

The Role of Religion In Addressing Contemporary Social And Political Issues

Dr. Mohammed Alshehri

(Theology & Contemporary Doctrines, College of Shariah & Principles of Religion / King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia)

ABSTRACT: Religion has been a fundamental aspect of human civilization, shaping cultures, societies, and individual behaviours throughout history. Its influence on social norms is profound and multifaceted, affecting various dimensions of life, including morality, family structures, and community interactions. This essay analyses what Religion can do by engaging in several contemporary issues and challenges politically and socially. Religion strongly intersects with politics and people's lives in many societies around the world. Thus, it is important to explore the role that religion can play in general towards political and social matters and issues in modern world. It touches briefly on some key elements which give a general picture on the subject.

KEYWORDS; *Religion, Social and Political Issues, Influence of Religion, Conflict Resolution, Social Norms.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, religion has had a crucial role in shaping civilizations, societies, and political structures. Religion still plays a big part in solving social and political issues in the modern world. This essay looks at how political views, social norms, and environmental concerns are shaped by religion. It also offers frameworks for solving modern issues like inequality and violence. We can gain a better understanding of the complex role that religion plays in the modern world by examining different theological viewpoints and their implications for social justice and political participation. Around the world, religions are having a big impact on public affairs, impacting things like social justice, democracy, and human rights. It is not quite clear from the secularization argument how important religion still is in contemporary culture.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON SOCIAL NORMS

Religion frequently shapes societal norms and values by acting as a moral compass for both individuals and societies. Religious teachings that promote kindness, fairness, and the worth of every person can inspire people to take up collective action against societal injustices. For example, the Christian principle of loving one's neighbour has served as an inspiration for many social movements, such as the American Civil Rights Movement, in which religious figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. organized local communities to combat racial discrimination.

Similar to this, Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on social justice and charity (Zakat), which inspires many Muslims to participate in volunteer work and humanitarian endeavours. Demonstrating how religious beliefs can be translated into social action, organizations such as Islamic Relief and the Muslim Aid have formed to address poverty, education, and health care in various parts of the world. Thus, this essay investigates the ways in which religion shapes social standards, the ways in which it functions, and the consequences of its impact on modern society.

The development of moral frameworks is the fundamental aspect of religion's influence on societal standards. The majority of religions offer a set of moral precepts that specify what is proper and evil. For example, the Five Pillars of Islam and the Ten Commandments in Christianity are fundamental beliefs that serve as guidelines for followers in their day-to-day activities. These moral principles influence society norms as well

as individual behaviour. When members of a society follow these religious guidelines together, they establish a common concept of proper behaviour, which strengthens social cohesiveness and stability.

Furthermore, gender roles and family structures—two essential elements of societal norms—are frequently imposed by religion. Men and women are allocated distinct responsibilities in various religious traditions, which have an impact on everything from parenting practices to marital customs. For instance, traditional family roles are emphasized in conservative interpretations of Islam and Christianity, supporting the notion of male leadership and female obedience. These conventions frequently uphold patriarchal structures and can have long-lasting consequences on gender equality and the distribution of power within families and communities.

Religion-related rituals and practices also have a big impact on how society is governed. Religious rituals like marriage, mourning, and festivals strengthen common ideals and foster ties among the community. These gatherings frequently set social norms and expectations, which gives attendees a feeling of community. For example, social gatherings and prayers in the community can foster a sense of community and collective identity, both of which are necessary to uphold social order.

Moreover, because of its connections to administration and the law, religion can have an impact on social norms. Legal systems and public policy have been influenced by the incorporation of religious elements in numerous countries. For instance, Sharia law, which regulates many facets of life, including as marriage, inheritance, and criminal justice, is frequently incorporated into nations with Islamic legal systems. Although freedom for those who do not follow the main religion is protected by religious laws in various countries, this intertwining of religion and law can sometimes be seen as something that leads to the enforcement of religious norms at a societal level, impacting the rights and freedoms of individuals, particularly those who may not adhere to the dominant faith (Habermas, 2006).

This implies that there are challenges associated with religion's influence on societal norms. The cohabitation of several religions and belief systems can cause tensions and conflicts over divergent moral standards and societal expectations in increasingly multicultural society. The difficulty is striking a balance between the need for tolerance and diversity and respect for religious traditions as secularism grows and people look for ways to identify their identities outside of established religious frameworks.

To sum up, religion has a big impact on societal norms since it creates moral frameworks, defines family duties, performs rituals, and is incorporated into legal systems. It creates problems in varied communities even as it promotes community and shared values. In order to navigate modern social dynamics and promote an inclusive environment, it is imperative to comprehend the intricate relationship that exists between religion and social norms. The conversation between religious traditions and contemporary values will continue to influence societal standards as civilizations develop, underscoring the importance of religion in human life (Casanova, 1994).

III. RELIGION AS A POLITICAL FORCE

Religion also plays a crucial role in shaping political ideologies and influencing governance. In many countries, religious institutions and leaders hold significant sway over political decisions and public policy. For example, in the United States, the Religious Right has been instrumental in shaping conservative policies on issues such as abortion, marriage, and education. This coalition of evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics has mobilized voters and influenced legislation, demonstrating the power of religion in the political arena.

Conversely, in countries with strong secular traditions, such as France, the separation of church and state is a foundational principle. However, even in these contexts, religious groups often engage in political discourse, advocating for issues such as immigration reform and social welfare. The challenge lies in balancing religious influence with democratic principles, ensuring that diverse voices are heard while maintaining a secular governance structure.

An examination of the relationship between politics and religion underscores the major features of the responses societies are developing towards the immense task of building order of some sort. It is therefore fundamental in the understanding of political institutions and behavior. Yet it turns out to be a highly elusive theme. It is, in the first place, highly sensitive, for both religion and politics are basic to most people. They represent the most fervent beliefs and commitments, and the idea of inquiry may conflict with the more secular elements in each culture. Moreover, in many cases, it is dangerous. The uses of both religion and politics are often strongly circumscribed by civil laws and prohibitions. These prohibitions are themselves a part of the political structure, and deciding which religious conceptions to represent and which to ignore is ultimately a political decision (Norris, 2011).

But there are other reasons for the state of neglect from which the theory of religion and politics is only recently beginning to emerge. In many cases, this can be attributed to the narrowness of experience. Since the era of the Reformation, many have become accustomed to the separation of church from state and free, competitive religious toleration, usually within a rectangular geographic area. This geographic neutrality was possible because many religious conflicts arose from elements of faith different from the policies of church structure or from the implicit support one clerical hierarchy could give a political regime. With public safety depending often on rigid adherence to particular religious tenets, the separateness of the two hierarchical structures was logical.

IV. ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES

V. Religion can be a powerful force in addressing contemporary social issues, including poverty, inequality, and human rights. Many religious organizations are at the forefront of efforts to alleviate poverty and provide social services. For instance, faith-based organizations like Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army offer food, shelter, and support to marginalized populations, demonstrating a commitment to social justice rooted in religious teachings (Smidt, 2003).

VI. Moreover, religious leaders often advocate for policies that promote equality and human rights. The interfaith movement, which brings together leaders from various religious traditions, has emerged as a platform for addressing issues such as climate change, racial injustice, and gender equality. By uniting diverse faith communities, these movements can amplify their voices and influence public policy on a larger scale.

VII.

VIII. RELIGION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

While religion sometimes through its extremist followers has the capacity to sow discord and strife, it may also serve as a catalyst for harmony and peace. Numerous religious traditions provide frameworks for resolving conflicts by emphasizing compassion, forgiveness, and the quest of peace. For instance, Buddhist teachings advocate mindfulness and compassion in handling interpersonal conflicts, whereas the Quaker tradition supports nonviolence and conversation as ways to settle disagreements (Marsden, 2014).

Religious leaders have frequently been essential in efforts to promote peace in areas riven by violence and sectarian conflict. One example of how religious organizations can encourage communication and reconciliation between parties in conflict is the role the Catholic Church plays in mediating disputes in nations like the Philippines and Colombia.

Although the area of peacebuilding is often accused of disregarding religion, many people and organizations are motivated by their religious beliefs in their social issues. Furthermore, a more adaptable and inventive peacebuilding theory and practice can benefit from a deeper comprehension of religious peacebuilding. The 'Religion and Peacebuilding' approach is presented in this essay, which also discusses aspects of space, ideals, and strategies pertinent to a more peaceful world, as well as the possible involvement of faith-based groups in official and informal peace processes. It also makes sense of the ongoing global discussion between religion and peacekeeping (Wilcox and Ted G, 2002). The essay's key finding is that, despite faith-based actors' strong incentives and extensive background in solution-focused activities, formal conflict resolution forums should be the main focus of efforts to persuade participants in the peace process to give religiously motivated non-violent actors more weight.

It is generally acknowledged that understanding religion in the context of peacebuilding as a component of a broader respect for cultural, ethnic, gendered, and other types of variety is important. As a result, examining how religion affects economic, political, and cultural contexts is crucial. It also helps to address how religion either supports or undermines respect for life, both human and non-human, and it pays particular attention to issues that are pertinent at four different levels of conflict: the family, the community, the nation, and the global system. An additional objective of the essay is to aid in the creation of a theoretically grounded framework that directs the operationalization of a significant request, advocating for the promotion of interfaith communication as a prerequisite for broad support of global development grounded in equity, subsidiarity, and solidarity. One view holds that fostering friendship between various cultural traditions is a necessary condition for world peace. Based on a wide range of international case studies, the goal is to discover religious peacebuilding techniques and impacts, with a focus on novel initiatives rather than traditional models that depict current practice. On the ground, there are global initiatives and organizations which advocate for religions to take the lead in peacebuilding, one successful example is KAICIID organization (founded by Saudi Arabia and Spain, and it is located now in Lisbon), although it is not religious, but it helps and supports religious leaders to foster dialogue between people and communities who would not otherwise come into contact, but whose cooperation is essential to building effective, long-term solutions to global challenges. KAICIID endorses and utilizes interreligious dialogue (IRD) to uphold conflict prevention and resolution, sustainable peace, and

social solidarity; to advance mutual respect and comprehension between diverse religious and cultural communities, while also working against the misuse of religion to support oppression, violence, and discord.

IX. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

There are obstacles and objections to religion's beneficial contributions to social and political issues. Politics and religion can coexist, which can result in the marginalization of minority groups and the imposing of particular religious views on a variety of demographics. Religious extremism has occasionally fostered intolerance and violence, undercutting attempts at fostering harmony and social cohesion.

Furthermore, as countries become more diverse, pluralism becomes a challenge. Maintaining communal harmony while upholding individual liberties is a difficult balance that must be struck when navigating the complexity of diverse religious practices and beliefs. To address these issues, interfaith conversation and the promotion of understanding amongst peoples are crucial.

X. CONCLUSION

The role of religion in addressing contemporary social and political challenges is complex and multifaceted. While it can serve as a source of inspiration and mobilization for social justice, it can also pose challenges related to pluralism and extremism. Ultimately, the potential for religion to contribute positively to social and political issues lies in its ability to promote compassion, justice, and dialogue. By harnessing the moral teachings of various religious traditions, societies can work towards addressing pressing challenges and fostering a more just and equitable world. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, the engagement of religious communities in social and political discourse will remain crucial in shaping a better future for all.

REFERENCES

- [1]- Habermas, Jürgen (2006). "Religion in the public sphere", *European Journal of Philosophy* 14 (1):1–25.
- [2]- Casanova, José, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- [3]- Smidt, Corwin E. (Ed.), *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good* (Baylor University Press, 2003).
- [4]- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- [5]- Marsden, George M., *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
- [6]- Wilcox, Clyde, and Ted G. Jelen (Eds.), *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, the Few, and the Many* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- [7]- <https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are/governance> (22/09/2024).