

The Five Fundamental Characteristics of Religion.

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Religion, as a social institution, is made up by many complex parts. Religion is established and continued by a group of individuals who develop a set of common beliefs and morals as well as practices and reverence for the same things. These parts are very important to the establishment and the continuation of the religion.

One of the most interesting things about religion is the fact that it takes place in groups. A religion is not practiced only by a single individual. In order for a religion to take flight, two or more people must interact and share some common beliefs with each person playing an integral role in the development of the religion. During this interaction, group norms and a hierarchy of people are established. The members of this group must be able to identify with the whole.

At the core of any religion is its beliefs. These beliefs are accepted by the members of the religion and are considered sacred. There are beliefs that make up the structure of the religion and are very important. There are some beliefs that are not as important and may change over time.

The practices of the group are also very important to religion. Patterns of practices that become norms and prescribed rites are known as rituals. A ritual can be any type of ceremony or event of the religious group, even just gathering regularly for Sunday dinners. The members of the religion are the ones that give these rituals their meaning. The complexity of individual rituals ranges greatly from simplistic to elaborate. Rituals take many forms, but all are important to the religion.

Each religion has its own set of morals. These moral beliefs are established by the group and modify the behaviors of all the individuals in the group. Usually, these are set and not up for debate; however, some of these beliefs can change slowly over time. Examples of moral beliefs are the rules set out by the Book of Leviticus in the Jewish Bible and the Eightfold Path in Buddhism.

A religion also revolves around religious respect for or the veneration of certain things. Religion separate things that are sacred and things that are profane. Two different spheres emerge: the

sacred sphere and the profane sphere. The profane is the mundane or secular world that is not devoted to a holy or religious purpose. Likewise, there are things that pertain to or are connected directly to the religious beliefs, which are called sacred. Sacred also involves anything that is greater than ourselves that is considered higher or supernatural. The sacred takes place outside of our world and is not subject to the laws of the natural world.