

# Intro to Religion

*Disclaimer: The information relayed to students in this unit is not meant to promote or disparage any religion. It is approached from a social science perspective and will only serve to educate students on basic vocabulary and cultural histories of some religious groups.*

# Religion Intersects with Culture

- Religious laws influence and sometimes supersede secular laws
  - Can dictate whether you're allowed to eat bacon, wear shorts, or even work for the electric company
  - Can determine who you can marry or even if you marry
  - Affects literature, movies, and music
- Affects the way we think about time
  - December = Christmas = Presents
  - April = Easter = Chocolate
  - Chronological terms: B.C. and A.D.
  - Islamic calendar follow A.H. (anno Hegirae – in the year of Hijra)
  - Baha'i follows the Badi calendar (19 months, begins March 21)
- No escaping the fact that religion impacts culture pretty much wherever you go!

# Supernatural Stuff

- Countless ways religions manifest
  - Worship the souls of your ancestors
  - Believe that natural spirits inhabit natural and/or manmade objects
  - Think one or more people have supernatural knowledge and power that exceeds normal human capability
  - Revere one or more deities or none at all
  - Guide your behavior in day-to-day life
- In most urbanized societies today, religion is subordinate to secular ideas, values, and laws
  - Vast movement of diverse people with many different religions – would get ugly fast otherwise! (Hello French Wars of Religion)
  - Most developed countries base laws and system of governance on secular principles

# What's the difference between...

- Atheists and Agnostics?
- Atheist – believes there is no supernatural being sitting on a cloud and making sure you don't get into mischief
  - Follow secular system of ethics/values
- Agnostic – isn't sure one way or the other
  - Not convinced there's a higher power, but also not convinced there isn't one

# Converts

- Proselytizing – convincing someone to convert to one's faith
- Converts – new followers of a religious faith/group
  - Those who must leave their old religion in order to convert to a new one are called apostates
- Dogma – written texts, rules, and practices of a religion
  - Accepted as true because someone (divine being or religious leader who is allowed to interpret on behalf of the divine) says it is

# Rebels

- Blasphemy – speaking against the dogma
- Heresy – occurs when someone actually acts against religious dogma
  - Historically, both punishable by excommunication, exile, or death
- Infidel – term used (a LONG time ago) to refer to non-Christians
  - Pagans, polytheistics, and any group which tended to scare the heck out of early Christians

# Misc Religious Vocab

- **Idol** – figure, picture, or statue that represents a deity or divine figure
  - Common in some religions
  - Forbidden in other religions
- **Prophet** – someone who interprets a message from the divine or supernatural
- **Myth** – stories that aren't true, problematic term
- **Cult** – fringe religious group, term not used by academics anymore