

Franciscan
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Contemporary Views of Religion

Fundamentalism sees religion and modernity as inimical and privileges religious doctrine over science.

Rationalism shares with Fundamentalism the view that religion and modernity are inimical, but privileges science over religious doctrine.

Romanticism rejects the view common to Fundamentalism and Rationalism that the referent of religion is the external, (and in some cases, the verifiable) world. Instead, Romanticism sees the human psyche as the true referent of religion.

These Views in Contemporary Thought

Creationism – Specifically, “young earth” creationism, which rejects any form of macroevolutionary theory and holds that the earth is less than 10,000 years old, is most widely held among Protestant Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, although some Muslims, Jews and Catholics hold similar views. Institutions like the Creation Museum in Petersburg KY and the Creation Research Society in Arizona, and so forth, offer what they view as scientific demonstrations of the creationist position, but these positions have not been accepted by the scientific community at large. Creationism enjoys tremendous press coverage, though its actual influence in society at large is debatable. Officially, the Catholic Church is not committed to a creationist position.

Social Sciences – For that great pioneer in the history and phenomenology of religions, James G. Frazer (1854-1941), myth is the ‘primitive’ counterpart to modern science. In this typically rationalist view, myth and science are entirely incompatible, science is **true** and myth is **false**. Therefore, myth must go when science comes. [cf Robert A. Segal, “Jung’s very twentieth-century view of myth,” *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 2003 November; 48(5): 593-617]

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Psychology – Rationalists like Frazer maintain that religion can exist only in so far as it serves as an explanation of the physical world, which the rise of science now precludes. Romantics like Carl Jung, however, maintain that religion, while serving as an explanation of the physical world till dislodge by science, is at heart anything but an explanation. The toppling of the religions explanation by the scientific one, far from dooming religion, prods religion into making explicit what it has in fact been all along.

For Jung [and Freud], the function of religion has always been more psychological than explanatory, and the rise of science does not preclude the continuing existence of religious myths as a psychological rather than an explanatory phenomenon. For those for whom science does spell the demise of religion, secular myths can replace religious ones, and those secular myths are more secular versions of religions myths than secular alternatives to religions myths. [Robert A. Segal, “Is analytical psychology a religion? Rationalist and romantic approaches to religion and modernity,” *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 1999 October; 44(4): 547-60]

Campbell: Mythology’s primary function is elicit and support “a sense of awe before the mystery of being” (*Masks* 519). Moreover, mythology initiates “the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche” (*Masks* 521). All religion, therefore, is mythological and there is no essential difference between myth and religion. Indeed, myth is merely “someone else’s religion (*Inner* 55). [Joseph Campbell, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) and *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Penguin, 1991)]

A Contrary View Based on Mimetic Theory

1. Mimesis
2. Escalation
3. Contagion
4. Sacrifice
5. Concealment

For a fuller exposition of Mimetic Theory, and especially the *scapegoat* hypothesis, see any or all of the following:

Girard, René Noël. *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); *Job, the Victim of His People* (London: Athlone Press, 1987); *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008).

Williams, James G. *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 2001)