SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Across the four units of Religion and Society the interaction of religion with the societies in which it exists is explored. As part of this exploration the role of various Aspects of religion that feature in the study design are considered.

In this panel presentation and discussion for the 2019 RASNET Conference, we want to particularly explore how the aspect of social structure works in particular religions.

We especially want to make teachers aware that social structure means the whole gamut of how a religion organises itself and get them out of the mindset that social structure means only the official leadership of the religion.

Some questions you might wish to consider:

What are the features of the social structure of the particular religion?

What variations are within those features because of the religion interacting with different cultures?

How do people become members of the tradition?

What do people have to do to stay in the tradition?

How are they organised to achieve this membership?

Where does authority rest in the religion?

What are the different types of authority?

Who or how is authority given?

What or who controls or limits or monitors the various types of leadership?

What are the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of the features of the social structure?

What are the current challenges to the social structure of the religion?

How does/can the existing social structure of the religion address these challenges?

**Religion and Society Text page 32**

“An established social model to which society conforms, which often places religious leadership at or near the top of society. The way a religious tradition is organised; the established social model for the religious community.”

**Encyclopedia Britannica**

“The distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together.”

**eNotes website**

“A group of people who act together on a consistent basis.”

**??? (A definition I use but the source is lost.)**

**“**The internal institutionalized relationships built up by persons living within a group (such as a family or community). It focusses on different relationships and interactions, such as those between leaders and other members, regulated through accepted norms and shared values.”

**<https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-structure>**

**Social structure**, in sociology, the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together. **Social structure** is often treated together with the concept of **social** change, which deals with the forces that change the **social structure** and the organization of society.

[**https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20structure**](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20structure)

the internal institutionalized relationships built up by persons living within a group (such as a family or community) especially with regard to the hierarchical organization of status and to the rules and principles regulating behaviour

the social organization of a society constituting an integrated whole

**[https://www.thoughtco.com › Science, Tech, Math › Social Sciences](https://www.thoughtco.com/social-structure-defined-3026594)**

**Social structure** is the organized set of social institutions and patterns of institutionalized relationships that together compose society.

From these, when looking at the aspect of social structure for religious traditions, look at relationships and organisation within the tradition and at the means by which the tradition interacts with the wider society. This includes:

* Membership: Ways to gain membership

Ways for participation

Ways to leave the tradition

* Formal roles
* Leadership
* Authority
* Recognized sub-groups
* Spokespersons that interact with wider society on behalf of the tradition