

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Religion has always been with us. Throughout history, it has expressed the deepest questions human beings can ask, and it has taken a central place in the lives of virtually all civilizations and cultures. As we think all the way back to the dawn of human consciousness, we find religion everywhere we turn.

Religion has been defined in different ways by different philosophical thinkers. The following definition seems to be nearest to truth: "Religion includes a world-vision, a daring belief, a set of absolute obligations, a range of imaginative, emotional and practical experience that is denied to the non-religious mind. It is an interpretation of the universe, of both Nature and history; it is an answer in ultimate terms to the torturing difficulties which we compendiously call problems of life; and it is a way of living which with that interpretation is both noble and rational and both theoretical and practical. How theoretical it can be is evident from the volume and difficulty of theology. How practical it can be is evident from History."

Viewing the problem from the side of the practical aspects of human life, the function of religion is integration. It integrates the different aspects of the life of the individual. It integrates the life of the individual with the lives of other individuals. It integrates the life of the individual with the life of the cosmos. It integrates the life of the individual and the society with the Divine Scheme of Creation.

Revealed and Non Revealed Religion

One distinction between revealed Religion and man-made Philosophy is that the former supplies sure knowledge of the ultimate values, while the latter does not and cannot. The other distinction is that the former orientates life in spiritual values (which refer to God and our personal relation with Him) while the latter stops, and must necessarily stop, at the level of reasons, keeping us totally at a loss as regards the vaster and more fundamental domain of the spirit. The third distinction is that while the outlook of philosophy is essentially theoretical, the outlook of Religion is essentially practical.

Why We Need Religion

Religion gives us moral values and answers the questions that cannot be addressed by science. Religion has been an important place in the history of civilization. It gives a meaning and purpose to human life and satisfies man's longing for peace and salvation. Religion has been defined as "the relationship between man and the super Natural power (GOD) he believes in and depends upon".

The goal of religion is getting in tune with the infinite. Moreover, the philosophy of religion is neither ceremony, nor ritual, nor going to the temple, but an inner experience to submit his will to God. Religion consists of a number of beliefs relating to reality which cannot be proved by science, such as, does God exist? What happens after death? How did we come into existence? Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Religion helps to extend the view of an individual beyond our dimensions.

There was a discussion about the need of Religion? Some argue that why we have to follow a religion? Why not to follow good things focusing on humanism. A counter question can be the reply of this question that who is going to define what is good and what is bad for human? We know that in different countries we have different level of modesty for instance in USA wearing mini skirts is modest but here in Pakistan it would be consider immodest, same like the pardah system in Islam is modest here in Pakistan but and considerable good in USA. That means human cannot be lay themselves on one platform and will bring their own laws which in reality are dangerous for mankind like for example Alcohol is one of the most fatal drink in world but still common and legal to use in most of countries. The only way to know what is wrong and what is right is to know from the Creator, Who Has created us He knows better than any human beings on the earth, so why not follow that Divine authority which knows and provide everything which is in welfare of human beings.

Social effects of Religion

Religion explains individual suffering

Man does not live by knowledge alone. He is an emotional creature. Religion serves to the emotions of man in times of his sufferings and disappointment. On God religion puts faith and entertains the belief that some unseen power moves in mysterious ways to make even his loss meaningful. In this way religion gives release from sorrow and release from fear. It helps man to bear his frustration and integrate his personality.

Religion enhances self-importance

Religion expands one's self to infinite proportions. Man unites himself with the Infinite and feels ennobled. Society also gains from the self-flattery provided by religious belief. Religion assures a greater reward in the afterlife to worldly failures than to successful life. Such kind of assurance encourages members to continue to play their part in society.

Religion comes as a source of social cohesion

Religion is the ultimate source of social cohesion. The primary requirement of society is the possession of social values by which individuals control the action of self and others and through which society is perpetuated. Science and technology cannot create this value. Religion is the foundation upon which these values rest. Children should obey their parents, should not tell lie, women should be faithful to men, people should be honest and Virtuous, are some of the social values which maintain social cohesion.

Religion encourages social welfare

Religion has also performed some other services to humanity like the provision of work. The many religious organization lays the foundation of medicine. It also fulfils the functions of scholars and scientists. Religion has served humanity through spreading of education and also creating the habit of charity (Zakat) among the people who open many charitable institutions like hospitals, rest houses, mosques and to help the poor.

Religion is the agency of social control

Religion provides a model for living. It upholds certain ideals and values. The believer imbibes these ideals and values in his life. Religion can help youth generation to become moral, disciplined and socialized citizens of society.

Religion controls economic life

Max Weber was of the view that religion also controls the economic life. To Weber, capitalism grew in the Protestant nations like England, U.S.A. It did not grow in Italy and Spain where the people are Catholic. The Muslims lay great stress on spiritual progress and worldly affairs at a time which creates a fine balance between these two and support healthy economic life.