



## The Importance of Religion in Public Life

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**Abstract:** Social transformation is shaped in large part by the interplay between religion and law, which is complicated and frequently contentious. Religion has the power to both promote social change by galvanising movements for equality and justice and to impede such change by clinging to long-held traditions and beliefs. However, religious norms and values may have an impact on the legal system, causing laws to either reflect or reinforce religious views. The power of law to create beneficial social change, such as advancing equality or safeguarding rights through legislation, is in sharp contrast to this. Justice, equality, and respect for human rights are causes that religious beliefs and teachings may motivate people to fight for. Take liberation theology as an example. It stresses that the church should stand up for the downtrodden and the oppressed. Social movements can be organised by religious leaders and organisations to combat issues like poverty, injustice, and prejudice. To better comprehend societal problems and to help people make moral choices about social change, religious ethics might offer useful frameworks. Social change, especially when it threatens long-held values and conventions, can be met with resistance through religious beliefs and practices. Resistance to reforms that threaten the traditions can arise when religious organisations hold rigidly to traditional practices and interpretations of religious scriptures. A religion's ability to both uphold and discourage non-conformist conduct makes it a potential tool for social control. We have the power to legislate against injustice, safeguard personal liberties, and advance social parity. By discouraging people from participating in damaging or discriminatory conduct, the execution of laws can serve as a potent instrument for social transformation. Problems arise when people's religious views are at odds with established legal concepts or when people perceive that the government is trying to limit their right to freely practise their religion.

**Keywords:** Change, law, society, religion, belief, value, norms, behaviour, control, tradition

## Introduction

For what grounds do sociologists study religion? Everyone, at some point in their lives, has wondered what the “meaning of life” is. For many thinkers, the uniqueness of the human species lies in its capacity for introspection and its obsession with understanding its place in the universe. Religion has always been an integral part of human culture, dating back to the earliest known civilisations. Artefacts from ancient ceremonies, sacred burial places, and religious practices have all been found during archaeological digs. Disagreements over religion have caused a lot of trouble in society, even wars. Sociologists examine religions to understand cultures.

What exactly is religion? Émile Durkheim, a pioneer in the field of sociology, had the audacious claim that it is made up of “things that surpass the limits of our knowledge” (1915). Following that, he described faith as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them” (1915). People often associate religious structures (such as synagogues or churches) with specific rituals (such as making a confession or meditating), while others associate them with more general concepts (such as dharma or sin) that they use in their daily lives. A person’s religious beliefs, practices, and ideals centre on the things that person regards as holy or having spiritual significance; this is something that all of these individuals can agree on.

A religious perspective can help shed light on pressing social and cultural issues. As an example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it was very necessary for religious leaders, schools, and the media to work together in order to debunk religious intolerance and false beliefs about Islam. Research of religious practices in a community can benefit from the application of sociological tools such as polls, interviews, and the examination of past records. What this could teach us about religion’s role in shaping individuals and communities is up for debate.

## Approaches to Religion

In accordance with Durkheim (1915) and Fasching and deChant (2001), the English term “religion” is derived from the Latin *religio*, which means “reverence for the sacred,” and *religare*, meaning “to bind, in the sense of an obligation.” Many belief systems and activities are associated with what individuals perceive as holy or spiritual. Religious leaders have always looked on their faith’s narratives, symbols, and traditions to help them make sense of the world. Nearly every culture on Earth

has some sort of official religion that its adherents follow. Art, meditation, initiation, sacrifice, service, religious holidays, ceremonies celebrating God or gods, weddings, funerals, and many other cultural traditions are all part of religion.

Despite the fact that religious beliefs and practices can be deeply personal, which might cause some to see religion in a negative light, religion is really a unifying force. Social scientists see religion for what it is: a consistent set of norms and expectations founded on universally shared human needs and ideals. Additionally, religious affiliation is present in all societal subsets. Take burial ceremonies as an example; they are practiced in some form or another across all nations and religions. The announcement, the care of the dead, the disposal, and the ritual or ceremony are some of the most constant aspects of a funeral, even if each one is special in its own manner. Sociologists have a wealth of information to work with when studying these universals and the variations in religious experience among cultures and people.

Sociologists who research religion differentiate between the three main components of faith: rituals, beliefs, and experiences. A religious experience is characterised by a strong conviction or a sense of oneness with “the divine.” This sense of oneness is possible when one prays or meditates. Many religions’ members believe in things like Jesus Christ’s divinity and the likelihood of his resurrection. Religion manifests itself in numerous ways, one of which is the fact that different religions insist on different ways that the cosmos came to be. Certain religious ceremonies, such as bar mitzvahs and confessions, are expected or required of specific groups of people (Barkan and Greenwood 2003).

### **Religion as a Sociological Concept**

The function of religion in the new social order that emerged as a result of industrialization and secularization was a topic of interest for three eminent nineteenth-century European social theorists: Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. Their contributions to modern sociology are substantial.

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist who lived from 1858 to 1917, described faith as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (1915). “Sacred,” he indicated, was an unusual occurrence that had taken him by surprise and seemed to be connected to “the divine.” Durkheim argues that the separation of sacred and profane activities is the condition under which “religion happens” (1915). For example, a rock does not inherently have any sanctity or impureness.

Whether the stone is shaped into a headstone or utilised in landscaping determines its sanctity and profanity.

The prevailing opinion is that Durkheim was an early trailblazer in sociology when he examined religion's role in society. A source of meaning and purpose for individuals through life's ups and downs, religion mostly acts as a uniting factor, according to Durkheim. It also acts as a social regulator. Ethics and religion originated in communal thought, and shared values formed the foundation of social order, according to his scientific views of society. He said that these ideas must be upheld for a society to be stable.

Then, different religions offered varying degrees of "social cement" to bind civilisations and civilisations. For believers, "for faith is before all else an impetus to action, while science, no matter how far it may be pushed, always remains at a distance from this." In addition to the physical and insufficient reasons for existence given by science, this religion gave civilisation a reason to continue existing. As per Erlangen's findings (1915, p. 431). But what would happen if religious belief declined? Durkheim responded to this question by arguing that religion is a sign of a society's strength rather than just a product of society. If one were to follow this school of thought, the end of traditional religion would not inevitably lead to the collapse of society.

### **Classical Sociology: Emile Durkheim**

The father of Durkheim was steeped in the tradition, being the ninth in a long line of rabbis. Emile had a solid secular and religious education and was chosen to follow in his father's profession, even though he was the second son. But his atheism progressed to the point where he gave up on a career in religion or rabbinics. This is seen, for instance, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), his sociological examination of religion. By doing this research, he hoped to lay the groundwork for a relatively nonreligious sociological inquiry: how, apart from God, might religion benefit society? Instead than delving into philosophical concerns about God's nature or plans, this was his aim. No matter how illogical or filled with "barbarous and fantastic rites" a religion may be, he said, it may nonetheless serve a social or human purpose. Then he made the bold statement, "There are no religions which are false" (Durkheim 1912). Faith unites its followers in a common bond, which is its greatest strength. Belief in a supernatural person, symbols, and rituals unite individuals in religious traditions, which "excite, maintain or recreate certain

mental states” (Durkheim 1912). The functionalist school of sociology has its roots in this sort of study. Religion, he said, had to exist and endure because it united people and was thus vital to society.”

Max Weber (1864–1920), a sociologist and political economist from Germany, disagreed with Durkheim that religion impeded social stability and instead believed it accelerated societal development. The most advanced capitalist societies, according to his analysis of religious influences on economic activity, were located in Germany, Scotland, the Netherlands, and England. Among the political and corporate elite, these countries also had the highest concentrations of Protestants. In *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in 1905, he argues that capitalism sprang from the Protestant work ethic’s rejection of old anti-materialist Christian perspectives on poverty. According to Weber, several Protestant faiths encourage Christians to work hard, be frugal, and succeed materially. Affluence was more often viewed as a sign of divine favour than a reflection of wrongdoing. (The contemporary word “work ethic” is derived from Weber’s Protestant ethic, but the religious overtones of the desire to succeed in one’s profession had mostly disappeared by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.) “In [Puritan theologian Richard] Baxter’s conception,” he said, “the care for outward goods is the obligation of the saint like a light garment, which might be cast aside at any moment.” It was fate that determined the garment’s intended use—its iron prison (Weber 1905, p. 181).”

### “The Protestant Work Ethic in the Information Age”

During Max Weber’s time in Europe, Protestants were more likely to hold orthodox capitalist ideals, such as frugality and hard labor, than Catholics, according to his 1904 thesis. He proved that Protestant beliefs like Calvinism were instrumental in establishing capitalism and the modern international system. According to Weber, the main difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is that the former places a premium on community and the latter on individual success. The long-standing assertion of Weber that capitalism was founded on the Protestant labour ethic is one of the most contentious and consequential issues in religious sociology. Several academics have argued that his argument still fails when applied to modern society (Greeley 1989). Nuala McGrail, a psychic and a Catholic, and sociologist Father Blackie Ryan solve complicated crimes while maintaining and even praising their religion

What exactly does the term “work ethic” entail in the modern era? Work ethic has been impacted by the massive social and cultural shifts brought about by the

digital era, just like it was by the Industrial Revolution in the middle to late 19th century. In most industrial professions, the worker is required to repeatedly carry out the same tasks without much room for creativity or initiative. Employees' work ethic has transformed in response to the higher cognitive and decision-making demands of modern workplaces. Workers prioritise job autonomy and personal happiness alongside monetary reward. Nowadays, a bachelor's degree is required, and you need to be able to access current information on any topic. You also need to be good at managing people. In this information age, the need for rapidity has increased in numerous fields.

Workers in the information age want to achieve financial and professional success as a result of their skills and hard work, regardless of whether their religious views are modern Protestant, Catholic, or otherwise. More and more Westerners, particularly younger ones, regard this as a broken promise, and many seek comfort in religion as a result.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) - a German revolutionary socialist, philosopher, writer, and journalist—also investigated the impact of religion on society. From his point of view, religion reflected and perpetuated societal hierarchy and inequality. Religion, he said eloquently, “is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions,” expressing the proletariat's economic conflicts. The opium that the ordinary people use was this (1844).

Philosophers such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber argued that religion is fundamental to human civilization throughout the great social and economic upheaval that swept Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While Durkheim saw religion as a unifying force in society, Weber maintained that religion may be seen as distinct from it. Religion and the worker were interdependent, according to Marx. Religion would serve no use if it did not conceptually serve to uphold or conceal the inequalities of capitalist society. Though they approached social theory from different angles, these thinkers had a firm faith in God.

His 1904 masterpiece, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, is largely responsible for Weber's fame. He adamantly maintained that the vast majority of influential, wealthy, scientifically and professionally literate, and executive-level Protestants in contemporary industrialized nations are Protestants. In addition, he brought attention to the fact that capitalism spread unevenly across Europe, with the Protestant-dominated regions being the first to see its growth. His question was this: “Why were the areas of greatest economic development also the most conducive

to a church revolution?” in other words, the Protestant Reformation that occurred between the years 1517 and 1648 (Weber, 1904). The need to “work hard in one’s calling” was central to his response, which centred on the history of the Protestant ethic within specific Protestant denominations including Baptism, Calvinism, and Pietism.

In contrast to the Catholic tradition’s view of poverty as a virtue and work as a means to a goal (supporting one’s family and community), Protestant groups started to view persistent, hard work as an aim in and of itself. In the beginning, hard work was a method of asceticism that helped people give up earthly pleasures and protect them from distractions like the dirty living, sexual temptations, and theological uncertainties. Second, conventional Christian rituals like confession, penance, and purchasing indulgences could never change God’s predestined disposition towards the individual, according to Protestant sects. Having success in one’s chosen profession, however, was seen as a “calling” bestowed by God, and it was the sole earthly manifestation of God’s favour or acknowledgement. Consequently, being financially secure and having amassed a considerable fortune via hard work and good judgement was considered as an indication of a person’s spiritual condition. Weber believed that these concepts allowed for the formation of capital, the stated aim of economic activity, and a hard-working and disciplined workforce. This foundation could not have been built without the ethic that developed out of these concepts.

On this point, Weber frequently faces criticism for providing a historical narrative of capital’s history that is more utopian compared to Marx’s historical materialist analysis. Cultural ideology plays a larger role in societal transformation than the actual economic system’s organisation and class conflicts. It might be more reasonable to see Weber’s Protestant ethic thesis as one of many issues related to rationalisation and to view his work as expanding on Marx’s. For a long time, the West was well behind the East, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent when it came to science, technology, and culture. So, why did Western nations become the epicentres of modern science, industry, and democracy? The rise of contemporary Western civilizations, argues Weber, is directly attributable to rationalization. This process involves the replacement of “magical” thinking with more practical forms of reasoning, such as calculation, technical reasoning, and rational bureaucratic organisation. The tendency toward using instrumental reason to change most parts of modern life is also a part of it. Traditional, ineffective management styles were gradually phased out as rationalization hurdles were lowered, allowing for

a reorganization of institutions and organizations focused on specialization and efficiency maximization.

In the long run, the ironic morality that emerged from Protestant morality was shaped by the replacement of its religious aims with the rationalisation of capitalist corporate processes and the structuring of labour. In the last chapter of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber bemoans the “iron cage” that contemporary humans find themselves trapped in. The iron cage metaphor is used by Weber to show how contemporary man fits into a technologically advanced, rationally defined, and “efficiently” organized society. “Now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production” describes the system that people acquiesce to because they have lost sight of humanity’s spiritual and other ambitions (1904). “Only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march”.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Religion**

There are three main theoretical frameworks that sociologists typically use. Functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and critical sociology all provide unique perspectives on society. The way these paradigms are applied by researchers to the study of religion is worth investigating.

#### **Functionalism**

A number of societal functions are served by religion, say functionalists. Religion cannot exist, be valuable, or be important apart from society, and society cannot exist apart from religion. Looking at religion through this lens reveals its many purposes: facilitating social interaction and social control, providing emotional comfort, and explaining spiritual mysteries.

Religion provides explanations by describing the ethereal realm and its powers, including gods. Questions like “How was the world created?” can be better answered with its aid. “For what reason are we put through this?” Both “Is there life after death?” and “Is there a purpose to our lives?” During difficult circumstances, religious practices can also provide as a source of emotional solace. Through the use of common, recognised symbols and patterns of conduct, religious rites provide a sense of stability, security, and order.

From a functionalist point of view, the chances for social contact and group formation that religion provides are among its most significant purposes. Through

its social networking and support services, it connects people who share same ideals and gives a platform for those in need to reach out for emotional and practical support. Group integration and cohesiveness can be enhanced as a result. Many people's sense of identity is deeply influenced by their religious beliefs, which can lead to "in-group" and "out-group" attitudes towards various religions within our society or practice. At its most severe, this dynamic manifests itself in anti-Semitism, the Salem witch trials, and the Inquisition. Finally, religion is a means of social control since it prescribes and enforces norms of behaviour, including proper attire, deference to authority, and sexual regulation.

To understand how sociology's study of religion evolved through time, we must go to its origins in the nineteenth century. Society was undergoing numerous structural changes at this time due to the industrial revolution, reformation, and enlightenment, which is why it is considered a pivotal period in history. Because of this, sociologists primarily set out to study religion as an institution that may provide light on societal changes. Notable writings from this time include those of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, all of whom attempted to make sense of these shifts by considering the impact of religion on society. Religion, in Marx's view, was a tool of the capitalist class to control the working class, while in Durkheim's view, it could bring people together. Moreover, there are the works of Weber, who aimed to decipher the emergence of capitalism by investigating the function of Protestant ideology. All of these thinkers were trying to figure out how religion shaped human civilization, but they did it in their own unique ways. Detailed explanations of these academics' works will follow in the following sections. But before we go into the complexities of religion and its social effects, let's attempt to grasp the fundamentals of religion.

### Elements of Religion

Durkheim states in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that beliefs and rituals are the two main categories of religious phenomena.

- (i) Beliefs are views, principles, or guidelines for conducting oneself in a particular way. Durkheim posits that beliefs divide reality and ideals into two categories: the holy and the profane (Durkheim, 1912). At its core, religion rests on the idea of a holy and profane world, with one side housing the former and the other the latter.
  - Anything other than the impersonal entities known as Gods or Spirits might be considered sacred. The most incongruous objects can contain profound

spiritual meaning: a pebble, a piece of wood, a rock, a tree, etc. The thing itself is not holy; rather, its significance as a result of ritual and religion is what gives it its sacredness. Furthermore, the societal belief is the source of the sacredness of such items. Therefore, religious belief or religion itself becomes a unifying force in society, fostering a sense of moral community among its adherents.

- On the flip side, profane things are those mundane, life-sustaining items and actions that are not held in any special or holy respect. Essentially, it encompasses private and individual matters that do not significantly impact the community as a whole. There is no connection between the holy and the profane, yet they coexist. There is no other way to transcend the secular and enter the realm of the holy but by means of ceremonial or ritual purification.
- (ii) A man's proper behaviour in relation to holy objects is dictated by rituals, which are standards of behaviour. Considered holy during a rite or puja, for example, are specific artefacts. Please do not touch these. Part of the rituals include engaging in such behaviours or breaking such taboos associated with the belief system. There are three types of rites that Durkheim identified: positive, negative, and piacular.
- Activities that foster productivity and serve as a unifying factor in society are known as positive rituals. Two types of ceremonies are considered positive: imitative and representational. Consistent with religious ideas, positive behaviours outline the "dos."
  - One kind of negative ritual is the establishment of taboos, which serve to discourage specific behaviours. Their primary purpose is to demarcate holy space from profane. The 'don'ts' are outlined in negative practices that align with religious views.
  - In order to restore the faith of the community, piacular rites are carried out, which can be either expiatory or punishing in nature. This is the method for strengthening one's devotion to the holy.

Arnold Van Gennep attempted to provide a sociological and naturalistic rationale for religious rites in his 1960 work *Rites of Passage*. By adhering to the rituals and ceremonies associated with each major life event, from birth to death, he depicted this process in his research. The majority of cultures require its members to perform a number of rituals upon birth, during adolescence, marriage, and, finally, death.

Sacred and profane helped Durkheim make sense of religion, but he also acknowledged that not all feelings of sanctity had a religious undertone. Similar to religious life, he saw indigenous people performing magical rituals. Nonetheless, he insisted that the two are distinct. Faith is best practiced in community. Achieving a holy character requires participation from a group. Religion cannot be applied until this occurs. According to him, religion meant:

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” (Durkheim, 1912).

The conflict perspective on religion put forward by Marx is more troublesome than that of Weber and Durkheim (Turner, 2010). Turner proposes a pair of explanations for this

- (i) Marx never really put much thought into the study of religion.
- (ii) Religion was seen by him as an enemy. Essentially, he zeroed in on the way religion may cause divisions.

Religion, according to Marx, is an illusion that promotes a distorted view of reality. His interpretation of religious texts is consistent with his critique of social stratification. In his critique of capitalist society, Marx distinguishes between two major social classes:

- (i) This owning class is known as the Bourgeoisie.
- (ii) The working class, or proletariat, makes up a large portion of society.

Marx said in his seminal book *The Communist Manifesto* that the proletariat were brutally exploited by the capitalist bourgeoisie. One side of the coin holds that capitalists became filthy rich thanks to the proletariat, or working class. Workers' wages are lower than the product's selling price, even if both the product and the workers' labor are of same value. As a result, capitalists reap the rewards of their effort while people go hungry. As a result, the worker begins to feel estranged from either his or her own job and identity. When all other options have been exhausted, the isolated individual may turn to religion for solace. When people are oppressed in many ways, including expropriation and exploitation, they often turn to religion for solace. It paints an inaccurate image of reality that makes the status quo look reasonable and unchangeable, so limiting social progress. Marx argues that this illusion leads to a false consciousness and its negative effects. The imprisoned creature

sighs, the world's heart breaks, and soulless conditions are embodied by religion, he says. The people's opiate, as Marx put it in 1848. Here he is attempting to argue that the root of religious impulses stem from a cold and uncaring environment, and that the elimination of religion itself is not society's most pressing necessity.

Given this, there are two possible avenues for deducing his religious beliefs from the foregoing:

- Religion as an ideology: In a class society, the most influential ideas are those of the ruling class. For the benefit of themselves and their interests, the ruling class uses religion as a tool to control the working class.
- Religion as superstructure: The foundation (or substructure) and the upper echelons (or superstructure) make up human society according to Marxist philosophy. The bedrock is the economic system, which consists of the productive forces and linkages. The superstructure rests above the underlying framework and consists of things like religion, family, states, laws, etc. Due to the fact that most social change takes place at the base, an unequal relationship exists between the two levels of organisation. Changing perspectives on religion are one effect of transitioning from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist society, according to Marx. For the working class, religion goes from being a shared experience to a means of evading oppression.

The connection between religion and economics was something Weber was attempting to comprehend. He disagrees with Marx and argues that economic conditions shift in response to shifts in social structures. Utilising this comprehension, he sought to ascertain whether the rise of capitalism may be linked to religious principles and associated methods. He made the astute observation that most entrepreneurs in the West were Protestants or protestants. It becomes a matter of sacrificing one's free time in favour of a work ethic and self-control when one follows the Protestant ethic, which places greater value on 'calling,' investments, and savings. The teachings of John Calvin form the basis of this code of ethics. According to Calvinists, God rightfully owns material wealth, and people should live for the aim of multiplying that wealth by reinvestment rather than indulging in worldly pleasures. A person can avoid damnation and become God's chosen one by putting more emphasis on working hard. In keeping with the ideals of capitalism, this proposal is sound. People were motivated to accumulate riches because the

Protestant ethic supplied them with theological punishments that created an attitude of religious discipline.

### **Religion and Construction of Knowledge**

Durkheim argues that religion is essentially a sociology of knowing. He asserts that religious teachings are the origin of our conceptual categories of cognition, including ideas like time, space, numbers, and causes. It has religious roots and serves religious purposes. He argues that these foundational ideas are socially produced since religion is inherently social. Because we are social beings, our minds work in certain ways.

Durkheim continues by showing that the totem system is really a cosmological system and that the early people's idea of clan and totem organization is deeply connected to their concept of categories of thought. Durkheim starts by elaborating on the ritual practices of a certain clan to clarify this. People in prehistoric societies saw themselves as sacred because they were both members of and descendants of a certain totem. As an example, a member of the black cockatoo clan would not identify themselves as a member of the clan but rather as a black cockatoo.

Like with totemic notions, everyone is member of a holy clan, and everyone is affiliated with at least one clan. The Arunta Crow clan, for example, is linked to winter, lightning, and rain. Similarly, there are systematic ranges of a natural event throughout several clans. Durkheim claims that this systematisation of totemic notions is unprecedented in human thought. None of these ideas about mental categories—class, category—were provided. Its origin is uncertain. Concepts and ideas like these emerged from communal existence. In this line of thinking, social structure is paramount. The structure of society has been adopted by the aborigines. In other words, the social organisation of clans gave birth to the formation of mental categories, which allowed for the possibility of thought.

According to Durkheim, if totem and clan are holy symbols, then society and deity are one. This demonstrates Durkheim's view of society as unique and subject to its own set of rules. Based on moral authority exerted as an external force on the person, he elevates society above the individual. Everyone follows the rules set down by society, both out of respect for it and a sense of obligation to one's fellow citizens. Society is perceived by humans as an external force that assumes a religious and spiritual quality as a result of this. Durkheim sees religion in this way: as the power of society exerted on an individual. Religion is society transformed, according to

Durkheim. Since moral power exists in society and is dependent on and susceptible to humans, it is neither an illusion nor a falsehood.

### **Religion as an Instrument of Oppression**

Religion, in Marx's view, serves as both a means of solace and a weapon of tyranny. After death, religion says, there will be salvation. It proclaims that there will be rewards in the hereafter for those who endure life's hardships with modesty and grace. By promising mystical answers to ills, religion also soothes tyranny. Religion, by positing that God sends bad things to people as punishment for their sins, serves to both justify and maintain the existing social order. Therefore, it gives a false sense of optimism in a hopeless situation, which distorts reality and legitimises injustice.

### **The Dominant Ideology**

Marx wrote that ideologies were destructive and illusory in German Ideology. Religion, in his view, distorted perceptions of the world. Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, who Marx admired, saw gods as reflections of human characteristics and saw religion as a dream. According to Feuerbach, people would be able to break free of ideas if they realised that erroneous views emerge as a result of societal structures. Religion, according to Marx, is something that society and the state create; it serves to draw attention to the contradictions and hardships in reality.

### **Religion as Super Structure**

According to Marx, the foundation of any society is its economics. Legal, governmental, and religious institutions all have their roots in this economic structure. Religion, in Marx's opinion, is both an aspect of and impacted by the infrastructure. Marx saw religion as an aspect of this system that is both supported by and impacted by the infrastructure; he refers to this overall framework as the superstructure. Whenever there is a shift in the underlying economic system, the superstructure undergoes a transformation throughout history. Additionally, he noted that economic foundations, politics, and the law all interact with one another.

### **Rebuttals to the Marxist Method in Religious Studies**

Based on his understanding of Christian ideas, Karl Marx criticized religion. In constructing his case, he disregards the beliefs of other faiths. Because religion

cannot be both affected and impacted by infrastructure, Marx's view that religion is influenced by infrastructure is another point of critique.

There are two distinct spheres in every prehistoric society that skilled ethnographers have studied: the sacred and the profane (Durkheim, 1912; Malinowski, 1948: 1). Magic and religion, in Malinowski's view, belong to the holy realm, whereas science belongs to the profane. Scholars like Durkheim, on the other hand, argue that magic is not sacred since it is conducted for personal benefit rather than communal good.

Born into Jewish families, Marx and Freud both experienced anti-Semitism as children (Kung, 1976: 162). Marx saw religion as the people's opium, whereas Freud saw it as a delusion based on a craving for reliance. Religion is essentially psychological, says Freud. Many of the books and articles he wrote over his life deal with religious topics. *The Future of an Illusion*, *Moses and Monotheism*, *Totem and Taboo*, and *Civilisation and Its Discontents* are a few of his famous works that convey his opinions on religion.

### **The Myth of Religion**

Religion, which Freud deems as "perhaps the most important item in the psychological inventory of a civilization" (1927), is characterized by him as an illusion. In it, he elaborates on the theological concepts that had concerned him all his life. It is his firm belief that religious concepts are nothing more than the realisation of humanity's deepest, darkest, and most pressing desires (Kung, 1976: 168). He came to the conclusion that religion's purpose is to provide emotional support to a human race that is inherently weak and unable. Believers in religious systems sometimes seek to influence, bribe, or satisfy the gods rather than take active steps to improve the environment (Sharvit, 2015). Science and reason, according to Freud's enlightenment, demanded mature conduct, but religion provided solace to believers and practical answers to the universal problems facing humanity. According to Freud, this kind of circumstance creates a person's position comparable to that of a helpless child (ibid: 7).

When people felt uncertain or powerless, they turned to the gods, who, in their view, had threefold mission: (i) to drive out the monsters of nature; (ii) to make people accept the harshness of fate; and (iii) to make people pay for all the pain that civilisation has caused (Freud, 1927: 18). It became clear to them later on, though, that fate was supreme and, in most instances, beyond the control of the

Gods. Therefore, it was the responsibility of the Gods to alleviate human misery. So, a repository of ideas is established, which safeguards mankind against the perils of the natural world, the hand of fate, and the harm that may be inflicted by human civilisation. They reasoned that if they attached these ideals and principles, life would be bearable.

### **Primitive Men and Their Idea of Religion**

Based on his research on taboo, Freud concluded that totemism was the world's most rudimentary religion and viewed "primitive" humans as little more than helpless babies whose urges they lack the maturity to regulate. What he means by "very ancient prohibitions which one time were forced upon a generation of primitive people from without" is his psychological justification for taboos. They encompass all the banned yet deeply desired behaviours. According to Freud, the concept of God and religion has evolved throughout history in response to people's changing desire for comfort and guidance. Totem and Taboo is a work in which he argues that the belief in natural forces by prehistoric humans was also motivated by practical considerations.

Totemism is defined by Freud as a system of beliefs and actions that include the following:

- (a) Clans within the tribe believe they have a common ancestor with an animal or, less commonly, a natural phenomenon like thunder or wind.
- (b) The rules state that no two members of the same totemic clan may be married, and that breaking these rules might result in the death penalty.
- (c) The totemic animal, bird, or natural item may not be killed, eaten, or otherwise harmed.
- (d) As with the loss of a family member, the ceremonial slaughter of the totemic animal is an annual event that is typically followed by mourning.

Religions that hold to a god who came after the original God are said to have strong ties to totemism, according to Freud (1927: 23). The strong link between a child and his father—a powerful character who poses a threat to the youngster because of his tight relationship with the child's mother—is described in totemism by drawing on psychoanalysis. As a result, the little one is filled with dual feelings: dread and desire. The infant takes on its father's characteristics to ward off the destructive forces of nature. This is how an adult (still haunted by his or her childhood

demons) comes up with a personal deity to worship and appease. Therefore, during ceremonies, the totemic taboos and rites related to the totemic species are observed. Religion, which is present in later-God faiths to some extent, has its roots in this adult response to the helplessness felt by children.

On the other hand, Freud claims that he isn't looking for the basis of religious belief but rather the mechanisms of transmission. He continues by saying that religious teachings provide justification for religious belief-

- The fact that their forefathers believed in these teachings means that they must be true.
- They have evidence that has been passed down from ancient times.
- Doubting their veracity is strictly prohibited (Freud, 1927: 26).

Freud claims that the last point generates intense mistrust. If he's right, our forefathers were far more naive and held views that are socially unacceptable now. Some religious tenets may also be considered part of the same. They include many inconsistencies, and even the ancestors question their veracity (ibid: 26-27). Freud offers two ways out of this jam. A more subtle and contemporary one exists beside the more antiquated one.

According to the first, religious concepts defy rational explanation. They defy logic and reason, and one must feel the truth within to know it.

ii. The second one is the "As if" school of thought in philosophy. Like in fairy tales, these fictions persuade people to behave "as if" they believe in them.

### **Source of These Ideas**

He begins by outlining the rationale for religious dogmas and doctrines, and then he carries on to identify where these beliefs first originated, or where these ideas came from. These dogmas, in his opinion, are illusions that have arisen from human desire rather than from rational thought or deliberation. According to Freud (1927: 30), their power comes from the intensity of their desires. So too are religious dogmas illusory. There is no rational way to disprove these beliefs, philosophies, etc. as they cannot be proven.

### **Sufferings in Human Life and Oceanic Feeling**

Within a different publication, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Religion, according to Freud, is a delusion. Nevertheless, according to one of his closest friends, there is a

possibility of a genuine religious background. A sensation of inescapable connection to the outer world that follows us like a shadow is what he refers to as a “Oceanic feeling” (Freud, 1930: 11).

This is something that Freud recognises and says can be present in many religious individuals. A sense of one’s own identity, or ego, he says, is like this oceanic sensation. Including anything from the outside would be a major challenge for this feeling of self. But he does note that this is possible under certain conditions, such as love (ibid: 13). When you’re in love, the barriers between yourself and the item vanish. He claims that when we are born, our egos take in the entire universe. However, as soon as we have wants, our egos begin to split from the outside world (ibid: 15).

Later on, he thinks, the oceanic sense became associated with religion. “Oneness with the universe” is only another method, in his view, for the ego to avoid facing the external threats it perceives (ibid)

### **Dealing with Unhappiness**

Attempting to return to religion’s purpose, Freud continues by describing the oceanic sense. To him, religion is a balm for the sufferings of this world. The pursuit of happiness, he says, is universal among humans. In its most literal form, happiness is the result of wants being met. But being joyful isn’t hardwired into every human being. According to Freud, the source of all suffering is inside the individual, their immediate surroundings, and their interpersonal connections (Freud, 1930: 24). When compared to the agony caused by the first two, the third is far more severe.

As a result of these hardships, people have developed strategies to cope. Religion is just one of three ways people try to get away from the hardships of life (ibid: 22).

- i) Intoxication- To deal with misery, this is the most effective method since it renders one indifferent to it.
- ii) Powerful deflections- via the practice of intellectual labour
- iii) Substitutive satisfactions- One can get the joy of serenity by various practices: art, yoga, deliberate seclusion, etc.

We may understand Freud’s view of religion by reading his two books and examining his explanations. What follows is an attempt to elucidate religion via Marx’s lens, which, similar to Freud’s, employs a critical analysis of it.

## Critical Sociology

Those who think critically see religious organisations as helping to keep societal injustices in place. To illustrate the point, the Vatican possesses vast riches, whereas Catholic parishioners typically get pitiful salaries. This person believes that religion teachings have provided cover for oppressive social systems like India's caste system and the "divine right" of tyrants.

Somehow, though, people always figure out how to react when they witness injustice or when their religion is dismissed as unimportant. One of the most vibrant sectors of Christianity globally is the fast growth of evangelical churches, which is particularly noticeable in South America but also in North America. Because of this growth, the Catholic Church, which was formerly dominant in South and Latin America, is now weaker. Latin America is the collective name for the nations in the Americas subregion that are Romance language speakers, mostly of Spanish and Portuguese. Evangelical churches, according to Christina Vital of Rio de Janeiro's Institute of Studies of Religion, are less dogmatic in their worship than Catholic churches. They can more faithfully depict modern ideals and standards, such self-control and the significance of initiative in achieving material riches, as a result (Fieser and Alves 2012).

Simultaneously, fundamentalist and evangelical Christian groups frequently bring in anti-family planning and anti-AIDS doctrines that are homophobic. As a result of pressure from American evangelicals, the Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act (2014) was passed, making homosexuality a crime in the country (Gentleman 2010).

Conversely, Norman Gottwald's 1999 landmark book, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE*, attempted to understand religious history using this framework, bringing Weber's sociological theories to the attention of modern public and academic audiences. In his magnum opus *Ancient Judaism*, published in 1921, Max Weber posed the issue, "How did Jewry develop into a pariah people [guests hosted by larger societies] with highly specific peculiarities?" Go to Gottwald's *The Politics of Ancient Israel* for a clearer explanation of this exchange. Weber (1921) and Gottwald (2001-2001). Even those who disagree with Gottwald, such as Kenton Sparks, provide other explanations based on Weberian principles that might explain the survival of early Israel."

Another factor contributing to Israel's longevity was the theological innovation of the mono-Yahwistic prophets who lived throughout the age of state. In the face

of foreign tyranny, these prophets interpreted it as a sign from Yahweh that enabled Israel to preserve its religious beliefs and ethnic identity (Sparks 2004 p. 126).

Weberian theory's continued applicability to the study of social behaviour, despite its antiquity, remains a contentious issue. As a scholar of religion and society, Weber is still very much in demand.

Because adherents of these faiths believe that God has already decided how their lives will unfold, they are taught to accept these circumstances as they are. Critical thinkers are worried by this. They say that religious organisations have used this power dynamic for decades to keep the poor in poverty by persuading them their "true" reward is in heaven and that they shouldn't bother about worldly goods. Religious leaders can influence their followers' actions by interpreting holy texts or making claims of direct revelation from God, according to critical theorists who study religion. Take the recent instance of George W. Bush asserting that he was commanded by God to "end the tyranny in Iraq" (MacAskill 2005). From a critical vantage point, the Enlightenment's goal of creating a barrier between religion and state remains vital. A crucial part of democratic debate and public assessment of decision-making is undermined when scientific facts are superseded by religious belief or "revelation" in public policy.

Feminists believe that the elimination of gender inequity is of paramount importance. Even if women are more prone to teach their children religious principles, feminist theorists argue that there has always been a lack of women in positions of religious leadership. While some faith groups are making strides towards gender equality, males remain predominate in authoritative roles. But feminist researchers look at this claim thoroughly. For instance, several have played a key part in re-establishing women's roles in Christian history since the 1979 publication of Elaine Pagels's groundbreaking study, *The Gnostic Gospels*. When God was a Woman, a 1976 book by Merlin Stone, states that fertility goddesses and other feminine deities were powerful in prehistoric European cultures. In the fifth millennium BCE, southern Semites and northern Kurgans arrived, bringing with them patriarchal religions characterised by strict social structures.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Assuming that social factors mould our reality perception, symbolic interactionism explores the complexities and meaning of everyday interactions and symbols. The importance of a community's beliefs and practices is directly related to how

seriously it takes its members' ideas and experiences, say interactionists. Christian and Jewish holy symbols include the cross and the Star of David, while Islamic sacred emblems include the crescent and the star. For interactionists, the significance of these symbols is paramount. Because interactionists focus on everyday encounters, a researcher utilising this approach may also raise questions about these types of interactions. An interactionist might look at religious leaders and their followers, how religion affects relationships, or how religion is present in people's daily lives. All of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks attempt to explain religious practices and beliefs, albeit to different degrees.

### **Types of Religious Organizations**

Religions encompass a wide range of organisational traditions, practices, and establishments. The early Roman Catholic Church, for instance, took a few organisational cues from the ancient Roman military, such as the idea of making senators cardinals. *Acclesia*, denomination, and “sect” are some of the words used by sociologists to characterise these groups. Also, academics know that these meanings can change. Most faiths go through a series of stages before they become officially recognised. The development of Christianity from a cult to a sect and finally to the *ecclesia* is illustrative of this.

Cults and sects are two examples of the new forms of religious organisation. In everyday conversation, this expression is often used in a negative way. “Cult” and “new religious movement” (NRM) have become synonymous terms in modern times. Still, most religions started off small as NRMs and eventually grew into larger, more structured religions. The term's pejorative meaning often alludes to the notion that such groups are secretive, domineering, and controlled by an imposing leader.

The ongoing issue about the status of some organisations, such the Peoples Temple members who perished at Jonestown, Guyana, or the polygamous Mormons, may be exacerbated by the media's tendency to sensationalise these cases. Some modern-day organisations, including Scientology and the Hare Krishna movement, continue to be the subject of cult labelling debates.

A small, new group is known as a sect. Numerous well-known Christian faiths in North America may have their roots in previous communities. For example, the English Anglican Church—which Presbyterians and Baptists shared with Henry VIII—was the target of rebellion from Catholics. Protest is the root of the Protestant word.

A sect can be defined as a distinct group that disagrees with the majority. Some theories may be questioned or the claim that they are returning to “the fundamentals” made by them. A growing number of followers within a sect might eventually lead to its formal recognition as a denomination. When certain believers in a religion decide they want more autonomy from the main group, they often form a sect.

True denominations do not often emerge from smaller religious groupings. These long-standing communities are called sects by sociologists. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Hutterites are two Canadian established sects that, because of their hybrid practices, fall somewhere in the centre of the ecclesia-cult continuum.

A denomination is a big, widely-practiced religious group that does not seek official recognition or take funding from the government. It is only one of many faiths. Christians in Canada adhere to a broad range of faiths, from Seventh-day Adventism and Presbyterianism to the United Church of Canada and the Church of England in Canada. The current Greek name for a city council replaces the old Greek phrase for a religious gathering. To describe the religious allegiance of the great majority of a society’s members, sociologists use the word. Despite the country’s outward acknowledgement of Islam as the dominant religion, it is really very closely tied to secular and political influences. Canada does not have an ecclesia according to this criterion.”

A useful mental image to help you remember the names used to describe different types of religious groups is a scale from most significant (ecclesia) to least significant (cults, NRMs, sects, denominations) in relation to their societal influence.

## Types of Religions

The process of categorising religions has received a lot of attention from several academic fields. Most people think that looking at what or who people worship is a good way to distinguish various faiths. Based on this taxonomy, it appears that there are basically four different faiths.

I should emphasise that some religions have several ways of looking at things or doing things. According to these scholars, Christians do not have a monotheistic understanding of the Holy Trinity since it comprises three divine persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—rather than just one. For Hindus, the many manifestations of the godhead are a monotheistic analogue to the Christian Trinity, even if this may appear polytheism to Westerners.

Bear in mind that sceptics, such as atheists and agnostics, are an inevitable part of every civilisation; they argue that the character of ultimate reality (including God) is unknown. Many atheists don't form organized groups despite their lack of faith in God or other supernatural powers. It would be a mistake to assume that someone who does not believe in a supernatural entity has no values. Many famous peacemakers and recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize have claimed to be atheists or nonbelievers. Changes in society have historically been sparked by theological views. Allowing early Europeans greater agency in their faith development, translators took religious texts and made them more accessible in a common vernacular. Persecution of religious minorities and conflicts between religious groups have historically led to genocide, mass displacement, and war. Though it originated in theological disputes, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe and may have been the catalyst for the modern concept of sovereign countries and international law. Canada has a long history of religious influence on social transformation, as we shall see in the next section.

### **Secularization**

Secularized nations also see a flowering of religion, although not to the same extent as the West. One reason religion is losing power in modern societies is secularization. Another reason is secularization of the state, economics, and science. A third reason is secularization of religion, which is sometimes seen as "emancipation" from religious institutions and norms. Despite its contentiousness, Jose Casanova's 2006 three-pronged approach explains secularisation from a social and historical perspective.

Many prominent thinkers, including sociologists, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx, foretold the coming of secularism. They all observed a decline in religious importance as nations advanced technologically. In Weber's view, membership in exclusive clubs will eventually overtake that of Protestant churches as a path to power and prestige.

Drug misuse, falling educational standards, and divorce are only a few of the social issues that many people hold secularisation responsible for. U.S. presidential candidate Michele Bachmann even went to the extent of blaming D.C. leaders for calamities like Hurricane Irene and the 2011 earthquake, claiming that they disregarded God's word (Ward 2011).

Sociological research on religion has far-reaching effects that extend beyond our own religious beliefs and practices. Other important areas of our life are also impacted by these ways of thinking and behaving. Sociologists have found that

studying religion sheds light on how people act as a whole, regardless of whether we are discussing homosexuality, politics, or the education of our children.

## Conclusion

Religion and law interact in different ways depending on a number of social and cultural issues. These factors include the degree to which a society is secularised, the clout of religious organisations, and the intensity of individual religious beliefs. Law and religion can evolve through time in reaction to societal shifts, but in different ways and at different rates. Changes to religious law and practice may result from secularization's and modernization's attacks on long-held religious ideas and traditions. There are times when religious revivalism impacts law and society, proving that secularisation does not always result in the decline of religion. In conclusion, religion and law are dynamic partners in society change, with complex and ever-changing interactions between the two. Religion may be a liberating force that encourages social change and provides moral guidelines, while it can be a conservative force that opposes innovation and advancement. The rule of law is susceptible to religious influence, which in turn can affect legislation and judicial decisions, which in turn can affect society at large. The relationship between religious organisations and the law is shaped by sociological variables, and both systems adapt to changing society throughout time.

Keep in mind that religious sociology and general sociology are not inherently distinct disciplines. Sociology of religion examines religion in society and uses the same theoretical frameworks and analytical methods as other social sciences to study religious behaviors. These techniques are borrowed from fields like economics and politics. In general, the focus of sociologists of religion is on the reciprocal relationship between religious life and society. The purpose of this article is to make the case that religious sociology and general sociology are mutually supportive fields. It is possible that modern sociology, in contrast to its classical origins, has paid little attention to religion, which contributes to the propensity for sociology of religion to become somewhat separated from general sociology. For the most part, academics have written religion off as a minor phenomena. Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, two of the first prominent thinkers in general sociology, were noted by sociologists for their intense fascination with religion. Subsequently, religious sociology and general sociology progressed independently. There was a decline in cultural and religious sociology in the West following WWII due to the emphasis

on sociology as a discipline that might aid in economic and political reconstruction. According to Beckford, there are a number of topics in modern society that both secular sociology and religious sociology are interested in. Gender, language, and meaning are a few examples; the body, for example, may convey meaning through ritualised physical expressions. Another prevalent subject is globalisation. In reality, religious sociologists have made significant contributions to general sociology in this area. Both areas of sociology have benefited from the discussion around rational choice theory. Here, none of these concepts are elaborated upon beyond a cursory remark. On the other hand, we'll get into them later on. It is possible that the tendency of sociologists of religion to concentrate on things within churches is one reason why there is a chasm between religious sociology and general sociology. To begin with, collaborations with established religious organizations have been crucial to several sociology of religion research. So, both religion and the sociology of religion are impacted by society. Sociology that seeks to discover a universal truth about society is often characterised as positivism. Typical of classical sociologists, it suggests a hopeful and aspirational outlook on the field and its potential. Since positivism has been under such fire for the last forty years, very few people now hold to the idea of an impartial sociology. The idea that analytical techniques that were helpful a few decades ago aren't going to cut it anymore when it comes to attempting to comprehend modern culture is a popular one. Furthermore, people have the capacity to direct their actions towards things that truly matter to them. This is why many scientific thinkers would claim that studying humans is more difficult than studying mechanical systems.

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