

Role of Religion in Modern Life

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this tutorial, you are going to see that religion is alive and present in the modern world. You will also understand that religion unifies in ways that political institutions often can't. This unity, in addition to being used for peaceful and beneficial ends, is often used for destruction and violence. It's therefore very important in the study of religions to understand objectively, without judgement, what a religion is all about. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Religion Today
- 2 Bringing Unity
3. Objectivity

1. Religion Today

Religion is something alive and present in the modern world. You are likely to see and hear evidence of religion all around you: religious music or symbols, such as the Christian cross, a Buddhist or Hindu mandala, an Islamic prayer rug, or the Jewish Star of David. These are not mere **relics** of religion or things left over from another time. They are more than artifacts to be studied from a historical or **anthropological-sociological perspective**.

These disciplines that study the behavior and customs of society are beneficial and helpful in understanding religion in people's lives both yesterday and today. These traditions and practices that have carried forward are alive and providing meaning in people's lives and influencing their behavior.



TERMS TO KNOW

Relic

A leftover belief or object from past times.

Anthropological-Sociological

Relating to the combination and interaction of the disciplines of anthropology (the observational study of humankind) and sociology (the scientific study of humankind).

2 Bringing Unity

Religion unifies in ways that **nationalism** and secular politics often can't. This unity, in addition to being used for peaceful and beneficial ends, is often used for destruction and violence.

In the modern world, religion plays a big role in shaping our global society and the way people think about it. This impact goes beyond the structure of beliefs but also influences geopolitical and socioeconomic structure. It impacts the way cultures communicate across the globe.

IN CONTEXT

The Israeli-Palestine/Arab-Israeli Conflict

You are probably familiar with certain aspects of this historical struggle. It dominates the news either directly or indirectly, and it has great significance geopolitically in the world today.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is largely related to the religious struggle between Muslims and Jews and the dispute over claims to territories in and around Jerusalem and Israel. This area has many names, such as Canaan, the Promised Land, Palestine, and the Holy Land. The roots of this conflict reach back through history to biblical times and the words from history that are interpreted in conflicting ways.

A central point of conflict between Jews and Muslims, if not the actual origin, revolves around the genealogy of Abraham, the patriarch, and his two sons Ishmael and Isaac. As descendants of Isaac, Jews claim the rights to the land promised to the heirs of Isaac as interpreted in their texts. As descended from Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn son, many Arabs stake claim to the Holy Land and the surrounding territories.



TERM TO KNOW

Nationalism

The belief that either a particular nation merits a higher position than other nations or that citizens' lives should be structured around the needs of the state or society.

3. Objectivity

So what is the role, then, of objectivity in understanding religion? You may be bombarded through media about the destruction caused in the name of religion and hear less about the positive aspects of different beliefs. It's therefore very important in the study of religions to understand objectively, without judgement, what a religion is all about.



THINK ABOUT IT

How do you remain neutral when thinking about and interacting with different religions? How do you avoid judging the different parties and the different religions?

Consider the principle of charity, which might act as a guide: withholding judgment and attempting to step into the shoes of the religion being studied and the beliefs and experiences of its proponents.

You will be looking at this concept a little more closely in a definition of religion, but this is a place to start to develop objectivity.



SUMMARY

Religion today has a real place in people's lives in the modern world, and people refer to it for meaning. It **brings unity** to people in a way that many other institutions can't. Sometimes this is productively and constructively, and sometimes religion is used destructively. **Objectivity** has a big role to play in understanding and studying religions, and the principle of charity might provide a useful angle for studying the religion itself.

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