

Religion functions as a means of social control and change.

Religion is assumed to have emerged during the Upper Paleolithic with the out-of-Africa diaspora. It is estimated from recent research into the dynamics of religion that ritual behaviour and belief in Gods who will punish wrongdoers were developed to promote high levels of pro-sociality, cooperation, growth and stabilisation of communities. This can be considered as the desire for a commonality of belief within communities so that religion may then be defined as whatever system of practices unite many people into a single moral community (whether or not those practices involve belief in any unusual realities)

Many rituals and customs of most religions follow similar patterns, such as incorporating ceremonies to bless newly born infants, coming-of-age rites of passage, marriage and death. These formal exercises have been developed by the evolved beliefs of a spiritual being or beings that, in concert with such dreams and stories of a society's probably mythicised history, give answers to what could not then be currently explained.

As science itself developed to answer many of those then-unexplainable events, religion still maintains its stance as the answer to all of nature's appearances of good and evil by now entrenched beliefs in gods, saints, angels and demons with their complementary mystical sacred objects (such as crosses and prayer beads). Expressions of these latter are recognisable as part of the Christian religion and allegedly give hope and succour to believers. Other examples could be that of peoples such as the Trobriand islanders, who may discard scientific knowledge to call on help from the supernatural when faced with unexpected sailing conditions (Malinowski, 1931/1978, cited in Kottak, 2019) or on the expected delivery of goods otherwise unattainable by the Vanuatuan Tanna islanders who believe that

their American messiah will return after his first visit during the Second World War (personal visitation, February 1974 when Vanuatu was still called The New Hebrides). Many are the benefits attributed to religiously oriented belief systems. Still, there is a more grim side to these systems that a paraphrase of Voltaire's work encapsulates in his "Questions sur les miracles" (1765): "Those who believe in absurdities are capable of atrocities".

Reflecting on this, in the Old Testament, there is a divine command from God for Israel to exterminate the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:2,16, 23). This suggests that modern readers could associate these biblical verses with ethnic cleansing or genocide and that such an authoritative text in Judaism and Christianity could justify violence in the present time. This would be so, but they were not alone; Islam and Buddhism also had their say.

In present times there have been several attempts at these corrosive efforts, examples of which are the Armenian Genocide (1894 - 1920), the Holocaust (1939-1945), the Civil War in Sri Lanka (1983 - 2009), and the Rwandan Genocide (1994). Further, there is an ongoing desire for extremist groups to eradicate those opposing their radical religious demands together with dictats from other theocratic regimes.

There are many ethnographic studies regarding religion, but regardless of the erudition of all this writer has read, there still appears to be a greater reliance on the supernatural than science. Absurdity versus Truth, indeed.