



İSTANBUL
GELİŞİM
ÜNİVERSİTESİ

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

RELIGION

WEEK 8

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RELIGION

- Religion is a universal institution.
- Religion is a belief system and has defined practices.,
- It defines the behaviors of its members and affects social practices.
- Religion, is to believe what is sacred.
- Religion is supernatural and therefore it is related with the world beyond our senses.
- Religion is among the most important institutions explaining people their reasons of existence in this world and give meaning to life.



RELIGION

- Religion is a universal institution
- According to some anthropologists, there are no human beings living on earth and not having a religion.
- The history of religion is almost as old as the history of humanity.



PROFANE and SACRED

- Religion, then, is a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on recognizing the sacred.
- Religion divides the world into **profane** (daily) and **sacred** (holy).
- We define most objects, events, or experiences as profane (from Latin, meaning “outside the temple”), included as an ordinary element of every-day life.
- But we also consider some things sacred, set apart as extraordinary.
- The difference between the **sacred** and **profane** is the essence of all religious belief.



- All religions have different symbols and objects defining sacred; these vary from one belief system to the other.
- Durkheim: people understand profane things in terms of their everyday usefulness. We separate the sacred in our daily life.
- Example: To set the difference Muslims leave the shoes in the mosque threshold.
- Rituals give the sacred their physical appearance.



- **QUESTION 1:** There are many places in our daily life that are sacred and they are part of our daily routine. We pass them sometimes without noticing, how come we say that they are totally different domains? (Masjid in front of library)
- **QUESTION 2:** There are places or objects we use for both because of their sacred features and both because their ordinary existence in our daily life; how do we affirm the differences? (the garden of Mosque / wine and bread)
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- **QUESTION 3:** Does sacred always come before us? Can there be facts or things which became sacred or lost this value in our daily life? (Martyrdom/Saints/).



THEORIES ON RELIGION

STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

- In Durkheim's structural-functional analysis, religion represents the collective life of society. The major weakness of this approach is that it neglects the fact that in societies religion can also be used to create conflict.



STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

- Functions of religion:
- **1. Establishing social cohesion:** Religion brings people together by shared symbolism, values, and norms.
- **2. Promoting social control:** Religious ideas are used to sustain conformity. By religious rules people internalize and implement cultural norms. Religion can also be used to support the continuity of political systems. Monarchy in England can be an example.
- **3. Providing meaning and purpose:** Religious belief offers the sense of serving some greater purpose. People mark important phases in life by transitions and rituals—including birth, marriage, and death— with religious observances.



SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST APPROACH

- Religion is socially constructed (does not claim that it can be constructed without divine inspiration).
- Through various rituals—from daily prayers to repeated rituals (Christmas, Ramadan)—people sharpen the distinction between the sacred and the profane.
- Symbolic-interactionist approach deal also with how people turn to religion to give everyday life sacred meaning. Marriage's being a social contact makes it less easy to dissolve in comparison with the importance it gains as a religious contact.
- The sense of protection can be increased by using some rituals and symbols or by adopting them from other cultures (evil eye).



SOCIAL CONFLICT ANALYSIS

- The social-conflict approach sees religion as a human construct such as culture.
- People create religion and explain the world according to the limits of their own technological expertise (pray for rain if they do not have irrigation systems.)
- Religion is a great mechanism of control that may support of social inequality. It may serve ruling elites by legitimizing the status quo and diverting people's attention from social inequalities.
- However, it is also true that religious leaders can be part of the social change taking the side of the powerless. American civil rights movement developed under the leadership of Martin Luther King who was also a religious leader.



PROTESTANTISM and CAPITALISM

- Weber argued that particular religious ideas motivated the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe. The rise of industrial capitalism was encouraged by Calvinism, a movement within the Protestant Reformation.
- Calvinists see prosperity as a sign of divine blessing. By fate and devotion they adopted working hard as a principle and many reached great wealth. Calvinists believed that they best fulfilled religious duties by achieving economic success. They adopted new technologies to increase effectiveness and they formed the basis for the accumulation of the economy for the rise of capitalism.
- Calvinist heritage, according to Weber, left a “Protestant work ethic.” Therefore they turned a sacred essence to profane and industrial capitalism is built on an ideal based on religion.