

## Contributions of the Sociology of Religion to the Interpretation of Psychological and Social Behaviour: A Socio-Religious Perspective

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### **Abstract:**

Human beings are complex entities shaped by the interplay of psychological, social, and religious dimensions, making their behaviour the result of a dynamic and multifaceted interaction. In this context, the sociology of religion provides a significant analytical framework for interpreting psychological and social behaviour through the study of religion's influence on values, norms, and practices. This study examines how religion, as a normative and value-based system, contributes to regulating individual and collective behaviour and fostering psychological balance and social integration. It argues that religious institutions and socialisation processes play a central role in shaping behaviour and maintaining social cohesion, particularly in contexts of social change. The study concludes that the relationship between religion and psychological and social phenomena is complementary, with religion acting as a key mechanism of social regulation and stability. Methodologically, the research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, supported by a comparative perspective in selected aspects.

**Keywords:** Sociology of Religion, Psychological and Social Behaviour, Social Control, Socialisation, Religious Values .

### **01. Introduction:**

The study of human behaviour in its psychological, social and religious dimensions is a central concern in the social sciences, given the complex interplay it reveals between an individual's psychological makeup and the social context in which they live, as well as the value and religious systems that frame and guide this behaviour. In this context, the sociology of religion has emerged as a field of study seeking to understand the explanatory role of religion in analysing social and psychological phenomena, by examining the influence of religious values and beliefs on the shaping of human behaviour within society.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed growing interest among a number of Western thinkers in the role of religion in the construction of the social order and the production of values, with the emergence of theoretical trends that sought to explain the development of human societies from a constructivist and developmental sociological perspective, focusing on the relationship between religion and social and psychological behaviour. These efforts contributed to the development of theoretical approaches concerned with studying the interaction between the religious dimension and psychological and social phenomena, which subsequently gave rise to what is known as the problem of the relationship between the sociology of religion and human behaviour.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyse the concept of the sociology of religion, elucidate its significance and objectives, and trace its development in understanding human phenomena, whilst highlighting its relationship with religious practices and its impact on the interpretation of psychological and social behaviour. It also seeks to establish a balanced scientific approach to addressing social issues with a religious dimension, and to highlight religion's capacity to contribute to the understanding of social problems linked to psychological phenomena, free from ideological exploitation or the provocation of intellectual conflicts.

### **The Problem:**

Despite the significant progress made by the social sciences in studying societies from economic, political and cultural perspectives, and the resulting accumulation of important theoretical and methodological insights, interest in the religious and psychological dimensions has remained relatively limited in some sociological approaches. This may be attributed to methodological caution or epistemological apprehension regarding the inclusion of religion as an explanatory variable in the analysis of social phenomena. This situation has led to ongoing academic debates regarding the nature of the sociology of religion and the limits of its explanatory power in studying the relationship between religion and human behaviour. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to address the following question: **How does the sociology of religion contribute to explaining the psychological and social behaviour of the individual within society?**

### **Research Questions:**

This study is based on a central question: How does the sociology of religion contribute to explaining the psychological and social behaviour of the individual within society? A number of sub-questions stem from this main question:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between religion and psychological and social behaviour in the light of the socio-religious approach?
2. How do religious values and norms contribute to shaping social responsibility and regulating individual and collective behaviour?
3. To what extent can the sociology of religion provide a scientific explanation for psychological phenomena with a social dimension?
4. What are the implications of the decline in religious motivation for psychological balance and social cohesion within society?

**02. Significance of the study:** This study derives its significance from its aim to highlight the explanatory contributions of the sociology of religion to our understanding of human behaviour, by:

1. Clarifying the analytical role of the sociology of religion in explaining the interaction between the psychological, social and religious dimensions of human behaviour.
2. Highlighting the importance of religious values as an effective mechanism for achieving social control and promoting psychological and social balance.
3. Contributing to the development of a socio-religious approach that aids in understanding psychological phenomena within their social and cultural context, moving away from reductionist interpretations.
4. To transform abstract religious concepts into analytical indicators that can be utilised in the study of social behaviour and the promotion of social cohesion.

**03. Objectives of the study:** This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse the interpretative contributions made by the sociology of religion to the understanding of psychological and social behaviour.

2. To elucidate the role of religion as a system of values and norms in interpreting and regulating psychological and social phenomena.
3. To highlight the importance of the socio-religious approach in addressing social issues with a psychological dimension in a balanced, scientific manner.
4. To reveal the impact of religious values on promoting psychological balance and social cohesion in the context of social change.

#### 04- Research Methodology:

This study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach as a suitable methodological framework for studying social and psychological phenomena in their real-world context, by describing them and analysing their various dimensions, whilst identifying the relationships between them. A comparative approach was also employed in certain aspects, with the aim of highlighting similarities and differences in the interpretation of psychological and social phenomena in light of the religious variable, thereby enhancing an integrated understanding of the subject matter.

#### 05- The Concept of the Sociology of Religion:

**The sociology of religion** is a specialised branch of sociology concerned with the study of religion as a social phenomenon, through the analysis of the beliefs, practices and organisational structures associated with it within society (Durkheim, 1912/1995, pp. 44–47). This field relies on a range of methodological tools, both quantitative (such as questionnaires, opinion polls, and statistical and demographic analysis) and qualitative (such as participant observation, interviews, and analysis of historical documents), to understand how religious phenomena are formed and interact with social structures. (Bryman, 2016, pp. 21–39).

**Religious sociology** is also defined as the discipline that studies religious institutions (places of worship and rituals) from a social perspective, focusing on the processes and interactions taking place within them, as well as analysing the social roots of religious phenomena and demonstrating their impact on the formation and development of social structures (Weber, 1905/2002, pp. 79–92).

In this context, some researchers point out that religion is understood not merely as a system of beliefs, but as an integrated social system that contributes to the production of values and norms which guide individual and collective behaviour, and influence the dynamics of social cohesion and stability (Berger, 1967, pp. 29–51).

The sociological approach to religion is an integral part of research efforts aimed at understanding religious phenomena and the specific social contexts surrounding them. Early philosophical studies provided a foundational approach to analysing the relationship between religion and society, before the sociology of religion emerged as an independent field seeking to interpret this relationship through systematic scientific approaches. Despite the multitude and diversity of theoretical approaches to the interpretation of religion, the latter has continued to be viewed as the bearer of a system of lofty values reflecting the highest human aspirations. Religious values are not limited to their abstract normative dimension, but go beyond this to perform social and ethical functions that contribute to the consolidation of the principles of tolerance, coexistence and solidarity among individuals and groups. From this perspective, it is difficult to separate religion from the construction of the social system, given its active role in guiding behaviour and regulating social relations, as well as its contribution to achieving stability and balance within society, which makes it a fundamental element in understanding the dynamics of social change. (Al-Khashab, 1981, p. 27).

#### 06. The Sociology of Religion: Development, Objectives, and Significance

##### 1.6. The Development of the Sociology of Religion

The emergence of sociology in general, and the sociology of religion in particular, is closely linked to the history of philosophical thought, as social philosophy formed the primary framework for understanding social phenomena before sociology became an independent field of knowledge in its own right. As social life developed and its structure became more complex, sociology was able to achieve relative independence by developing its analytical tools and research methodologies, whilst maintaining overlapping and complementary relationships with philosophy and other social sciences.

In this context, social phenomena, including religious phenomena, cannot be understood without relying on theoretical and philosophical frameworks that help to abstract, analyse and link them to their historical and social contexts. Furthermore, social philosophy that is detached from reality loses its explanatory power and becomes mere theoretical speculation that is difficult to test scientifically. Social transformations have contributed to the expansion of the fields of sociology, which has branched out into multiple specialisations, including the sociology of religion, which focuses on the study of religion as a fundamental element of social structure. The earliest roots of this approach can be traced back to the contributions of Ibn Khaldun, who laid the foundations for the analysis of human civilisation, regarding it as a science in its own right with its own subject matter and questions (Ibn Khaldun, 1987, p. 234).

From this perspective, religion is viewed as a pivotal component in shaping social reality, representing a system of values and norms to which individuals turn to interpret their situations and deal with the challenges they face. Consequently, religious realities are inseparable from social and psychological realities; rather, they interact with them within a dynamic framework that helps to guide human behaviour. Therefore, the function of religion cannot be reduced to ritual practices alone, but extends to encompass various spheres of social life, including cultural, political and economic dimensions.

**2.6. The Objectives of the Sociology of Religion :** The sociology of religion seeks to achieve a range of academic objectives, the most notable of which are:

1. Studying religion as a social phenomenon, analysing its intellectual and doctrinal dimensions and its relationship with social structure.
2. Explaining the relationship between religious phenomena and human behaviour, particularly in its psychological and social dimensions.
3. Analysing the interactions between religion and other social spheres, such as the economy, politics and culture.
4. Identifying the social laws and patterns that govern the development of societies in the light of religious values and norms.
5. Comparing different religious systems and values, and understanding their influence on the formation of customs, traditions and social behaviour.

In this context, the sociology of religion emerges as an analytical tool that helps to link religious phenomena with various social dimensions, thereby contributing to a comprehensive scientific explanation of human behaviour within society (Lash, 1996, p. 22).

**3.6. The importance of the sociology of religion:** The importance of the sociology of religion is evident in the following:

1. Analysing religious phenomena as social practices and understanding their manifestations in individual and collective behaviour.
2. Interpreting the interactive relationship between religion and society, and highlighting the role of religious values in guiding behaviour and strengthening social cohesion.

3. Studying interactions within religious institutions, including manifestations of cooperation or conflict within their social context.
4. Providing a balanced scientific approach to interpreting the psychological and social phenomena associated with religion, free from normative judgements.
5. To promote scientific objectivity in the study of religion, whilst highlighting the integration of the sociology of religion with the rest of the social sciences.

#### **4.6. Approaches in the sociology of religion:**

In the study of religious phenomena, the sociology of religion relies on a range of scientific approaches that enable the analysis of the relationship between religion and social structure, and an understanding of patterns of religiosity and their development over time (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 17).

Among the most prominent of these approaches are:

##### **1. The historical approach:**

This approach focuses on studying the development of religious phenomena over time, analysing the relationship between social transformations and characteristics of religiosity, as well as tracing the development of religious groups and their theories. This approach is fundamental to understanding the historical roots of religious phenomena and their evolution across different periods.

##### **2. The sociological approach:**

This approach is used to study patterns of religiosity within society by analysing ritual practices, religious affiliations and doctrinal orientations, thereby revealing the relationship between religious characteristics and social trends and interpreting them within their social context.

##### **3. The comparative approach:**

This aims to compare religious phenomena across different societies and cultures in order to reveal similarities and differences in patterns of religiosity. Max Weber employed it in his studies on the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism, by comparing religious and economic contexts across multiple societies. Despite the methodological difficulties faced by this approach, it remains an important tool for understanding religious and cultural diversity.

##### **4. The statistical approach:**

The statistical approach is one of the fundamental tools in the social sciences, as it contributes to the measurement and analysis of social and religious phenomena in a quantitative manner. This approach has evolved alongside the development of the social sciences and mathematics, and its use was particularly evident in Émile Durkheim's studies on the phenomenon of suicide, where it helped to transform social phenomena into data that could be measured and analysed. It has also contributed to the development of modern sociological research in various social, political and economic fields.

##### **5. The empirical approach:**

This is used to study the relationship between religious and social variables using a rigorous scientific approach; however, its application in the religious sphere faces methodological constraints, given the difficulty of subjecting religious beliefs to experimentation or controlling them within experimental and controlled groups in the strict sense.

#### **07. The Social and Religious Phenomenon: Concept and Stages**

##### **1.7. Social and Religious Phenomena in Contemporary Thought**

Émile Durkheim defines the social phenomenon as: 'any mode of action, whether constant or variable, which exerts a form of external coercion upon individuals, or general patterns of behaviour existing in society and possessing an existence independent of their individual manifestations' (Durkheim, 1995, p. 52).

Based on this conception, religion is viewed primarily as a social phenomenon, as its role is clearly evident during periods of social crisis, when society seeks to produce collective solutions and interpretations that take on a sacred character and become guiding references for social behaviour. In this context, Durkheim distinguishes between the social phenomenon and the religious phenomenon, arguing that religion consists of a system of beliefs and practices adopted by a particular social group, used to regulate individual and collective behaviour, encompassing social, political and cultural dimensions, whilst acknowledging the existence of supernatural beings or forces that lend this system its symbolic character.

Durkheim points out that defining the religious phenomenon is one of the most complex tasks in sociology, given the multitude of religious forms, the diversity of religious practices and their variation from one society to another, as well as the pervasiveness of religion across various spheres of social and intellectual life. (Durkheim, 1912/1995, pp. 50–59)

From this perspective, the study of the religious phenomenon in contemporary sociological thought has received widespread attention, both in the Western context and in Arab studies, as it is linked to the historical and cultural development of societies and to the social changes that influence patterns of religiosity. (Turner, 1991, pp. 45–67).

Nevertheless, the study of the sociology of religion in some Arab contexts continues to face theoretical and methodological challenges, particularly regarding its relationship with the philosophy of religion and contemporary ideological trends. Therefore, analysing the religious phenomenon requires a flexible sociological approach that takes into account the specificity of religion as a social phenomenon with symbolic and normative dimensions.

From a sociological perspective, religion is not reduced to its metaphysical dimension alone, but is also understood as a daily social practice manifested in the behaviour of individuals within society. Furthermore, the multiplicity of religious interpretations of texts makes the religious phenomenon a dynamic structure open to historical and social interpretation, rather than a fixed, closed system (Berger, 1967, pp. 3–28).

## **2.7. Stages of the religious phenomenon:**

The study of the religious phenomenon is based on the fundamental premise that it has not been studied systematically in a single go, but has gone through several historical and intellectual stages, through which sociological approaches to understanding religion as a social phenomenon have taken shape. These stages can be identified as three main phases, each characterised by specific epistemological and methodological features.

### **1.2.7. The first stage: the descriptive and digressive stage**

This phase was characterised by the early, indirect study of religious phenomena, where religion was not an independent subject of study but was addressed within descriptions of the social life of different peoples. Early researchers focused on describing religious beliefs and practices within limited geographical areas, without conducting an in-depth analysis of their structure or social functions (Hassan, 2001, p. 432).

With the development of travel and geographical exploration, alongside the expansion of commercial and political ties between societies, researchers began to draw comparisons between religions and beliefs in different regions. However, this comparative approach was not always objective, as it was often influenced by value judgements and religious biases; some studies sought to favour the researcher's own religion as the most perfect model, thereby distancing them from rigorous scientific rigour. In this context, Al-Khashab notes that this approach led to a kind of

hierarchical classification of religions, whereby it was assumed that human societies had passed through similar stages of development in their religiosity, prompting researchers to rank religious phenomena according to degrees of ‘perfection’ and ‘development’ based on their preconceptions (Al-Khashab, 2005, p. 30).

This conception gave rise to an interpretative tendency that regarded primitive groups as having lived simple religious patterns, gradually evolving towards more complex forms, which made analysis at this stage closer to historical and classificatory description than to a scientific, structural analysis of the religious phenomenon (Ezzedine, 2011, p. 422).

### **2.2.7. The Second Phase: The Scientific and Interpretative Phase**

In the second phase, which emerged clearly during the 1930s, researchers moved towards adopting a scientific approach to the study of religious beliefs, moving away from speculative or interpretative explanations. Attention in this phase focused on analysing how religious systems influence social structure, particularly in shaping human relationships and patterns of social interaction (Hassan, 2001, p. 423).

In this context, Abu Zayd notes that some anthropologists turned to the study of traditional societies, or what are known as primitive societies, with the aim of understanding how these societies perceive the world and the universe, and how they interpret the phenomena surrounding them, given that these perceptions represent symbolic patterns in the search for the unknown and the attempt to explain the mysteries of existence (Abu Zayd, 2001, p. 45).

With this methodological development, a specialised branch of science emerged: the sociology of religion, which focuses on the study of religious phenomena and systems in terms of their origins and social functions, and the analysis of their roles in organising social life and guiding individual and collective behaviour (Ja’far, 1988, p. 432).

This shift has contributed to the emergence of two main trends in contemporary thought:

- A positive interpretative trend that seeks to understand religion as an element of social construction, and attempts to reconcile religious values with the realities of social change.
- A critical trend that views religion as potentially playing a restrictive role in certain contexts, with some thinkers interpreting it as a tool for social control or a factor that limits human freedom in specific situations.

### **3.7. Religiosity:**

Religious inclination is a central concept in the study of religiosity, interpreted as an innate and social tendency that contributes to shaping human behaviour within society through the interaction of psychological, symbolic and cultural dimensions associated with religious institutions. This inclination can be analysed through three fundamental, interrelated pillars:

#### **1.3.7. Human nature**

The sociological approach to religion suggests that religiosity is a universal human phenomenon that has accompanied various human societies throughout history, as no human group has been without a belief system that explains the world and existence. From this perspective, religious inclination manifests itself as an extension of what is known as the ‘religious instinct’, that is, the inner predisposition of human beings to seek meaning in the universe and existence. Émile Durkheim noted that religion is not merely an individual belief, but rather an expression of a profound social reality that reflects the group’s self-awareness. (Durkheim, 1912/1995, pp 208–215).

In the Islamic context, Qur’anic texts support this view by emphasising the innate dimension of religiosity, as in the words of God: **{The natural disposition with which Allah has endowed**

mankind } (Ar-Rum: 30), from which it is understood that the inclination towards faith is part of the human constitution, reinforced through socialisation and cultural experience.

### **2.3.7. The Awakening of Conscience and Consciousness**

Religiousness is also linked to the development of moral conscience and collective consciousness, as anthropological studies show that various societies, whether primitive or advanced, have known forms of belief in supernatural forces. In this context, some researchers view religiosity as one of the fundamental pillars that have contributed to the organisation of social life, by reinforcing moral commitment and guiding individual behaviour in accordance with collective standards. Furthermore, the development of religious conscience is linked to processes of socialisation that transform religious values into practical behaviours amenable to social practice and control.

### **3.3.7. The Power of Religious Belief**

In the sociology of religion, religiosity is interpreted as a force that regulates behaviour, serving to control individual impulses and direct them towards shared moral and social standards. The deeper an individual's religious awareness, the greater their ability to control their desires and strike a balance between the individual and the collective.

Arthur Schopenhauer noted that human behaviour is governed by desires and interests, which makes a value system essential for the organisation of social life. From this perspective, religion is viewed as a normative framework that helps to regulate behaviour and direct it towards social stability. It is clear from this analysis that religiosity is not merely a spiritual phenomenon, but rather a complex social and psychological structure that contributes to creating a balance between the individual and society, and plays a fundamental role in regulating behaviour and strengthening social cohesion within various social structures.

### **4.3.7. Religiosity as a social phenomenon:**

Religiousness is one of the ancient social phenomena that has accompanied human societies since their inception, with a number of researchers noting that the need for a religious interpretation of existence is considered a universal human trait. In this context, Muhammad Abdu argues that human beings, regardless of the level of their consciousness or the extent of their cognitive abilities, remain aware of the existence of a higher power that governs the workings of the universe, prompting them to seek this power through reason, the senses, or spiritual experience (Abdu, 1980, p. 62). Based on this conception, the most prominent features of the religious phenomenon can be identified as follows:

#### **Firstly: The universal nature of religiosity:**

The religious phenomenon is a universal human phenomenon, shared by various human societies throughout history, regardless of their cultural differences or levels of social development.

#### **Second: The cognitive dimension of the religious phenomenon:**

Religiousness stems from a human sense of the existence of a power transcending nature, through which human groups interpret cosmic and social phenomena and attribute to it the meaning of existence and order in the world.

#### **Thirdly: The need for a higher epistemological authority:**

Some intellectual approaches hold that the human mind, despite its capabilities, requires a supreme epistemological authority (revelation or a transcendent conception) to unify knowledge and direct it towards a shared value system that ensures intellectual and social stability.

#### **Fourthly: The behavioural dimension of religiosity:**

Religiousness is also manifested as a daily practice and social behaviour, requiring the individual to adhere to religious values and perform rituals in accordance with an inner conviction, thereby reinforcing the balance between the individual and society.

**Fifth: The missionary dimension of religiosity:**

Religious conceptions emphasise that religiosity is not limited to the individual dimension, but is also embodied in the sending of prophets and messages aimed at guiding humanity towards moral and normative values and organising social life.

**5.3.7. Interpretative Approaches to the Phenomenon of Religion**

Historians of religion have differed in their interpretation of the origin of religiosity, falling into two main schools of thought: (Al-Hashimi, 1963, p. 21).

- **The evolutionary approach:** This view holds that religion began in simple forms (superstition and polytheism), then gradually evolved towards monotheism and perfection through the development of human societies.
- **The Innate Approach:** This view holds that belief in monotheism represents the primary origin of religion, and that polytheism emerged as a subsequent deviation from this innate origin, a view supported by some studies in anthropology and the psychology of religion.

It is clear from these approaches that religiosity is not merely an individual or doctrinal phenomenon, but rather a complex socio-psychological structure in which nature and culture, and meaning and social organisation, intertwine, making it a fundamental element in understanding human behaviour within society.

**4.7. Religious and moral imperatives and the interpretation of psychological and social behaviour**

Religious and moral motivation is considered one of the fundamental components in the construction of value systems within societies, where this system varies from one society to another depending on its cultural and social structure, and the beliefs, rituals and patterns of moral organisation it encompasses, which differ in their forms and practices. In this context, a number of researchers in the sociology of religion point out that religiosity represents a pivotal element in the regulation of human behaviour at both the individual and collective levels.

From a sociological perspective, religion is not viewed merely as a ritualistic practice, but rather as a comprehensive social system that permeates various spheres of daily life, including the family, work and social relations, making it one of the mechanisms of socialisation and the production of behavioural norms.

Religious and moral scruples also contribute to guiding individual behaviour by promoting self-discipline and reinforcing a system of values that defines what is socially acceptable and what is not, which in turn contributes to the individual's psychological well-being and strengthens their integration within the community. In the same context, religiosity is viewed as a mechanism for regulating behaviour before deviance occurs, as it works to shape an inner awareness within the individual that performs the function of self-monitoring, or what is known as the moral conscience, which makes human behaviour subject to an interaction between internal values and social norms. Al-Ghazali noted that faith represents a force that guides human behaviour, contributing to the refinement and regulation of impulses, as a living moral energy that influences both the individual and society (Al-Ghazali, 1987, p. 28).

From this perspective, religion emerges as a factor explaining social and psychological behaviour, through its ability to influence the system of values and internal controls, thereby

contributing to an understanding of patterns of deviance or compliance within society within an interactive framework between social structure and individual consciousness.

### **08. The development of religiosity in the light of the socio-religious approach**

Some anthropological and sociological approaches suggest that the development of religious phenomena in human societies can be understood within a historical progression linked to the development of human consciousness and symbolic thought structures. It is posited that religious practice has passed through multiple stages, beginning with primitive forms of veneration associated with elements of nature, before later crystallising into symbolic systems and organised rituals that reflect human conceptions of the world and the universe.

In this context, it is noted that the shift from a naturalistic interpretation of phenomena to a symbolic and religious one reflects an evolution in human consciousness, as societies moved from simple interpretative patterns to more complex belief systems linked to the idea of a god or transcendent power that governs the universe.

Furthermore, some comparative religious approaches suggest that the divine messages represent a historical continuum in the development of religious consciousness, being viewed as an integrated system of values and meanings aimed at unifying religious conceptions and organising social life according to a comprehensive ethical and normative framework.

In this context, Islamic literature cites the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ comparison of the structure of the religious message to a complete building that is finished with the placement of a final 'brick', referring to the completion of the prophetic system and the conclusion of prophethood (Al-Asqalani, 1213 AH, p. 1271).

The Qur'anic text further reinforces this meaning by pointing to the completeness of the religious system in Islam, as a definitive system of values and legislation from the perspective of Islamic doctrine, as in the words of Allah: **“This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you”** (Al-Ma'idah: 3), and His words: **“But the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets”** (Al-Ahzab: 40).

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the significance of this development lies not only in its doctrinal dimension, but also in the fact that it reflects the function of religion in regulating human behaviour and guiding it within a value system that contributes to social cohesion and the production of meaning within society.

### **1.8. The concept of psychological and social behaviour:**

Psychological and social behaviour refers to the pattern of responses and interactions that an individual exhibits in the context of their interaction with themselves on the one hand, and with their social environment on the other, where internal psychological drives intersect with external social determinants in shaping human action. In this context, behaviour is not reduced to a mere mechanical response to stimuli, but is rather a complex product of mental and emotional processes (such as perception, thinking, attitudes and motivations), which interact with the social, cultural and religious values and norms that govern society.

From this perspective, psychological and social behaviour represents a point of convergence between the individual's psychological structure and the social structure to which they belong, with such behaviour being largely determined by the prevailing value system, foremost among which are religious values that play a regulatory and guiding role in behaviour within the community. Consequently, understanding human behaviour within the socio-dynamic approach requires integrating the psychological, social and religious dimensions into a single, comprehensive analysis,

thereby allowing for a deeper interpretation of behavioural dynamics within society, moving away from a purely psychological or social reductionism.

### **2.8. Psychological phenomena in the light of the socio-religious approach**

Psychological phenomena are considered fundamental entry points in the study of human behaviour, as some schools of psychology view religion as a psychological state linked to the individual's internal structure. However, this proposition has faced significant sociological criticism, as reducing religion to a mere psychological reflection constitutes a simplification that undermines its complex nature, since it ignores the social, cultural and symbolic dimensions of the religious phenomenon (Abdulaziz, 1999, p. 275).

In this context, the psychology of religion is defined as a field concerned with the study of religious experiences and the associated psychological and behavioural states, such as motivations, instincts and emotions; it also seeks to understand how religious behaviour is shaped within the human personality through its interaction with the social and cultural environment. This field is also concerned with the study of religious experience as a subjective experience lived by the individual, manifested in contemplation, reflection and existential meaning, whilst analysing the impact of these experiences on psychological and social well-being, and on the formation of patterns of individual behaviour within society. Certain behavioural psychological approaches, such as the work of Julian Rotter, have contributed to the interpretation of human behaviour through the concept of cognitive expectations and social reinforcement (Rotter, 1954, p. 34).

From a religious perspective, religious texts point to the psychological–spiritual dimension of the human being, where the psyche is viewed as a realm of balance between conflicting drives, making religious values an important element in achieving psychological stability and reducing feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Furthermore, some sociological studies highlight that belief in religious values contributes to enhancing a sense of psychological and social security by providing an interpretative framework for existence and regulating the individual's relationship with themselves and others, thereby promoting social adaptation and reducing behavioural disorders.

In this context, the relationship between religion and psychological phenomena can be understood as a complementary one, whereby religion helps to guide psychological behaviour through mechanisms of internal regulation (conscience) and restores the balance between the individual and society within an organised value system, a view confirmed by the contemporary sociological approach to the analysis of religious behaviour.

### **3.8. Psychological phenomena and human behaviour in the socio-religious approach**

In sociological and psychological studies, psychological phenomena are understood as a complex field encompassing observable behaviour (objective behaviour), as well as internal processes that cannot be directly perceived, such as thought, emotions, and the sensation of pain or pleasure. This phenomenon also encompasses a range of psychological components such as motives, attitudes, and mental representations that contribute to guiding human behaviour within a social context.

In this context, the psychology of religion is defined as the field that studies human behaviour as a living being interacting with its social environment, where it is influenced by it and influences it at the same time, through interactions that encompass the cognitive, emotional and motor aspects evident in an individual's daily behaviour.

Julian Rotter presented an important explanatory model of human behaviour through his theory of 'locus of control', in which he distinguished between two patterns of psychological orientation in individuals: . (Julian Rotter, 1972, p 14).

- **Internal Locus of Control:** where the individual attributes their success or failure to their personal efforts and intrinsic ability, accompanied by a strong sense of individual and social responsibility.
- **External Locus of Control:** where the individual believes that the outcomes of their actions are controlled by external factors such as luck, fate or surrounding circumstances, thereby reducing their sense of personal responsibility.

It follows from this perspective that the interpretation of human behaviour cannot be separated from the social and cultural structure within which the individual lives, as psychological factors interact with social experience in shaping patterns of behaviour and response.

In the context of sociological analysis, a number of key variables can be identified that contribute to the interpretation of psychological and social behaviour, the most notable of which are:

- 1. Behavioural Energy:** This refers to the totality of observable and measurable behavioural responses—whether motor, verbal or emotional—which reflect the individual’s interaction with various social situations.
- 2. Expectancy:** This refers to an individual’s mental expectations regarding the outcomes of their behaviour, i.e. their perception of the likelihood of achieving satisfaction or avoiding punishment based on their previous experiences within society.
- 3. Reinforcement Value:** This refers to the value an individual assigns to the consequences of their behaviour, whether positive (reinforcement) or negative (punishment), which influences their future choices.
- 4. Psychological Situation:** This reflects an individual’s interaction with their internal and external environment, including their value system, attitudes, and religious beliefs, which are fundamental to shaping their behaviour within society. It is clear from this analysis that psychological behaviour cannot be separated from the social and religious context; rather, it is the product of a complex interaction between internal motivations and the social structure. This is confirmed by the socio-dynamic approach in the sociology of religion, which holds that religious values play an organisational and interpretative role in shaping and regulating human behaviour within society.

#### **4.8. Classification of psychological phenomena in the light of the socio-dynamic approach**

Psychological phenomena can be viewed as a complex structure comprising two complementary levels of human behaviour, in which the internal dimension interacts with the external dimension in shaping human action within society.

##### **1.4.8. External psychological phenomena (overt behaviour)**

These consist of various observable and measurable activities and behaviours, such as physical movements, verbal expressions, gestures, and patterns of social interaction such as walking, speaking, laughing, playing, and so on. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, this type of behaviour is not understood merely as individual actions, but is analysed within the context of the religious and social values and norms that govern and guide it, whereby the religious system contributes to defining its moral implications and functions within society in accordance with the aims of social organisation and value-based legislation.

##### **2.4.8. Internal psychological phenomena (inner behaviour)**

These include psychological processes that cannot be directly observed, such as thinking, imagination, the sensation of pain or pleasure, and internal emotions that take shape within the individual’s consciousness. Some studies suggest that these phenomena are an expression of the

‘inner feeling’ that guides the individual’s perception of the world around them (Mohammed, 1980, p. 166).

Some researchers have distinguished between these two levels of phenomena, considering internal phenomena to belong to the psychological realm, whilst classifying external phenomena within the observable physical realm. However, recent trends in psychology and sociology emphasise that this distinction is not absolute, as human behaviour is an integrated whole in which psychological, physical and social dimensions overlap. This integration is clearly evident in emotional states, where psychological responses manifest themselves in physical and biological forms such as increased heart rate, breathing disturbances and physiological changes; these are known as emotional reactions, which reflect the close relationship between psychological structure and physical behaviour (Al-Ta’i, 1958, p. 19).

It is clear that psychological phenomena cannot be reduced to a single dimension; rather, they constitute an interactive system that brings together the internal and the external, and the individual and the social. From this perspective, the sociology of religion contributes to reinterpreting psychological behaviour as the product of a complex interaction between an individual’s psychological structure and the value and religious system to which they belong within society.

### **5.8. Psychological health phenomena in the light of the socio-religious approach**

The relationship between religion and mental health is considered one of the most problematic issues in psychological and social studies, with some analytical trends in clinical psychiatry linking religiosity to certain mental disorders. In this context, Sigmund Freud regarded religion as an extension of collective compulsive psychological states, similar to obsessive-compulsive disorder, and argued that religious beliefs do not result from cumulative rational experience, but are linked to the satisfaction of deep-rooted psychological desires (Freud, 2004, p. 45).

Similarly, some contemporary behavioural approaches, such as the theories of Albert Ellis, have regarded certain forms of religiosity associated with irrational thinking as a source of emotional distress, noting that reduced religiosity may be linked to higher levels of emotional stability in some individuals (Ellis, n.d., p. 43).

However, these views have faced significant sociological and psychological criticism, as many recent studies confirm that the relationship between religion and mental health is not necessarily negative; rather, it may be a positive functional relationship in many social contexts. Religiosity contributes to enhancing psychological cohesion, alleviating social pressures, and imparting meaning to the human experience, thereby helping the individual to adapt to life’s circumstances. In this context, researchers distinguish between two types of religiosity in terms of their psychological and behavioural impact:

**1. Intrinsic Religiosity:** This is a form of religiosity based on a deep inner commitment to religious values, whereby religion becomes part of the structure of consciousness and behaviour, guiding an individual’s life according to a stable moral system, free from external social influences. This pattern contributes to the promotion of self-discipline, emotional stability, and the reinforcement of moral behaviour.

**2. Extrinsic Religiosity:** This is a functional form of religiosity in which religion is used as a tool to achieve social or self-serving goals, such as gaining social status, protection, or self-justification, without a genuine internal commitment to religious values. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, mental health is understood not merely as the absence of disorder, but as a state of balance between psychological drives and social behaviour, wherein the individual interacts with their

environment through a system of attitudes, beliefs and values that shape their daily behaviour. Sociological approaches also suggest that interpreting human behaviour requires an understanding of the interaction between internal factors (motives, attitudes, psychological experiences) and external factors (social structure, values, institutions), with the social and religious environment playing a significant role in shaping patterns of adaptation and behaviour within society.

It is clear that the relationship between religion and mental health is a complex one that cannot be reduced to a single dimension; whilst religiosity may play a protective and adaptive role that promotes psychological and social stability, in some contexts it may become a mere formality that does not reflect an inner commitment. Consequently, the socio-religious approach offers a balanced interpretative framework for understanding this phenomenon within the context of the interaction between religion and the individual's psychological and social structure.

### **09. Religiosity and approaches to psychological and social behaviour:**

Numerous sociological and psychological studies point to a correlation between religiosity and certain positive personality traits, whereby religious commitment contributes to fostering a sense of individual responsibility, both internally and in relation to society. In this context, psychological and social behaviour is understood as the sum of internal responses (emotions, motivations, attitudes, and perceptions) and external responses (actions, interactions, and communication patterns) that an individual exhibits in their interaction with their social environment; it thus forms a link between the individual's psychological structure and the social structure to which they belong.

In light of this concept, it is observed that individuals with deep religious commitment are often characterised by a high level of self-control, adherence to moral values, and consistency between words and deeds, in addition to a greater sense of psychological stability and the ability to adapt socially. From this perspective, religiosity can be understood as a regulating factor for psychological and social behaviour, as it contributes to supporting emotional balance, enhancing the ability to control impulses, and reducing disruptive or socially unbalanced behaviours. Conversely, some behavioural approaches suggest that a weak commitment to religious values may be associated with an increased likelihood of impulsive behaviour or social instability, in the absence of a regulatory value framework for behaviour. (Kenneth I. Pargament, 1997, p. 39).

#### **1.9. Psychological Dispositions and Their Role in Explaining Behaviour**

Psychological attitudes are fundamental concepts in the analysis of human behaviour; they are defined as a state of acquired mental and neurological readiness that influences an individual's responses to various situations. They have been described as the sum of an individual's responses to specific social issues, whether in support or opposition (Rotter, 1954, p. 55), and have also been defined as an acquired disposition that directs behaviour towards specific subjects in a relatively consistent manner (Al-Ashoul, 1999, p. 85).

In the same context, Gordon Allport views psychological attitudes as a psychoneurological state characterised by relative stability, yet capable of changing over time due to the continuous interaction between the individual and their social and cultural environment. Louis Leon Thurstone also noted that an attitude reflects the degree of positive or negative feeling towards a particular subject, which influences the formation of an individual's social behaviour (Maase, 1948, p. 106).

#### **2.9. Religion between behavioural stability and psychological change**

Behavioural approaches suggest that psychological attitudes are characterised by a degree of relative stability, but are not absolutely fixed, as they can change through experience, social interaction and emotions. In this context, sociological analysis distinguishes between an orientation—

defined as a relatively stable cognitive-emotional structure—and an emotion—defined as a temporary and rapidly changing state. Furthermore, dispositions do not always translate directly into overt behaviour, as social pressures and cultural norms may inhibit the explicit expression of an individual's true attitudes. Consequently, overt behaviour does not always accurately reflect the internal dispositional structure, but is influenced by multiple social contexts. (David Myers, 2010., p. 33).

It appears that religiosity is not understood merely as ritual practice, but as a psycho-social mechanism that contributes to the regulation of individual attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, the relationship between religiosity and mental health is mediated by 'psychological dispositions', which act as a link between an individual's internal structure and the social context in which they live. Consequently, the socio-psychological approach offers an integrative explanation that links religion, psychological structure and social behaviour within a single framework. It is clear from the above that religiosity is not understood merely as ritual practice, but as a psycho-social mechanism that contributes to the regulation of individual attitudes and behaviours, and promotes a balance between internal drives and social constraints. Furthermore, the relationship between religiosity and mental health is mediated by 'psychological dispositions', which act as a link between an individual's internal structure and the social context in which they live.

In this context, psychological and social behaviour can be defined as a set of complex responses and interactions that arise from the individual as a result of the interaction between internal psychological factors (such as motives, emotions and attitudes) and external social factors (such as values, norms, and social and religious institutions). Thus, this behaviour is not an isolated individual act, but rather a dynamic product of the interplay between the psychological structure and the social and cultural structure to which the individual belongs. Hence, the socio-psychological approach in the sociology of religion offers an integrative explanation of human behaviour by linking religion to psychological and social structures within a single analytical framework, allowing for a deeper understanding of how human behaviour is shaped and guided within society, moving away from reductive, one-dimensional explanations.

#### **10. Conclusion:**

This study has concluded that the sociology of religion constitutes an important analytical framework for understanding and interpreting human psychological and social behaviour, by linking religious value structures on the one hand, and psychological and social phenomena on the other. It has become evident that religion, through its value and legislative systems, is not limited to ritual practice, but performs regulatory and guiding functions that contribute to regulating human behaviour, promoting psychological balance, and strengthening social cohesion.

The study also highlighted that religious phenomena, whether in their internal dimension linked to beliefs and consciousness, or in their external dimension manifested in behaviour and practices, represent a fertile ground for interpreting numerous psychological and social phenomena, which reflects the integrative role of the sociology of religion in analysing the relationship between the individual and society within a comprehensive cultural and value-based context. Consequently, understanding religion within a socio-psychological framework contributes to a deeper understanding of human behaviour as the product of a complex interaction between psychological, social, and religious factors.

It can therefore be argued that the socio-religious approach represents an important epistemological gateway to understanding human behaviour in its multiple dimensions, as it

combines value-based and scientific interpretations of social and psychological phenomena, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive and balanced view of social reality.

**Recommendations:** In light of the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. The establishment of research centres specialising in the sociology of religion to study contemporary social and religious transformations and their relationship with psychological and social phenomena.
2. Renewing religious and social discourse to keep pace with contemporary cultural transformations, whilst preserving authentic value-based references.
3. Incorporating the sociology of religion into university curricula as a field of study that bridges the social sciences and religious studies, thereby enhancing the scientific understanding of human behaviour.
4. Encouraging field studies that address the relationship between religiosity, mental health and social behaviour in various societal contexts.

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