

THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIAL LIFE

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Annotation: The article provides information about the functions of religions and their content. Additionally, the article highlights the influence of religion's functions on people's lives and the importance of its place in society.

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Religion is a necessary and important gift for society and an integral part of social life. It manifests as a factor that creates and implements social relations. In religious studies, apart from the approach of identifying the content and essence of religion, there is also an approach from the perspective of its activity. This issue is mainly addressed by the sociology of religion, which studies the roles of religion in society. The functions of religion refer to its impact on individuals and society, and the nature of this influence. Additionally, sociology of religion examines questions like "How does each religion affect its followers and the life of society in general?"

In society, religion performs several important functions and plays a significant role in people's lives. The concepts of "function" and "role" are interrelated and close, but they are not identical. Functions are the ways in which religion operates and affects social life, while the role is the overall result of these actions and influences. The following functions of religion reveal some of its significant aspects:

- Formation of worldview;
- Compensatory (providing solace and comfort);
- Communicative (establishing communication and interaction);
- Regulatory (maintaining order and control);
- Integrative (uniting and bringing together);
- Promoting culture;
- Legitimizing (legalizing and legitimizing).

Religion fulfills its worldview formation function by maintaining certain views on humans, society, and nature throughout human life. This function includes explaining the world and its individual phenomena and processes, understanding the world through perception and cognition, accepting or rejecting it emotionally, evaluating it, and more. Religious worldview sets specific "boundary" criteria based on which humans, the world, and society are understood, and the purpose and meaning of life are determined. It also allows individuals to go beyond certain boundaries in their imagination, giving hope for a bright future, happiness, and relief from suffering, loneliness, and depression.

The compensatory function of religion helps restructure perception and consciousness, addressing situations caused by changes in objective conditions, such as the limitations, dependence, weakness, and helplessness of people. Social inequality, oppression, and injustice are overcome by “spiritual freedom,” resulting in social inequality becoming “equality” to some extent. This function provides spiritual solace by filling the “deficiencies” in people’s lives. Charity events, almsgiving, and compassion help redistribute income to ease the difficulties of the poor. Community solidarity is strengthened by overcoming indifference. The psychological aspect of the compensatory function manifests in alleviating stress, providing solace, catharsis (emotional release), meditation, and spiritual enjoyment. Religion satisfies the spiritual-psychological need when individuals feel the need for spiritual solace in their interactions with nature and society when achieving their goals seems impossible.

The communicative function of religion ensures the realization of mutual interactions. These interactions develop both in religious activities and in relationships unrelated to religious activities. It involves the exchange of information, mutual influence, and perception among people, as well as spiritual communication during worship, prayers, and meditation. Religious consciousness distinguishes between two types of communication: interactions among believers and divine-spiritual interactions (with God, angels, spirits, etc.) during worship and meditation.

The regulatory function of religion involves managing the activities and relationships of individuals, groups, and communities through certain ideas, values, beliefs, customs, and religious institutions. Various religious-ethical norms, divine encouragement, rewards, and punishments are used to regulate the behavior of individuals and communities.

The integrative function of religion unites individuals, groups, religious communities, and various institutions. This function manifests more fully within the scope of shared beliefs. By uniting people based on faith, it forms communities with a worldview that can resist various societal ills and destructive ideologies. Collective worship, customs, and ceremonies also serve as unifying factors for believers. Religion is an integral part of culture. Therefore, its function of promoting culture is significant in social life. Historically, religion has contributed greatly to the development of writing, book art, various cultural constructions, and artistic directions. Religious cultural values have been preserved and developed to this day. Cultural and spiritual heritage is passed down from generation to generation. The scientific legacy of great thinkers who dedicated their lives to knowledge and enlightenment holds a central place in promoting culture even today.

Any religious community, association, or theological perspective cannot exist without certain limitations as a social system. Therefore, it must develop ethical norms elevated to the level of law. Religion not only legitimizes these norms but also defines the requirements and attitudes towards them. Moreover, the philosophical and theoretical aspects of religious functions address questions about the purpose of human life, the meaning of life, and the nature of the transient and eternal world, as described in religious teachings.

The legitimizing function of religion involves legalizing certain social orders, relationships, and religious-ethical norms, emphasizing their mandatory nature in social life. Religion proposes certain legal requirements and obligations, leading to unique rights and responsibilities in people’s lives.

Religious scholars pay great attention to studying the functions of religion and continually research them. Studying various religious views in religious studies inevitably expands the researcher’s worldview. Some individuals acquire new terms and approaches related to human

psychology and the reality of existence. This distinguishes religious studies from religious education. While religious education focuses on nurturing and strengthening a specific worldview and associated values, religious studies emphasize expanding the researcher's understanding of religion and humanity.

In conclusion, throughout its long history, religion has encapsulated many universal ethical norms, turning them into obligatory behavior rules for everyone. Religion has helped people live in cooperation, peace, and harmony, strengthening their sense of trust, which is the essence of life, and providing strength to overcome life's trials, problems, and difficulties. Religion has preserved and transmitted universal and spiritual values from generation to generation, greatly influencing cultural development.

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