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# Unit 8 Religion & Society

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Sociologists try to understand Religion in the form of an institution. Consider it as a Collective Human Activity & not as a supernatural thing. Study relationship of Religion with other social institutions

- Functionalist - Beneficial entity.
- Conflict Theorist - Device of the haves to ideologically subdue the have nots  
Earlier it was a speculative activity, but now Religion is seen in terms of functions - dysfunctions & present forms

Religion - A Cultural system of commonly shared beliefs & rituals that provide a sense of ultimate meaning & purpose by creating an idea of reality that is sacred, super natural & all encompassing

**#ED** Religion - A unified system of beliefs & practices related to sacred things, that is to say that things set apart & forbidden, beliefs & practices which unite them into a single moral community for all those who adhere to them. Religion is about the realm of sacred.  
(Elementary form of Religion)

New Definition of Religion, that transcends the dualism of materialism-spiritualism, sacred/secular

Peter **#Mandaville** & **#Paul** James Religion - A relatively-bound system of beliefs, symbols & practices that addresses the nature of existence, and in which, communion with others & otherness is lived as if both, takes in & spiritually transcends, socially-grounded ontologies of time, space, embodiment & knowing

## Functions of Religion / Role in maintaining Social Order

Can be studied at Individual/Societal level, Latent/Manifest Functions

1. Social Change -
2. Integrative Force -
3. Social Control -
4. Intellectual Function -
5. Normative Role -
6. Solace & Comforting Function -
7. Stabilisation -
8. Ritual Role -
9. Supplements empirical knowledge -

## Dysfunctions

**#Merton** introduced concept of Dysfunction of religion in a multi-religious society

1. Creates False Consciousness, thus preventing oppressed from taking Collective Actions to ameliorate their lives
2. Persecution, war, terrorism, fundamentalism, communalism
3. **#Marx** Religion acts as Opium of masses, justifying dominant ideology & exploitation
4. Hinders Social progress & impedes Social change
5. Makes people Dogmatic
6. Sometimes promotes social evils & superstition
7. Doctrines like Predestination can make individual feel powerless and fatalistic

## Sociological Theories of Religion

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### Types of Religious Practices

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#### Animism

Belief in Anima/Spirits, world is driven by (Benign/Malevolent) spirits.

Man finds the presence of spirits in objects or notions that surrounds him.

Most primitive idea that gave birth to religion, as a religious concept it is associated with primitive people

**#Eg** Teton Sioux, America Ghost Dance to appease spirits; Nuer, North Sudan Sky Spirit/High Ghost, **#IndianSociety** Witchcraft, Sorcery

#### Emerged from 2 Questions

1. What is the difference between a Living Body & Dead?
2. What are the Humans shapes that appear in Dreams & Visions?

#### Monism & Pluralism

#### Sects & Cults

#### Science v/s Religion

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#### Religion & Science ~ Religion in a Modern Society

#### Secularisation & Secularism

#### Fundamentalism & Communalism

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#### Fundamentalism & Religious Revivalism

# Fundamentalism & Communalism

Both have certain ideological elements in common

1. Both attack concept of separation of Religion from Politics & State
2. Oppose concept of equal truth in all Religions & Unity of different religions
3. Advocate control over education by the followers of the dominant religion

Fundamentalism - Strict adherence to the Religious Doctrine & full opposition of other religions and any Criticism

Strict adherence to a set of principles with antagonism to other view points

Karen [#Armstrong](#) - Fundamentalism is a part of Modern scene. They believe that they are fighting for survival as they believe the Western Secular Values aim to wipe out their Religion completely

Steve [#Bruce](#) echoes similar views

Fundamentalism	Communalism
Stresses upon infallibility of scriptures	Strong allegiance to ones own ethnic group rather than society. Can be based upon religion, race, ethnicity
Pursuit of Political power is important	More protective of its own rights & beliefs, exclusionary in nature
Tend to separate certain communities from mainstream	Religion based opposition. Ideological & activates during social upheaval
Aims to establish a normative order by various means, Wars to speeches	Establish Supremacy through hatred & Violence
As a movement is led by Charismatic leaders	Have a mass psyche, may not form a sustained movement
Reject all corrupt lifestyles & aim to get rid of such evils from society	No such reformative agenda
Opposed to Rationalism & Discard equality of all Religions	Nothing as such during peaceful times
Are usually Reactive in nature & a response to what they consider as a Crisis	Usually emerge when conflicts of interest & sense of insecurity arises
Promotion of the Original	Antagonism is central here

1. Communalism is often associated with eruption of violence & riots which may or may not have any particular goals

2. In a multi-religious society, Fundamentalists tend to be communal, but not the other way round. (#Eg) RSS, ML, Akali Dal were communal parties but not fundamentalist
3. Communist leaders may not be Religious leaders. (#Eg) Maulana Maududi of Jamat Islami - Journalist, Hedgewar of RSS - Physician
4. Fundamentalists want only 1 religion, while Communalist only want to communalise their own social community
5. Communalists needs a Binary Opposition (real or created) to mobilise its members