

The main function of religion is to provide people with a code of behaviour which...

[Religion](#), [God](#)



Religion in the modern age has been seen by some sociologists as being refreshing to the morals of society, while other sociologists feel that religion has for too long placed restrictions and limitations upon those who partake in it. Both functionalists and Marxists have identified that religion does have the main function of providing guidelines and restrictions to how someone should behave in society., albeit both perspectives have a different outlook on the result of the social restrictions. Functionalists such as Durkheim seen religion as being a vital part of society's structure and form. Durkheim and Parsons believed that by laying down a social consciousness of agreed norms and values in regards to behaviour of individuals would ensure a greater security for all in society. Durkheim identified that any breach of the accepted behavioural code could possibly lead to deviance and even to criminality. This social consciousness certainly regulates personal and social life and encourages social solidarity. In modern society we can see that there is an accepted code of behaviour set down by the law. Most law systems throughout the world are base don religious teachings and values. Such and example is the introduction of some of the Ten Commandments of God being in place in British law , such as it being illegal and punishable to murder and steal and also to lie in court. Ritual as identified by Malinowski still plays a large role in regulating personal and social life. The ceremony of marriage is placed in stone as the only way for some couples to gain certain rights that they would not have if they were no married. Marriage is set down as a way of regulation and control as giving penalties to those who commit adultery or other acts which may break up a relationship. Religion has also placed

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restrictions on who can marry. Many religious teachings condemn homosexual marriages and has influenced many countries not to allow homosexuals to marry. This is a clear sign that religion's main function is provide a code of behaviour which regulates personal and social life. Religious ritual is also identified by Malinowski as being a source of hope and courage to many in the modern society. On his study of the Trioband he noticed that they used ritual as a way of protection by a profane body when they attempted to fish on the open sea as opposed to the lagoon. This can be compared to modern day when many armed forces pray to gods for protection when entering battle. Each member of the groups is expected to perform this act and can be seen as a regulation of behaviour and as setting down a code of behaviour through religion. Marxists agree with the functionalist perspective that religion has the main function of laying down a code of behaviour which regulates personal and social life. Though unlike the functionalist perspective they do not believe that religion is mandatory in a society's structure and that in many cases religion is detrimental to the liberation and security of society. Marxists believed that religion is used as a way of laying down a code of behaviour that is built with the welfare of the ruling classes in mind, that the code of behaviour that is promoted by many religions is a form of control upon the masses, and indeed lead to Marx referring ' religion is the opium of the people'. Marx noted also that religious beliefs were as a result of the alienation that people felt from society as a whole and that the behaviour code produced by religion is only accepted by the masses because society is such that they have nowhere else to turn. This

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can be partly seen in society today where although individuals do not have a personal faith they attach themselves to religious groups in order to feel as if they are part of community. Such examples are the attachments by Catholic and Protestants in Northern Ireland without having a personal religious faith through Christianity. Marx further seen religious influenced codes of behaviour as being a result of the false direction that the religious teachings bring upon the masses. The promise of immortality in the afterlife is noted by Marx as being delusionary and a tool in which the ruling-classes can insure that the masses behave in a way that is seen as getting them to heaven while it is actually-according to Marxists- nothing more than a way of securing the place of the ruling-class. An example of this is the caste system in parts India whereby Hindus see a strict social order and behave according to their ranking in society to see themselves reincarnated in a higher social position in the next life. Also evident is the high esteem in which monarchy are held around the world, that they are they by divine appointment and should be treated better than their subjects. An example of the physiological and sociological extent of the influence that religion has in maintaining social order is the rhyme ' the rich man at his castle, the poor man at the gate, God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate'. This gives justification to such structures as feudal system, the Undertakers in plantated Ireland and financially successful businesspeople in the western world. There are those however that believe that the influence of how we live by religion is dwindling. They point to statistics of recent falls in the membership of religious organisations and the increase in crime and anti-social behaviour.

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Other behaviour that would have been seen as anti-social in the past has also increased such as shopping on Sundays and alcoholism. There is not much debate about the main function of religion in today's society. Even though there may appear to be a drop in interest of religion the main function still remains to form a code of behaviour which regulates personal and social life.