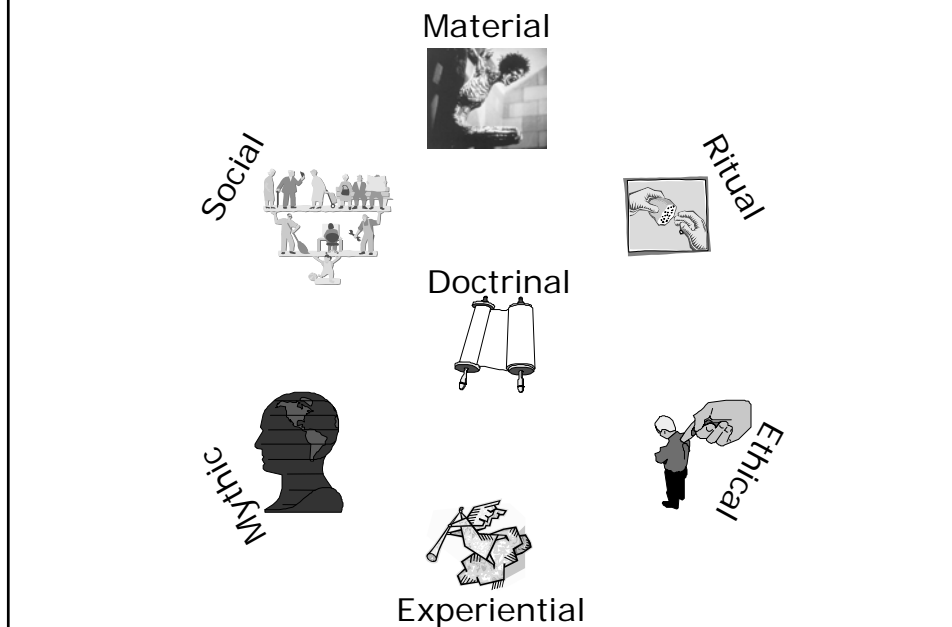


# Dimensions of Religion

(adapted from Ninian Smart)



## The Doctrinal Dimension

- Doctrines are truths framed in religious teaching.
- These may be propositional or experiential, objective or subjective.
- They may or may not be directly related to "real life".
- They may be organized in a stand-alone fashion, or scattered within the mythic, ethical, and ritual dimensions of a religion.
- They are fundamental explanations about the world, the universe, and the relationship of people within the larger structures and answer important questions, such as:
  - What is truth about the unseen powers?
  - What is truth about the world?
  - What is truth about people?
  - What is the meaning of life?
  - Why are we here?
  - How do I understand the reality of evil?

## The **R**itual Dimension

- Rituals are *regularized ceremonies of life*
- They provide “places” of security
  - Through reparation for broken taboo
  - Through marking and sanctioning transition from one phase of life to another,
  - By intensifying social cohesion through participation with the community in culturally important celebrations.
- They are “cultural libraries” that act out, establish and preserve in symbolic form important religious truths

## The **E**thical Dimension

- Ethics refers to religious values and value systems
- They are applicational, focusing on *how people are to behave* as they interact with other people, the spiritual realm, and the physical world.
- They are seen on the personal, group, and societal (systemic) levels.
- They are deeply interwoven into the cultural values and doctrine, and often enshrined in heroic (or evil) acts discussed in cultural myth.
- They provide the maps (or interpretive frames) which we use as we live and interact with others.

## The Experiential Dimension

- How we experience the transcendent in our lives (angels, demons and God)
- To what extent we embrace or distance ourselves from experiencing the supernatural.
- Can range from the mundane to the sublime, though generally focused more on the latter. Includes such things as
  - Dreams and visions
  - Out-of-the-body experiences
  - Contact with the spirit realm
    - Positive: Spirit-filling/baptism, ecstatic experiences of God, peaceful sense of God's presence, etc.
    - Negative: evil spirit influence or control

## The Mythic Dimension

- The corpus of narratives found in a society that reflect that society's thinking about the world, itself, its laws and values.
- Myth concretizes important cultural values and enables those values to be passed from generation to generation.
- Technically speaking, myth is focused in timeless stories of creation, redemption and human/divine drama (Scripture, epics and classics).
- Myth includes folklore, fairy stories, epics, and classics.

## The Social Dimension

- The religious frame of *linking of people to each other*
- It is built on the cultural values of how people are to relate socially in religious contexts.
- It includes social institutions found in every society (AKEEL)
- It also includes the sense of belonging inculcated through socially-experienced religious events.
- Foci include:
  - The institutions themselves
  - How the institutions operate
  - How the institutions maintain identity (leadership, decision-making, cohesion, polity, etc)

## The Material (Technological) Dimension

- All religious systems of the world seek to symbolically capture values, thoughts, ideas and themes.
- Typically they do so through artistic expression, whether architecture, art, ritualistic objects or places.
- Examples of this dimension include such things as:
  - Buildings for worship and ritual,
  - Statuary and paintings,
  - The dress and vestments of priests and so forth
  - Books, amulets and the like,
  - Graves, burning-ghats [places in India where corpses are burned] and so on,
  - Sacrificial animals and the like" (Smart 1996, 277).