



Introduction to Religion

2nd Lecture

1st Chapter

Main Questions



1. What is religion?
2. How is it defined?
3. How the people with different thoughts, regions and religions interpret it?
4. When, why and how did it start?
5. Why do people follow it?
6. Why do we need it?

All these and many other similar questions lead us to this discussion in order to find answers before starting the religious studies.

Etymology

Religion, derived from old French word "Religiun" means "Respect for what is sacred" & Latin word "Religionem" means "Reverence for the gods".

Modern Sense: "Recognition of, and obedience to a higher unseen power". Words "Creed", "Cult" & "Faith" are used as synonyms.

In Urdu, we use word "Mazhab" مذہب which is originally an Arabic word means "A way to go", "A path to walk", "A style", "A method" etc.

In Arabic, in the sense of religion, the word "Deen" دين is used commonly which literally means "Retaliation", "Recompense", "Requital", "Commandment", & "Judgment" etc., for example,

Qur'an says " . . . مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ " The Master of the Day of Judgment".

Word religion in Quran

The most appropriate of the above mentioned Arabic words in the sense of religion, is "Deen". Although, Qur'an uses some other words as well in this sense like ملة

صِرَاط... "Siraat مِنْهَا جُ Minhaj

Shir'ah", but the word preferred and used most often in the divine guidance i.e. Qur'an and Hadith, it is "Deen " دين as it indicates to the requital and the recompense of the deeds in after life.

The word "Mazhab " مذهب has not been used anywhere in divine scripture in the sense of religion as it does not express the exact sense of religion except in Urdu, instead, it is used in Arabic for "Point of view" & "School of thought".

Definitions & Concepts

- **William James** 1842-1910 (describes in his book "The Varieties of Religious Experiences")

"The feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, whatever they may consider the divine.«

- **Edward Burnett Tylor** 1832-1917 (defines in his book "Primitive Culture")

"The belief in spiritual being

- **David Emile Durkheim** 1858-1917 (writes in his book "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life")

"Unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things«

- **Divine Perspective: (Eastern Perspective)**

"Religion is a complete code of life set and sent down by the Creator, the Lord (God) through His messengers from time to time to guide His slaves (Mankind & Jinn) to the success in life and afterlife".

- **The crux** of the western ideas is that the Religion to them is "A relationship to sacred & spiritual things, feelings in solitude & experiences of individuals.

Analysis

- Western scholars, however, interpret religion as it is something related to thought only, not stressing upon the practical aspect of the religion.
- Western society as they dislike the interference of religion into their daily lives as well as in economic and political bodies.
- Their interpretation shows that religion to them is a personal matter of every individual, because people are different in their thoughts and association with spiritual & sacred beings.
- On the other hand, it appears that religion to divine perspective is more practical than it is theoretical as it is a complete code of life and almost 90% of Islamic teachings are practice based. Besides

Need for Religion

Religion is an essential need of mankind as it gives meanings to the essence of life, creates objective of existence and establishes the core of mankind.

Demand of Nature

association with some religion is the demand of the innate human nature man has been created with. Nature refers to an essential feature or characteristic of something by which that particular object is recognized and known. In case, if this feature is removed, that particular object remains not the same object any more.

The Innate Human Nature

The word "Innate" refers to built in essential human features. Man has been created with an innate nature that compels him to believe in an unseen super natural power as God. Qur'an reveals in Surah Al- A'raf (172) about an incident that occurred in Heaven before Adam (AS) was sent down to earth which is identified as "The Initial Covenant".

The innate human nature in Hadith.

Allah, the Exalted, created all of the human souls from Adam (AS) and presented Himself to them and questioned them, "Am I not your Lord?" They all replied, "Why not" which means they all agreed upon it. This covenant has been set as the innate nature of the human beings by Almighty Allah. This is the nature termed as "Fitrah" in Qur'an and everyone takes birth with same "Fitrah" that leads to the acceptance of the Ultimate Reality "God".

History & Background

Through the history of religions, we come to know that religion has ever been the essential part of human life in every society. The Greek historian Plutarch (46-120 AD) writes, “In history, I have found cities without forts, cities without palaces, cities without schools, but never have I found cities without places of worship”

For history of religion, we find archaeological evidences as well; likewise tablets of law by Hammurabi (2300 BC), a king of Babylon lived in Nineveh, the capital of Babylon, almost in the age of Ibrahim (AS).

But, when and how did it start actually, history is silent and provides no definite answer. But, the divine scriptures like Qur'an & Bible reveal it well that the religion started with the very first person on this earth named Adam (AS).

Craves of Mind for the Knowledge of Essential Facts

- From where?”, “To where?” and why?”
 - from where did I and this immeasurable universe come?
 - Did I come into existence on my own or is there a creator who brought me to existence?
 - Who is he?
 - How am I related to him?
 - What about this vast land, sky, animal, vegetable, mineral, planets and stars?
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- Did they come into existence on their own or is there some sovereign creator? What is after this life? What is after death? Where do we go after the short journey on this planet Earth? Does the story of life from birth to death have nothing beyond that?
 - Do the virtuous who sacrifice their lives for good and truth meet the same end as the wicked and villainous who sacrifice others for their own desires and pleasure? Does life culminate only in death?

Classification of Religions

There are almost nine thousands religions including the tribal religions existing in the world. These religions have been classified into two major categories, Revealed & Non-revealed. Revealed refers to the claim by the followers in order to have some divine scripture for human guidance.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are considered as the revealed religions. Rest of the religions have been declared as non-revealed religions as they do not claim to have the divine scripture despite they have some sacred and holy books.

Universal Features of Religion

1. Faith and Beliefs
2. Rituals & Customs
3. Ethics & Morality

Theological Ideas

1- **Atheism:**

Denying the existence of God & religion and believing in the self-existence of the universe.

2- **Agnosticism:**

Not being certain about the existence or non-existence of God, instead, being in doubt about it.

3- **Deism:**

Believing in God but denying the revelation & the interference of God in universe.

4- **Pantheism:**

Identifying and equating God with the law & nature of universe, declaring universe as God.

5- **Monotheism:**

Believing in that there is not but one God (this one is supported by the divine scriptures)

6- **Polytheism:**

Believing in the plurality of God i.e. numbers of God.

Lecture Ended Thanks

Lecturer

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