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Q7(c)

What is the nature of relationship between science and religion in modern society? Analyze with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- **State possible relations:** conflict, independence, dialogue, persistence of the sacred
- Use Comte, **Weber disenchantment**, secularisation debates, Berger
- Give modern examples including India if natural (science institutions and ritual)
- Avoid a school-essay on 'both are important'

Revision summary

Comte expected science to replace theology; **Weber** expected **disenchantment** of technique.

Secularisation is regional, not a universal emptying of faith.

Relations include conflict, institutional separation and practical coexistence.

Berger's later **desecularisation** thesis matches much of the contemporary world.

India shows high-tech science beside public ritual and sacred politics.

The modern pattern is differentiation plus plurality, not a simple war.

Introduction

Modern society is often described as scientific, and science is often described as the opposite of religion. The sociological relationship is more mixed. Auguste Comte expected a scientific stage to replace theological thought. **Max Weber** spoke of **disenchantment**: calculation drives out magic. Later research found secularisation in some regions and religious revival in others. Science and religion now compete, ignore, and sometimes bless each other in the same public sphere.

Body

Conflict, separation and coexistence

Conflict appears in creation controversies, in battles over reproductive technology, and when clerical authority denies epidemiological advice. The independence model, close to Stephen Jay Gould's "non-overlapping magisteria," treats science as how the heavens go and religion as how to go to heaven. Dialogue appears in religious environmentalism and in scientists who remain practising believers. Peter Berger first expected secularisation, then stressed **desecularisation**: the world is furiously religious, with pockets of European-style unbelief.

Weber's **disenchantment** never meant that temples empty overnight. It meant that technical rationality becomes the default for administration, medicine and production, while meaning and theodicy may still be sought in faith. Thomas Luckmann described invisible religion; **Durkheim** already allowed civic sacredness. In India, space missions and large science laboratories coexist with ritual at launch, pilgrimage economies, and political uses of sacred geography. Ayurveda and evidence-based medicine negotiate prestige. Anti-superstition movements and new gurdums grow together.

The nature of the relationship in modern society is therefore **structurally differentiated and empirically plural**. Science claims cognitive authority over empirical nature; religion claims authority over ultimate meaning, identity and often morality. The state, the market and the media decide which claim wins in a given dispute. A single formula of inevitable conflict is as unhelpful as a pious harmony.

Flow diagram

Modern society -> Science cognitive authority
Modern society -> Religion meaning identity
Science cognitive authority -> Conflict
Religion meaning identity -> Conflict
Science cognitive authority -> Coexistence dialogue
Religion meaning identity -> Coexistence dialogue
Science cognitive authority -> Disenchantment of technique

Conclusion

Science and religion in modern society are differentiated institutions that sometimes clash, sometimes ignore each other, and sometimes intertwine in ritual and politics. **Disenchantment** names a tendency of technique, not the death of the sacred. Examples should show that plurality, not a winner-takes-all story.

Facts & figures

Disenchantment

Weber's process in which calculation and bureaucracy displace magical means, without automatically abolishing religion.

Secularisation debate

The dispute over whether modernisation necessarily reduces religious authority; evidence is mixed by region.

Desecularisation

Berger's later view that the contemporary world remains strongly religious outside some European and academic enclaves.

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