

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q5(c)

Distinguish between sects and cults with illustrations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Religion and Society

Religion and Society: Sociological theories of religion; Types of religious practices: animism, monism, pluralism, sects, cults; Religion in modern society: religion and science, secularization, religious revivalism, fundamentalism.

Core demand of the question

- Distinguish between sects and cults with illustrations
- Keep the distinction within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Sect:** voluntary, exclusive, often a purity protest within a tradition (Troeltsch, Wilson, Weber).
- **Cult:** newer, syncretic or leader-centred, often charismatic.

Both sit outside the low-tension church.

- **Illustrations:** Methodist-type sects; guru movements as cultic centres.

The media insult is not the sociological type.

Introduction

Sect and cult are types of religious organisation outside the church-denomination mainstream. The cut is usually tension with society, claim to exclusive truth, and the source of authority. Labels are often polemical; use them as ideal types.

Body**Sect**

- **Ernst Troeltsch and later Bryan Wilson:** a voluntary group that demands high commitment, often a return to a pure tradition, and tension with the world.
- **Max Weber** linked sect to virtuoso religion and to status honour among the elect, as in some Protestant sects that trained methodical life.
- **Illustration:** early Methodists, or in India a reformist Sikh or Arya Samaj-type association that polices membership and doctrine more tightly than a loose church.

Cult

- Often used for a new, syncretic, or leader-centred group with weaker ties to a historic church, sometimes around charisma.
- **Weber's charismatic domination fits many cultic centres:** devotion to a person, proof by miracle or success, unstable succession.
- **Illustration:** a new guru movement around a living teacher, or a small millenarian circle. The word is abused in media to mean "dangerous".

Distinction

- **Sect:** exclusive community, often a protest inside a known tradition. Cult: new combination or personal sacred centre.
- **Emile Durkheim's** church as moral community can spawn both as intense sub-assemblies.
- A sect may become a denomination; a cult may routinise into a sect or dissolve.

Flow diagram

Church denomination -> Sect exclusive tradition

Church denomination -> Cult new charismatic

Sect exclusive tradition -> Tension with world

Cult new charismatic -> Personal sacred

Conclusion

Sects are high-demand, often restorative communities in tension with the world. Cults, in the sociological type, are newer, often charismatic centres. Illustrate with Protestant sects and guru movements, and treat media insult as a separate fact.

Facts & figures

Troeltsch

Church-sect typology: church accommodates the world; sect protests it.

Wilson

Mapped sects by response to the world, including conversionist and introversionist types.

Weber charisma

Personal extraordinary authority that many cultic groups organise around.

Routinisation

Charismatic cults tend to become office, tradition, or memory after the founder.