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## Religiology as a Meta-Theory: Historical, Institutional, and Economic Functions of Religion

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### ABSTRACT

Religion has increasingly influenced social, institutional, and economic processes amid global crises, ideological fragmentation, and technological transformation. However, traditional religious studies and philosophy of religion often remain insufficient to explain the external socio-economic effects of religion. This conceptual paper proposes religiology as a meta-theoretical framework for analyzing religion as a historical, institutional, and economic force. Using historical analysis, institutional theory, and socio-economic synthesis, the study examines how religions shape social relations, professional institutions, and economic models across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. Particular attention is given to religion as a form of social technology that regulates behavior, reduces social risks, and contributes to economic sustainability in multireligious societies. The paper argues that religiology provides an integrative analytical tool for understanding the role of religion in economic development, governance, and social stability, especially in periods of systemic crisis and technological change.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, religion has re-emerged as a significant factor shaping socio-economic development, governance structures, and institutional behavior amid global crises, technological transformation, and ideological fragmentation. Processes such as globalization, economic restructuring, and the transition toward a new technological order have intensified the role of values, beliefs, and cultural frameworks in economic decision-making and social stability ([Glushchenko, 2022](#)). In this context, religion increasingly influences not only personal worldviews but also collective economic models, organizational cultures, and state policies.

Despite this growing relevance, conventional approaches within religious studies and the philosophy of religion have largely focused on the internal doctrines, rituals, and historical evolution of religious traditions. While these perspectives provide valuable insights, they often remain insufficient for explaining the external socio-economic, institutional, and governance-related impacts of religion in contemporary societies ([Kolkunova, 2018](#); [Zhang, 2021](#)). This limitation becomes particularly evident in multireligious and multicultural contexts, where religion interacts dynamically with economic systems, legal frameworks, and technological development.

Recent scholarship highlights the need for integrative and meta-theoretical approaches capable of addressing religion as a systemic force embedded within social and economic structures rather than as an isolated cultural phenomenon ([Mashchytska, 2021](#); [Golovushkin, 2019](#)). Studies on Islamic economics, religious governance, and value-based financial systems further demonstrate that religious principles actively shape institutional arrangements, risk management practices, and economic behavior at national and transnational levels ([Murtilova & Magomadov, 2024](#); [Jalil, 2025](#)).

In response to these theoretical and methodological gaps, this paper introduces religiology as a meta-theoretical framework for analyzing the historical, institutional, and economic functions of religion. The study conceptualizes religion as a form of social technology that structures social relations, professional institutions, and economic interactions across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. The purpose of this paper is to articulate the foundations of religiology, clarify its analytical scope, and demonstrate its relevance for understanding economic development and social stability in periods of systemic transformation. The novelty of this study lies in positioning religiology as an integrative framework that extends beyond traditional religious studies by systematically linking religion to institutional formation, economic models, and socio-economic resilience.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, theoretical, and analytical research design to examine religion as a meta-theoretical construct influencing historical, institutional, and economic processes. Rather than relying on empirical field data, the paper adopted a conceptual analysis approach, appropriate for developing and refining theoretical frameworks in interdisciplinary studies of religion, education, and society.

The primary method used was systematic literature analysis, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, policy-oriented publications, and foundational theoretical works related to religious studies, political economy, institutional theory, and socio-economic development. The selected sources represent diverse disciplinary perspectives, including religious studies, economics, sociology, philosophy, and management, enabling a comprehensive and integrative synthesis.

To structure the analysis, historical analysis was applied to trace the evolution of major religious traditions and their roles in shaping social institutions and economic practices across different historical periods. This was complemented by institutional analysis, which examined how religious values and norms become embedded within organizational structures, governance systems, and professional practices. Furthermore, system analysis was employed to conceptualize religion as an interconnected social technology operating across macro-level (national and global economies), meso-level (institutions and organizations), and micro-level (individual behavior and motivation).

The study also utilized analytical synthesis to integrate insights from multiple theoretical traditions into a unified meta-theoretical framework referred to as *religiology*. This synthesis enabled the identification of recurring patterns, functional mechanisms, and structural relationships between religion, institutions, and economic development.

Finally, a comparative conceptual approach was used to contrast *religiology* with conventional religious studies, highlighting its added explanatory value in addressing contemporary socio-economic challenges. Through this methodological combination, the paper develops a coherent and systematic framework for understanding religion as a dynamic institutional and economic force.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that religion operates as a systemic mechanism shaping economic development models, institutional structures, and technological trajectories. The analysis confirms the core hypothesis that religion is not merely a cultural or spiritual phenomenon, but a mesoeconomic regulator influencing both macro-level economic paradigms and micro-level organizational and individual behavior. This influence becomes particularly visible during periods of global crisis, technological transition, and ideological instability.

#### 3.1. Religion as a Mesoeconomic Regulatory Mechanism

The findings demonstrate that the influence of religion on economic development has a mesoeconomic character, meaning it simultaneously affects macroeconomic and microeconomic levels. At the macro level, religion shapes national economic philosophies, ideological orientations, and institutional frameworks. At the micro level, it influences organizational culture, labor relations, professional ethics, and individual economic behavior.

Religion functions as an intermediate coordinating mechanism between abstract economic models and concrete social practices. This explains why economic systems often display strong path dependency: once a religiously grounded institutional structure is formed, it continues to shape economic behavior even under changing technological conditions. The results show that religion reduces uncertainty in socio-economic interactions by providing stable normative frameworks, thereby lowering social and transactional risks.

To clarify this multi-level influence, **Table 1** summarizes the mesoeconomic role of religion across economic levels. Religion does not operate in isolation at a single level, but rather integrates values, institutions, and behaviors into a coherent socio-economic system.

**Table 1.** Meso-economic Influence of Religion on Economic Development.

Economic Level	Area of Influence	Manifestation of Religious Impact
Macroeconomic	National economic model	Economic philosophy, ideology, institutional legitimacy
Meso-economic	Institutions and organizations	Organizational culture, governance norms, professional relations
Microeconomic	Individuals and groups	Work ethics, motivation, consumption behavior

### 3.2. Religion, Institutions, and Technological Development

The analysis confirms that technological development is institutionally conditioned. Production technologies do not emerge independently; instead, they require compatible social and professional institutions to function effectively. In this study, technology is conceptualized as an integrated system consisting of production methods, means of production, qualification skills, professional relations, and social relations.

The results indicate that religion plays a decisive role in shaping the latter two components professional and social relations thus indirectly determining which technologies can be successfully adopted. When technological innovation contradicts dominant religious norms or institutional arrangements, resistance, inefficiency, or crisis may occur. This finding aligns with crisisology approaches that associate systemic crises with institutional and ideological mismatches during technological transitions ([Glushchenko, 2026](#)).

Based on the findings, the following logical sequence of socio-economic development is supported:

Adoption of religious worldview → formation of social and professional institutions → emergence of compatible technologies → consolidation of an economic development model

This sequence explains why technological revolutions are often accompanied by ideological and religious transformations, especially during periods of global restructuring.

### 3.3. Historical Patterns of Religion and Economic Specialization

The historical analysis reveals that world religions have contributed to distinct patterns of economic specialization, influencing labor division, professional orientation, and institutional priorities. Rather than providing a purely theological narrative, the findings emphasize the functional economic role of religious doctrines.

Hinduism emphasized introspection and self-awareness, historically coinciding with the development of early exchange and circulation systems. Judaism established strong legal and ethical norms that supported financial management, trade, and information-based economic activities. Buddhism promoted moderation, discipline, and efficiency, values that resonate with modern lean production systems and quality-oriented manufacturing, particularly in East Asian economies.

Christianity introduced principles of social solidarity, mutual assistance, and moral restraint on wealth accumulation, supporting agrarian and later industrial economies through cooperative labor relations and ethical norms. Islam developed a comprehensive regulatory framework governing finance, trade, labor relations, and social welfare, which continues to influence modern Islamic banking and economic systems ([Murtlova & Magomadov, 2024](#); [Derzayeva & Aletkin, 2025](#)).

These patterns are summarized in **Table 2**, which links major world religions with dominant economic orientations. Religions have historically functioned as institutional enablers of specific economic trajectories, rather than passive belief systems.

**Table 2.** World Religions and Dominant Economic Orientations.

Religion	Core Value Orientation	Economic Implication
Hinduism	Self-awareness, discipline	Early circulation and exchange systems
Judaism	Legal–ethical regulation	Finance, trade, and information technologies
Buddhism	Moderation, efficiency	Lean production and quality management
Christianity	Social solidarity	Agrarian and industrial cooperation
Islam	Normative economic regulation	Islamic finance and welfare systems

### 3.4. Prince Vladimir’s Choice as a Strategic Economic Decision

One of the most significant results of this study is the reinterpretation of Prince Vladimir’s adoption of Eastern Orthodoxy in 988 as a strategic geopolitical and economic decision. Historical evidence indicates that Prince Vladimir evaluated religious doctrines based on their compatibility with geopolitical alliances, institutional capacity, and socio-economic conditions.

Judaism was rejected due to the absence of a strong territorial state among its adherents at the time. Islam was considered incompatible with climatic conditions and everyday economic practices in northern territories. Western Christianity was excluded due to geopolitical considerations and Russia’s strategic alignment with Byzantium. Eastern Orthodoxy, by contrast, offered ideological universality, institutional strength, and geopolitical advantages, making it suitable for unifying diverse ethnic groups and stabilizing economic relations.

This case confirms that religion functioned as a tool of state-building and economic governance, reinforcing the argument that religious choices can shape long-term economic models and institutional stability.

### 3.5. Religion as Social Technology

The results further confirm that religion can be conceptualized as a social technology—a structured system for shaping consciousness, behavior, and social coordination. Religious technologies include infrastructures for influencing values, tools for behavioral regulation, communication rituals, and qualification systems for religious personnel.

Through these mechanisms, religion transforms individuals into social actors integrated into systems of labor division, production, and consumption. Religious organizations perform critical socio-economic functions, including regulating family relations, defining ethical standards in business communication, providing social support, and mitigating social risks. These functions contribute to economic sustainability by reducing conflict, promoting cooperation, and stabilizing institutional expectations.

### 3.6. Power of Religious Faith in Organizational Contexts

A key finding of the study is the identification of the power of religious faith as a distinct structural element of power within organizations. Alongside positional power and personal power, religious faith shapes motivation, value systems, and informal norms of behavior. This form of power is particularly significant in multinational and multireligious organizations, where religious diversity can either enhance adaptability or generate conflict.

The findings suggest that organizations acknowledging religious factors in management and human resource practices are better equipped to reduce social risks and improve organizational stability. This supports the argument that religiology provides essential analytical tools for organizational governance and socio-economic management.

### 3.7. Religiology as a Meta-Theoretical Framework

The findings support the argument that traditional religious studies alone are no longer sufficient to explain the growing influence of religion on socio-economic and geopolitical processes. While religious studies primarily focus on internal theological doctrines and historical development of religions, religiology emerges as a meta-theoretical framework designed to analyze the external effects of religion on society, economy, and state governance.

Religiology does not replace religious studies; instead, it complements it by specializing in the analysis of religion as a regulatory, institutional, and technological force. This distinction is crucial in the context of globalization, technological transition, and ideological crisis, where religion increasingly intersects with economics, management, and public policy. The findings indicate that religiology functions as an interdisciplinary science integrating philosophy, economics, sociology, management, and political studies.

### 3.8. Functions of Religiology in Socio-Economic Systems

One of the central results of this study is the systematic identification of the functions of religiology as a scientific discipline. These functions explain how religious influence operates within socio-economic systems and why religion remains resilient during periods of crisis.

To improve clarity, the key functions identified in the analysis are summarized in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** Core Functions of Religiology and Their Socio-Economic Implications.

Function	Description	Socio-Economic Implication
Methodological	Develops concepts, categories, and analytical tools	Enables systematic study of religion's economic impact
Cognitive	Accumulates and analyzes empirical religious data	Improves understanding of religious-economic behavior
Instrumental	Provides tools for regulation and management	Supports policy and organizational decision-making
Legislative	Justifies legal regulation of religious activity	Enhances institutional stability
Prognostic	Forecasts religious influence under change	Reduces future socio-economic risks
Preventive	Anticipates religious conflicts	Supports social cohesion
Psychological	Explains motivation and value systems	Enhances workforce and consumer management
System-forming	Integrates religion into economic models	Strengthens national development strategies

The results show that these functions operate simultaneously rather than independently. Their effectiveness determines the extent to which religion contributes to economic stability or, conversely, becomes a source of conflict.

### **3.9. Religion, Power, and Organizational Behavior**

The analysis confirms that religion plays a distinct role in organizational power structures. Beyond formal authority (positional power) and personal influence (charisma, expertise), the study identifies the power of religious faith as a third structural component of power within organizations.

This form of power influences organizational culture, decision-making norms, ethical standards, and conflict resolution mechanisms. In mono-religious organizations, religious power often reinforces hierarchy, discipline, and corporate identity. In multireligious organizations, however, unmanaged religious diversity may generate latent tensions unless addressed through inclusive institutional frameworks.

The findings suggest that ignoring religious power in organizational analysis leads to incomplete explanations of employee behavior, motivation, and resistance to change. From a management perspective, religiology provides tools to identify, regulate, and integrate religious influences into human resource management and organizational design.

### **3.10. Religion and Global Technological Transformation**

The study further demonstrates that religious influence intensifies during periods of technological transition, particularly during the formation of a new technological order. As highlighted by crisisology, technological revolutions disrupt existing institutions, labor relations, and economic models, creating uncertainty and ideological vacuum ([Glushchenko, 2022](#)).

In such contexts, religion functions as a stabilizing force by offering moral guidance, behavioral norms, and interpretative frameworks. The results indicate that societies experiencing technological disruption often witness increased religiosity or the emergence of postsecular forms of belief, such as “invisible religion” or “religion without essence” ([Mashchytska, 2021](#)).

This explains why religion regains socio-economic significance during global crises, acting as a mechanism for risk reduction and institutional adaptation.

### **3.11. Laws of Religiology and Economic Development**

The findings allow for the formulation of several laws of religiology, understood as stable cause-and-effect relationships between religious activity and socio-economic outcomes. These laws do not function as deterministic rules but as analytical regularities observable across historical and contemporary contexts.

Among the most significant laws identified are:

- (i) Religious activity constitutes an integral segment of geopolitical and economic processes.
- (ii) The influence of religion increases with the growing importance of the human factor in production.

- (iii) The diversification of religious concepts corresponds with increased socio-economic complexity.
- (iv) The emergence of religiology is driven by the need to adapt religious influence to technological and economic change.
- (v) Religious effectiveness manifests simultaneously in geopolitical, economic, social, and demographic dimensions.
- (vi) In new technological orders, religion gains importance as a mechanism for shaping human consciousness.

These laws reinforce the argument that religion is structurally embedded in economic development rather than externally imposed.

### **3.12. Religion, Sustainable Development, and Social Stability**

The results further indicate that religion contributes to sustainable development by coordinating economic behavior with social values and long-term goals. Sustainable development requires alignment between resource use, investment orientation, technological development, and institutional change. Religion facilitates this alignment by promoting normative stability, ethical constraints, and social responsibility.

The findings support the assumption that societies with strong religious traditions often exhibit higher resilience to socio-economic shocks, provided that religious institutions are integrated constructively into governance frameworks. Religion reduces social risks by regulating behavior, supporting vulnerable groups, and fostering collective identity.

### **3.13. Discussion Synthesis**

Religion operates as a multi-level socio-economic regulator, influencing economic models, institutions, technologies, and organizational behavior. Religiology provides the conceptual and methodological foundation necessary to analyze these influences systematically. By recognizing religion as a social technology and institutional force, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of economic development in multireligious and technologically dynamic societies.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that religion remains a structurally significant force in shaping economic development models, organizational behavior, and socio-economic stability, particularly in the context of global crises and technological transformation. The findings confirm that religious influence operates at a mesoeconomic level, simultaneously affecting macroeconomic structures such as national economic paradigms and microeconomic dimensions including organizational culture, labor relations, and individual economic behavior.

The article substantiates the necessity of developing religiology as a general meta-theory of religious activity. Unlike traditional religious studies, which primarily examine internal doctrines and historical evolution, religiology provides a methodological framework for analyzing the external socio-economic, institutional, and technological effects of religion. The identified functions and laws of religiology explain how religion contributes to risk reduction, institutional formation, and the regulation of social and economic relations in multireligious societies.



Historical analysis, including the case of Prince Vladimir's adoption of Orthodoxy, confirms that religion has long been evaluated not only as a spiritual system but also as a geopolitical, social, and economic instrument. In contemporary conditions marked by ideological crises and the emergence of a new technological order, the role of religion intensifies as a stabilizing and system-forming factor.

Overall, the study concludes that integrating religiology into socio-economic analysis enhances the understanding of sustainable development, organizational power structures, and crisis management. Future research should further explore the application of religiology in economic policy design, organizational governance, and international development strategies.

## 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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