

What is religion?



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Religion is a special form of awareness of the surrounding world, which is based on the belief in the existence of one (or more) of the gods. It includes a set of moral and ethical conduct, which are usually reflected in the sacred texts. Religions emerged in the form of different beliefs, that appeared almost simultaneously with the emergence of mankind. Despite lacking a clear organization like modern religions, it has always played a prominent role in different societies.[1]

Even though, we usually see religion as the belief in one or more gods, this is not always the case. In Buddhism, for example, there are no deities.

However, like other religions, Buddhism strongly asserts the existence of a spiritual reality, which is separated from everyday life of the material world.

Consequently, perhaps, those who, by their own assurances, believe in the existence of the spiritual world should be called religious people. However, this is not necessarily true: religion, at least partially, can be institutionalized gathering in the shadow of their communities of those who join similar or common beliefs.

However, the presence of the community is only one side of religion. Among others lay faith – personal beliefs and feelings of reverence and veneration; the cult – rites and church premises, collective prayer, and so on, norms – moral rules and prohibitions, as well as notions of sin and holiness.

However, this does not make religion an ideology. Like religion, ideology – such as Nazism or communism – require their followers' absolute loyalty and direct follow of dogma, but do not need gods or special spirituality.

Religion is not magic either. Magic fans believe, that certain rituals produce the desired changes in the material world without interfering with what is happening on the part of a deity. Religious people, on the contrary, pray about something, believing that only God is able to help put their prayers into reality.

Religion can also be viewed as a cultural phenomenon, characteristic of various human societies with their system of values and fundamental myths. Some religions, such as Christianity or Islam, affirm their universality, and insist on their own exceptionalism and its special position in the world. Nevertheless, even Christianity and Islam can be seen as a product of historical development under certain conditions.

People throughout the ages have tried to answer the question about the essence of religion. Theologians, base the definition on the value of the word “ religion,” that in Latin means “ connection.” It is about the relationship between God and man. One of the Orthodox dogmatic teachings asserted that religion is a “ contract or union between God and man.”[2]

But, to agree with this explanation of religion is impossible, as it is impossible to agree with the simplistic interpretation of the fact, that religion is a fraud and a charlatan.

Marxism suggests a scientific definition of religion. Exploring the laws of development of human society, the classics of Marxism-Leninism revealed the social essence of religion. We have convincingly shown that religion is, for example, politics, law, morality, science, art is a form of social consciousness.[3]

Each of the forms of social consciousness reflects a certain aspect of the life of society. Politics, for example, reflects the relations between classes, states, nations, morality – the moral qualities of people.

In other words, people's consciousness reflects the objective world. However, this may be a reflection of true and false. Religion is a specific form of social consciousness, which always reflect objective reality as false, ugly, distorted. As Engels pointed out, "... All religion, however, is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces."[4]

This is manifested in the people's faith in the real existence of God, as well as different kinds of spirits, angels, demons, faith in supernatural connection between the real existing material objects and their properties.

The definition of religion also includes representations, a system view of the world, expressed in the so-called " holy books" containing various myths, regulations and instructions, as well as by word of mouth of the mythical images, visions, paintings, based on a belief in the supernatural.

Another element of religion are the sentiments of the faith. Religion can possess not only thoughts but also feelings of people. Theologians argue that man is born with the religious feelings, that is, with a ready ability to communicate with the supernatural, to feel the power of God, to see and feel his actions.

Science denies the allegations and says religious ecstasy, fanaticism, and feelings of believers perversion of healthy human psyche that occurs under the influence of religious beliefs. Specificity of religious feelings is that, they are directed at the fictional, supernatural objects, rather than actually existing ones.

The third element of religion is actions. Theologians say that the supernatural world cannot be known by human reason, it is necessary to believe in it, despite the arguments of science and reason, reject the existence of God. Therefore centuries elaborated and corresponding patterns of human behavior, customs and traditions passed down from generation to generation, performing religious rites and rituals following different regulations. All these actions are called worshipping.[5]

When talking about religion, the existence of specific groups of people – clergy should also be considered. Together with the faith, they constitute a special community or religious organization called the Church. For example, the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and so on. The clergy is promoting beliefs and worship. However, the existence of the clergy cannot be regarded as an indispensable element of religion: there are religious organizations, that do not have a permanent priesthood.[6]

Thus, religion and belief is what connects the human with the divine world and gives the person a special state of inner warmth, tranquility and confidence because he does not feel alien to the divine forces that surrounds it. He does not feel thrown out in front of the meaninglessness of life. Life becomes meaningful with its purpose to union with God. It becomes clear

and positive. We can say, that religion is one of the universal cultural mechanisms of regulation of human activity, it is through the actions of religious system organizes daily life, with the help of the development of doctrine structures the world, that makes us think about the basics and the meaning of our own life.

[1]Kucheman, Cark, " Religion, Culture, and Religious Socialism," The Journal of Religion, Jul 1972

[2]Holy Bible

[3]Bauer, Andrea, " The Marxist view: In the beginning was the World," Apr 2006

[4]Engels, Frederick," Anti-Dühring," Part III: Socialism, Ch. 5, 1877

[5]Wellman, James, " Religon, Ideology, and Belief," Oxford Scholarship Online, Sep 2008

[6]Ibid