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Q5(c)

Give an assessment of Durkheimian notion of 'sacred' and 'profane' in sociology of religion

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- Give an assessment of the Durkheimian notion of the sacred and the profane in the sociology of religion
- Keep the assessment within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Durkheim**: sacred and profane as the basic religious classification.

The sacred is society's force in ritual and church.

Festivals and civil religion still fit.

Weber, Marx, and gender show meaning and domination the split misses.

Lived religion often leaks across the border.

Introduction

Emile Durkheim treated the sacred and the profane as the elementary classification of religious life. The sacred is set apart and forbidden; the profane is ordinary practical life. Assessment must keep the power of that split and its limits for salvation religions and inequality.

Body

The notion

- In The **Elementary Forms**, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, uniting a church.
- The sacred is society's ideal force, felt in **collective effervescence**.
- Taboo and ritual maintain the border.

Assessment, strengths

- It explains ritual solidarity without requiring a particular god.
- National days, stadiums, and Indian public festivals still mark space and time as set apart.
- Robert **Bellah**'s civil religion is a Durkheimian cousin.

Assessment, limits

- **Max Weber** stressed theodicy, prophets, and inner-worldly asceticism, which a clan totem model underplays.
- **Karl Marx** stressed class veil and protest. The "church" is stratified by caste and gender.
- Everyday lived religion mixes kitchen and shrine, so the border is leaky.

Flow diagram

Religion -> Sacred set apart
Religion -> Profane ordinary
Sacred set apart -> Effervescence church
Weber Marx gender -> Limits

Conclusion

The sacred-profane split remains a strong tool for ritual and group ideal. It is a weaker tool for meaning, domination, and porous domestic worship. Use it for solidarity; do not use it as the whole of religion.

Facts & figures

Elementary Forms

Durkheim's 1912 statement of sacred, profane, and church.

Collective effervescence

Heightened assembly in which the sacred is felt as external force.

Bellah

Civil religion as national sacred without one church.

Weber

Counter-stress on meaning, prophecy, and salvation paths.

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