

Emile durkheim and karl marx' views on sociology of religion essay



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The role of religion and religious beliefs on society is powerful indeed (Haar and Tsuruoka 16). People are eager to make a number of supernatural claims to justify their thoughts and actions in order to legitimate the existing cultural norms and values people have to follow. Durkheim and Marx are the two sophisticated theorists, who believed that religion was a crucial aspect of society but offered different opinions (Lundskow 18; Riesebrodt 63). In this paper, the theoretical approaches developed by Durkheim and Marx will be compared to explain the connection between religion and society and understand if it is correct to identify society in terms of religion, or it is the religion that is based on society and human needs.

Durkheim believed that “ religion began at that point when a man found he was able to picture a supernatural being” (Durkheim and Pickering 13). In the majority of writings, the author underlined the power of religion over people. At the same time, it was wrong to say that religion could have a kind of priority over society. Religion and society remained to be inseparable from one another because religion was “ an eminently social phenomenon” on the one hand, and “ all mental categories and institutions developed out of religion” on the other hand (Riesebrodt 62). According to Durkheim, there were two crucial concepts: a sacred and a profane. A man is a profane due to their needs, desires, and egoism. However, when moral and social limitations are considered, a man can become sacred.

The ideas of Marx were based on a thorough evaluation of capitalistic society and its needs. As well as Durkheim, Marx underlined the importance of religion in society. Still, his position was the opposite. He defined religion as a form of escape for people. It was a protest available to people, an “ illusory

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happiness” or false consciousness that was required for human “ real happiness” (Marx and Engels 42). Besides, Marx introduced religion as one of the possible reasons for social inequality, a “ tool for class oppression” (Andersen and Taylor 453), and the existing religious institutions served as the main instruments of dominance. However, despite numerous critiques of religion, Marx did not deny its importance in society but provided the majority of negative characteristics.

The approaches of Durkheim and Marx have a number of similarities and differences. Marx wanted to provide people with a chance to be free from religious beliefs and their superfluous power on society. Durkheim tried to explain the evident connection between religion and society as a chance for people to become better and happier than they were at the moment.

Durkheim underlined that all religions were true, and Marx declared that all religions were false (Riesebrodt 63). At first, their contradictions may confuse people and get lost in the search for the right decisions. With time, their opposite ideas helped to come up with one truth: religion and society cannot be separated or divided according to the priorities. The connection between religion and society helps people to understand their own abilities and preferences and make the choices in regards to their personal needs as a significant part of society.

In general, a person, as a society member, is free to identify the role of religion in their life. Durkheim and Marx offered their ideas on how to understand religion and society and left the right of choice for people, who could use their personal attitudes to experience to realize how they should study religion and society.

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