

# THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO EMILE DURKHEIM

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### 1.5. ACORDING TO EMILE DURKHEIM

As we have already mentioned, Durkheim accepts totemism as the oldest religion of humanity and according to him, totemism explains the essence of religion. He argues that religion as a social phenomenon can be comprehended by analyzing totemism. According to Durkheim, the most important element of religion is not the belief in a supreme god, but the division of the world into the sacred and the profane.<sup>1</sup> The reason for such a conclusion is that there are godless religions. Durkheim also says that religion cannot be defined in terms of mystery and the supernatural. Religion consists of sacred objects, beliefs and rituals. He says that religion first determines the sacred, then the organization of beliefs related to this sacred takes place, and finally the rites and practices that emerge more or less logically from beliefs take shape. In this systematic, Durkheim thinks that religion is a means of social integration. Although he says that people get most of their knowledge and the organization of this knowledge from religion, he also states that religion is the extreme point of collective thought. Durkheim states that religion is the first and most tightly unifying force and that it encourages a sense of loyalty to co-religionists, the country and the rulers, and gives them moral obligations. Durkheim does not accept God, he says that religion comes from a single source and that this source is society. According to him, collective consciousness constitutes religion, and the source of collective consciousness is society. Therefore, the source of the concept of God and the sacred is the society that forms the collective consciousness. Durkheim states that the whole being, order and structures of society are expressed in religion; religion is the institution that gives a miniaturized model of society. He considers religious rituals as an affirmation of social values that enables people living in that society to remember its social constitution from time to time.<sup>2</sup> According to Durkheim, religion is not a personal but a social process. With this inference, Durkheim is similar to the emphasis in the Qur'an that religion is a process; in fact, the situation here is the distinction between subjective and objective. However, Durkheim deals with this situation in terms of totems. According to him, totems were worshipped because they represented the unity of their group. Once the sanctity of the totem was accepted, the foundations of the sanctity of the society worshipping that totem were laid. Therefore, the respect shown to the totem was also shown to that society. He also says that respect for religious things is in fact nothing but respect for authority. From Durkheim's theory we can conclude that everything human or social is religion or religious in nature. In this way, for religion to be religion, it means that society must be overemphasized. Therefore, it is clear that Durkheim neglected the personal aspect of religious feeling too much. It is possible to infer from his definition of religion that 'societies deify' or that 'gods are nothing but society in disguise'. Moreover, no religion that does not have a community has disappeared from the face of the earth, just as it is not clear to what extent it would be valid for all religions to put a religious stamp on everything that societies do.

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<sup>1</sup> Bozkurt, *a.g.e.*, s.247.

<sup>2</sup> Şerif Mardin, *a.g.e.*, s.45.