

Sociology and religion

Religion



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In sociology, sociological theories, perspectives and paradigms are theoretical frameworks that are used in explaining particular objects of social study. They help to explain the reason for certain behavior in regards to the object of social study. They also contribute largely towards sociological knowledge. Over the years, these theoretical frameworks are continuously expanding and can, therefore, not be deemed complete at any one particular time. This is because they are subject to human behavior among other factors. Unlike social theory, sociological theories seek to gain a better understanding of the society. There are several sociological theories in sociology. In this paper, a review of functionalism, interactionism and conflict theory will be made. This will be explored in relation to the effects that these theories have on religion (Brinkerhoff, 2007).

Conflict theory mainly focuses on the fact that in society, some groups of individuals tend to dominate others. This is mainly on the basis of political, social or material inequality that may exist among different groups of individuals. These are largely drawn from the differences in power acquisition that is derived from different classes among individuals in the society. Conflict theory has been discussed by different scholars in sociology. It is mainly associated with Karl Marx and the effects of capitalists' societies.

According to Marxism, for the different societies in the world, there exist different social classes. These are based on what each group owns and what it is therefore in control of. The conflict was persistent due to the ownership of the means of production which included land, labor and tools. Hence, the conflict was between the owners and the non-owners of the various means of

production. As a result, there was a rise of the two social classes; the working class (less powerful) and the ruling class (more powerful).

In a capitalist economic system, the main means of production include factories and machineries. As a result, the owners of these means of production are out to gain all that they can from the implementation of these means of production. However, they still need labor in order to complete the production process. Their main objective is to maximize profits and as such, they result to minimization of the labor costs as much as possible. As a result, the working class is angered by the low wages and is ultimately tired of the exploitation by the persistent means of production owners. Eventually, the working class tends to alienate itself from the overbearing production process. The working class will therefore try anything in its power so as to overthrow the owners who have continuously been exploiting their labor (Crutchfield, 2000).

In their continuous endeavor to overthrow the dominating ruling class, there is competition among them and things become harder. Karl Marx notes that in due course, the working class realizes that the means of production owners also dominate the political divide. As such, their needs are well catered for in the formation of the laws that govern them. They not only have economic control, but also political control. It is then that the working class realizes that they are trapped in their course for freedom and equality.

The working class therefore becomes vulnerable and results to crime. After all, there is hardly any way out as the owners of means of production have completely dominated the economy. The poor continue to be poor while the

rich become richer. Marxist argued that it was only through theorists like them coming out to clearly inform the working class of who their enemies really are that the conflict resolution would advance and eventually the working class would achieve their sole objective of having some form of control. He argued that with the underpinnings of the capitalist system being brought to light, the fall of this system would be hastened and a communist system would be eventually reached. A system where there were no rights to private property and hence, a society free of classes and oppression (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2009).

Though he did not largely dwell on deviance, Karl largely mentioned about criminal tendencies. He even ironically mentions that had there been no criminals, then personnel such as judges and the police would have no jobs. Marx largely dwells on the societal pressures in doing wrongs other than the individual motives of being immoral. This is largely supported by some scholars for example, Merton who argues that the problem of alienation is mainly due to the social structure other than social change since the society presents equal goal to be achieved yet there are no equal means of achieving the set out goals and objectives. It therefore becomes a form of survival for the fittest. Deviance therefore, is as a result of incompatibility of what the society expects of the working class and the social structure that is in existence.

Karl Marx's view on religion was that the provisions in the religion gave room for the ruling class to dominate the working class. He views religion as a representation of human self-alienation through the development of false consciousness among the working class. A justification of this fact is found in <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-and-religion/>

the lines that “ God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate.”

This leaves the working class with no option but to meet the requirements of the ruling group. This is a clear indication that the Marxists were of the opinion that religion promoted social inequality. To be more precise, Marxists viewed religion as a device used by the ruling group to dominate the working class.

Functionalism is viewed as a theory that has a huge focus on how elements of the society need to work together in order to fully function as complete. It lays prominence on the fact that certain objects of the society continue to exist due to the fact that this helps in carrying functions as a whole. This implies that having these units in the society enhances oneness. Such objects are requirements for the existence of social systems. Therefore, functionalists are of the opinion that such systems must exist in order for a social system to be well established.

In regards to religion, functionalists believe that it is a requirement as it brings individuals in the society together. As a result, they end up having certain things in common. Believing in the same things implies that they are in a position to agree on various issues and, hence, operate as a system because they work together on the basis of the same values. This is because they are able to achieve equilibrium in the society through the socialization among the members of the society in their places of devotion. They are also in a position to reach a consensus on a variety of issues due to the fact that they are in agreement on the norms and values within their society.

Functionalists also seek to show how individual behavior is shaped through the broader social forces such as religion.

Interactionism on the other hand, examines the fact that in the course of social interactions social patterns and shared meanings are developed. It is a study of how individuals interact in the society may it be positive or negative. This means that through the interactions that may exist among individuals, it is possible that there is the development of positive or negative perceptions (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003).

According to interactionalists, they agree with functionalists that religion boosts the relationships among individuals and hence boosts coordination and understanding. It also increases diversity and it largely promotes understanding among the societies concerned. This is because of the fact that they are in a position to agree on many issues based on the adapted norms and values.

It is evident that conflict theory largely differs with the perceptions adapted by functionalists and interactionalists. This is in regards to religion. This is because according to conflict theory, religion draws individuals in the society further apart as opposed to functionalism and interactionism that state that religion draws individuals in the society closer. According to conflict theory, religion empowers individuals from the ruling class and looks down upon the working class. According to functionalism and interactionism, religion empowers all individuals in the society and builds cooperation among the members of the society (Kunin, 2003).

It is also evident that according to conflict theory, religion does not seek to bring about equality in the society. It is also evident that the individuals are drawn further away from one another. Also, the perceptions and views of the

society remain unchanged. On the contrary, the division into social classes is largely enhanced.

According to functionalism and interactionism theories, religion enhances understanding among the members of the society and they are closer to one another. This is because they are able to identify similarly in the various values and norms that they share. Therefore, the views of the society are changed such that individuals are able to accept one another. This is a free world and no one should be discriminated against just because they are not of a particular social divide. Policy makers in states should carefully choose the best economic system to ensure equality of its people. The interest of the people should always be prioritized.