

# Sociology of Religion

An Academic Exploration for University Students

This comprehensive presentation examines the intersection of sociology and religious studies, exploring how social conditions create beliefs, the meanings of religious representations, and the ethical dimensions of faith communities. Through rigorous academic analysis, we will journey through the foundational theories that have shaped our understanding of religion as a social phenomenon.



# Understanding Our Journey

01

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## Foundations

Defining sociology and sociology of religion, exploring major schools of thought

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## Major Theorists

Examining Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Eliade's contributions

02

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## Social Creation

How social conditions generate religious beliefs and representations

04

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## Christian Perspective

Integrating sociological insights with faith-based understanding

This presentation bridges academic rigor with practical application, preparing students to engage critically with both sociological theory and religious practice in contemporary society.

# What is Sociology?

## Defining the Discipline

Sociology emerged as the scientific study of human associations and their mutual relationships. First coined by Auguste Comte in 1838, the term combines Latin "socius" (companion) with Greek "logos" (study).

It examines the nature of human associations, their relationships, and their influence on individual and group actions and psychological states. Sociology studies the fundamental internal logics of society, going beyond mere description of social facts.

## Core Characteristics

- Studies human behavior in relation to social environment
- Analyzes processes linking individuals in associations, groups, and institutions
- Examines interdependence among people
- Investigates principles and institutions of communal life
- Explores origin, development, structure, and functioning of social groups

 **Key Insight:** Societies are products of social actors' actions, yet these actors are also conditioned by participating in social structures and transformed by the social construction they create.

# Sociology of Religion Defined

Sociology of religion applies sociological methods to religious questions, encompassing two broad aspects: the sociological dimension of group dynamics and the religious dimension of beliefs in divinity and divine dependence.

This field examines humans in religious interdependence, studying processes and outcomes of human associations as they affect religious beliefs. Natural conditions and biological nature are important for understanding social facts, which are also biological facts occurring among living beings.

"Religion is a human work through which a sacred cosmos is constructed."

— Peter Berger

Ethics becomes an important aspect of sociology of religion, as much human conduct results from religious convictions. Understanding diversity, combating cultural superiority, and comprehending different dimensions of life and universe interpretation are crucial objectives.

# Why Study Religion Sociologically?

## Understanding Diversity

Combat the vision of "superiority" over peoples with different cultures and judgments labeling "strange" behaviors as inferior

## Multiple Dimensions

Know different dimensions for understanding and explaining life and the universe through various social and cultural processes

## Critical Analysis

Comprehend religious thought as an instrument of domination, intolerance, and verify parameters of religious fanaticism

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Religion constitutes sophisticated systems of beliefs, social relations, behavioral patterns, and rituals developed throughout history and across varied cultural contexts. Despite attempts to eliminate or modify it since the French Revolution, religion remains a universal element present in societies.

# General Perspectives on Sociology of Religion

Much of modern sociology disagrees at the level of presuppositions with the Christian view of society. Sociology is partly a product of the nineteenth century that rejected the Christian worldview, assuming its own authority using society as the sole reference point.

Religions constitute sophisticated systems developed throughout history across varied cultural contexts. Understanding their mechanisms has been the object of sociological study, generating diverse theories without consensus.

At first glance, sociology of religion appears very threatening to Christians. Facets of our religion pass unnoticed to us but are obvious to the inquiring sociologist. In early social research, when sociological thought was popular among certain German theologians, the Bible was often reduced to mere social product status.

## Research Fields

- General group influences on religion
- Functions of rituals in societies
- Typologies of religious organizations
- Influences of religious ideal systems on society
- Analysis of specific religious groups and movements
- Interaction of religious entities locally
- Conscious evaluations by religious group spokespersons

# Major Sociological Schools

1

## **Empirical School**

Uses induction and statistics as important tools, extracting conclusions about people's beliefs, conduct, and interactions. Small quantifiable information presumably reflects how people's beliefs develop from social conditions.

2

## **Evolutionary School**

Examines basic evolutionary tendencies as development from rites to ethical religions, or from theological and metaphysical approaches to Comte's positivist approach. Generally follows development through magical to scientific phases.

3

## **Functionalist School**

Focuses attention on social differences and resulting religion compartmentalization. Examines institutions' involvement and resulting contributions. Religion seen as mental vestment of these institutions, with society expressing itself through rites and magic.

4

## **Marxist School**

Highlights history and its social conflicts that can provoke changes. Treats religion as a force not contributing to people's welfare, used by dominant classes to oppress dominated classes. Religious beliefs considered harmful superstitions serving only to enslave people.

**1**

### **Phenomenological School**

Specific doctrines develop as results of local and national situations involving people's hopes and aspirations, their conflicts, setbacks, and victories. Social phenomena create beliefs, and group beliefs create specific religions. Natural phenomena are thus naturally involved.

**2**

### **Weber and Troeltsch School**

For Weber, the main interest was tensions occurring between religious values and other considerations' values, such as economic, aesthetic, political, or even erotic values. Additionally, we must account for religion's power capable of producing profound social changes.

- ❏ These schools represent different approaches to understanding how social conditions create beliefs and how religion functions within society. Each offers unique insights while sometimes contradicting others.

# How Social Conditions Create Beliefs

Many sociologists don't believe religious beliefs truly rest on divine revelations or some theistic power resident in the world. Instead, they see social causes for beliefs.

## Historical Examples

The people of Israel, thrown back and forth by wars and military defeats, captive to foreign powers, supposedly invented the Messiah concept as an illusory way to reverse this situation, conferring hope to Israelites.

Primitive Christians adopted these beliefs, and Christ's crucifixion made them transfer the Messiah's power to some future century, hence the belief in parousia, or Christ's second coming.

## Cultural Variations

Ancient pastoral peoples naturally imagined a heaven where the soul rests in abundant green fields, explaining the belief in Elysian fields among ancient Greeks.

Hunters, like Native Americans, imagined a heaven where hunting is always abundant, the so-called "happy hunting grounds."

While it seems obvious that beliefs originate in certain social conditions, forming despair or future hopes, these conditions aren't the only source of beliefs, nor can genuine revelation be denied before these observations.

# Religious Meanings and Representations

"Religion acts as a form of collective consciousness. Representations influence how we act, and thus transform and reproduce society's structures."

From a sociological viewpoint, religion is always defined as cultural and social construction referring to the "supernatural." Religious references appear particularly where human history's contradictions are found, such as life and death or good and evil.

The sociology of religion concerns itself with knowing how and why religious representations of relationship with nature are born, dissolved, and transformed. Religious representations coincide with situations of great human vulnerability before nature.

## Collective Consciousness

In collective consciousness representation, nature is manipulated by superior entities. The possibility of humans relating to these entities or performing cults or sacrifices is the way to symbolically control nature.

## Social Necessity

No society can exist or develop without a system of nature representation. The problem isn't just explaining history, but asking why religion continues in contemporary societies even as religious representation has disappeared from nature relation.

# Belief Systems and Social Reality

A person's total belief system consists of a set of beliefs and expectations—expressed or not, implicit and explicit, conscious and unconscious—that they accept as true regarding the world in which they live.

How we perceive reality is strongly influenced by beliefs acquired from the environment, often unconsciously. Phenomena of refusal and resistance in psychotherapy illustrate the intensity with which we tend not to see things that threaten deeply rooted images, conflicting with rather conservative beliefs.

Religious representation of social production relations studies under what conditions the representation that human groups possess of social relations has religious connotation. In feudalism, there is no reciprocity structure except lord and serfs, with the latter not as a social group but as individuals.

## Historical Context

A direct relationship establishes between serf and lord, an exploitation relationship. In slave production mode, no explanation or legitimation of social production relation is needed, because what is exercised is coercion. Legitimation is force, only force.

With capitalism, strong development of productive forces occurred, permitting ample and sustained accumulation. In capitalism, representation of fundamental social relation isn't religious.

# Capitalism and Religious Representation

The capitalist doesn't present himself as such by God's will. This doesn't mean religion plays no role in constructing and reproducing capitalist societies, but that religion doesn't occupy a place in fundamental explanation of capital-labor relation, of real subordination of labor to capital.

1

## Economic Logic

The capitalist system is an economic logic characterized by commodity logic and a series of consequences in social, political, and cultural order

2

## Religious Coexistence

In feudal societies, diverse religions couldn't coexist, hence the Inquisition's necessity. In capitalism it was possible, as relations were based on "commodity logic"

3

## Criticism Tolerance

System criticisms were tolerated, provided these criticisms didn't have practical effects. When religious groups find faith motives for effective capitalism criticism, defense mechanisms activate

A fundamental characteristic of human condition seems to be this more or less conscious search for equality among human beings. When this equality or reciprocity doesn't exist, a contradiction appears that must have its explanation.

# Global Meaning and Religious Systems

We can say this representation of global meaning of humans and universe is an explanation of human origins and finalities, in individual, collective, and universal sense.

Religious meaning systems are quite effective in their capacity to generate and maintain active dispositions and motivations in people, and especially in their capacity to order human existence, conferring meaning amid constant danger of chaos.

Religion doesn't propose solving the problem of inexplicability of things, doesn't intend to solve the problem of pain, suffering, death, and moral paradox, but seeks to signify all this, conferring meaning to human experience of chaos.



- ❑ The following song example illustrates how religion provides religious meaning, offering comfort and understanding in human experience.

# A Song of Faith and Meaning

*You have the gift of seeing roads  
Where I see the end  
You convince me when you speak:  
It's not quite like that!*

*If I forget, you remind me  
If I don't know, you teach me  
And if I lose direction  
You come find me*

*When solitude hurt in me  
When my past didn't pass through me  
When I couldn't understand life  
You came to understand for me*

*When my eyes couldn't see  
Your secure hand helped me walk  
When I had no more love in my chest  
Your love helped me love*

*When my dreams I saw collapse  
You brought me others to restart  
When I forgot I was someone in life  
Your love came to remind me*

*That God loves me  
That I'm not alone  
That God cares for me  
When He speaks through your voice  
And tells me: courage!*

— "Humano Amor de Deus" by Fábio de Melo

# Religious Systems in Historical Context

## Pre-Capitalist Class Societies

1

Society permits groups to survive without producing their own subsistence means, prioritizing intellectual or artisanal activities. Material development creates necessary conditions for specialized agents to exist—philosophical or religious systems.

## Socialist Societies

3

Must seek in collective consciousness an answer for society today. Each religious system must be analyzed in its historical conditions of production and development, helping understand the present.

2

## Development of Major Religions

Historically, all religious systems based on philosophical construction were born in class societies: Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and great pre-Colombian religions.

For example, Buddhism's origin was a reaction against Hinduism due to Brahmin caste hegemony over mercantile and political castes, in an Asiatic production mode development period. For Buddha, caste linkage didn't guarantee salvation, but personal merits did, destroying Brahmanist power's ideological base.

# Religious Expressions and Symbols

Religious expressions are rites, cults, sacraments, devotions, sacrifices, and liturgies of religious systems. With symbolic practices, it's always the group that gives meaning to symbolic practice. The first function isn't transmitting rationality or rational ideas.

## Primary Function

Its fundamental function isn't transmitting knowledge, but reaffirming meaning. Care must be taken, as all symbolic practice can fall into formalism.

Thus, identification with the poor disconnected from Eucharistic religious practice, opening space for individualistic spirituality. When Jesus took bread and wine and distributed them at the last supper to his disciples, saying "this is my body, this is my blood" (Matthew 26:28), he actually meant: "this is my life; I offer my life on behalf of others' lives."

## Social Function

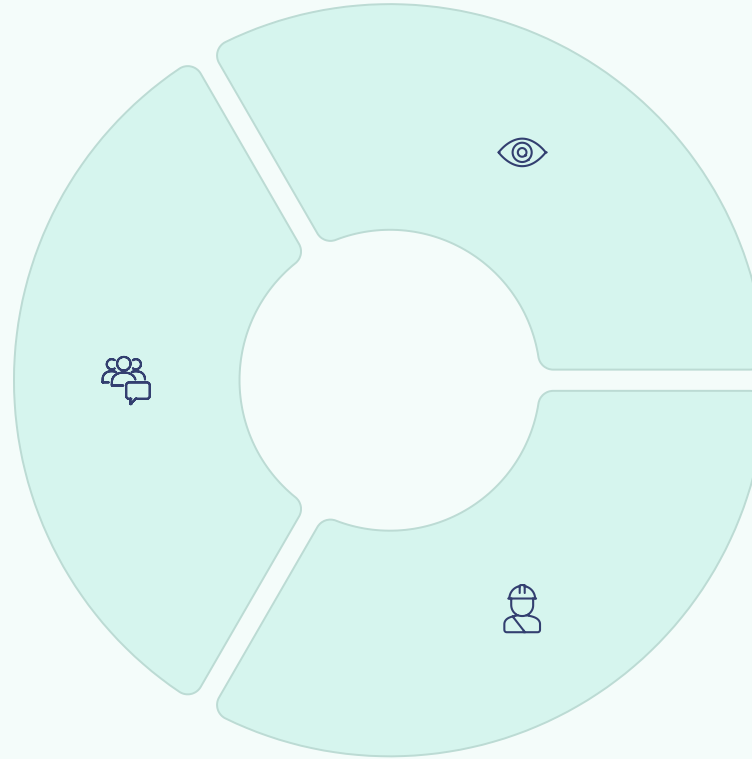
Religious symbolism aims to link humans to a supernatural or supranatural order. But religious symbolism doesn't cease being profoundly social.

Religious symbolism feeds on social context, expressing social realities, having social scope and consequences. It serves to distinguish believers from non-believers, clergy from believers, sacred from profane places, pure from impure objects, configuring society's very texture, constructing hierarchies.

# The Power of Religious Symbolism

## Social Solidarity

Religious life itself is almost universally a social practice, in which mystical solidarity has a central role, holding great symbol diversity to externalize and develop



## Invisible Universe

If religion is endowed with diverse symbols, it's because it references an invisible universe, inaccessible directly, must follow symbolic life to maintain humans in contact with this universe

## Social Organization

Society and its complex organization couldn't exist and perpetuate, like religion, without symbolism's multiform contribution, both through participation or identification it favors and communication of which it is instrument

Institutionalization of expressions occurs in all societies, fruit of social reproduction demand. With institutionalization these institutions create aversion to changes. But institutionalization doesn't cease being necessary, thus creating a paradox.

# Origins of Sociology: Historical Context

We can find traces of human society studies in various ancient and modern thinkers' writings, even those not specifically concerned with this area. However, sociology as autonomous science originated in the nineteenth century.

Auguste Comte, French thinker, can be easily pointed as sociology's father, though later theorists developed it much more than he did. Sociology's formation constitutes a complex event for which a constellation of historical, intellectual circumstances and certain practical intentions concur.

## **Secularization**

Secularization of attitudes and modes of understanding human nature, origin and foundation of institutions

## **Rationalization**

A rationalization process projecting into collective action sphere the ambition to know, explain and direct events and social life

## **Social Transformation**

Response to profound transformations generated by French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, formation of capitalist society

# The Birth of Sociological Thought

## Revolutionary Impact

Sociology is a direct product of nineteenth-century humanism and skepticism. Those years unleashed diverse new and specific problems that until then weren't part of human concerns universe.

Industrialization and revolution impact in Europe had such vast implications for all society sectors that it generated total confusion and disorientation. Society's very base shook with entirely new "social classes" emergence; old values, customs and alliances were abandoned, giving place to new ideas, lifestyle and institutions.

## Academic Development

Sociology's slow formation process, different schools' emergence with different approaches, criticisms and analyses of its validity and utility, and especially belonging to human sciences roster, makes sociology a science in constant development and direction change.

Facing a world population in the billions, and plurality of ideas and reality interpretations, the need to understand humans within collectivity is ever greater. Contributions arrive from all sides, sometimes clashing, sometimes complementing, and still others canceling out.

"Sociology emerges from lived reality and destines itself to it. Its research element is collectivity's concrete actions and its intent is to interfere in that collectivity."

# Auguste Comte: Founder of Sociology



## Key Contributions

Comte invented the term "sociology" and developed positivism. Disturbed by French Revolution's more radical results, and considering humanity in dangerous social disorganization phase, he proposes new social order that must be born from solid positive spirit opposing Enlightenment's negative spirit.

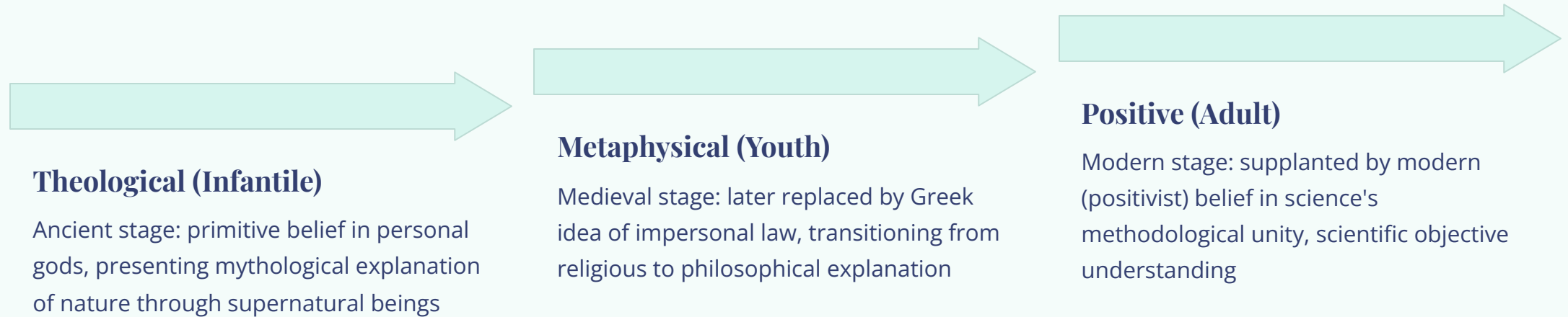
Comte's main works were *Discourse on Positive Spirit* (1830-1842) and *Positivist Catechism* (1852). This yearning for intellectual and social reform led Comte to develop, in his life's last fifteen years, a religion of humanity, with new calendar whose months had names of great history of thought figures.

## Biography

Born January 19, 1798 in Montpellier, France. Precocious student, entered Paris Polytechnic School at 16 in 1814. Secretary to Saint-Simon from 1817 to 1824. Founder of positivist philosophy. Died in London, 1883.

- ❏ Brazil's flag bears Comte's motto "Order and Progress" and the 1891 Constitution was strongly influenced by positivists. The Brazilian Positivist Church exists today in Rio de Janeiro.

# Comte's Law of Three Stages



With epistemological starting point in Immanuel Kant's antimetaphysical agnosticism and G.W.F. Hegel's historical developmentalism, Comte developed his "law of growth." These three stages represent humanity's mythological (mythos), metaphysical (logos), and scientific (positivist) stages.

According to Comte, humans pass from personal nature explanation to impersonal law, and finally to objective method. They advance from belief in supernatural beings to acceptance of natural forces, to understanding through phenomenological (empirical) descriptions.

# Comte's Vision: Order and Progress

"For Comte, Liberty and Equality are contradictory ideas, since liberty notion can lead us to individualism and differences. The motto Comte proposes for nations is Order and Progress."

## Sociological Science

For Comte, sociology is the final science, society's science. Social progress is dialectic, passing from feudalism, through French Revolution, to positivism. True liberty is in rational subjection to scientific laws.

Catholic priesthood was replaced by scientific-industrial elite. Dogmas are based on science and proclaimed by elite. Karl Marx denied reading Comte before 1886, but Comtian friend presided 1864 assembly of Marxist International Workers' Association.

## Religious Evolution

Religious stage has its own evolution. People pass from polytheistic nature manifestations to multiple gods and finally to monotheism, consolidating all forces not understood into single divinity.

For Comte, Jews hated and persecuted supposedly invented hell of fire for enemies' elimination. Christians equally persecuted readily reaffirmed hell existence belief. Thus though beliefs seem to originate in certain social conditions, these conditions aren't beliefs' only source.

# Karl Marx: Revolutionary Thinker

## Biography

Born 1818 in Trier, Prussia, Jewish family, father lawyer. All family members baptized Lutheran Church when Marx was six in 1816. Studied history, philosophy and law at Bonn and Berlin Universities, obtaining philosophy doctorate from Jena University in 1841. Died London 1883.

Few thinkers in human history possess Karl Marx's density. One of modern's most influential atheists. Strongly influenced by G.W.F. Hegel's idealism of whom he was student, adopted colleague Ludwig Feuerbach's atheism.

## Major Works

Never university professor. Without stable subsistence means, could survive thanks to financial support provided by friend and collaborator Engels. After some radical political activity leading to his expulsion from France (1845), united with Friedrich Engels to produce *Communist Manifesto* (1848).

With economic support from Engels' prosperous textile trade, Marx spent several years researching in British Museum to produce *Das Kapital* (1867). His theoretical work is much larger than his political speeches. Thus before being revolutionary, defending our society's radical transformation, he was intellectual.

# Historical Materialism: Marx's Foundation

01

## Materialism

The term refers to material, matter, therefore what exists concretely. Indicates theory centered on society's concrete existence, distant from metaphysical abstractions common in mystic-religious thought

02

## Historical

Marx was great History knower and always sought to contextualize his reflections with rich period descriptions. Theory analyzes humanity's historical evolution, emphasizing interpretation of different production modes employed throughout times

03

## Dialectical

Dialectical thinking admits its own contradiction as part of same argumentation. Reflection method presented in three parts: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Indicates past reinterpretation using present as base, aiming to trace future

According to Marxist theory, how humans produce and reproduce their survival (manner of seeking satisfaction of material necessities indispensable to life maintenance) exerts determining influence over other social life spheres, such as religion, culture, political and juridical institutions.

# Class Struggle: The Motor of History

Marx's analyses' culminating point declared human history is nothing more than class struggle history between alienated workers and their employers. History's motor is class struggle. This fact is veiled by his peculiar theory, derived from Hegel's history philosophy, about historical development necessity.

## Industrial Conditions

- Work days exceeding 14 hours daily
- Women and children working same hours as adult men but receiving much less
- Unhealthy work environments due to lack of hygiene and poorly ventilated factory physical structure
- Worse housing conditions for workers
- Precarious nutrition
- Constant surveillance and vigilance in work environment
- Reduced salaries barely guaranteeing single worker's sustenance

## Surplus Value

In Marxist theory, proletarian producing great profits for bourgeois but not receiving remuneration equivalent to generated profits is called surplus value: work time performed by proletarian for which he isn't remunerated.

This makes more sense remembering worker's work final product has much greater value than remuneration he receives. Example: think of car value and how much worker earns in this industry branch.

# Religion: The Opium of the People

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, because it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. Religion is the opium of the people."

— Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

For Marx, struggle against religion is therefore indirectly struggle against that world having religion as its spiritual aroma. Religious misery is on one hand real misery expression and on other protest against real misery.

Religion is afflicted creature's sigh, heartless world's state of mind, because it's spiritless situation's spirit. Overcoming religion as people's illusory happiness is demand for their real happiness.

Demand to abandon illusions about their situation is demand to abandon situation requiring illusions. Religion criticism is therefore criticism germ of vale of tears whose sacred appearance is religion.



Marx believed religion is human creation. Men make religion; religion doesn't make men. Religion is general theory of this world, its encyclopedic sum, its logic in popular form, its spiritualist point of honor, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its general consolation and justification reason.

# Marxist Analysis of Religion

## Social Product

According to Marxism, religion is human product, reflecting class domination relations. Characterized by its alienating and ideological condition

## Justification of Inequality

Religion serves to justify inequalities in terms of wealth and power found in society. Used by dominant classes to oppress dominated classes

## False Hope

For Marxist sociologist, religion is automatically false, based on erroneous diagnosis of human condition. Problems' root resides uniquely in economic system, production mode

Marx's contribution most specific to religion criticism is precisely its role in social production relations reproduction. Not abstract criticism, but concrete criticism, always in relation to concrete societies. Marx performed criticism from social science and not atheist criticism.

Marx's fundamental contribution is his criticism is real criticism, criticism of how society's ideological apparatus functions. His religion criticism is made from viewpoint of role it plays in society's construction and reproduction.

# Marx on Capitalism and Ethics

With capitalism, strong productive forces development occurred, permitting ample sustained accumulation. In capitalism, fundamental social relation representation isn't religious. Capitalist doesn't present himself as such by God's will.

## Capitalist System

Capitalist system is economic logic, characterized by commodity logic and series of consequences in social, political and cultural order. In feudal societies where religious representation prevails, social ethics is also religious order.

In capitalist societies, peculiar ethics prevails, generally mixed, with partial religious characteristic. Ethics with religious reference adopts different forms according to production modes.

## Class Division

Society is divided into classes, and these hardly share anything together. This problem is found in classes and not in personal relationships. Making social analysis means having society as social groups set, where each has its function and contributes to whole.

Dominant class sincerely believes it represents entire society's interests, and its juridical, philosophical, moral ideas etc. are eternal, absolute, ethical truth expressions.

# Émile Durkheim: Sociologist of Solidarity



## Life and Work

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) was French philosopher and sociologist. Born in Epinal (Vosges), France. Rejected becoming rabbi, which was his Jewish family tradition. Preferred sociologist career, graduating as such from École Normale Supérieure.

In 1902, Durkheim was appointed in Paris, becoming in 1906 titular of science of education chair occupied by Ferdinand Buisson at Sorbonne. Year 1912 saw publication of *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, major and also last work. In 1913, sociology mention was officially introduced in his university chair titlature.

He dedicated his entire life to reflecting on conditions in which Republic could make emerge common values indispensable for society life. Implicated for this reason in laicity construction, was member of Lay Youth Federation and sympathized with humanist socialism ideals.

# Durkheim's Method: Social Facts

## Defining Social Facts

Phenomena presenting very special characters: consist in ways of acting, thinking and feeling external to individual, endowed with coercion power by virtue of which they impose themselves. Cannot be confused with organic phenomena nor with psychic phenomena

## Two Essential Characteristics

Social fact is exterior to individual; they are thought and behavior patterns passed to him by society. Has imperative coercion power, not being possible for isolated individual to escape without being classified as crazy or delinquent

## Proper Domain

These facts are therefore sociology's proper domain. Being social, don't depend on any type of organic or psychic phenomenon to exist, as their origin is found in society itself

Durkheim's original contribution was precisely sociology constitution as autonomous field, not dependent on philosophy, saying "social is explained by social and not by appeal to other disciplines."

# Durkheim on Religion: Sacred and Profane

Durkheim concentrated his attention on collective representations, particularly religious representations. Religion acts as collective consciousness form. Representations influence how we act, and thus transform, reproduce society structures.

"Religion is eminently collective thing. Religious representations are collective representations expressing collective realities; rites are ways of acting arising solely within assembled groups and destined to suscite, maintain, or remake certain mental states of these groups."

Durkheim's classic work is called *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912. Title already points to different parts of Durkheim's theory. He parts from primitive society comparing it with religion in more modern societies.

For Durkheim, religion essence is world division into sacred or profane phenomena. Sacred composes set of things, beliefs and rites, these beliefs and rites set constitutes religion. For sacred to exist, men must make difference between what is profane and quotidian, and what is different and therefore sacred.

# Durkheim's Analysis: Totemism and Society

## Totemism Study

Societies analyzed by Durkheim organized in clans, large groups united by kinship tie defined not by possessing common ancestors, but by sharing same name, defined from something taken as their emblem. Such thing giving name to group is called totem.

Totem can present under animal and vegetal form, being more common first type. But it's more than emblem; its nature is sacred for clan. Series of prohibitions and care marks contact with totem. Therefore, can't kill animal or harvest vegetable giving totem name to clan.

## Social Function

For Durkheim, religion substantive function is creation, reinforcement and maintenance of social solidarity. While society persists, religion will persist. Sacred sentiment is sui generis sentiment, irreducible to others, drawing its specificity from reality to which it addresses, beyond objects that are its symbolic expression.

Society ideal is sacred, and sacred society, once personified is God. Religion would have function of strengthening social cohesion ties and contributing to group members' solidarity.

- ❏ Durkheim's research with Australian tribes, particularly on these tribes' religion, provided basic contribution for sociology of religion and explanation of religious phenomena by social.

# Max Weber: Understanding Social Action

## Biography and Context

Max Weber (1864-1920) was born in Erfurt, Thuringia, Germany, in Protestant family of German bourgeoisie. Father, magistrate who made political career as deputy, belonged by origins to fortunate bourgeoisie. Mother, of Huguenot origin, was woman of great culture.

After secondary formation received in Berlin, Weber studied mainly law, but also history, political economy, philosophy and theology. After 1889 doctorate on Commercial Societies History in Middle Ages, was habilitated for Berlin University in 1892. In 1894, was appointed to political economy and financial science chair at Freiburg University in Breisgau, then in 1896 to Heidelberg.

## Major Contributions

Weber called his sociology interpretative, or as became better known, comprehensive. This implies Weber won't be content with macro explanations about society, turning his focus to individuals' different actions in society.

Weber didn't believe society simply imposed itself on individuals, as process about which people would have no consciousness. Considering society's real coercion power, Weber identified it was individuals' action, stimulated by certain interests, that moved society.

# Weber's Types of Social Action



## Rational Action Related to Ends

Individual orders action aiming determined objectives, possibly employing all means can mobilize to reach final goal



## Rational Action Related to Values

Person who acts according to convictions (political, economic, religious, family values or any others), without considering foreseeable action consequences. Question isn't action end, but behaving according to values set in each action to be performed



## Affective or Emotive Action

Acting guided by emotions taking moment of action. Acts this way who immediately avenges fact. Delivering to moment passions, whether sublime or coarse



## Traditional Action

Action determined by already rooted custom. Obscure reaction to habitual stimuli, generating customary attitudes. Everything we do, consciously or not, on account of custom passed to us (tradition)

Important to perceive human actions are actually mixture of all types defined by Weber, with nobody acting daily solely from one of these types.

# The Protestant Ethic and Capitalism

Weber's most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, identifies relationships between Protestant ethics development, worldview Protestants construct, with capitalist culture growth. Independent of favorable or contrary opinions to Weber's thesis, question is religion relevance even for society's non-religious aspects.

## Calvinist Work Ethic

Calvinism was born as expression of class already performing new capitalist accumulation and contributed to industrial capitalism development. If Puritan ethics favored capital accumulation through secular asceticism, also favored it through confidence these virtuous and convinced believers inspired in commercial relations.

Protestantism opposing spontaneous wealth fruition and curbing its consumption even for those producing it, favored these riches' productive employment and transformed them into capital to invest.

## Predestination Doctrine

For Weber, capitalism is defined by existence of enterprises whose objective is producing greatest possible profit and whose means is rational work and production organization. Union of profit desire and rational discipline historically constitutes Western capitalism's singular trait.

Weber observed Calvinist churches expansion in England coincided with capitalist production mode appearance. Religious precepts constitutive of Calvinist doctrine led adherents to adopt methodical lifestyle in all aspects, denominated by Weber as asceticism.