

Functions of doctrine in religion essay sample

[Religion](#)



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Since centuries, religious scholars and experts have endeavored to propose an understandable interpretation of religion. In this regard, one of the theories presented to define and explain religion has been proposed by Ninian Smart, who provided his model of religious dimensions. In specific, he has tried to provide an explanation of religion by categorizing it in the practical, experiential, narrative, doctrinal, ethical, social, and material dimensions. In specific, this paper will discuss the doctrinal dimension of religion according to Ninian Smart (Smart, 1999) and will endeavor to understand its functions while relating it to different religions of the globe.

In brief, doctrinal dimension of the religion plays a significant and imperative role in underpinning different aspects of religion. It is noted that since centuries, doctrines have been used to complement and support narratives and teachings in a number of religions around the globe. For instance, absence of Buddha would have resulted in elimination of Buddhism from the face of earth; however, doctrinal dimension of Buddhism represented Buddha as a living existence in the world, and that motivated its followers to continue their religious practices, as taught by Buddha himself. (Smart, 1999) Similarly, a number of religions have used the doctrines to prove their belief systems, as doctrines portray symbolic and mythological expressions to articulate its teachings that allow religions to continue their existence, which is one of the major functions of doctrinal dimension of the religion.

Throughout the time, people have raised intellectual queries against belief system of every religion, such as notion of belief, creation of God, existence of the ultimate reality, death, life after death, suffering, etc. (Smart, 1998). In this regard, it is the function of doctrines to clarify and explain such queries

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to its followers with the help of its scriptures and revealed teachings. (Smart, 1998) In the case of Buddhism, Buddha provided a philosophical approach to religion, and thus, in this case, doctrinal thoughts played a momentous role in complementing his philosophies.

Every religion whether it is Confucianism, Buddhism, or Judaism, has transformed from existence as faith to a social reality where religion takes a form of social practices and values rather than a thing of faith. At this moment, it is the function of doctrines to support religious leaders and scholars to benefit from intellectual statements presented in doctrines, in order to provide rational answers to its educated followers. Doctrines in Confucianism have played an extraordinary in such case. For instance, Confucius gave considerable importance to ethical commitment and conduct in his teachings that can be seen in political leaders and rulers throughout the time in areas of Confucianism. In brief, Confucian's five pillars of ethical and moral guidelines present in doctrines have been able to provide an ethical framework to its followers. (Smart, 1998)

Besides social practices, ritual or practical is an imperative dimension of religion according to Ninian Smart and a number of scholars that provide a specific and exclusive platform to followers to practice their religious beliefs collectively, as well as, individually. (Swidler, 2000) It is noted that doctrines provide basis for the existence of such ritual practices, and thus, it is another function of doctrines to justify ritual practices.

Although it is the function of doctrinal dimension to harmonize the society and community; however, it is noted that the same dimension has resulted

in a number of conflicts in religions. For instance, Theravada and Mahayana doctrines in Buddhism have cursed the Buddhist community and divided it in two. Even though purification of consciousness has been the message of both doctrines; however, conflicts have been raised over originality and authenticity of one another. (Smart, 1998) Similar cases can be found in a number of other religions as well, where sects are formed due to existence of more than one doctrine. In this regard, provision of social harmony has brought risks of conflicts and sect formation due to doctrinal dimension of religion.

Another identified function of doctrines in religion is to connect its belief system to the ultimate reality, or in other words, to the earliest revelations. It is noted that a number of religions have traced back its existence to Abrahamic religions and belief system with the help of nothing else, but its doctrines. In this regard, information and faith matters of past religions are provided by doctrines as well, which allow a religion to represent itself as closest to the ultimate reality, rather than symbolizing it as a contemporary teaching. (Swidler, 2000) Moreover, every religion has some inclusive and few exclusive properties and characteristics. At this place, boundaries of religious expressions are marked and controlled by doctrinal dimension of the religion, as to where one may mark his line.

Conclusively, whether it is the concept of God's unity in Judaism, notion of Dharma and Nirvana in Buddhism, or principles of ethical commitment in Confucianism, every belief system and religion has utilized doctrines to justify its existence and motivate their followers to continue their practices. In conclusion, doctrines play a significant and imperative role in a majority of

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religions around the globe by their normative function to interpret their teachings, polemical function to justify their faith and belief system, etc. Conclusively, the paper has discussed some of the significant aspects of doctrinal dimension of religion with instances from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Judaism. It is hoped that the paper will be beneficial for students, teachers, and professionals in better understanding of the topic.

References

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