
UNIT 3 RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to understand religious structures and their operational patterns from a philosophic perspective. Religious structures vary from religion to religion but some of the common features found in these structures can be identified. In this unit, some of these structures found in many religions have been presented and discussed. We expect that by the end of this Unit the student should be able:

- To understand some of the religious structures present and operational in religions
- To identify key ideas and world views found in these structures
- To be able to critically analyse religious structures and institutions

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In a world of diverse and various religious forms and expressions, it is pertinent to observe, understand and appreciate the various philosophies underlying these. The undercurrents of many of these religions find an outward manifestation both formally and informally. Dealing with formal expressions, one would find quite often strict and rigid structures within which the believer is 'tamed' or 'trained'. Some of these expressions or structures undergo changes as they encounter changing times and cultures, but some become too difficult to change, for they become institutions of their own within the larger framework of the religion. A study of a few important structures commonly found in some religions would enable us to understand the role that religions play in the growth process of each believer and the believing community.

3.2 PRIESTHOOD

This is one of the religious structures found in many religions. A priest is a religious official or animator or leader who is authorised by the community to perform religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, administer sacraments, or/and lead people spiritually. He/she is generally an expert in rituals, has some special

acquired knowledge of spiritual matters, and has the techniques to conduct worship for believers that include incantations, prayers, sacrificial acts, songs, and other appeasing rituals.

Etymology

Etymologically, the word priest has its root in two words in Greek: a) presbyteros (Latin presbyter) meaning elder, and b) hierous (Latin sacerdos) referring to priests who offer sacrifice, such as the priesthood of the Jewish Temple, or the priests of pagan gods. Christ is considered as the High Priest in Christianity. The Sanskrit word Purohita meant placed foremost or in front, Charged, Commissioned, and appointed. This word is usually used by some groups in Hinduism.

There are several words used to denote priests. While some are common, others are special words. For instance, a Lama is a Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism, Magus is a member of the Zoroastrian priesthood of the ancient Persians, Shaman is one who acts as a medium between the visible and the spirit world and practices sorcery for healing or divination. There are some terms which denote seniority and hierarchy in certain religions, such as archpriest, high priest, bishop, etc. In Hinduism, the Purohit is a priest, generally of the Brahmin caste. Priests in many Christian denominations follow a strict hierarchy, the authority being passed on from traditions. Some religions like Islam and Sikhism do not strictly have priests, but are led by community leaders. The Muslims have local spiritual and community leaders such as the imam, the mullah, the mufti, the qadi, etc. Buddhism and Jainism do not have priests but the monks officiate various rites and rituals. The priests in Zoroastrianism are called as Navote. Many sects in Judaism do not have priests, but there are hereditary priests through paternal descent from the tribe of Levites, descendants of Aaron. Such priests are called as Kohanim. The rabbis are teachers and they hold congregational leadership.

The Office of the Priest

Priesthood, not uniformly found in all religions, is prevalent in many religions. A few common roles of priesthood are discussed below:

Initiator of Dialogue between People and Gods:

A priest initiates a dialogue between people and Gods through verbal prayers or non-verbal rituals or both. He stands as a reminder of the spiritual realm of the society and is often called upon to initiate the process of this spiritual aspect. This dialogue is at times initiated in a formalistic way, as in pujas or Masses, and at times informally, as in the case of raising spontaneous prayers at the funeral of a person (although even for such occasions, there are formal ways). As a leader of the religious community, it is his/her bounden duty to initiate such dialogues through prayers, rituals, feasts, ceremonies etc.

Intermediary between People and God:

A religious leader or a priest also plays the function of an intermediary and becomes the representative of the community. As a sacred agent, the priest is the visible representative of the gods or the divine beings. In ancient times, they were believed to hold the power to control or manipulate natural processes and events. As the community depends on nature for their survival, sustenance and well-being, the priests were held in high reverence, as they engaged in a sacramental relationship between humans and the divine. They were not like

postmen or messengers, but were considered agents of sacred power. In some religions, the use of a sacred language is often used after formal training by the priests (or the priestly class). The work of the priest is to take to the gods the requests, the appeasements, the petitions, etc of the community and to return blessings, graces, commands etc. of the gods to the community. The priest is considered to enjoy a social cum secular bond with the believing community and the Divine beings.

Defender of Social and Religious Principles:

The office of priesthood has been considered important as it seeks to balance the sacred and the profane aspects of human society. Religious priests and leaders are also responsible for defending the social security of the believing community. When in distress or in trouble, defending the community from the forefront from attacks and criticisms, is also a key aspect in priesthood. Thus, during the Reformation period, priests of the Catholic Church tried to protect their faith and their faithful through various means. The social framework of a religious community is preserved through tradition and moral-spiritual values. The role of a priest assumes significance in such a social context too. Constant reminders, interpreting values and explicating social-spiritual-moral values and imparting them to the younger generations is one of the chief roles of the priest. He/she keeps the flock together. He is also responsible for perpetuating the sacred traditions, practices, doctrines and dogmas, beliefs and world views of the religion.

Powerful Embodiment of Valour and Supreme Order:

By his/her lifestyle, the priest embodies virtues and holiness and is a model to the rest of the believing community. They are courageous people who will stand for their faith and will even be willing to sacrifice their lives for the faith and supreme values. This would not mean that they are super-human beings, but leaders worth following. As people set apart, they held central positions in the social structure. This prestigious position as spiritual and social leaders is acknowledged when people turn to them in times of events beyond human control and where the divine or the sacred realm begins. At critical junctures of individuals, such as birth, puberty, marriage, death etc, and of communities such as flood, drought, famine etc, the priests are often sought after.

Ministers of Public Worship:

The priests are also ministers of public worship and involve in sacrifices, rites, sacraments, blessings and preside over rituals that re-enact creative, redemptive, or salvation events, etc. While others can wish blessings to one another, the priest, being sanctified and anointed, gives blessings to the faithful. The priest is also concerned with the practical aspects of religion, apart from preaching and teaching. He is also a spiritual administrator of the community.

Religious Power and Priesthood

Priesthood is also associated with power, domination, guidance and charisma. Religious power is often exercised through religious priests or through other religious leaders. Clashes often have arisen over the supremacy of secular power over religious power or vice versa. Often secular power has sought its legitimacy from religious power. Conflicts between military nobility and priesthood have been recorded in history. Often clashes with the nobility- e.g states of Mesopotamia in Egypt and Palestine or the complete takeover of priestly

positions by the secular nobility in the Hellenic city state, particularly in Rome, are some examples. In some countries, religious law reigns supreme and some religions are state religions. The power of the religious leaders in such countries (e.g. Iran) is greater than the governments. The theocratic states (a form of government in which a god or deity or religion is accepted as the highest rule of the state) consider their leaders to be divinely guided. Such governments are different from those governments that are only inspired and influenced by moral concepts of some religions.

Priesthood and Seclusion:

In religions that consider priesthood seriously, the priests are often considered as 'special' and are 'set apart', for they are considered to be sacred. In Ancient Egypt and India, priests formed a separate caste. The Levites were a priestly tribe, instituted by the laws of Moses. In Catholicism, priests and bishops are entirely male and celibate. However, anyone can become a priest and the rigidity of a familial lineage is not present. This seclusion is often marked by a special ceremony called ordination. The priests are different in the sense, that their lifestyle and patterns are suited to the community.

This seclusion came with certain personal requirements too: Celibacy as in Roman Catholicism and the Arcakas of the Digambara sect in Jainism, asceticism in various Buddhist and Jain groups, personal religious experiences in some Protestant sects, etc.

3.3 THE SACRED

The Concept

All religious structures have a strong concept of the sacred, which is distinguished from the secular or the profane. What 'belongs' to the Gods or the realm of the gods is considered as sacred. (The word *sacrum* means what belongs to the gods or was in their power). Hence, the deities and the images of Gods, the temples and other places, Godly values, the language used by the gods, etc. are considered sacred. The realms of the sacred are set apart by a boundary (real or virtual).

The word *profanum*, meant in front of the temple precincts. It was distinct from the location of the sacred. The Latin word *profanare* meant "to bring out" the offering "before the temple precinct" (the *fanum*) in which a sacrifice was performed. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, considered the concept of the sacred and the profane to be of the greatest importance while considering the characteristics of religion. According to him, "religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden".

Temporal Aspects

Mircea Eliade gives a few temporal aspects in the phenomenon of the sacred and the profane:

Unchangeableness:

The sacred is absolutely unchangeable when it has extra-historical reasons for treating it as a metaphysical, eternal, or is a trans-historical reality. Historically speaking, this quality of unchangeableness and constancy are found in all those that religions consider as sacred - persons and communities, actions and

words (written and uttered), natural objects and created objects, time and periods, places and stations, numbers and formulas, events and situations, In all these, a repetition or a reappearance of the ancient type (event or motive) takes place and they persist over periods of time.

Metamorphoses:

Metamorphoses means to change into a wholly different form or appearance, in other words, transform. The profane or the secular begins to appear as sacred or transcendental after metamorphoses takes place. This occurs in initiations, sacraments, and baptisms. It also appears in the use of certain objects to symbolize the divine, such as stones to represent gods or shrines. Acts of blessing of an object, an act or a person also come into this category. Vice versa, a sacred becomes secular or profane, when it is used for a different purpose. When a religious myth is transformed from its religious context and meaning and is used as a piece of literature or as entertainment, when a religious act is used for imitation or dramatic enactment, then also metamorphoses is in place.

Destruction:

Quite often, religion and the sacred are intertwined and so the destruction of one may cause the other also to be destroyed. The realm of the sacred faces erosion when it is used too commonly in social intercourse. For instance, "God bless you" has become a social greeting than a religious blessing because of its excessive use in social realms. Such elements are found more in industrial societies and the sacred has been destroyed turning profane. However, when favourable conditions occur, the sacred always returns as its archetype always persists in the human spirit.

Restoration:

Every community that is intact and wishes to remain intact should need a notion of the sacred as a priori. In archaic societies - secret fraternities, magicians, shamans... In modern societies, public events like festivals, which generate social strength, or the establishment of monastic, elitist orders, or the creation of new centres of authority help the society to be intact and this restoration of the sacred is not only desirable but also advantageous to societies that are fragmented due to various social, economic and political reasons.

Sacred Space

A sacred place is a defined place, a space distinguished from other spaces. It is marked by rituals practised by people in that place or directed towards that place. Sacred space is like focusing lens- it focuses attention on the forms, objects and actions in it and reveals them as bearers of religious meaning.

There are different kinds of places:

Places that are constructed for religious purposes, such as temples.

Places that are religiously interpreted, such as mountains or rivers.

Spaces that can be entered.

Physically- as the outer geography of a holy land.

Imaginatively, as the inner geography of the body in Tantric yoga, or

Visually, as the space of a *mandala*.

Sacred space does not even exclude non-sacred space, for the same place may be both sacred and non-sacred in different respects or circumstances. (in Maori culture, latrine is both sacred and non-sacred: Sacred because it is the ritual place at which an unwanted spirit can be expelled or the help of the spirits obtained. And it is also a latrine). In short, a sacred place comes into being when it is interpreted as a sacred place. Places are sacred because they perform a religious function. Such religious functions create religious emotions of peace, joy, or satisfaction or a deep eagerness to do something for the divine. A sacred space is a symbol – a symbol of the relationship of humanity with divinity. At least three symbolisms arise:

Symbolism of the Threshold

The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – the divine world and the sacred world. In the thresholds we have gods, spirits- as guardians that forbid entrance both to human enemies and to evil spirits. At this place, sacrifices are offered and judgments take place. These are also symbols of passage and vehicles of passage. Transcendence of the world of profanity takes place here. The sacred enclosure constitutes an opening in the upward direction and ensures communication with the world of the gods. Temples and other similar buildings add much importance to the doors or the main entry points, as this is a symbol of the threshold.

Symbolism of the Centre

The concept of the centre is always important for the religious minded person. To such a person, life is the centre of existence and God is the centre of life. In the religious world, there are three cosmic levels of reality – the earth, the heavens, and the underworld. The centre is often symbolized by the imagery of a universal pillar. In the homogeneity of space, the sacred place constitutes a break. The break is symbolized by connecting the three worlds, so that passage between the three is made possible. Communication with heaven is often symbolized by a tower, pillar, ladder, mountain, tree, vine, etc. This *axis mundi* (the axis of the world) is located in the middle at the ‘navel of the earth’. The holy sites and sanctuaries are believed to be situated at the centre of the world. Temples are replicas of the cosmic mountain and hence they constitute a link between earth and heaven. The fountains in the temples link the earth and the lower regions.

Symbolism of Cosmos and Chaos

What makes a place sacred is consecration. Any place, when consecrated, becomes anew and the ‘dwelling place’ of the divine. Such a place is a symbol of the cosmos which is derived out of chaos. Many creation myths of various traditions portray the origin of the cosmos from chaos. There is orderliness in the cosmos which is depicted in the sacred place after its consecration. This orderliness has many dimensions- proximity and distance, hierarchy, size and shape, colour, etc. Sacred places are very often not “chosen” by humans, but are “determined” by past religious or virtuous events.

Sacred Time

Humans have two types of time- sacred and profane. Sacred time is observed in religious feasts and festivals, rites and rituals, ceremonies and observances. Profane time is the time of the ordinary everyday life. The concept of sacred time is confined only to the religious minded persons. Sacred time is a time when sacred events of the past (found in myths) are re-actualised, or re-

enacted, or remembered with special formalities and observances. When one participates in sacred time, he/she is stepping out of ordinary time. Sacred time occurs periodically as sacred time is not considered linear (as in ordinary time) but as circular (which is why we have religious celebrations each year).

Illud Tempus

Illud Tempus is a phrase coined by Mircea Eliade, to mean the time of origins, the sacred time of the origin of the world. This origin of the world is accessed by the believer whenever he/she ritually re-enacts the cosmogonic myth (myth of the beginning of the universe). This ritual enactment is needed for the believer because this gives him/her inner strength. It is also needed because by going back to the origin of time, everything becomes anew again. A state of reinstatement of the original harmony takes place by such 'going back'. This is not escapism, but a holistic participation in the cosmos for the well being of those living now in the present.

Myth

Myths, though a separate structure in themselves, are also part of the sacred time as they reveal through symbols and images, how the cosmos, and all that contains in it came to be. It tries to explain the 'how' and the 'why' of the universe's existence. It encapsulates all the theories and explanations understood by primitive minds. Each character in the myth is a rich symbol and is directly or indirectly related and connected to the sacred reality. They offer paradigms for understanding the reality of the world. They also play a didactic role, offering role models through the various gods and heroes involved. The moral functions that the myths connote can be better understood by those who come from the traditions from which these myths arose. Almost all rituals performed today have at least a myth associated with. While various motifs are associated with these rituals, a common factor found is the desire of the continuation of the myths, at least in subtle forms, in the present.

The Eternal Return

That the golden era would return again is the main motif of many repetitive rituals, festivals and observances that follow the cyclical nature of time. This not only brought the community together but also raised their spirits of hope and optimism. The connection with the sacred brought relief and strength to their otherwise battered and harsh reality, arising from changes in nature and human relationships. This cyclical concept of time was however, not acceptable to all civilizations. Hence, in religions like Hinduism, the cyclical nature of time would be brought to an end by a periodic destruction of the cosmos and recreation of the same. On the other hand, in religions such as Judaism and Christianity, the cyclical concept of time was unacceptable and time was irreversible. God made the world sacred and so the entire history is sacred. The culmination of this time would be the Last Judgment, where the world and its time would come to an end.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.s.

1) What is the role of a priest in religious activities?

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 2) How do sacred time and sacred space contribute to the understanding of religions?

3.4 RITUALS

Terms and Concepts

One of the religious forms or structures that expresses the extrinsic character of religions is sacraments or sacred ceremonies or rituals. A few minor distinctions would be of help at this juncture before proceeding further. Sacraments are church ceremonies or rituals, and is commonly used in Christianity. Such ceremonies are well-planned, officially approved and animated by trained and ordained ministers. The lesser rituals and practices (like blessing ourselves with holy water or praying the rosary) are called sacramentals. The Latin word *sacramentum* means “a sign of the sacred”. Rituals are also sacred ceremonies which invoke and evoke energies to empower life. These are similar to sacraments, however, any sacred ceremony can be called a ritual and some rituals can even be performed by ordinary believers.

A rite is an established, ceremonious, usually religious act or process. Rites fall into three major categories: a) Rites of passage, which changes or acts as a transition of one’s social status, such as baptism, marriage, death, etc. b) Rites of worship, that involves a community to gather together for worship, such as a Christian Mass, and c) Rites of personal devotion, which is purely an individual effort, such as prayer, pilgrimages, etc.

Two other words that need a clarification are Signs and symbols. Although there are close similarities between sign and symbol and are often used interchangeably, yet there are differences and dissimilarities. According to Susanne Langer a sign “is something to act upon, or a means to command action; the symbol is an instrument of thought.” An ordinary sign-function contains subject, sign, and object, while a symbol contains an additional element, namely, conception. A sign points to something else, but a symbol denotes something. It also connotes something. A symbol leads to a conception which then leads to a certain level of abstraction. “A concept is all that a symbol really conveys.” Signs are pointers, but symbols are “vehicles for the conception of objects.” Paul Ricoeur brings out deeper differences explaining that there is a ‘double intentionality’ found in symbols (which is not found in signs). The primary intention is literal. The symbol acts like a sign. Every symbol is a sign. The second intention is that it points to a certain situation that is ennobling, something that is different from the usual. In other words, symbols are signs and yet they point to something beyond and stands for this something. In other words,

“symbol is the movement of the primary meaning that makes us share in the latent meaning and thus assimilates us to the symbolized without our being able to intellectually dominate the similarity.” Signs are indicative, while symbols are more revealing. Ricoeur further points out that signs are more transparent since they are literal and obvious. Symbols are however opaque since they conceal the meaning and is not divulged unless dealt deep into it.

Rituals involve the use of symbols and symbolic actions. Practical actions are those that are performed for specific practical purposes, like cooking, or drying clothes. Symbolic actions are performed to symbolize a deeper meaning, like a priest lighting a fire or washing his hands etc. Rituals sometimes combine symbolic actions with practical actions, thereby bringing greater significance and deeper meaning to the practical things that we do, for instance, saying prayers before a meal. The difference between a ritual and a routine is very similar to the difference between a sign and a symbol. While rituals have deeper and multi-level meanings, routines are one-dimensional. For instance, brushing your teeth, eating etc are routines and not rituals. Sometimes rituals can come to be experienced as lifeless routines when repeated continually without any sense of their deeper significance. Rituals are often celebrative in nature. They enable us to break the monotony of daily routines. They enable us to pursue various deeper aspects of life that might otherwise be neglected.

Characteristics of Rituals

Some of the characteristics of rituals described here will enable us to understand how they operate and their impact on the believers. Rituals involve movements and gestures that convey meaning beyond what they express at the literal level. They are symbolic actions that are repeated regularly. Often they take on the tone of celebration - helping us to break out of life's routines. Rituals are usually connected to important events. They are often associated with the many new beginnings in people's lives. Rituals Words sometimes play a secondary role supportive and complementary to the actions. They link people with their past, contribute to the well being of the present, and gently lead them into the future. A good ritual is how we remember who we are and how we celebrated who we shall become. In rituals people come together to celebrate being a community with a common identity. Rituals become alive and meaningful not by simple observance, but by wholehearted participation.

Elements of Rituals

Many rituals contain or concern one or all of these seven elements.

Ceremony

An introductory ceremony, either grand or simple, and a concluding ceremony is part of the ritual performed. In some occasions, the actual ritual may be serious and simple, but the accompanying ceremony may be filled with pageantry and paraphernalia, depending on the circumstance.

Religious Devotion

Humans as homo religiosus, find their expressions revealed through religious devotion. This entails verbal prayer, bodily expressions of praise, supplication, surrender etc. The expressions of faith is an individual effort, although often performed in a collective forum. The believer prays with his/her entire being with gestures, dances, songs, rhythms and all this is done to invoke, appease, seek, thank, etc. Religious devotion is also expressed non-verbally through a grand silence which contains reverence and awe in the presence of the holy.

Sacrifice

Sacrifices of food, animals, or goods is another element of rituals which act as a substitute to the one who offers. Some rituals have sacrifices as an extension of gratitude, while some others (especially tantric rituals) consider sacrifices as obligations in order to appease the divine.

Arts

Many rituals have either music or visual arts, or dance, or all the three as important components of the performance of the sacred ceremony. The use of arts could be seen primarily as keeping the attention of the believers intact and involving them, thus enriching the ritual performances. The use of arts in rituals aid the believers and the performers to enter into a state of transcendental relationship. Music and dance de-stress and relieve the participants and help them to enter deeply and participate wholeheartedly into the ritual.

Life Cycle

Rituals deal closely with human growth. Each ritual or sacrament seeks to confirm a new stage of growth such as birth, coming of age, marriage, etc. , or act as progressive factors in that growth. In rituals, the life cycle of the divine is also reflected and their help is sought to assist human growth.

Relationship

A significant aspect of rituals is relationships - between people, animals, the natural world, the divine, etc. It seeks to purify, strengthen, reintegrate, beautify and beatify all relationships. Especially, relationships with the divine is sought to be 'set right' in rituals. Divine intervention in human relationships, knowing and understanding the divine ways so that relationships on earth do not suffer are often the motifs found in many rituals.

Petition

The phenomenon of asking for graces and favours and blessings upon humanity is part of every ritual. As mentioned above, to help survive and flourish on this earth, with no discomforts is at the core of every ritual and this is expressed through petitions.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.s.

1) What are the various elements in rituals?

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2) What are some of the important terms and concepts used in the understanding of 'rituals'?

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Terms and Importance

Any system or set of rituals that is prescribed for public or corporate performance is liturgy. There are two aspects that need to be addressed in any liturgy: the corporate character of liturgy and the articulation of this corporate character as a set of ritual performances. Liturgical practices differ from religion to religion. In countries like India and China, household rituals are more common and even among the Muslims, the role of public liturgy is minimum, although they come together to pray every Friday.

The term liturgy has its origin in the Greek noun *leitourgia* that refers to an act or work (*ergon*) performed by or for the people (*laïtos*). In Greek city states, this word was used in a technical and political sense. It referred to the social obligation that the rich and the wealthy citizens had towards the society. They had to undertake common tasks such as building a monument, outfitting a ship, helping to supply an army etc. It was also used to refer to any service rendered by one to another. Later this general meaning acquired a new technical meaning within the cultic sphere of a service performed for a deity, especially among the mystery cults of Eleusis, Isis, and so on. Christianity borrowed this term and referred it to the Eucharist. Then this term was not used much till the 19th century- when liturgical reform movements began springing up. The Catholics emphasized the importance of increasing lay participation in the ritual activity of the church, and the Protestants, through the reforms sought to amplify and diversify the ritual expression of congregational life. Within this context, liturgy suggests the articulation of a ritual structure or calendar.

Elements in Worship and Liturgy

There are various elements involved in worship and liturgy. A few of them are mentioned below:

Involvement and Integration:

In any act of worship, the involvement of the body, mind, and the spirit is important. The merit of a liturgy lies in such an involvement, along with that of the corporate body. The performers of the ritual often become mediators and animators of the worship, bringing together the corporate body. Involved deeply into the liturgy, the participants hope to experience an integration of the sacred and the secular, the divine and the human, etc. Integration into the religious corporate body is one important task of liturgy.

Articulation and Expression:

Liturgy creates the space for articulation and expression of one's innate desires, visions and expectations through rituals. No liturgy is complete without articulation of the individual and the corporate body's needs and desires. When a space for articulation of one's own personal needs is blocked or unheeded to within the space of liturgy, such a liturgy would soon find itself redundant and archaic. For liturgy to be relevant, articulation and expressions are important.

Memory and Re-enactment:

Through diverse celebrations, feasts and festivals spread throughout the calendar, liturgical events re-enact the foundational experiences of the believing community and bring it live to the worshipping community. Tracing back the memory is also important to the believers as it sustains their faith and increases their hope.

To go back into history and considering it as sacred history re-energises and brings a fresh meaning into the present moment.

Interpretations and Understanding:

One of the purposes of liturgy is also to impart understanding, knowledge and wisdom of the theological interpretations of God, humanity and the entire world. Sacred books, myths with their events and figures etc. are interpreted to the present contexts, in order to understand the way of the future.

Such an understanding is not done in isolation, but in relation to the cycle of time. Each event is understood better and related closely to the previous event. Thus, all liturgies are integrated into the other. The cyclic calendar of liturgies are also interpreted in such a way only.

Functions of Liturgy

There can be at least four functions of liturgy. They are a) temporalization, b) socialization, c) coordination, d) liturgical paradigms.

Temporalization:

Temporalization is to order or structure time. One of the chief functions of liturgy is to provide a periodization that is necessary for the experience of time. This led to astronomical observations and the development of calendars. Christianity has a three year cycle, Judaism has a fifty year cycle, Hinduism has seven ages etc. are examples of temporalization. This structured time is made available for a conscious experience and intellectual comprehension through liturgy.

Socialization:

Another chief function of liturgy is to instil a corporate identity. The need to belong is a human need and religious liturgy addresses this by inviting its members to participate. Liturgy focuses on a collective identity and presents it to the believing mind that it can be consciously appropriated.

Coordination:

Yet another function of liturgy is to coordinate various dimensions of experience that includes the emotive, social, domestic, political, natural, and the spiritual. An interplay of various kinds of languages- silent, verbal, non-verbal etc help in this process. The emotive aspects of experience include sexuality, relationships, etc, the social aspects are of that of identity, conformity, community, etc, the domestic aspects concern the day to day living, in contrast to the spiritual which is vision-based, celestial and eschatological, etc., the natural aspects are that of relationship with nature, agriculture, animals, seasons etc, and the political aspects include the public face of the community, its moral authority and its influential capacities. Liturgy coordinates all these factors from a traditionalistic and futuristic perspective and affects the internal fabric of each believer.

Liturgical Paradigms:

Liturgy serves as a model or paradigm for life outside it. It aims to serve as a model for the secular life or the life within religion. It serves as common models of what appropriate or significant action is like. While being didactic also, the primary aim of liturgy would be inspire the believers to follow the paradigm it offers. Hence, it attracts the participants, not through fear, but through an appeal to the heart to carry forward the liturgy to secular life.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.s.

1) Is Liturgy an important aspect of religious structure?

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2) What are the various functions of liturgy?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Religious structures thus attempt to make an indelible impact in the various dimensions of life of the believer and the believing community. Through its diverse organizational aspects, religions try to strengthen themselves, their followers and exercise influence to the very internal fabric of each follower. The quality of each religion is often revealed through the formation of its structures. When loose-ended and less-controlled, religions tend to grow, but with limited social influence. But when strictly structured and ordered, religions tend to become autocratic, orthodox and even suffocating. A healthy balance of both these aspects are necessary for any religion to keep growing. This unit was an exposition of a few forms of Religious structures. This, we hope, would enable critical minds to probe deeper into religions so that clarity and enlightened understanding of religions may arise.

3.6 KEY WORDS

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| Priesthood | : a structure in religions which creates leaders or animators or officials to perform religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, administer sacraments or rituals, or/and lead people spiritually. |
| The Sacred | : Opposite of secular or profane. The word sacrum means what belongs to the gods or was in their power Set apart by a boundary for gods, the divine etc. |
| Rituals | : sacred ceremonies which invoke and evoke energies to empower life. These are similar to sacraments, however, any sacred ceremony can be called a ritual and some rituals can even be performed by ordinary believers, while sacraments are performed by religious officials. |

Liturgy

: Any system or set of rituals that is prescribed for public or corporate performance is liturgy

3.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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