

The Complicated Relationship of Religious Rituals and Morality: A Critical Review

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Abstract

While many scholarly studies have focused on the relationship between religion and morality, religion encompasses various domains, necessitating a focused examination of religious rituals and their role in human morality. Reviewing research findings and theoretical frameworks, this article explores how rituals influence moral behavior. The investigation yields varying and sometimes contradictory empirical results from various literature, resulting in inconclusive outcomes. However, theoretical models consistently suggest that rituals affect morality through multiple mechanisms: behavioral, spiritual, behavioral-spiritual, social-interactional, and anthropological. The findings indicate that the influence of rituals on moral order and behavior is not straightforward, but instead operates through complex processes, including the performance of rituals, their sacred nature, and symbolic mechanisms that shape individual adherence to societal norms. Future research should therefore pursue interconnective investigations and multi-method approaches that integrate key ritual dimensions –such as sacredness, devotion, symbolic meaning, and social context– to provide a deeper empirical understanding of the mechanisms by which religious rituals contribute to the development of human morality.

Meskipun banyak penelitian akademis telah fokus pada hubungan antara agama dan moralitas, agama mencakup berbagai bidang, sehingga memerlukan analisis yang terfokus pada ritual agama dan perannya dalam moralitas manusia. Dengan meninjau temuan penelitian dan kerangka teoritis, artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana ritual mempengaruhi perilaku moral. Penelitian ini menghasilkan kompilasi temuan empiris dari berbagai literatur yang bervariasi dan

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kadang-kadang bertentangan, sehingga menghasilkan kesimpulan yang tidak pasti. Namun, model teoretis secara konsisten menunjukkan bahwa ritual memengaruhi moralitas melalui mekanisme yang beragam: model behavioristik, spiritual, behavioristik-spiritual, social-interactionis, dan model anthropologis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh ritual terhadap tatanan moral dan perilaku tidaklah sederhana, melainkan beroperasi melalui proses yang kompleks, termasuk pelaksanaan ritual, sakralitas ritual, dan mekanisme simbolis yang membentuk kepatuhan individu terhadap norma-norma sosial. Penelitian masa depan seharusnya mengejar penyelidikan yang interkonektif dan pendekatan multi-metode yang mengintegrasikan dimensi-dimensi kunci dalam ritual –seperti kesucian, dedikasi, makna simbolis, dan konteks sosial– untuk memberikan pemahaman empiris yang lebih dalam tentang mekanisme di mana ritual keagamaan berkontribusi pada perkembangan moralitas manusia.

Keywords: morality; moral order; religion; religious ritual

Introduction

For a long time, religion has been regarded as a noble teaching that leads people to moral order and a peaceful life (Stark, 2001; Winchester, 2008). However, in reality, there is a vast gap between the ideal and the reality surrounding it. Notwithstanding several complex factors, to begin this discussion, it is interesting to highlight and compare several global reports on the levels of religiosity and morality in countries worldwide.

For most religious countries, we can take the reports of the Pew Research Center and Ceo World Magazine (Evans, 2024; D. Wilson, 2024). Meanwhile, the morality level of countries in the world can be taken from The Good Country Report and the World Index of Moral Freedom (Alvarez et al., 2020; Good Country, 2024). The results of the two reports on the most religious countries contrast with those of the report on the most moral countries. Some of the most religious countries are almost at the bottom in terms of morality. For example, Indonesia, which occupies the top position as the most religious country based on the Pew Research Center or in 7th place based on the Ceo World magazine report, turns out to be 83rd in terms of morality based on The Good Country report, even in 136th place based on the World Index of Moral Freedom report.

In simple logic, comparing these reports could potentially lead to the radical conclusion that religion has failed to lead human life toward moral order and

peace. Indeed, several influential critics argue in a similar vein. In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins (2006) argues that morality can be best explained through evolutionary processes and rational human reasoning, rendering religion unnecessary. Likewise, Charles Kimball (2023) in *When Religion Becomes Evil*, the author approaches the issue from a socio-cultural perspective, arguing that religion's tendency toward absolutism, blind obedience, and legitimization of violence reveals its capacity to become a destructive social institution. Similarly, Christopher Hitchens (2007) in *God Is Not Great* frames religion as a sociopolitical force that perpetuates intolerance, violence, and dogmatism. Sam Harris (2006) in *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* adopts a philosophical stance that equates religious belief with irrationality and regards it as a threat to global security.

Yet, to treat these critiques as conclusive is problematic. They often abstract religion into a monolithic entity and neglect the internal diversity of its domains – beliefs, ethics, institutions, and particularly, rituals. As Jing (2024) and Norenzayan (2014) remind us that the relationship between religion and morality is embedded in complex socio-cultural processes, rather than being reducible to simple causal claims. Thus, moving beyond global indices and broad generalizations requires a more nuanced approach. An interconnective socio-cultural lens – attentive to practices such as rituals – can provide a richer account of how religion contributes to or detracts from moral life.

Since religion encompasses many domains, specific academic mapping is necessary to be more observant of issues related to religion and morality. For this reason, this article narrows the focus to rituals as a critical domain of religion. By reviewing empirical findings and theoretical models, this article aims to clarify the extent to which religious rituals influence moral behavior, thereby contributing to the broader debate on the relationship between religion and morality.

Although there are many domains in religious teachings, such as belief and knowledge, rituals occupy a very special position in the concept of religion for some scholars. For William James (2012) and Heiler (1932), Rituals, such as prayer, are the essence of religion. Rituals, which often take the form of

worship practices, become actions or behaviors that connect humans as religious adherents with a deity, such as God, as a figure worshiped in religious teachings (Ladd, 2017, 2021; Spilka & Ladd, 2013). At the dogmatic level, religion, as a set of teachings and rules, must be recognized as theoretically binding its adherents to act according to the prevailing ethics (Purzycki et al., 2023). However, whether religion also provides accommodation to train its adherents in shaping moral behavior, examining it through its ritual teachings is essential. Moreover, as a teaching, belief alone is not enough to preserve and sustain the existence of religion, so this is where rituals come in. Through rituals, beliefs are communicated, practiced, and maintained (Chvaja et al., 2023).

While many scholarly studies have been on religion and morality, the debate remains heated, whether in everyday conversations or academic studies (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015). The main question is whether religion is necessary for human morality. According to the Pew Research Center report, religion is still considered essential for morality by many people (45%), although more say it is not required (51%). In Western European countries, most consider religion to be moral, but it is not necessary (Tamir et al., 2020). In its latest release, the Pew Research Center reported that most Americans say it does not need to be religious to be moral (65%), and majorities in many countries say the same (Fetterolf & Austin, 2023).

Given the numerous domains in religious teachings, the theoretical testing of survey results certainly requires a special academic discussion. However, if the negative possibility is that religion is truly unnecessary, then to provide a cooperative explanation, it is necessary to present scientific evidence from more specific domains of religion, such as rituals, to highlight the positive aspects of religion in the context of morality. Although many consider religion unnecessary for morality, examining and comparing evidence that religious rituals can foster human morality reveals that religion can be a strong option for organizing human morality. The next few subchapters and paragraphs will explain how the evidence demonstrates the issue, whether it will be constructive or otherwise. The two discussions highlighted in this article are the results of

empirical research on the effects of rituals in religion on moral behavior and theories that explain how rituals shape patterns of human ethical behavior.

Religious Rituals and Morality: Some Study Results

Talking about religious rituals as a form of a person's religious attitude and behavior will closely relate to religiosity (Mavor & Ysseldyk, 2020). However, they have significant differences. Therefore, it is essential to emphasize that religious ritual, as a variable, differs from religiosity. The apparent difference is that religiosity is an accumulation of a person's religious attitudes, consisting of many domains, while religious rituals are one of several domains contained in religiosity (Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2023).

From a sociological point of view, religion is a social institution that contains some structures in terms of institutional organization and teachings (Durkheim, 1995). Meanwhile, if religion is interpreted psychologically, it will manifest as an accumulation of attitudes of participation, obedience, and actions based on a particular belief or teaching (Mavor & Ysseldyk, 2020). When religion is considered as a social institution or read psychologically, the role of religion needs to be broken down into macro or micro areas, given the broad scope of religious teachings (Finke & Adamczyk, 2008).

One way to understand the micro role of religion is through its ritual teachings and how they contribute to organizing human moral order. Related to this, the author finds results that could be more conclusive, yet tend to be contradictory in some empirical studies on the role of religious rituals in maintaining moral order or behavior. On the affirmative side, several studies report that ritualistic religious worship increases good and pro-social behaviors. Pew Research Center (2019) has released a report showing that individuals who are active in spiritual activities tend to be happier and avoid some risky behaviors, such as drug addiction or bad driving behavior, than those who are not.

In another report, some Islamic worship rituals, such as prayer and fasting, were applied by some counselors as counseling methods (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014). Its application relies on the understanding that through such religious

rituals, a person is taught to develop positive behaviors, such as discipline and gratitude, that will be useful in everyday life.

Munsoor and Munsoor (2017) highlight some empirical research related to ritualistic acts of worship in Islam that have positive effects in the context of physical, mental, moral, and social health. He highlighted that at the social level, acts of worship such as zakat and hajj can trigger cohesion, solidarity, and cooperation in social networks. Meanwhile, acts of worship such as prayer and fasting lead to good physical and mental health.

In another study, worship, such as prayer, was used to teach and foster positive character traits in students. Kaščák and Gajňáková (2012) investigate that religious rituals, such as prayer, in the case of school children, socially have intrinsic mechanisms that include formal and symbolic structures that can serve as a medium for organizing and realizing various social goals.

These studies demonstrate that Islamic worship rituals, including daily prayers, fasting, zakat, and hajj, involve structured movements, specific recitations, and communal participation, collectively influencing physical, mental, and social well-being. Daily prayers necessitate precise bodily postures and focused reflection, thereby fostering self-discipline and mindfulness. Conversely, fasting cultivates self-control and empathy. Zakat and Hajj are two practices that, when considered together, encourage individuals to engage in coordinated social actions, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity and cooperation within their respective communities. Within the context of formal educational institutions, ritualized prayers serve as a guide, facilitating the development of key competencies such as attention, moral reflection, and social responsibility (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014; Kaščák & Gajňáková, 2012; Munsoor & Munsoor, 2017).

Not only serving as a symbolic-habituative medium for pro-sociality missions, but certain rituals in religion are also reported to be a symbolic-anthropological stimulus for people to exhibit moral behaviors. As shown by Aveyard (2014) in his experimental study of two groups of students, comparing those who heard the adhan (call to prayer) before exams with those who did not, he found that there was a higher increase in honesty among students who listened to the adhan than among those who did not.

The same experiment was also conducted by Duhaime (2015) of traders in the city of Fes, Morocco, in the context of the effect of the adhan on donation decisions. The results showed that more merchants chose the most generous donation option when the adhan was heard, and this difference was statistically significant. The experiment directly supports the assumption that the adhan, as a ritual in Islam, can increase pro-social behavior. However, Duhaime (2015) noted that such effects may only occur temporally, not over a long period of time.

While experimental evidence from Aveyard (2014) and Duhaime (2015) demonstrates an increase in prosocial behavior following the auditory perception of the adhan, an anthropological perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to this phenomenon within specific socio-cultural contexts. In the societies examined, the adhan serves not only as a religious signal but also as a culturally embedded practice that structures daily life, reinforces social cohesion, and reminds participants of communal moral norms. The performance's profound impact on individuals is twofold: it serves as a poignant reminder of their inherent connection to both the divine and the broader community. Moreover, it seamlessly integrates ritual practice into the fabric of social relationships, shared values, and the collective rhythms of daily life (Chvaja et al., 2023; Rappaport, 1999). Consequently, the adhan's impact on moral behavior can be interpreted not merely as a transient behavioral priming but as a component of a symbolic and socially significant system that cultivates moral awareness within the cultural and relational milieu of the participants.

Discussing religious rituals that involve multiple movements, readings, and provisions can lead to the view that they serve as a medium for practicing self-control. Related to this, Pajević et al. (2017) presented a finding that among the war veterans he studied, those who prayed regularly and those who did not differed in their level of self-control, emotions, and interactions. Veterans who prayed periodically were more sociable, compassionate, obedient, and shy than those who did not. The veterans who did not pray were more aggressive and found it challenging to adapt to the social norms of their environment.

The same result was also revealed by Pieper et al. (2018) in the context of Dutch Muslim women respondents of Moroccan descent. In their report, she states that prayer creates a physical and mental connection, resulting in the ability to control emotions as well as increased intimacy with others and closeness to God.

Contrary to some of these studies, many others show the opposite result. As conducted by Greenway et al. (2018) in their experiment to investigate the effect of worship on generosity, they found that two groups, those involved in prayer and those not, showed that the former exhibited lower nominal generosity than the latter. In their notes, Greenway et al. (2018) suggest that the moral attitude of people involved in worship may not be one of generosity, but rather one of praying for God's favor.

In another study, Alogna and Halberstadt (2020) highlighted the effect of prayer as a ritual in religion on cheating behavior. His research reveals two key findings: prayer can reduce the likelihood of cheating only in groups with high levels of religiosity, not the other way around. Research with similar results, in the context of the influence of worship and egoism in the workplace, found that positive effects were observed only among participants who felt close to God (Wnuk, 2024). Drawing on this conclusion, rituals in religion will only have a moral impact on their devout followers, not on others.

Such salient findings thereby highlight the interplay between orthopraxy (correct practice) and orthodoxy (correct belief). It has been posited that ritual performance, in and of itself, such as prayer or fasting, may prove inadequate in shaping ethical behavior unless it is accompanied by sincere belief and internalized values. In the Reformed tradition, scholars emphasize the mutual reinforcement of correct belief and correct practice. Orthodoxy provides guidance to the moral meaning of ritual, while orthopraxy, defined as the disciplined performance of religious practices, has the capacity to fortify and internalize ethical convictions (Bolt, 1986). Adherence to specific ritual practices (orthopraxy) and genuine acceptance of the underlying tenets of a religion (orthodoxy) are integral factors in the practical cultivation of moral dispositions, prosocial behavior, and a sense of ethical responsibility through

the medium of ritual experience. The interaction above suggests that moral identity is co-constructed through the alignment of correct practice and authentic belief. This provides a nuanced understanding of why rituals may fail to influence less devout participants while reinforcing ethical behavior among committed adherents.

In 2001, Stark (2001) conducted a multinational study on the role of religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in shaping moral order through their beliefs and rituals in various European and Asian countries. The report also shows differences in the results of the various countries studied. Even from these results, ritual participation, in many religions, is not strong enough to present a positive correlation. Some even negatively correlated with moral order.

Multinational-level research results were also reported by Finke and Adamczyk (2008) on the role of religion in moral order across 29 countries, examining both micro and macro scales. One of the findings is that, among the many variables studied, including age factor, social context, beliefs, and religious rituals, religious rituals emerged as a consistent predictor only in terms of the sexual morality index, not in other morality contexts. In other words, the role of rituals in religion on morality is only partial, not general.

Daniel Winchester and Guhin (2019) study reveals the existence of a paradoxical phenomenon in a ritual practice where, on the one hand, it can function as a solution to a problem. Still, on the other hand, it can be a source of problems that alienate individuals from their social environment. Moreover, research conducted by Jackson and Gray (2019). The results show that states in America with the highest number of groups involved in worship have higher crime rates than other states.

How Religious Rituals Shape Moral Order and Behavior: Theoretical Options

While numerous empirical reports have been published on the effects of rituals on moral behavior, a deeper understanding of their interconnections requires investigating the theoretical explanations that underlie the mechanisms

by which rituals influence the formation of moral order and behavior. In the author's investigation, the explanation of the mechanism by which religious rituals can improve one's morality can be theoretically divided into several models. This division is based on the nature of each theory, whether behavioristic, spiritualistic, behaviorist-spiritualistic, or social-interactionist. The explanation will be detailed in the following sections.

Behavioristic Model

First is the behavioristic explanation. In this explanation, rituals are viewed as a form of habituation of positive behaviors, or, in other terms, as a pattern of habit formation. The habituation theory on this topic posits that prayer involves patterns of movement and habits that train a person to cultivate positive traits, such as regularity, discipline, calmness, and cleanliness (Hamjah & Akhir, 2014; Tanshzil, 2018).

However, this explanation has been refuted by some moral development thinkers, such as Sherman (1991), who argue that it cannot be interpreted as an unconscious, mechanical process. Even though there is a disciplinary habit in prayer, when the habit is to form automatic behavior, prayer is nothing more than something that Jerolmack and Porpora (2004) termed as uncritical habituation or superficial habituation that lacks meaning. In addition, habituation is thought to have a greater effect on children than on adults (Roberts, 2019).

Spiritualistic Model

The second explanation model is a spiritualistic one. In this explanation, religious worship, as one of the ritual practices and forms of servitude, is assumed to increase human spirituality, which in turn enhances human sensitivity to ethical matters (Wells, 2002). In this explanation model, spirituality, as a concept of human connectedness, will serve as the basis for human ethical sensitivity, as ethical matters are inseparable from human relationships with others (Al-Razi et al., 2025; Hardy et al., 2014). However, this explanation is refuted in that not all forms of spirituality can provide a strong intellectual foundation for morality. In fact, some forms of spirituality

derived from religion are considered to provide only a dogmatic foundation, not a logical one (Spohn, 1997).

Essentially, the spiritualistic explanation shares many of the same points as the behavioristic explanation, where rituals serve as a method of habituation. Still, the spiritualistic explanation model emphasizes that rituals are a form of habituation aimed at enhancing human spirituality, rather than merely being patterns of behavioral habituation. In this case, the behavioristic and spiritualistic theoretical explanations can be combined into the term behaviorist-spiritualistic.

Behaviorist-spiritualistic Model

The behaviorist-spiritualistic explanation, the third explanation model, can be found in the ancient Chinese philosopher Xunzi's interpretation of the philosophy of ritual. This related explanation is conveyed by Kline (2004), where Xunzi's philosophy of moral formation through rituals emphasizes the somatic and affective aspects of ritual performance. Through the incorporation of these somatic and affective aspects in Xunzi's philosophy, rituals shape, transform, and direct one's cognitive and affective responses to environmental realities. In other words, one's engagement with ritual practice is a process of cultivating transformation, instilling moral affections originating from the environment into the individual's consciousness.

The process of transformation of moral affection obtained from performing rituals in Xunzi philosophy brings a person into the rhythm of harmony between the individual, the social environment, and the universe, referred to as "Dao." (Kline, 2004). The routine engagement with ritual practices on a continuous cycle ultimately shapes one's sense of moral awareness in following the harmony called Dao, so that moral affection is formed and manifested in one's behavior and even attitude. Due to its indirect and complex process of shaping moral awareness, the pattern of moral formation through rituals in Xunzi philosophy is not referred to as moral training practices or habituation; instead, it is termed *metapraxis* (Kline, 2004).

At first glance, this explanation is almost similar to that conveyed by Hanin Hamjah and Mat Akhir (2014) on the theory of ritual as moral habituation.

However, Xunzi's philosophy also involves the harmonious interaction between the individual, the social environment, and the universe, so the explanation can be classified as a behaviorist-spiritualistic model of theory because it emphasizes habituation based on one's connection with the social environment and the universe. Such an explanation can also provide a rationalization that is readily accepted and makes more sense than the habituation theory regarding the effect of ritual involvement on the formation of morality. However, one criticism that can be raised against such an explanation is that it relies on the concept of harmonious rhythm, referred to as Dao. It is possible that the so-called Dao is not harmonious and may even contradict universal normative values, rendering the explanation of Xunzi's philosophy potentially irrelevant in a chaotic social context.

Social-interactionist Model

The fourth explanation model is social-interactionist. In this explanatory model, the author finds two theories: the Interaction Ritual Chain (IRC) theory and the Sociology of Prayer Experience (SoPE) theory. Both theories rest on the functionalist paradigm, which posits that a ritual, including prayer, is a community behavior that arises from religion, considered a social symptom. Because religion is regarded as a social phenomenon, the rituals that become its teachings serve as sociological mechanisms that incorporate elements of commonality in their implementation (Collins, 2004, 2014; Froese & Jones, 2021).

IRC theory is a social dynamics theory that explains the collective emotions that shape a social atmosphere through rituals carried out collectively. These collective emotions are processed and felt together when community members carry out a ritual collectively (Collins 2014). In other words, the collective performance of rituals can generate emotional resonance among religious believers. Although rituals may not initially appear to involve formal interaction activities such as speaking, the point of interaction lies in the fact that rituals are sacred objects that unite a person's behavior into a specific pattern of movements or readings (Collins, 2022). As explained by Draper (2020), involvement in religion can make a person feel accepted by their social

environment. Thus, the collective emotional resonance of a ritual generates a spirit of solidarity as a result of emotional energy that is felt and accepted together (Collins, 2014; Draper, 2014).

In the context of moral quality development, IRC or SoPE theory is rooted in the ideas of functionalists such as Durkheim (1961) where the solidarity built emotionally through collective ritual practices will ultimately foster an attitude of social conformity in each member of the community. From this conformity, the person's behavior adjusts to the norms that apply in the community and is shaped (Draper, 2020). In short, IRC emphasizes that the emotional experience individuals feel during the performance of collective rituals determines how a ritual affects their behavior, increasing their sense of belonging to the community.

In primitive and traditional societies, rituals are often an essential element that shapes and drives solidarity and cohesion among community members. Research conducted by Munson et al. (2024) shows how the dynamics of ancient Maya society were shaped by shared rituals that created a moral community among its members. However, rituals may become less critical in the context of modern societies that have individualistic tendencies and less importance of religion in their lives. According to a recent study by Rotolo et al. (2024) from the Pew Research Center, 80% of Americans perceive the role of religion as declining in social life. Similarly, there is relatively little engagement with religious activities, including rituals, in the Western European region, with only 22% of the population participating, and this occurs only once a month (Pew Research Center, 2018). In this case, IRC becomes less relevant in explaining the process of morality formation through religious rituals.

Additionally, the IRC theory does not account for explanations related to specific personal rituals. In this case, although a ritual may be performed in the congregation in some situations, in other conditions, some rituals take the form of personal worship rather than communal worship. It is at this point that IRC automatically gets its refutation.

In the following years, the IRC became the cornerstone of Froese and Jones (2021) to develop a new theory of the social mechanisms underlying rituals,

particularly prayer. They refer to it as the Sociology of Prayer Experience (SoPE) theory. Similar to IRC, SoPE is a theory of the social dynamics of the effects of a ritual, such as prayer, on changes in a person's behavior. SoPE theory offers a dimensional breakdown of worship, facilitating a deeper understanding of how it impacts individual experiences within a social context.

In SoPE theory, ritual worship, such as prayer, is divided into four dimensions, namely: quantity, which includes duration, frequency, and consistency in prayer; style, which consists of the extent to which specific rules guide a person in worship or prayer, such as how prayer is embodied, articulated, and formalized; purpose which includes what a person is trying to achieve in a practice of worship or prayer; then target which includes to whom or what figure is the partner or purpose of prayer (Froese & Jones, 2021).

The four dimensions proposed by the SoPE theory are assumed to be the determining mechanisms for the kind of emotional experience a person has in their worship. Differences between the four will result in differences in various emotional experiences, which in turn will lead to differences in the effects of a ritual (Froese & Jones, 2021). Unfortunately, there has been no further exploration of the impact of religious rituals on morale using this theory.

Anthropological Model

The last explanation related to the mechanism of the effect of ritual implementation on moral order and behavior is an anthropological theory. This explanation is based on the work of American anthropologist Rappaport (1999). In his writings, he investigates performance related to the symbolic functions of ritual implementation in a society. In this explanation, religion is viewed as a teaching that offers a set of morals that binds humans. Meanwhile, belief alone in religion is not strong enough to transmit the set of morals it carries without rituals (Chvaja et al., 2023).

How a set of morals brought by religion can be accepted and maintained by society certainly requires a mechanism that oversees it. It is where rituals become a symbol of one's acceptance of the norms brought by religion. Through rituals, religious beliefs are communicated and realized, and religious

norms are transmitted (Lang & Kundt, 2024). The symbolic dimension of sacred rituals, which are accepted and carried out by religious believers, serves as a reliable mechanism for preserving and instilling norms under the supernatural authority of God, who is believed to be the highest authority over all norms established by the religion (Chvaja et al., 2023; Rappaport, 1999).

The explanation of this anthropological model can actually complement the explanation of the sociological-interactionist theory model. It is because, in the anthropological explanation model, the rationalization of rituals as a form of symbolic communication is clearly explained, allowing the emotional effects of communication, as in the sociological-interactionist explanation, to be more clearly illustrated.

Conclusion

Considering the various empirical studies and theoretical options presented in the previous section, the comprehension of religious rituals must extend beyond the confines of personal piety, as their practice frequently permeates social contexts, thereby contributing to the internalization of moral values through the use of sacred and symbolic elements. This inherent complexity elucidates the frequent inconclusiveness or contradictory nature of empirical findings concerning the association between rituals and morality. Explanations that reduce rituals to simple moral habituation, such as behaviorist approaches, fail to capture the essential dimension of sacredness that distinguishes religious rituals from other practices.

Consequently, the assertion that rituals do not play a significant role in shaping morality is not only erroneous but also represents a significant oversight, as it disregards the theoretical insights contributed by the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Rather than engaging in futile debates that perpetuate the reductionist paradigm, the academic community should prioritize the development of multifaceted methodologies that encompass the intricacies of sacredness, symbolism, and social dynamics. It is imperative to employ these approaches in future research endeavors to gain a deeper understanding of how rituals contribute to the establishment of moral order.[w]

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