see Weber]
- (3) formal [see Simmel, Blasi]
- (4) situational, subjective, phenomenological [see Thomas, Swatos]
- (5) action/ symbolic realism [see Wallis & Bruce/Bellah]
- (6) thick descriptive [see Geertz]

P. 9:

- There are implications to these various approaches along several dimensions:
  - (1) meanings in relationship to social structures and psychological processes
  - (2) action orientations, which can be either or both recognized as religious and complied with as religious it either of two ways:
    - a. ritual
    - b. moral
  - (3) systems of discourse
    - a. language, vocabulary
    - b. meanings
- **Side Note:** labeling can be descriptive or normative; as a student of and standing outside of religion one must be aware of and attend to the ways in which language is used to make distinctions or to assert or imply judgment.
- (4) subjective experience
  - a. extensive (i.e., coextensive)
  - b. intensive (institutionally differentiated)

Side Note: We will come back to this last distinction when we encounter Berger's historical and analytical explorations of religious development.

P 10:

- **Side Note:**
  - From a functional perspective, no religions are false.
  - From a phenomenological perspective, all religions are true.
  - From a sociology of religion perspective, religion does not exist; i.e., there is not "thing" that is religion.

P.12-15:

- Following Weber's definition, CSK expand on the following aspects:
  - (1) supernatural powers (note distinction between miracle and magic)
  - (2) charisma, charismatic leadership
  - (3) symbolic expressions, especially those that lie outside of or beyond language
  - (4) various forms of religious expression and response
    - a. congregational vs. pilgrimage
    - b. church vs. sect
  - (5) various types of leaders
    - a. prophets (ethical and/or exemplary)
    - b. priest
    - c. teachers
  - (6) patterned behavior of lay people (ethnic, cultural, historic)

P. 16-17:

- Back to action orientations – two main types (again following Weber):
  - (1) ritual practices, patterns, and beliefs
  - (2) moral actions
    - a. moral prudence
    - b. religious ethics
      - i. soteriology – actions to into the “right” relationship with external powers
      - ii. theodicy – explanations that account for evil:
        1. pluralism of gods, some of which are evil
        2. punishment for prior sins
        3. lack of the full picture
        4. need for human suffering
- **Side Note:** Gibran’s multilevel parable aptly titled “Satan” applies directly to this concern with theodicy.

P. 18:

- Weber’s definition now revised and summarized (drawing on the above):
  - (1) patterned social relationships around perceived supramundane power
  - (2) ethical considerations
- This involves several qualifications:
  - (1) focus is more on action and less on belief
  - (2) focus is on subjective perception rather than intellectual belief
  - (3) the power is beyond direct control, which distinguishes religion from magic
  - (4) supramundane rather than supernatural, because the power could be natural
- Summary view of CSK (offered by Don Swenson in *Society, Spirituality, and the Scared*, 1999): “the individual and social experience [both perceptive and re/active] of the sacred that is manifested in mythologies, rituals, and ethos, and integrated into a collective such as a community or an organization.”
- **Side Note:** It seems apparent to me [Toth] that this definition does not differ significantly from that offered by Durkheim, although the elaboration and qualifications should be included..