

## UNIT 2      PROBLEMS OF DEFINING RELIGION

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

In a multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture not only religion is undergoing radical changes but also its very meanings and definitions. Therefore the main objective of this unit is to show to students the series of problems that are present in defining religion. In order to do that we will first look at what religion is, its etymological meanings and scholarly definitions of theologians, philosophers, socialists, anthropologist and psychologist. Then we will also briefly discuss the various problems and complexities that are present in these definitions and finally with a comprehensive conclusion. thus it will enable a student ...

- To know the essence of religion
- To understand its evolutions in the Branches of philosophy
- To see the various paradoxes, complexities or problems that are involved in the definitions
- To have comprehensive outlook towards meaning and definition of religion

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion has continued to play a vital role in the lives of individuals worldwide. Its hold remains as strong as ever among both the under-privileged, as well as the economically and intellectually advanced people. We do well remember that the last but previous American presidential election was also fought on religion, more precisely on Christian religious sentiments and convictions. In Japan in spite of the apparent materialistic culture with the bullet trains, camera cell-phones and pocket-sized supercomputers, it is recognizable that there co-exists a thoroughly deified conception of nature. In America, for example, church attendance has remained relatively stable in the past 40 years. In Africa the emergence of Christianity has occurred at a startling rate. While Africa could claim roughly 10 million Christians in 1900, recent estimates put that number closer to 200 million. The rise of Islam as a major world religion, especially its new-found influence in the West, is another significant development. The day-by-day additions of commoners and the celebrities to Buddhism, the increasing influence of the 'gurus' and yoga-centres, speak of the vitality of Buddhism and Hinduism beyond Asia. Unfortunately, the only exception to the renewed religious vitality seems to be the Western Europe. (For in Europe 13% of the people declare that they have no religion, 5% are militantly anti-religious, and a much larger percentage than the mentioned here are indifferent to religion although officially said to be belonging to the church). But it cannot refute the spirit of the vitality of religion that is seen today. The question of our discussion here is not over the religious vitality but over the very concept or definition of religion. Does the definition of religion bring us to the whole truth of what religion is? Or what are the problems and complexities that are seriously concerned in defining religion? It would be impossible for one to enter into this realm without going to the etymological meanings and the various scholarly definitions of religion.

## **2.2 ETYMOLOGY**

The etymology of the English word '*religion*' is said to have possibly emerged from its root '*religio*' in Latin; '*Religio*' literally means obligation, bond or reverence. It is also said to be connected with the other following Latin terms: *religare*, *relegere*, *relinquere*. The original '*re-ligare*' would mean - to bind back, to tie tight/again and it indicates "a bond between man and the gods"; '*re-legere*' - to read again, or to remove/reduce, (say for example doubts) may express "the scrupulous attention to all the signs and manifestations (omens) of invisible powers shown

in the early Roman religion”; and ‘*re-linquere*’ (to leave again/fully, to give up fully) might mean the monastic life or the aspect of surrender, dependence, and faith expressed in religious worship/life. But it is to the term (*religare*) that the etymology of the word religion is often connected with perhaps to emphasize the ritualistic nature of religion.

Some scholars like Jonathan Z. Smith argue that religion doesn’t really exist — there is only culture. He in his book *Imagining Religion* writes: “while there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion — there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy.”

It is true that many societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars would call “religion.” This does not mean that religion doesn’t exist. Religion does exist, for it is claimed that no human society has ever existed without religion, and would probably never exist without it, and that the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but “the secularized rest of and substitute for” an original religious experience. Rudolf Brandner also implies that religion, being fundamental to human existence, will always exist in the human society in spite of all the scientific-technological progress. But in defining the word religion/what religion is one may be fraught with difficult. Why there are difficulties in defining religion. What are problems and complexities that are involved in defining them should be our serious concern. To enter into this reality one needs to study the various definitions and descriptions of religion.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the etymology of the word religion?

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2) Existence of religion becomes important why?  
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### 2.3 DEFINITIONS OF THE WORD “RELIGION”

"Religion" is a difficult word to define. This commonly used word seems to have arrived at entire ambiguity in modern times, apparently reflecting the multi-ethnic and philosophically diverse global culture that we currently find ourselves in. Therefore the task of definition finds itself in troubled times, having feet planted firmly in mid-air. Yet this word is not without reference or meaning, and is employed quite often in every day conversation. When we speak of "a Religion", we are using the term to classify something, and when we speak of "the Religious", we are seeking to capture those with some distinguishable characteristics. So what do we actually mean when we use the word "Religion"? Or better put: "How do we define Religion?" This leads us to back to where we started: the task of definition.

#### DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

Dictionaries have made many attempts to define the word *religion*:  
**The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990):** defines religion as “Human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience”

**Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary:** "Religion - belief in the existence of god or gods who has / have created the universe and given man a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body... particular, system of faith and worship based on such a belief...controlling influence on one life; something one is devoted or committed to."

**Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary:** “a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith."

**Webster's New World Dictionary** (Third College Edition): says "any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy" is religion. This definition would exclude religions that do not engage in worship. It implies that there are two important components to religion.

One's belief and worship in a deity or deities. One's ethical behavior towards other persons. This dual nature of religion is expressed clearly in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) in Matthew 22:36-39:

"Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

**Wikipedia** defines religion as: "... a system of social coherence based on a common group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, traditions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought."

**The Encyclopedia of Philosophy:** lists the traits of religions as:

- Belief in supernatural beings (gods).
- A distinction between sacred and profane objects.
- Ritual acts focused on sacred objects.
- A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods.
- Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in idea with the gods.
- Prayer and other forms of communication with gods.
- A worldview or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it.
- A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview.
- A social group bound together by the above.

This definition captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures.

## **SOME SCHOLARLY DEFINITIONS THEOLOGIAN'S ON RELIGION**

The famous author **William James** in his book "Religious Experience" gives a famous tentative definition of personal religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine". Through this he gives prime emphasis to the personal dimension of religion. He further states "... the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves there to."

For **Schleiermacher** the *sine qua non* of religion was experience; a vibrant, deep, and transcendent feeling of the divine which caused him to define religion as "absolute dependence". This feeling of dependence is what Schleiermacher sees in all of the world religions as the tremendous sensation invoked at the thought of standing before what is Supreme in the universe. This experiential definition finds a central place in Schleiermacher's religion. The most appealing thought about his definition is that it captures the meaning and purpose conveyed through religious experience. To stand beneath and up against the Ultimate is to find one's self shadowed by its presence, and this experience creates an ardent sense of meaning in discovering where it is that you stand and who it is that you are.

Apart from this pragmatic and existential ways of defining religion some prominent **theologians'** have defined religion in terms of God's mystery, power, transcendence, majesty, and wonder, and religion as the response to these concepts. Such prominent theologians are Augustine, John Calvin, Karl Barth Rudolf Otto etc. But I would like to state the most famous and often quoted definition of religion of **Rudolf Otto**. He defines religion in terms of "the Holy" (*heilige*), that is, the mysterious dread and wonder conveyed by the idea of the Ultimate. "The Holy" to Otto is a way in which we understand the aesthetic elements within religion, which emphasize beauty, truth, and goodness. This category of interpretation stresses the great wonder and awe brought about through religion, as well as the earnest moral desire to know and do the good. The another word that Otto coined to categorize and understand religion is called the *numinous*. The *numinous*, refers to an intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread". For Otto, the *numinous* is a lens through which we can understand

the irrational aspects of religion, for the tremendous mystery (*mysterium tremendum*) of reality is beyond us and therefore cannot be truly understood in rational categories of thought.

The another great historian, novelist, theologian and philosopher **Mircea Eliade** in his "The Sacred and the Profane" partially builds on Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* to show how religion emerges from the experience of the sacred, and myths of time and nature. His understanding of religion centers on his concept of hierophany (manifestation of the Sacred) —a concept that includes, but is not limited to, the older and more restrictive concept of theophany (manifestation of a God). From the perspective of religious thought, Eliade argues, hierophanies give structure and orientation to the world, establishing a sacred order. The "profane" space of nonreligious experience can only be divided up geometrically: it has no "qualitative differentiation and, hence, no orientation [is] given by virtue of its inherent structure".

Thus, profane space gives man no pattern for his behavior. In contrast to profane space, the site of a hierophany has a sacred structure to which religious man conforms himself. A hierophany amounts to a "revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse". As an example of "sacred space" demanding a certain response from man, Eliade gives the story of Moses halting before Yahweh's manifestation at the burning bush (Exodus 3: 5) and taking off his shoes. He says religious behavior is not only an imitation of, but also a participation in, sacred events, and thus restores the mythical time of origins. Eliade argues that religious thought in general rests on a sharp distinction between the Sacred and the profane; whether it takes the form of God, gods, or mythical Ancestors, the Sacred contains all "reality", or value, and other things acquire "reality" only to the extent that they participate in the sacred.

**Paul Connelly** another theologian defines religion in terms of the sacred and the spiritual. He says, "Religion originates in an attempt to represent and order beliefs, feelings, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual. As this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses."

He defines the sacred as: "The sacred as a mysterious manifestation of power and presence that is experienced as both primordial and transformative, inspiring awe and rapt attention. And the spiritual as" a perception of the commonality of mindfulness in the world that shifts the boundaries between self and other, producing a sense of the union of purposes of self and other in confronting the existential questions of life, and providing a mediation of the challenge-response interaction between self and other, one and many, that underlies existential questions."

Another famous protestant theologian **Paul Tillich** says - Religion is not a special function of human spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions... Religion is ultimate concern." God, he says, is human's ultimate concern. The divine is a matter of passion and interest for human being, avoidable only by being completely indifferent. What follows in this definition of religion is that worldviews such as Atheism, Agnosticism, Secular Humanism, Scientism, and Buddhism can be thoroughly held to be religions. This broad definition focuses more on the subject, or the one who believes, then on the actual content or propositional doctrine that is adhered to.

## **PHILOSOPHERS ON RELIGION**

**Kant** who brought in a Copernican revolution in the modern philosophy, while discussing on concept of God do not focus primarily upon on what *religious* content and function this concept may have for humans and their activity — e.g., how God may be an object of worship etc., Their focus is more upon properly locating the concept of God within a systematically ordered set of basic philosophical principles that account for the order and structure of world. External ritual, superstition and hierarchical church order he sees all of these as efforts to make oneself pleasing to God in ways other than conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions. The idea of God for Kant is totally immanent within human moral consciousness .For him religion is more intimately affiliated to the social moral order. Religion is well knit within the ethical commonworld. This linking of morality and religious belief will have positive value for a believer's reflective appropriation and practice of faith.

**J. S. Mill**, the English philosopher and economist says: "The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the conditions and desires towards an ideal object recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightly paramount over all selfish objects of desire."

**Hegel** defined religion as "the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind."

**Alfred North whitehead**, the English mathematician and process philosopher defines "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitude. If you are never solitary, you are never religious."

**Thomas Paine**, American political philosopher at the last moment of his life said: "The world is my country, mankind are my brotherhood and to do good is my religion."

## **SOCIOLOGIST'S ON RELIGION**

The classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. They attempt to explain the dialectical relationship i.e. The effects of society on religion and the effects of religion on society.

**Karl Marx:** For, "Marx did not believe in science for science's sake...he believed that he was also advancing a theory that would...be a useful tool...[in] effecting a revolutionary upheaval of the capitalist system in favor of socialism". As such, the crux of his arguments was that humans are best guided by reason. Religion, Marx held, was a significant hindrance to reason, inherently masking the truth and misleading followers. He said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." It soothes them and dulls their senses to the pain of oppression than for a reform. But later when he proposed an antithesis (freedom as response) to alienation he never suggested that religion ought to be prohibited.

**Émile Durkheim:** Durkheim, a Frenchman, placed himself in the positivist tradition, meaning that he thought of his study of society as dispassionate and scientific. Religion, he argued, was an expression of social cohesion. In his book 'Elementary Forms Of Religious Life' while studying the anthropological data of indigenous Australians especially the totems the

aborigines venerate he said they are actually expressions of their own conceptions of society itself. This is true not only for the aborigines, he argues, but for all societies. Therefore Religion, for Durkheim, is not "imaginary, Religion is very real; it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. We perceive as individuals a force greater than ourselves, which is our social life, and give that perception a supernatural face. Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all of our individual consciousnesses which then creates a reality of its own.

Durkheim's definition of religion, from *Elementary Forms*, is as follows: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." This is a functional definition of religion, meaning that it explains what religion does in social life: essentially, it unites societies.

**Max Weber:** Weber differed from Marx and Emile Durkheim in that he focused his work on the effects of religious action and inaction. Instead of discussing religion as a kind of misapprehension (an "opiate of the people,") or as social cohesion, Weber did not attempt to reduce religion to its essence. Instead, he examines how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life. In doing so, Weber gives religion credit for shaping a person's image of the world, and this image of the world can affect their view of their interests, and ultimately how they decide to take action.

For Weber, religion is best understood as it responds to the human need for theodicy and soteriology. Human beings are troubled, he says, with the question of theodicy – the question of how the extraordinary power of a divine God may be reconciled with the imperfection of the world that he has created and rules over. People need to know, for example, why there is undeserved good fortune and suffering in the world. Religion offers people soteriological answers, or answers that provide opportunities for salvation– relief from suffering, and reassuring meaning.

**Friedrich Engels**, the German socialist "Religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their early life."

**David Barrett**, in 'The New Believers', defines religion as 'a social construct encompassing beliefs and practices which enable people, individually and collectively, to make some sense of the Great Questions of life and death'. **B. Malinowski** says religion “relieves anxiety and enhances social integration.

## **ANTHROPOLOGISTS ON RELIGION**

Anthropologists tend to see religion as an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences developed as part of a cultural matrix. For example, in **Lindbeck's** *Nature of Doctrine*, religion does not refer to belief in "God" or a transcendent Absolute. Instead, Lindbeck defines religion as, "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought... it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments.” According to this definition, religion refers to one's primary worldview, and how this dictates one's thoughts and actions. Thus religion is considered by some sources to extend to causes, principles, or activities believed in with zeal or conscientious devotion concerning points or matters of ethics or conscience, and not necessarily including belief in the supernatural.

## **PSYCHOLOGISTS ON RELIGION**

With the dawn of psychology religion or defining of religion took a different strand. The psychologists like Freud, Feuerbach, and Carl Jung started to perceive religion as something psychologically produced within human beings and transferred or projected as something outside of themselves.

For instance **Jung** defines religion as “a peculiar attitude of the mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word *religio*, which means a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors that are conceived as "powers": spirits, demons, gods, laws, ideas, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshiped and loved.

For Jung religion has its origination in the mind of man. Religion is that mental process by which we adapt ourselves to our concepts of external "powers" and seek to please them by ritual action and contemplation. The mind must play a central role in religious phenomenology and must be given its due place as the determining factor. This will find a very naïve interaction between human and divine.

**Clifford Geertz** defined religion as a cultural system: "A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

In short religion is the belief in and worship of an ultimate reality. A particular system of faith and worship based on such a belief; and an interest or pursuit followed with devotion and attachment, and which has a controlling influence on one's life. It is a multifarious phenomenon, which includes various distinct dimensions such as ritual, mythological or narrative, doctrinal, ethical, social or institutional, experiential, and material dimensions. In other words, a religion includes distinctive worldviews, kinds of experience, social patterns, and material forms such as buildings, sacred sites, works of art, and so on. But what actually are the problems these definitions of religion have.

### **Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Which among the dictionary definitions captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures?

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2) How do you understand the term 'Holy' used by Rudolf Otto in defining religion?

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3) What is the idea of God/Religion according Immanuel Kant?

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4) Why does Karl Marx call religion as the 'opium of the people'?

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5) How does Max Weber differ from Durkheim and Marx on the concept of religion?

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**2.4 PROBLEMS OF DEFINING RELIGION**

Though we have studied definition given by various dictionaries, academic scholars, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and others still none of the definition is totally satisfying. For either they are intellectual, affective or functional definitions. Taking one and

leaving out the other. The various authors keep redefining religion in the light of their own thus making the meaning of 'religion' ambiguous and problematic. Mariasusai Dhavamony, speaking of the complications with regard to the concept of religion, says, the term 'religion' brings to mind different ideas for different people. Some consider it belief in God or the act of praying or of participating in the ritual. Others understand it to be the act of meditating on something divine, sacred, spiritual. Still others think that it has to do with emotional and individual attitude to something beyond this world. There are some who simply identify religion with morality. The way of studying the religious life of humanity depends to a large extent on one's experience with what one calls religious. Therefore it does not seem possible to define religion comprehensively in a precise logical way. Concerning the enormous diversity relating to the concept of religion, Winston L. King says: "So many definitions of religion have been framed in the West over the years that even a partial listing would be impractical." So let us now turn towards the problems and complexities that are present in the definitions that we have discussed.

## **2.5 COMPLEXITIES IN THE DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION**

One of the primary causes for the problem of defining religion is its very complexity of nature. No moment a person can say that he has attained the whole truth of religion or defined the unique essence of religion. This is reason no particular distinctive essence of religion is possible all that one can look for is some common characteristics that would enable one to identify religion. As a result today many scholars of philosophy of religion see the definitions of religion tend to suffer from one of two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree as religious, or they are too vague, wide, generic and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is a religion.

A good example of a narrow definition is the common attempt to define "religion" as "belief in God /supernatural. It is effectively excluding polytheistic religions and atheistic religions while including theists who have no religious belief system. Some religion doesn't accept the idea of the supernatural. For these traditions, religion is entirely natural for example the old religion of Europe and the Scandinavian Myth don't have a supernatural aspect. Their gods and giants are as much a part of the natural world as humans, they are just other races that exist along with us. Another obvious exception to our definitions is Buddhism. It has no central

deity and is not even superficially similar to any Western or mid-Eastern-religion. Therefore members of these religions will be rather offended by our claims that what they practice is not religion at all.

A good example of a vague definition is the tendency to define religion as a “worldview” — but how can every worldview qualifies as a religion? For instance Edward Caird’s definition of religion as “the expression of man’s ultimate attitude to the universe” or of Vergilius Ferm’s “To be religious is to effect in some way and in some measure a vital adjustment to whatever is reacted to or regarded implicitly or explicitly as worthy of serious and ulterior concern” are below the sufficient mark as they are too wide definitions to let in even non-religious ideologies within the class of religion.

Some of the definitions we have discussed for instance, the definition of William James though he emphasizes on personal spiritual solitude and the term "divine" still we see that he deemphasizes ritual and communal aspects of religion. Etymologically, the word itself, 'religion' comes from the Latin term '*religares*', meaning binding together. Community, social groupings of people with similar ideas are important for religion. The Actions, patterns, and practices that are done as a result of individual’s beliefs about what is most crucial in life. This could be going to Church, partaking of the Eucharist, going to Synagogue, practicing group meditation, or participating in religious and philosophical group discussion; all of these construct a framework and therefore cannot be underestimated in the role it plays within religion. Similarly, when James uses the term "divine", this excludes Atheists and Dialectic Materialists from being under the banner of religion, which I find problematic in many ways.

The definition of Schleiermacher though broad and experiential definition finds itself as one of the central elements in religion, but like all definitions does not exhaust religion’s entirety. It tends to deemphasize corporate religious experience and relegates his definition to individual existential interaction with the divine. Likewise Schleiermacher’s definition leaves out the ritual cultic actions of religious persons and their impact. Schleiermacher needed to dialogue with Durkheim and Weber to find more of a balance between the personal and social elements, which make up religion.

The definitions of the prominent theologian like Rudolf Otto are not without deficiency. What we see in Otto's thought is the Kantian abandonment of the reaches and use of logic in understanding theology. All of the concepts that Otto uses are employed to understand and systematize some rational process in the minds of religious devotees, and so to deny the uses of logic and rationality as a way of understanding religion is to miss one side of the coin. But at the same time the Kant-Hegelian understanding of God keeping it too rational, beyond and a kind of principle of order is also one sided. The definitions of the psychologists like Jungian though we see a psychological processes within religion still some of his presuppositions and reductive conclusions about the genesis of religion is not much satisfactory.

**Check Your Progress III**

**Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer**

**b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit**

1) Why does defining religion become a problem?

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2) According to scholars of philosophy of religion what are the two problems from which definitions of religion suffer from?

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3) What should be our outlook towards religion in our contemporary times?

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

Therefore where is the wrong? Is it in the very defining of religion itself or in its reality? Is it possible for any student of philosophy of religion to grasp the essence and characteristics of religion without focusing in the paradigms of its definitions? So the conclusion that I would draw is that, we have seen both the immense difficulty in defining religion as well as the intense efforts of various scholars to do so. Although the task may seem to be in disarray, under further investigation we come to discover the richness of understanding, the enormous amount of religious vitality brought about through this task of definition. Though Religious scholars have a keen way of disagreeing with definitions other than their own; they forget that the disagreement lies within *emphasis* not within *substance*. Each definition is a piece of the whole, limited by individual's presuppositions and perspective fields of study. Yet when we analyze the definitions throughout religious studies we can come to some sort of consensus of what religion truly is about. It is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. To limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition.

## 2.7 KEY WORDS

*Numinous* - refers to an intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread.

***Mysterium Tremendum*** - Tremendous Mystery

**Worldview** - A worldview is a set of basic, foundational beliefs concerning deity, humanity and the rest of the universe.

**Religion/ Religious** - When we speak of "a Religion", we are using the term to classify something, and when we speak of "the Religious", we are seeking to capture those with some distinguishable characteristics.

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## 2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The etymology of the English word 'religion' is said to have possibly emerged from its root 'religio' in Latin; 'Religio' literally means obligation, bond or reverence. It is also said to be

connected with the other following Latin terms: *religare*, *relegere*, *relinquere*. The original '*re-ligare*' would mean - to bind back, to tie tight/again and it indicates "a bond between man and the gods"; '*re-legere*' - to read again, or to remove/reduce, (say for example doubts) may express "the scrupulous attention to all the signs and manifestations (omens) of invisible powers shown in the early Roman religion"; and '*re-linquere*' (to leave again/fully, to give up fully) might mean the monastic life or the aspect of surrender, dependence, and faith expressed in religious worship/life. But it is to the term (*religare*) that the etymology of the word religion is often connected with perhaps to emphasize the ritualistic nature of religion.

2. It is true that many societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars would call "religion." This does not mean that religion doesn't exist. Religion does exist, for it is claimed that no human society has ever existed without religion, and would probably never exist without it, and that the aesthetic experience in modernity is nothing but "the secularized rest of and substitute for" an original religious experience.

### **Answers to Check your Progress II**

1. The definition given in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy captures much of what religion is across diverse cultures of the its comprehensive traits such as: Belief in supernatural beings (gods) - A distinction between sacred and profane objects - Ritual acts focused on sacred objects - A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods - Characteristically religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration), which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual, and which are connected in idea with the gods - Prayer and other forms of communication with gods - A worldview or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it - A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview - A social group bound together by the above.

2. He defines religion in terms of "the Holy" (*heilige*), that is, the mysterious dread and wonder conveyed by the idea of the Ultimate. "The Holy" to Otto is a way in which we understand the aesthetic elements within religion, which emphasize beauty, truth, and goodness. This category

of interpretation stresses the great wonder and awe brought about through religion, as well as the earnest moral desire to know and do the good.

3. For Kant, God does not focus primarily upon on what *religious* content and function this concept may have for humans and their activity — e.g., how God may be an object of worship etc., Their focus is more upon properly locating the concept of God within a systematically ordered set of basic philosophical principles that account for the order and structure of world. External ritual, superstition and hierarchical church order he sees all of these as efforts to make oneself pleasing to God in ways other than conscientious adherence to the principle of moral rightness in the choice of one's actions. The idea of God for Kant is totally immanent within human moral consciousness .For him religion is more intimately affiliated to the social moral order.

4. Marx said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." Because it soothes them and dulls their senses to the pain of oppression than for a reform.

5. Weber differed from Marx and Emile Durkheim in that he focused his work on the effects of religious action and inaction. Instead of discussing religion as a kind of misapprehension (an "opiate of the people,") or as social cohesion, Weber did not attempt to reduce religion to its essence. Instead, he examines how religious ideas and groups interacted with other aspects of social life. In doing so, Weber gives religion credit for shaping a person's image of the world, and this image of the world can affect their view of their interests, and ultimately how they decide to take action.

### **Answers to Check Your Progress III**

1. The term 'religion' brings to mind different ideas for different people. Some consider it belief in God or the act of praying or of participating in the ritual. Others understand it to be the act of meditating on something divine, sacred, spiritual. Still others think that it has to do with emotional and individual attitude to something beyond this world. There are some who simply identify religion with morality. The way of studying the religious life of humanity depends to a

large extent on one's experience with what one calls religious. Therefore it does not seem possible to define religion comprehensively in a precise logical way.

2. The scholars of philosophy of religion see the definitions of religion tend to suffer from one of two problems: they are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree as religious, or they are too vague, wide, generic and ambiguous, suggesting that just about any and everything is a religion.

3. Our outlook needs to be total and comprehensive for it is apparent that religion can be seen as a theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological phenomenon of human kind. But to limit religion to only one of these categories is to miss its multifaceted nature and lose out on the complete definition.

