

## **Role of Religion in Society: A Philosophical Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Religion involves an imperative spot in human culture. It is accepted by numerous thinkers that religion is inborn in men. It is generally said that religion is a social organisation that relate humanity to an order of existence, cultural system of behaviours and practices. About 84% of the total populace is associated with Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and folk religions. It is a social consciousness which plays a vital role towards social prosperity. So there is a persistent social interaction, sharing the same cultural expectation and spiritual ideals. Anyway, religious developments massively affects our society. Usually, these impacts are changed and both positive and negative impacts can be resolved. In this present paper I will propose to exhibit how religion gives the potency and help essential to manage steady inconveniences or incidents. My main purpose of this paper is to emphasise the origin, meaning, diverse perspectives and role of religion in society. Side by side efforts will be given to portray the dark features of it and finally to legitimise the need of religion in society.

### **Keywords**

Religion, Cultural, Ethics, Social, Existence, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Folk religion.

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Each person's definitions of religion are different. Each person's faith is different. This is a question that has been asked for centuries and regardless of the answer given there is no right or wrong answer; religion can be defined as a group of people who have shared beliefs who feel their life has purpose or meaning. This feeling or belief that their life has meaning can come from outside of themselves, as well as within. Taking this one step further, these shared beliefs put into action in the form of worship, can be easily identified because they happen regularly.

Religion, which is a matter of belief and practice, is a universal social phenomenon which seriously concerns almost every living man. Generally, religion is understood by many as a belief in the Supernatural power or the Supreme Being and their relationship with the nature that

surrounds them. Man, being a social animal, is also, therefore, considered a religious being. Religion is also accepted as one of the strongest sources and means of social control. It is considered as one of the earliest institutions of mankind and is found in all the societies of the past and present. Scholars from the different disciplines of Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnology, Theology and Philosophy conceptualise the elements of religion in their own context; as a result there is no single uniform theory or definition on religion. Besides, religion being one of the earliest institutions is also one of the oldest subjects in human history that is taught and is most widely spread and universally discussed at many levels.

Religion addresses itself to what men conceive to be an ultimate or transcendental reality. In doing so, it provides meaning to human life and tends to legitimate the values of the members of a society; moreover it may challenge them in a prophetic way. As such, religion may usefully be regarded as a cultural phenomenon, but again as we already know, it gets into men's social life. It brings into that life belief about ultimate reality and standards relating to men's behaviour that become institutionalized. The normative culture cannot be without all ideas and belief elements. Religious beliefs get a normative grounding when, for instance, all members of a society are exhorted to act in certain ways to please the gods and failure to act in those ways is met by disapproval. Items of a religious credo, however, are taken in themselves part of what may be called an 'ultimate reality' culture. As such they are not normative; still they can and often do get involved in social system in addition to men's relation to one another. There is a tendency in the relevant literature to label them as items of social structure when they are so involved, that they are not strictly normative. They may possibly be called institutionalized after they become expected (Merton, 1968, p.24).

Emile Durkheim in, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) conceptualised religion as a dichotomy on the basis of social facts by studying of the indigenous Aborigines of Australia and arrives saying that:

Religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories of beliefs and practices, the first being the states of opinion in the representation of the mind; the second determined modes of action" which is the practical side of life (Durkheim, 1915, p.36).

Durkheim's religious concept is focuses on the importance of the Aborigine's 'totem' a symbolic representation of their clan or society where he sees nothing in the practical meaning of the rites and rituals; rather he believes that it is in the sacredness of the totem that the rites and rituals are practiced to reinforce their group cohesion and solidarity which is seen to be the expression of

collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1915, p.37). Accordingly he states that “religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities” (Durkheim, 1915, p.10).

Therefore, he claims that, all known religious belief systems, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic that presupposes a classification of all the things as ‘real and ideal’, into two classes or opposed groups designated by two distinct terms or words, such as ‘profane’ and ‘sacred.’ Thus, Durkheim gives one of the most convincing definitions of religion as:

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 one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them (Durkheim, 1915, p.47).

Many religious scholar says that religion in terms of a particular kind of experience, termed as ‘religious experience’. ‘*Taxonomy of Religious Experience*’ in this article Stark says that:

Religious experiences can be characterized generally as experiences that seem to the person having them to be of some objective reality and to have some religious import (Stark, 1965, pp.97-116).

That reality can be an individual, a situation, a reality, or even a non-appearance contingent upon the religious convention, the experience is a part of. A large assortment of experience fall under the general heading of religious experience. The notion is obscure, and the variety of sorts of encounters that fall under it makes it hard to catch any broad record. Some portion of that unclarity originates from the term ‘religion,’ which is hard to characterise in a way that does not either rule out institutions which are obviously religious, or incorporate terms. Yet, we can gain some ground in illustrating the idea by recognizing it from particular however related ideas. In terms of feelings, religious experience akin to Schleiermacher’s “feeling of absolute dependence,” or numinous feeling, were important early contributions corresponding to theorizing religious experience (Niebuhr, 1964, p.81). Since at that point, it is contended that religious affective states are everything to religious experience. To represent the experiences *qua* experiences, we should go away from subjective feelings. They use words like ultimate, holy, sacred, infinite, and transcendent to portray that experience. For the greater part of these researchers religion need not allude to any extraordinary being or higher power i.e., anything that can be experienced as sacred, divine, ultimate etc. (Webb, 2015, pp.25-37). Any experience that has this quality is figured as ‘religious.’ After having such religious experiences, an individual may feel persuaded that it is an ordeal of God or some other higher power. But a

religious experience can also be evoked by the unusual rock sitting on the ground. Obviously there's no exact agreement among scholars on the features or characteristics to make an experience ultimate, sacred etc. However, this group of researchers concurs that religion alludes to an exceptional, unprecedented sort of experience. For researchers of this methodology, what characterizes as 'religion' and 'religious' is the nature of the individual's internal experience, rather than the wellspring of the experience.

Another group of scholars of religion adopts an alternate strategy. They center around social orders, or groups of people, instead of individual experience. When they run over a person's experience, they seem them as a major aspect of the individual's larger group. For these scholars, religion is mainly the overall structure a group uses to know its world and guide its life. This overall structure shapes every moment of the group's experience. It is not something strange and it does not exceed everyday life. Rather it is the constant base of existence.

Factually, man does not live by awareness alone, as he is a passionate animal. Religion serves to the emotions of man in times of his sufferings and disillusionment. Religion puts confidence on God and engages the conviction of some imperceptible power which moves in secretive ways towards making even his misfortune meaningful. In this way religion frees man from both distress and dread. It likewise encourages him to hold up under dissatisfaction and incorporate his identity. With Religious conviction, major social virtues like truth, honesty, non-violence, service, love, discipline etc. are encouraged, making followers adopt these virtues, thereby transforming them into a disciplined citizen of the society.

Religion governs various dimensions of human life. It plays vital role in integrating men, solving their deep mystic problems and giving increase to the guts of brotherhood. According to Durkheim, religion strengthens social solidarity. Similarly A.W. Green emphasized that religion has the tremendous force of incorporation and verification in human society (Topel, 2012, p.170). It is true that worship, common belief, sentiment and involvement in familiar rituals etc. serve as the major cementing factors in strengthening unity and promoting harmony.

Religion upholding certain values and ideals; also provides a model for living. The believer absorbs these ideals and values in his life. Religion in this way can help youth in socialized citizen of society and becoming moral, disciplined. Organizations like Churches, Mosque, Temples, Gurudwaras etc. also control the behaviour of the individuals at different levels in various departments of life.

Religion instructs to the individual to serve up the masses and support their welfare. It gives the message, “the service to humanity is service to God” (Yang, 1961, p.58). Great religions like Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, etc. put stress on giving alms; for this reason, people spend and donate money, clothes, food in order to provide help to the poor and needy. With the power of religious belief diverse religious organizations connect themselves in various welfare activities, such as, imparting education, opening several charitable institutions like rest house, hospitals, and building temples in order to serve the poor and the divine.

Religion is a definitive wellspring of social attachment. The essential prerequisite of society is the ownership of social values by which people control the activity of self as well as other people and through which society is propagated. Technology and science can't make this esteem. Religion is the establishment whereupon these values rest. Children should obey their parents, ought not lie, women should be trustworthy to men, individual ought to be straightforward and virtuous, are some of the social values which maintain social attachment.

From the perspective of function, religion is stated as a system of beliefs and practises by means of which the members of a human group are preserved from ultimate despair in their struggles with the ultimate problems of life. This preservation is effected through the leap of faith which supplies explanations of things which are otherwise inexplicable. Among these ultimate problems the meaning of life, the problems raised by death, the manner of dealing with forces which are beyond the empirical control of the society, reconciliation of personal egocentricity and hostility with the requirements of group living ought to be included.

We may consider as prospect, the theory that religion is an important part of this social system in maintaining the law and ethics, as an element of the composite structure with which human beings are enabled to live mutually within systematic agreement of social relation. However, religion is dealt not with its origin but with its social function, i.e., the role they play in the formation and maintenance of societal law and order. Several people uphold the view that it is only the ‘true’ religion, which can offer the foundation of a systematized societal life. The theory taken into consideration is a religion’s social function is independent of its truth and falsity, what we think to be erroneous, absurd and repulsive, as of some savage tribes, could possibly be important and effective components of the social machinery; also without these ‘false’ religions, social evolution along with the development of modern civilization, would have been an impossibility (Runciman & Traugott, 1952, pp.149-91).

Some essential things ought to be known are; first, considering religion in terms of ‘function’, is an alternative to consider it in terms of ‘origins’. Second, an important function provided by the notion of “contribution to the formation and maintenance of a social order or social system. Third, principally function is independent of religion’s presumptive truths or false. Forth, religion is tied with societies and in Radcliffe-Brown’s words is “part of the social machinery” (Runciman & Traugott, 1952, pp. 149-91).

In modern society, the reference to an area of flexibility holds significance. From the point of view of social importance, freedom to act variably in numerous areas of social life and personal conduct is no trivial thing. In the ‘modern’ situation, insofar as a religious orientation prevails, it might be said to operate on some such motto as, believe in God and, for the rest, do as you please. The individual in this situation can be powerfully exhorted to be just in his dealings with others, to be honest in those dealings, to be cognizant of and compassionate about the whole matter of the well beings of others. But the detail of how these values are to be realized is left to the individual himself. In the ideal case, top-level values such as those of justice, honesty and compassion will exercise a downward effect and penetrate even into the intimate details of the individual’s generic religious commitment. It is enough and he can be allowed considerable freedom beyond it on the ground that he is not likely to do anything terribly reprehensible in any case, precisely because of the commitment itself.

Religion exercises a profound influence on each and every society and numerous people throughout the world. Everywhere through out the history, it has ended up being the essential power for social advancement, rousing people to create profound characteristics, and engaging them to sacrifice for their fellow human-beings and to contribute to the betterment of their communities. Those worldwide spiritual principles which lie at the heart of religion- love, humility, tolerance, compassion, sacrifice, justice, trustworthiness, dedication to the well-being of others and unity are the foundations of progressive civilizations. Thus religion helps man to enrich his moral character and purify his inner being.

In the meantime, it must be recognized that the misrepresentation of religion has been a most important cause of intolerance, social collapse, oppression, hatred, sexism, poverty, and warfare down through the ages. Undoubtedly, a lot of today’s apparently obstinate issues, including huge number of those featured by the Social Summit process, can be followed to the defilement and abuse of religious authority. It is, thus, clear that if religion is to help address the complex difficulties standing up to the world network, it must be free of prejudice, ignorance, and animosity.

Religion has the capacity to bring an enormous, positive force through service, justice and unity. Therefore instead of foregoing the tendencies promoting simply individual, emphasis must be laid on the people's religious accomplishment and well-being, which are occupied with the collective progress of the complete world community. Religion has made several contributions around the world to education, health care and other social structures. It is easy to blame religion for human errors and evils carried out under the guise of religion and religious motivation. Therefore, a better analysis of religion's exploitation for political or selfish gains, the blame for the arrogance and misdirected ambition of a relative few is required.

For religion to enter more actively into public discourses and its participation in the development of a robust and healthy public sphere, work needs to be done both broadly across society and by believers themselves. Exclusive private or sectarian claims that place religion beyond reasonable discussion need to be challenged by fair and reasonable questioning. Furthermore, the easy and superficial dismissal of the need for religion as an institution in society also needs to be questioned. There are costs to society and a decline in the well-being of people that can legitimately be traced to the decline of religion as a source of social good.

Though religion has been used and abused by all manner of self-interested, malignant causes and by those who seek power for power's sake alone. It has not been in terms with the effectiveness of the scientific method. Yet this modern understanding of religion has been partial and one-sided, blind to the contributions that religion has made to human life through the centuries, contributions still very much in evidence and relevant today around the world. Thus if a just and balanced assessment is made, millions of individual lives, owe much to religion for the well-being, security and happiness of communities.

Religion in general, never considering its several forms, communities, confessions and practices; encourages a more reasonable and effective defence in addition to more vigorous efforts to define and uphold numerous virtues than popular opinion and average media would acknowledge. Thus for assessing religion as a social good, it must be understood in its true form, with all of its diversity, in addition to toleration, mutual respect and pluralism requiring the desired level of freedom of belief and non-belief. Thus the only practical conception of global along with national societies seems possible as a *modus vivendi* in these diverse communities around the world (Brown, 2010, pp.43-60).

In defining religion and its few commitments to human life and community, a few variables appear to be essential. Firstly, religion can advance our comprehension of human instinct in a way that goes well beyond the restricted origination of human beings as mere

consumers, economic units, individuals bereft of community. These powerful conceptions of human instinct flop totally to represent the full respectability of individuals. Furthermore, the claims to cultural identities that try to recover some sense of human dignity remain too thin and too specific for a universal understanding of who we are. There is a need for a broader vision of the human being, one that overcomes the problems of alienation, anomie and apathy that undermine human potential and leave it bereft of that meaning, beauty and love that seem essential to any authentic and fulfilling human life and culture (Swatos, & Kivisto, 1998, pp.287-90).

Secondly, unity and the oneness of the human family, human solidarity, which face such a great amount of discontinuity in the modern world, are surely among the most central values of religion. The world religions were, after all, global before modern globalization was made possible by the communication and transportation advances of science and technology. The broad solidarity of early cosmopolitan Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, stretching often across continental divides, is a consideration that cannot be divorced from any fair evaluation of religion.

Thirdly, justice; in both idea and practice, has always been human civilization and integral to religion. Spread and a progress and of human felicity can be experimental with the increase and efflorescence of several of the world's great religions, moving human life beyond prior, narrower limitations. Beyond even the advances of recent constitutional arrangements and the modern embrace of the rule of law, religion can be a source of new understandings and new ways of upholding justice in personal, family and community life, beyond the merely legal. This vision of justice is at the heart of all major religions in which various formulations of the golden rule are to be found.

Knowledge, of human relationships, social organization, art and music with the human spirit, in addition to natural forces and the best way to cope with our physical existence has a long association with religion (Weber, 1993, pp.22-28). Yet a strange amnesia has taken hold of the modern mind, separating religion from science. We forget that religion and science were previously in close interaction, where former provided the matrix of motivations, values and epistemic virtues, generating the latter. Those who have spoken in the name of religion as science have too often defended superstition and blind faith, to the detriment of the reasoning, convictions and practices enduring complementarily with science. Thus all elements serve as a solid foundation of true belief for those who acknowledge that reason cannot be separated from a conviction in a transcendent and ever-abiding God. To the benefit of all, religion must come to



terms with what it understands of the generation of knowledge, the engine of human civilization, and learn to work hand in hand with the other main pillar of an enlightened civilization, i.e. science.

Finally, in defending and defining religion's place in the public sphere, a broader understanding of power is necessary. Our understanding of power has narrowed to thinking of it as the use of coercion and force for the purpose of dominating others. While acknowledging the dominating exercise of power, we also need to appreciate a more positive and productive role of power. We must appreciate the necessity and place of authority in human social organization, and also recognize the generative powers released from developing human capacity, from drawing on the motivating potential of spirituality and from harnessing collective aspirations.

During the past several decades, thoughtful people the world over have cast aside ideas, if not completely the habits, that have propped up prejudices of all kinds; against women, different races, certain classes and social positions, against the physically challenged persons, different, diverse or particular religion/s, have remained in both idea and practice. Why? Society must cast aside this last prejudice. Religion will always remain in one or the other form, thus it is time to engage in a fair and thoughtful discussion of its public role.

In summing up the discussion, we can say that religion is an important part of life having effect on man, society and his environment. Individual, who are not all that spiritual by nature, cannot live without it due to its importance and engagement in day-to-day life. The question is why they cannot eliminate religious ways and live a completely balanced religion free life? Why there is a chaos in a religiously disintegrating society? Why certain religious principles have intruded not only in personal and societal life, but also in country's constitution and global meetings? Why true religiousness incorporates itself in every arena of life? The cause is mainly down to the belief that society needs religion; a society without religion dismantles and disintegrates. As a matter of fact, an individual, a society may possess some collective religious beliefs and values. They would fear for the rise of animalistic tendencies, chaos, selfishness and greed to take over resulting in the fall of virtues, system and humanness. Thus the biggest reason that society needs religion is that it mostly regulates behaviour of believers, creating balanced, harmonious and just environment. The greater part the laws that we pursue today have their base in religious teachings. There is impressive discussion concerning regardless of whether religion is required to make us great individuals yet what is beyond dispute is that the principles for what is satisfactory for society are largely based on religion. Without religion we would more likely that not live in an alternate kind of society that has no value-system and little self-governance.

Religion can have great importance for a society for a variety of reasons. It prepares persons to live in society like a good human being contributing towards its all-round development and welfare. Depending on the culture and governmental style it can range from a simple influence to a complete control of society, it can become the base of the society and also its epitome; it can become the essence of the society and also its life and soul. Considering the essence of religion, let us revisit its true spirit in order to be able to integrate people and help them rise above all man-made divisions and differentiations. This rise above all the separations will enable us to maintain the essence of religion and hence of humanity, by granting them the freedom to flourish freely, peacefully, justly and humanely.

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