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Introduction to the Study of Religion

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Loss of Religion?

IF YOU'RE
NOT
RELIGIOUS
FOR GOD'S
SAKE SAY
SO

- Census Data 2011:
- [Link to census data](#)
- "Religion" was voluntary question
- And 7.2% did not answer the question (the highest number was in Wales)

RESULT

- Christianity remained the largest religion (33.2 million people = 59.3%) -> decline from 71.7 % in 2001
- Islam was the second largest religious group (2.7 million people = 4.8 per cent of the population) -> increase from 3%.

But ...

- 14.1 million people (= 25.1%) reported they have no religion in 2011
- -> increase from 14.8 % since previous census
- But on the other hand, there is a growing interest for spirituality!

Spiritual Experiences

Type of Experience (British population)	1987	2000	% increase
Experience of a transcendent providence in pattern of events	29%	55%	90%
Awareness of a divine presence	27%	38%	41%
Having a prayer answered	25%	37%	48%
Awareness of a sacred presence in nature	16%	29%	81%
Awareness of the presence of a deceased person	18%	25%	39%
Awareness of an evil presence	12%	25%	108%
<i>Any of the spiritual experiences listed above</i>	48%	76%	58%

Sources: (Hay & Heald, 1987; Hay & Hunt, 2000)

* Over this time, UK church attendance fell by 17% from 10.2% to 8.5% (Brierly, 2005)

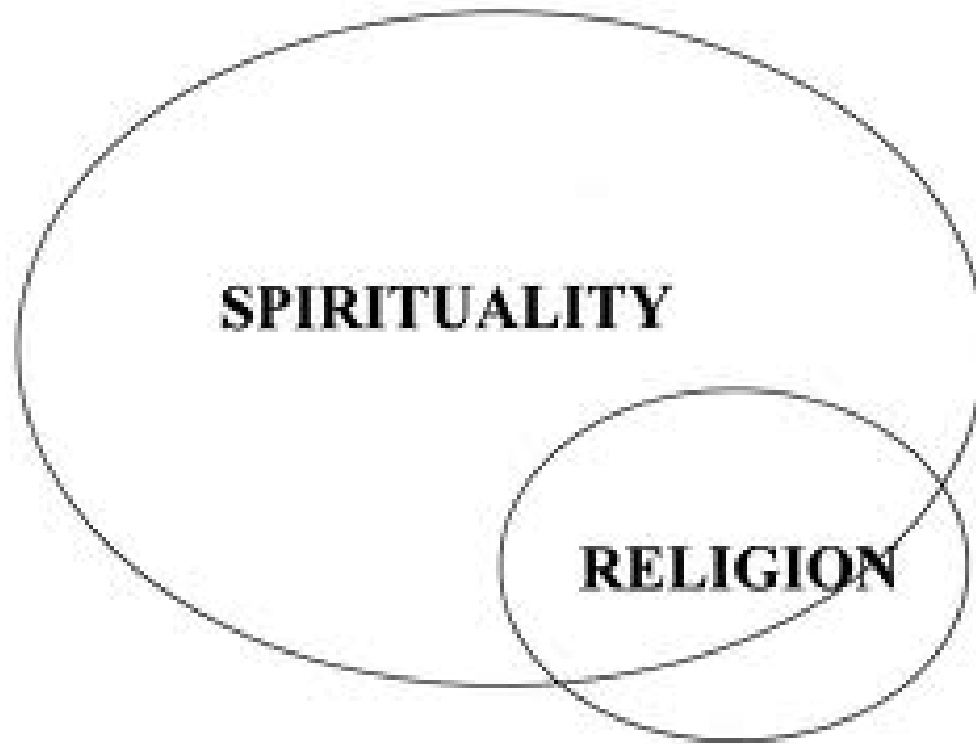
International comparisons

- the percentage of people who report having experienced the presence of 'a spiritual power' varies between 38% (Britain), 57% (Han Chinese), 44% (Australia) and 43% (USA) (Yao & Badham, 2008).
- in contrast religiosity varies widely across countries: regular church attendance is much lower in Britain and Australia (respectively 8.5% and 7.5%) (Brierly, 2005; NCLS Research, 2004) than in the USA (20%).

'I am spiritual but I am not religious.'

- Many people make this claim. But critics claim that this mind-set is...
 - an outgrowth of our cultural obsession with the needs and wants of the individual, and,
 - that a widespread social turn to self-directed seeking can lead to a dangerous neglect of moral and social responsibility.

From 'religion' to 'spirituality'



What is ...Religion?

- “set of beliefs, practices, and language that characterizes a community that is searching for transcendent meaning in a particular way, generally based upon belief in a deity” (Astrow et al. 2001).
- religious beliefs – “formed within the context of practices and rituals shared by a group to provide a framework for connectedness to God” (Davies, Brenner, Orloff, Sumner, and Worden 2002).
- “an organized system of practices and beliefs in which people engage ... a platform for the expression of spirituality...” (Mohr 2006).

What is ...Spirituality?

- “individual search for meaning” (Brown and Williams 1993).
- “the search for meaning in life events and a yearning for connectedness to the universe” (Coles 1990).
- “a person’s experience of, or a belief in, a power apart from his or her own existence” (Mohr 2006).

Spirituality vs. Religion

- Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community
- Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others in living together in a community.
 - Koenig et al., *The Handbook of Religion and Health* (2001)

Religion and Culture

- One cannot understand another culture without looking at the religion(s) practiced there
- But it is, as Hinnells writes, “difficult to say which came first, the religion or the values and ideals – but basically it does not matter; they are now part of an intricate network.”
(p.8)

- Religion as cultural system
- Or
- Religion as part of culture

Culture can be ...

- “anything that we can analyze like a language (including dreams, conventions of visual art, or universal structures of cognition), read as a cultural text (including material artifacts, forms of entertainment, or social dramas such as revolutions), or understand as a discourse (including systems of law and medicine, sexual practices, or issues of colonialism).” (Hulsether, p. 489)

Culture as Way of Life

- Culture shape religious practice
 - Differences between Christianity in Europe and Christianity in South America
 - -> Christinaities (in plural)
 - Similar to religions (in plural)

- “Religions do not exist, nor are they studied, in a vacuum.” (Hinnells, p. 1)