

Religion And Morality: A Conceptual Enquiry

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Abstract: Religion, originating from a Latin term meaning ‘to connect,’ has served as a fundamental force uniting individuals with each other and with a higher power. It has deeply influenced human civilization from its earliest days, evolving with social and cultural developments while continuing to shape moral and spiritual values. Central values include reverence for life, responsibility, and frugality, which together form the foundation of an ethical and sustainable lifestyle. This essay explores the origins and purpose of religion, the connection between religion and ethics, the moral and philosophical dimensions of religious belief, and the role religion can play in addressing modern challenges, including environmental ethics. For environmental ethics, the research emphasizes that protecting nature requires more than activism or hope; it demands a deep inner transformation and a new way of seeing the world. Besides, it draws various scholarly perspectives such as those of Martineau, Whitehead, and Radhakrishnan; it underscores that religion is not merely a set of beliefs but a guide for personal growth, moral behavior, and social harmony. Then the study concludes by emphasizing the need for a moral and spiritual renewal of religion in the contemporary world.

Key Words: Environment, Ethics, Faith, Morality, Religion, Spiritual.

Introduction: Human history is deeply connected to the history of religion. At its core, religion serves as a bridge, linking individuals to one another through shared values, duties, and love, and connecting humanity to the divine. Since the dawn of human consciousness, religion has played a vital role in shaping societies and guiding human behavior. Despite the rapid advancement of science and technology, the influence of religion on human thought and culture remains profound. Modern interpretations, especially from anthropology and psychology, suggest that religion emerged from humanity’s response to the mysteries of nature and the need for emotional security and moral guidance. That said, religion is complex and difficult to define universally. It encompasses beliefs, rituals, ethics, and spiritual practices that differ greatly across cultures. The roots of religion may lie in early nature worship, evolving into organized systems of faith centered around divine beings. Philosophers and scholars have offered various definitions of religion, often emphasizing faith, the search for meaning, or the pursuit of spiritual truth. In addition to shaping personal identity, religion plays a critical role in ethical development, social cohesion, and, more recently, environmental awareness. Understanding the relationship between religion and ethics offers insight into the broader spiritual journey of humanity and the ongoing need for moral and cultural renewal in a globalized world.

Essence of Religion

The word ‘*religion*’ is derived from the Latin word ‘*religare*,’ which means ‘to bring back’ or ‘to connect.’ Again, ‘*religare*’ is made up of two parts; that is, ‘re’ (meaning back) and ‘ligare’ (meaning to bind or connect). So, religion means something that connects people with each other through love, kindness, shared responsibilities, and also connects them to God. It helps guide people back to their true spiritual nature.¹ Because of this, religion brings people together. We do not know exactly when religion began, but we do know the basic things needed for it to exist. Religion is one of the oldest parts of human life. In fact, it is fair to say that the real history of humans starts with the history of religion.

Religion has always been very important in society and has had a strong effect on people. Even though science and technology have advanced a lot, religion still has a powerful influence on millions of people’s minds. Throughout history, the idea of religion has changed to fit people’s needs and situations, but it still has a strong impact on society. Many people’s thoughts, words, and actions are shaped by religion. Modern anthropology (the study of humans) looks at religion as something created by people. It suggests that the idea of God’s creative power is actually a reflection of human creativity.²

Since almost everyone belongs to some religion, it is important to have a basic understanding of what religion is. To understand it, we need to look at it from different points of view. Many people have tried

to define religion, but there is no single perfect or complete definition. Most definitions explain part of what religion is, but not the whole idea. That is why; it is hard to define religion exactly, though we can describe it. People have different ideas about how religion began. Some think it started with the worship of nature. At first, like animals, humans mainly looked for food. But as people became more intelligent, they began to understand that there is a greater power beyond their control. Even though humans learned how to farm and grow food, they could not protect their land from natural disasters like earthquakes, storms, heavy rain, or droughts. They felt helpless against the power of nature. Because of this, people began to think deeply about these natural forces and tried to understand or challenge them. Eventually, they believed that these forces were controlled by powerful beings in the heavens. These beings were thought to protect people from danger, and so they became known as gods.

People started to believe that if they worshipped these gods, they would be safe. So, they created different gods for different parts of nature like a god of mountains, trees, rain, and so on. These many gods were worshipped in many different ways. Groups of people who followed the same rituals or religious practices formed their own communities, and from this, many different religions began.

Many scholars consider that religion started with the worship of gods. James Martineau maintains that religion is the belief in an eternal God - a divine mind and will that controls the universe and has a moral connection with human beings.³ So, religion can be seen as a person's belief in a higher power beyond themselves. Through this belief, people try to meet their emotional needs and live a good, meaningful life. J.G. Frazer says, "Religion means trying to please or make peace with powers greater than humans, which are believed to control nature and human life."⁴ Whitehead asserts that religion is about seeing something greater that exists beyond and within the changing world around us. It is something real and powerful, giving meaning to everything in life, yet it is hard to fully understand. It is the highest goal, something people deeply want but can never completely reach.⁵ All these different definitions show that believing in and worshipping a supreme power who controls the universe brings people comfort and peace of mind.

Religion as a Faith

The main part of religion is faith, which is why many scholars say religion is faith. For people to live well and grow, they need faith in themselves and in important, lasting values. Being born into this world is seen as a kind of fall because life has both good and bad both parts. Religion helps protecting people from suffering. People usually think of themselves as their physical bodies, but many religions say that the body is alive because of the soul inside it. Some religions teach that the soul is the true reality. Because the soul is linked to the body, it faces limits. When a person dies, their connection to the body ends. The purpose of the soul's awareness is to watch what happens in life without getting attached or upset. So, religions teach that it doesn't help to feel happy or unhappy about life's situations. Religion helps people to understand who they really are and guides them to reach higher spiritual levels. In short, religion teaches people to know themselves.⁶

Religion helps building and keeping important values in how people treat each other. As S. Radhakrishnan expresses, religion should be the force that brings people together, even though its different forms in history have problems. At its heart, religion is a call to a spiritual journey. It is not just about beliefs or ideas, but about actions and self-discipline. Religion is the only way to fix the pride of the human spirit when it separates itself from eternal truth. When people think that they do not need anything beyond themselves, they can become lost and unhappy. Religion's job is to bring back the connection between people and something eternal.⁷ On the other hand, Sigmund Freud, a famous psychologist, thinks religion is not real. He comments that it comes from people's feeling helpless and dependent. Freud also states that religion can stop people from developing good moral behavior.

Now it is time to highlight a key point about religious faith and how we understand it. Unlike scientific beliefs, religious faith is not judged as true or false in the usual way, they are better seen as either wise or unwise. For example, when we ask whether the *Pythagorean Theorem* is true, we mean it is logically valid or not. When we ask whether *Darwin's theory of evolution* is true, we mean it is factually accurate or not. But when we ask if a religious belief like the Christian idea of original sin is true, we are really asking if it is morally or spiritually meaningful; that is, if it is wise or foolish. If the statement '*All humans are sinners*' were simply a factual claim, it could not be proven or accepted through faith alone. Just like formal logic cannot prove facts by itself, faith cannot prove factual claims either. This creates a problem for traditional religion - it often makes factual claims, but refuses to follow the scientific rules needed to prove them, relying instead on faith. But since faith cannot be tested through observation or

experiment, religious beliefs cannot be judged by true-false standards. Instead, they must be judged by whether they are wise or unwise, though even this is not always easy to decide or ascertain.⁸

It would make no sense to say that a religious belief is true in the same way a scientific belief is true, just like it would be nonsense to judge a scientific theory as 'wise' or 'foolish.' For instance, Darwin's theory may be scientifically true, but no one would call it wise in the way we describe wisdom in moral or spiritual matters. Julian Huxley may be right to say that understanding evolution is important for grasping human destiny.⁹ However, any vision of human destiny is a matter of value, not fact. It belongs to the realm of wisdom, not the realm of objective knowledge.

Religious and Ethical Interplay

Religion has many sides. It is both a social and a moral matter. Morality becomes important when people live together in a society. Every person has a duty to treat others in the community with respect and responsibility. As the philosopher Spinoza prescribes, "A good and happy life is not a reward for being good, it comes from being good and enjoying that goodness."¹⁰ But when religion uses morality as a tool to control others or gain power, and not for true goodness, then it is right to speak out against it.

It is a much known statement that humans cannot live without religion because it is a natural part of who they are. You cannot separate religion from real life. Religion is important because of how it helps improving the quality of life. It helps people to grow by giving society rules about right and wrong, social customs, goals, and ways to show devotion. Religion also helps people to become better and more aware of themselves. It further helps people living disciplined and pure lives. Religions always aim to improve the human soul. Although different religions have different names, they share many similar ideas and values. Each religion is special and cannot be compared exactly to anything else. All religions teach some form of universal brotherhood and encourage kindness to all living things. Even in religions where people eat meat, there is often a rule against unnecessary killing. Many Semitic religions believe that fasting and not eating meat on certain days brings special blessings.¹¹ Buddhism teaches strongly about not hurting others (called ahimsa), and Jainism follows this idea even more strictly.

A true religion must include a system of morals to guide its followers. The connection between religion and ethics has been an important topic for many philosophers. It is clear that religion and ethics are closely linked and this has always been true in history. There can be morals without religion, but there has never been a religion without morals. Ethics is the study of how people behave and whether their actions are right or wrong. Some philosophers look for absolute moral rules in religion. Most major religions teach the importance of ethics. Religion, ethics, and philosophy are connected. Religion helps guiding all other parts of life. At the same time, good moral behavior and philosophical thinking help a person grow spiritually. Without ethics and philosophy, religion loses meaning, and without religion, ethics and philosophy become empty. All religions understand how important ethics is. Religion, which is about connecting with something higher, and morality, which is about how we behave, are linked and together form the spiritual journey of humans.

Religion is about the moral life of people. F.H. Bradley thinks that religion shows the goodness in people. He observes, "Religion is the effort to show the full reality of goodness in every part of who we are."¹² Looking at religion from the view of morality, N.F.S. Ferre says, "Religion is a search for power to overcome the evil side of life even more than its concern for understanding what life at its centre or depth means."¹³ The idea of free will, which means being able to choose freely, is important in morals, religion, and society, and it is a key idea in most religions. Some people assume that the reason we have freedom is because natural events do not always happen in a fixed way.

According to the great philosopher Immanuel Kant, freedom of will is the most important idea in moral philosophy. He suggests that it doesn't need to be proven; it is something we just know to be true. Freedom is the foundation of morality. A true moral or religious life is not possible without freedom. When it comes to religion, the idea of free will is understood differently in Eastern and Western traditions. In the West, especially in Judaism and Christianity, free will is discussed in two areas: the philosophy of religion and moral philosophy. In religious philosophy, the issue of free will is linked to the idea of God and the existence of good and evil - this is called the '*problem of evil*.' In moral philosophy, it is about whether people are responsible for their actions, which brings up the debate between free will and determinism (the idea that everything is already decided).¹⁴

Ethics is a part of philosophy that studies and thinks about the rules of right and wrong behavior. People in a society are connected by shared rules and values, and morality helps guiding what is good or bad,

right or wrong. The words ‘ethical theory’ and ‘moral philosophy’ mean thinking carefully about what is moral. The word morality comes from a Greek word meaning duty. Morality is about the beliefs people have about what is right and wrong in how they act. It is a social system with a history and rules that can be learned. Ethics, like morality, helps to decide what is right or wrong and good or bad. Ethics also explains why people choose certain answers to questions about right and wrong.

Ethical science teaches people how to behave with each other and with other living things. It is based on clear rules about how to act in the right way. Many ideas have been created to explain how people understand right and wrong and take responsibility for their actions. Some thinkers like John Stuart Mill, Coke, and Comte say that ethics comes from experience, and every culture values morals or ethics. Some materialists like Marx and Hegel consider that the government controls people’s morals, but others think that each person controls themselves. Ethics shows what human nature is like by looking at how people decide what is right or wrong, good or bad.

To grow spiritually, people need to follow good behavior (ethics) and learn about philosophy. Religion has no real meaning without ethics and philosophy, and ethics and philosophy need religion to make sense. Good behavior and philosophical understanding are necessary for spiritual growth. That is why, being moral is the first step to religion.¹⁵ A person who lives a good and pure life can reach moksha, which means freedom or liberation. To live peacefully with family, neighbors, and friends, people must follow ethics. Ethics bring lasting happiness, peace, and keep a person’s conscience clear. Someone who follows ethical rules will always stay on the right path called dharma, or righteousness. Without religion, people cannot live a truly good and moral life because religion supports human life in this world. Believing in a religion gives people peace, happiness, and a feeling of safety. The goal of religion is to help people overcoming their problems and reaching the highest goal.

What we really need today is a return to good morals and spiritual growth in religion, not just material progress. To explain clearly, our culture and society need a deep change in how people think and feel a better kind of growth for all people. This new way of thinking means understanding the Ultimate Reality, or the most important truth. It also means realizing that all religions are connected and teach the same basic idea - to improve your soul and be kind to the world.

Religion’s Role in Promoting Environmental Values

Religious karma is not just about the connection between a person and God. There are many layers in between like our duties to the Earth, to animals, and to future generations. We are responsible for all these, and our actions toward them have karmic effects.¹⁶ We still respect our duty to God, but now we understand that this duty includes caring for the nature around us.

As a result, caring for the environment is a very important topic in schools, colleges, and discussions around the world, in both rich and poor countries. Today, human progress and protecting the environment often clash. Environmental experts assume that fast development is okay only if it keeps the environment healthy. Smart planning is needed to balance growth and saving nature. During the scientific revolution, people often forgot the old wisdom from spiritual traditions. To solve our environmental problems, we need to see nature in a new way.

What we really need is a deep change in the way we think and feel; a shift in our relationship with nature and with ourselves. This change must come from within, at a deeper level, not just from slogans like “let us save nature.” Instead of treating the universe like a machine, we should see it as a sacred space, a sanctuary.¹⁷ In this sanctuary, we must act as caretakers or stewards. Some might even say we should act like priests, showing deep respect for the *Earth*. This respect for all life becomes the most basic ecological value. From this comes the value, that is, responsibility, which means putting our respect into action. Another important value is frugality, living simply without waste. On our fragile planet, frugality is so important that we should treat it as a moral virtue. The way you live your daily life, whether it is simple or wasteful, is one of the most powerful choices you make.

We are not saying that the efforts to protect rivers or mountains are not important. They necessarily are. But those efforts need to be guided by a new mindset - one that values life, responsibility, and simplicity. When we have this awareness, our actions become more meaningful and more effective. In time, if more people live by these values, we will not need to constantly fight to save every part of nature. Respect, not greed, will guide us. The real fight to save the *Earth* is not just a physical or political one, it is a moral struggle. That is one of the main ideas we want to share in this essay.

Though, some experts think that education based on religion can help changing how people behave toward the environment. Religions can give ideas to solve today's environmental problems. In old religions, people were seen as part of nature, not as its rulers. Environmentalists still talk about how religion shapes how we treat nature. Most religions have strong rules about right and wrong. Many have ideas that support caring for the environment, even though their main goals are beyond just the earth. Religions can help creating a set of rules to protect the *Earth*. Many religions ask people to take care of nature, so they can help with today's pollution problems. Religion and morality (right and wrong) are closely connected, especially in big traditional religions. They depend on each other whereas religion supports morality, and morality helps shaping religion. The idea of free will, choosing what to do, is important in most religions. Some say freedom is based on natural events happening by chance. Philosopher Kant comments that freedom of will is the main idea of moral philosophy; it doesn't need proof, it is known to be true. Freedom is the foundation of being moral. A true moral and religious life cannot happen without freedom.¹⁸

Conclusion: Religion remains one of the most influential and enduring aspects of human life. Despite its potential to unite people through shared values and compassion, religion has also been misused to promote division, violence, and superstition. Many of the world's conflicts have religious roots, not because of the teachings themselves, but because of the way they are distorted by individuals for selfish gain. While all major religions promote love, tolerance, and moral conduct, few truly live by these principles. As a result, religion often fails to meet its highest purpose; spiritual upliftment and the betterment of human life.

In today's world, marked by technological progress and material advancement, there is a growing loss of spiritual depth. Science may explain the workings of the universe, but it cannot provide the inner peace, purpose, and ethical direction that religion offers. Amid the confusion and stress of modern life, religion can be a source of mental peace and spiritual balance - provided it is practiced with sincerity and openness. Furthermore, as humanity confronts urgent challenges like environmental degradation, religion can help to reshape our values toward nature and to inspire collective responsibility.

Ultimately, what the world needs is not a rejection of religion, but a moral and spiritual renewal of its essence. True religion transcends rigid dogma and fosters a universal message of kindness, tolerance, and inner growth. As globalization connects people across cultures, embracing the shared values of all religions can guide humanity toward peace, justice, and sustainable living.

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