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Q8(c)

In what way did Durkheim perceive religion as functional to society?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 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

- In what way did **Durkheim** perceive religion as functional to society?
- Keep the answer within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Durkheim**: religion is society in sacred form.
- **Functions**: integration, regulation, cognitive **categories**, continuity.

Effervescence and church make the force felt as external.

He did not predict a simple end of religion.

Marx, caste, and gender limit the harmony of that function.

Introduction

Emile Durkheim perceived religion as society worshipping its own ideal. Its function is to create, renew, and moralise solidarity. Gods are real as social forces, not as private errors.

Body

Core perception

- In The **Elementary Forms**, religion is beliefs and practices relative to the sacred, uniting a church.
- **Collective effervescence** generates the feeling of an external force, which is the group.
- The sacred-profane split classifies the world and protects the group's ideal.

Functions named

- **Integration**: a moral community, from clan to nation.
- **Regulation**: rites and interdicts discipline conduct, related to his suicide types.
- **Cognitive**: **categories** of time, space, and cause are socially forged in ritual, a strong claim.
- **Continuity**: funerals and commemorations bind generations.

What "functional" does not mean here

- It does not mean every priest is useful to every class. **Karl Marx**'s veil is a different problem **Durkheim** underplayed.

- It does not predict simple secular disappearance; he expected new cults, including the individual.

Later use

- Robert **Bellah**'s civil religion is a functional reading of national ritual.
- Gendered and caste temples show the moral community is stratified.

Flow diagram

Religion -> Sacred ritual
Sacred ritual -> Effervescence
Effervescence -> Solidarity regulation categories
Solidarity regulation categories -> Society's ideal

Conclusion

Durkheim saw religion as functionally producing solidarity, moral regulation, and basic **categories** through sacred ritual. The function is for the group's ideal. It is not a full theory of salvation, inequality, or inner faith.

Facts & figures

Elementary Forms (1912)

Religion as sacred practice uniting a church; function for solidarity.

Collective effervescence

Ritual assembly that generates the sacred as social force.

Categories

Durkheim's claim that ritual helps found time, space, and classification.

Bellah

Civil religion as a later functional application to the nation.