

The Secret of a Long-Lived Religion: From Social Comfort to the Pursuit of Truth

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Abstract. Religion has played an important role throughout human history by providing meaning, hope, emotional comfort, and a sense of belonging, while also contributing to social order and cooperation. In earlier societies, religious beliefs about the afterlife and divine rewards helped people cope with poverty, disease, and uncertainty. However, modern science, technology, and improved living conditions have reduced the influence of many traditional religious ideas. This study explores the factors that enable religions to survive and remain relevant across generations. Adopting an interdisciplinary literature-based approach that draws on sociology, psychology, philosophy, and religious studies, the paper examines the historical functions of religion, the challenges posed by modernization and secularization, and the ways religion adapts to social change. The main research question is how religions can continue to be passed on across generations while adjusting to modern society. The study argues that the long-term survival of religion depends on its ability to move beyond material promises and focus instead on deeper questions about meaning, morality, truth, and human existence. In this way, religion can remain valuable in an increasingly modern and secular world.

Keywords: Religion, Modernity, Social Stability, Meaning, Truth-Seeking

1. Introduction

Historically, major religions have historically served as important systems of social organization, psychological support, and moral guidance. In eras where human life was defined by the struggle for basic survival, religious institutions provided a necessary "outer shell" of hope through material-like descriptions of a "world after death" [1, 2]. These narratives acted as a vital form of spiritual guidance and social control, offering comfort to those facing physical hardship [3]. However, as modern society achieves unprecedented material progress, these traditional promises can often feel empty or hollow to the contemporary mind [4]. This research explores the "secret" behind the longevity of world-spanning religions: their ability to evolve beyond these outdated material shells.

The central theme of this study is how successful religions balance their functional role in social management with the innate human drive to discover the fundamental truth of the world. The paper addresses the critical question: how do these faiths maintain their transmission over centuries while adapting their core logic to a modern context? This research argues that the survival of a religion depends on its capacity to transition from "material promises" to "truth-seeking revelations." By

redefining faith not as a rigid set of ancient rules but as an underlying logic for understanding reality, religions can reconnect with the modern pursuit of truth. Understanding this layered transition is essential to explaining why certain belief systems endure while others fade away. This study uses books, journal articles, and previous research to examine the history of religion, the challenges it faces today, and the reasons why it continues to survive.

2. The historical foundation: religion as a tool for social management

Religion has fulfilled a wide variety of functions throughout history. Many individuals have found comfort, answers to life's great questions, and a sense of belonging through religion. Religion has also traditionally provided structure and guidance for society, from early forms of governance and laws to disciplines of group behavior. Although this paper does not argue that religion is always a means of control, it does weave in how religion has helped manage large societies throughout history. One of the most important ways religion supported society was by providing hope and emotional comfort to people facing hardship. This psychological role is explored in the following section.

2.1. Psychological comfort and the promise of a materialized afterlife

Whether or not people believed in real physical death, many people faced constant threats to survival [5]. Famine, disease, short lives, and a lack of understanding of scientific principles or modern medicinal practices complicated life for centuries. In such a world, it was a natural impulse to search for some sort of comfort and guidance through religion.

When people suffer, they often seek to feel that they are sacrificing temporarily to gain value independently of material conditions. One important factor is the belief in the possibility of being rewarded for their spiritual behavior in the afterlife [6]. In other words, religious conviction that pain will be compensated in the future enables people to experience the hardships in a more bearable way.

The descriptions of the afterlife made in religious texts, including "streets of gold" in Revelation or "gardens under which rivers flow" in the Quran, were not ordinary symbolic stories. These images served as inspiration for those who endured hard living and dying conditions [7]. Additionally, hope served as an active factor that encouraged people to carry on with their lives despite the hardships. The rewards in the afterlife made abstract images real, thus assisting the inhabitants of poor and dangerous social environments to continue being optimistic [8].

Still, it is not accurate to reduce religion only to a psychological or social good. Many people find real meaning, identity and purpose through it. But there is no question that the religious status quo has for centuries been attributable to both religion's intentional actions and to it serving an evolutionary need – a stabilising purpose. Beyond providing psychological comfort to individuals, these beliefs also contributed to broader social stability by encouraging cooperation and acceptance of shared moral norms.

2.2. Establishing social stability through moral codes and fear

With the expansion of societies from small tribal units to large-scale agricultural civilizations came social challenges known as the "problem of scale" [9]. In small societies, social order was maintained through social connection and reciprocity, but in large social groups it is difficult to trust strangers [10]. Big Gods offer a solution to this problem because they entail the belief that a

supernatural force is watching everyone and punishing wrongdoing, providing order in large groups [11]. In Christianity, the omniscient judgment and punishment of God along with the concept of hell help manage immorality [12]. Furthermore, morality is reinforced through commandments even where law enforcement is absent. Similarly, in Buddhism the concept of karma functions to regulate morality. Karma is the idea that all actions lead to future consequences, creating an independent system of morality [13]. Buddhism's Five Precepts also help to maintain social order.

The truth is that when left to our own devices, human behavior is often regulated through external moral systems due to social incentives and limitations in monitoring. Religious traditions have often served as external moral authorities that encourage cooperation and discourage socially harmful behavior.

Religion also contributed to the development of shared moral systems, a shared religious and cultural morality. Moral codes serve to reduce conflict and social behavior predictability [14]. For society to run smoothly and provide the benefits of a social order, there is a need for transaction costs to be reduced.

Religions enabled societal organization with universal moral codes that appeared on the world stage. These helped to ensure a common social structure, or Ummah, for societies like Islam and ensured that societies like Judaism remained connected and cohesive even in diaspora [15, 16].

Fear as an abstraction also reinforced the idea of hope. Terror-inspiring words like Hell, karma, and Kareth, describing invisible or divine punishments, held us back from committing wrongs [17]. Islam, likewise, emphasized the inescapable justice of Allah through mentioning Jahannam while believing that a bad deed would be visited upon future generations [18].

Moreover, there was also religious support of rulers and kings. For example, in France, it was illegal to disobey the king because he represented God [19]. In India, rulers and kings exploited the dharma and karma status quo to enhance their political power [20]. Additionally, in the Aztec Empire, religion was promulgated to the public to secure political loyalty [21].

Religion played a prominent role in early societies, integrating spiritual, social, and political elements as an institutional framework.

3. The modern crisis: the failure of the "material shell"

3.1. How scientific progress and abundance render traditional narratives obsolete

One influential explanation for the decline of religious authority is Max Weber's concept of the "disenchantment of the world" (Entzauberung). In premodern societies, natural occurrences such as storms, disease, and drought were commonly interpreted as manifestations of divine or supernatural forces. However, the advent of the Scientific Revolution rendered such explanations to common natural occurrences [22]. Meteorology, biology, and physics were used to explain the so-called supernatural events.

The emergence of science and technology has made life more predictable, reducing reliance on religious explanations and practices for dealing with everyday uncertainty [23]. Modern medicine and public health measures such as sanitation, vaccines, and antibiotics have increased life expectancy [5]. Death is not a constant presence; rather, it is a distant event. This, therefore, changes the approach to death.

In contemporary societies, it is life on earth and not the afterlife, which is the focus of attention [24]. Modern industrial societies have to some extent created an "Abundance Paradox" in that material comforts are experienced in a way that some of the religious promises of a paradise after death hail from [25]. Some of the religious "promises of material goods" such as rivers of milk and

honey, streets of gold, and rich food now seem somewhat less powerful in developed societies because they are already being enjoyed.

Not always, however. While some societies are embracing the future of the world with open arms, a number of nations are still very religious, and religions are constantly evolving as technology advances and cultures merge. Nevertheless, in the Western world there is a significant decline in institutional religious influence, although levels of religiosity vary substantially across countries.

This has been hastened by something curiously called "context collapse." In earlier times, communities had a consensus about their one unique religious view. Now, with internet technologies, people can see a number of confounding religious beliefs in one go [26]. Social media platforms and the internet have made all religions co-exist.

The ripple effect has made religious systems less powerful, with a shift in the general public's belief. This has resulted in an environment where some individuals view religions as not unique and absolute but as relative truths. Religion's place as a viable social framework has thus declined, as belief is now localized as opposed to being universally true [27].

3.2. The spiritual vacuum: why material promises no longer satisfy modern individuals

While the material conditions of life have improved dramatically, suffering has not disappeared. In many developed societies, material living conditions have improved substantially, although poverty and suffering remain in many parts of the world. However, it has not answered the deeper questions of life. Once survival is no longer central, people turn to consider purpose and existence [28]. This can lead to what psychologist Viktor Frankl described as an "existential vacuum" [28].

The concept of the hedonic treadmill further explains this paradox. People quickly get used to gains of money or pleasure, and their happiness eventually returns to normal levels [29]. Material success may therefore not provide lasting happiness. As a result, individuals in modern consumer societies tend to consume and consume but do not find the meaning they seek. Even if they are materially comfortable, they still feel empty.

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy provides another perspective on this problem. His principle that "existence precedes essence" argues that human beings are not born with a predetermined purpose but must create meaning through their own choices [30]. While this freedom allows individuals to define themselves, it also creates responsibility and uncertainty, leading to what Sartre described as existential anxiety [30].

In response to this search for meaning, contemporary society has produced various alternative sources of identity and purpose, including wellness culture, careerism, and politics. These systems can provide temporary structure and social belonging, but they often struggle to offer enduring answers to fundamental existential questions. Unlike traditional religions, they generally lack a comprehensive moral framework or a stable source of transcendent authority.

Digital media further reinforce this tendency. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become important spaces for identity construction and social validation. That is where we can create and enhance our own image, identity, and lifestyle. We get verified by the likes, views, and comments that we get. This is the modern way in which we get validation of our social or religious identity or our true self.

4. The mechanism of longevity: shifting from promises to truth-seeking

4.1. Stripping away the outdated shell to reveal eternal logic

To understand how religion survives modern change, we must separate its core meaning from its outdated "shell". The shell includes literal miracles, physical promises of paradise, and political control through religious authority. Many of these elements conflict with modern science and material progress. As science and rationalism grow, religions may need to drop these literal and material claims. If religion insists on treating myths as physical facts, it risks conflict with modern knowledge [22]. Survival may depend on shifting focus from controlling the physical world to exploring human consciousness and meaning.

In the past, religion was often transactional: people prayed or obeyed in exchange for survival benefits like rain, health, or safety [23]. Religion acted like a survival system. For long-term survival, religion may need to move from this "bargaining" mindset to truth-seeking. Instead of focusing on physical rewards, it anchors itself in "Eternal Logic"—questions science cannot answer, such as meaning, morality, and consciousness.

Science explains how the world works, but not why it exists. These deeper questions remain philosophical rather than empirical. By focusing on them, religion avoids direct conflict with science [22].

This allows religion to shift from a rigid system of rules into an evolving framework for meaning. It no longer competes with science but instead complements it [21]. Rationalism clears superstition, while religion provides ethical and existential direction [27, 30].

4.2. Faith as a cognitive system for understanding the nature of reality

Faith should not be seen as blind belief. Instead, it works as a cognitive framework that helps the mind organize reality. Humans cannot process raw reality directly, so we rely on basic assumptions to interpret the world. Even science depends on unprovable foundations, such as the assumption that the universe is logical and consistent [22]. This helps structure understanding rather than block it.

This cognitive structure can be understood through the lens of modern epistemology. Because the human brain is an organic processing engine, it requires a localized system of boundaries to prevent sensory saturation. By establishing an overarching teleological axiom—the fundamental premise that existence is intentionally structured rather than randomly organized—the mind bypasses the paralysis of radical skepticism. This foundational baseline allows the individual to convert random environmental stimuli into an ordered internal landscape, transforming raw perception into actionable consciousness.

4.3. Combating information overload in the digital age

Modern life exposes people to overwhelming and conflicting information due to globalization and the internet [26]. This can create confusion, overload, and difficulty forming stable beliefs.

Faith can act as a filter, helping people organize information and decide what is meaningful [27]. Instead of being lost in endless perspectives, individuals use a stable reference point to interpret reality. The utility of this filter becomes critically apparent when analyzing the phenomenon of hyper-pluralism. When digital networks dismantle traditional cultural barriers, they trigger a continuous collapse of contexts, forcing the human psyche to defend its cognitive boundaries against an endless stream of competing moralities and truth-claims. Without an anchor to establish a vertical

hierarchy of value, the mind is reduced to a state of constant intellectual drifting. A robust faith system resolves this vulnerability by serving as an internal anchor; it does not restrict an individual's awareness of external data but instead provides the steady metrics required to evaluate, categorize, and master that data without suffering psychological fragmentation.

5. Discussion: the possible future path of faith transmission

The recognition of faith as an essential cognitive system and a source of "Eternal Logic" inevitably shifts the discussion from theoretical philosophy to practical application: how can this refined, non-materialistic framework of meaning be transmitted to future generations within a hyper-digitalized, secular world? Because the traditional, rigid "shell" of religious institutions has lost its social monopoly, the survival of faith may depend on a fundamental mutation in its delivery mechanisms.

The future path of faith transmission may increasingly move away from top-down, monolithic institutions and toward decentralized, communal spaces. As formal church attendance declines in late-modern societies, spirituality is increasingly incubated within organic, smaller-scale networks—ranging from localized micro-communities to intentional online spaces [23]. In these decentralized environments, individuals are no longer passive consumers of institutional dogma; instead, they become active participants in a shared existential pursuit.

This structural decentralization is heavily accelerated by the digitization of ritual. Traditional, embodied practices—such as communal text study, meditation, and philosophical dialogue—are rapidly adapting to virtual environments. While these digital spaces carry a significant risk of succumbing to superficial performance, they may also offer a partial response to the existential isolation of the digital landscape. By decoupling spiritual practices from geographical constraints, virtual spaces can provide a stable, accessible refuge for individuals seeking to ground themselves amidst the chaos of digital information pluralism [26].

Ultimately, the success of this transmission may depend significantly on narrative synchronization: the ability to harmonize ancient metaphysical truths with contemporary language. To reach a generation deeply impacted by Sartre's existential anguish and the exhausting demands of digital self-creation, faith may need to shed its archaic, transactional terminology [30].

Instead of presenting spiritual principles as arbitrary commands from a distant deity, they can be translated into modern psychological and existential terms. Concepts like "overcoming the ego" can be reframed as a psychological strategy for resisting the exhausting performance pressures of consumerism and the hedonic treadmill. Similarly, the "Divine Spark" can be interpreted as a metaphor for intrinsic human worth, existing independently of external validation or algorithmic approval. By modernizing its narrative while preserving its transcendent core, faith may continue to function as a meaningful framework for navigating the psychological and existential challenges of the modern age [27].

6. Conclusion

This report has looked at the structural transformation of religion in the modern era, tracing its evolution from a socio-political mechanism of material security to a resilient system of existential truth-seeking. While the historical "religious shell" characterized by literal dogma, institutional coercion, and transactional bargaining has been significantly weakened under the influence of scientific rationalism and secular abundance, the underlying spiritual vacuum remains largely unresolved. As demonstrated by the limitations of modern secular substitutes, consumer culture, and the psychological pressures of digital identity performance on platforms like TikTok and Instagram,

material optimization alone cannot eliminate the radical freedom and existential anguish inherent to the human condition.

Ultimately, the longevity of a religion may depend not on its external utility but on its capacity to preserve what this paper refers to as its "Eternal Logic." When stripped of outdated material promises, faith can be understood not as a rigid set of ancient rules but as an underlying logic for understanding reality. Historically, major religions emerged as powerful systems for social management and psychological stability, providing a necessary outer shell of hope. Yet, as modern society achieves unprecedented material progress and traditional promises begin to feel hollow, the survival of a religion depends on its capacity to transition from material promises to truth-seeking revelations. By redefining faith as an evolving journey toward ultimate truth, world-spanning religions reconnect with the modern pursuit of meaning—proving that while material progress successfully manages the mechanics of human survival, spirituality endures to answer the eternal human drive to discover the fundamental truth of the world.

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