

Karl marxs characterization of religion and freuds view of religious instinct cri...

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Religion cannot be defined by a particular set of words due to its complex nature. Different philosophers, scholars and theologians have held different opinions on religion, some which are radical. Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud stood out for their unique views on religion, which have been studied for centuries. They both rooted for the abolition of religion. Religious instinct is a part of human existence. Every society has something that would be classified as religion by modern scientists. Human beings have formed a strong inclination towards religion since time immemorial. Marx described religion as the ' opium of the people', a quite controversial and popular view.

Karl Marx ran a left wing movement and created a communist ideology (Sowell, 1993). Marx believed the problem with society was capitalism, which he said ought to be eradicated so as to free the common man, an opinion that created controversy among the people. Marxism has, until very recently, been the most influential imposing philosophy in history. Marx's description of religion as the opium of the people gives one the idea that religion is a cushion, preferred most by those in need. Religion is turned to when there is a vacuum or a void that needs to be filled. Religion creates illusionary fantasies, promising the poor happiness in the next life despite facing economic hardships. Religion offers solace during moments of distress. Marx's belief indicates that religion fails to fix the underlying issues that cause pain and suffering to the people despite the people seeking solace from religion. Instead, just like the opium drug, helps the people forget the reason for their suffering and makes them look forward to an illusionary future without the pain and suffering as opposed to working harder to make

a difference in their lives. this is the main reason why Marx did not vouch for capitalism.

Karl Marx viewed capitalism as a historical stage which would at last give way to socialism after stagnating. This gives more credence to socio-economic relationships between people and not people and things, and less credence to capital. It is imperative to say that capitalism would succumb to its own contradictions, giving rise to a revolution by a disgruntled and dissatisfied working population that has been impoverished by the nature of capital over time. Change would be inevitable according to Marx.

Marx describes religion as an illusion meant to offer excuses to the society to maintain the status quo. With very strong beliefs in God, religion has been used to quell dissent among the population. Those who benefit from the current mode of operation would not want to see things change, thus the church is a likely tool of teaching and training individuals to be submissive to authority, to take things as given and not investigate the real truth.

Another description of religion by Marx is that it is irrational- it is delusional and fails to recognize what is real. This passes off an idea that religion cannot offer concrete solution to all of man's problems, and deals with them with promise and in faith. This cannot improve an individual's living standards; the poor remain poor. This is ironical, as that is not the main initial idea advocated for by religion.

Karl Marx gives a description of religion as hypocritical. Religion has in many cases been used to oppress the weak, yet still proclaim to speak for the poor. This gives the impression that the powerful use the church to push their agenda forward at the expense of the poor and weak. The church '

preaches water and drinks wine'. The Christian faith many times contradicts the very values it ought to uphold. For instance, the Church merged with the state of Rome, which is oppressive and participated in slavery instead of voicing the concerns of the poor like Jesus did. These views by Karl Marx are largely in conformity to what Sigmund Freud believed.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was born in a Jewish family. He depicts religion instinct as a 'universal obsessional neurosis' and neurosis as 'religiosity at an individual level' (Freud, 1907). In his works, Freud brings out religion as an illusion, and an attempt at controlling the ability of man to form groups and fulfil their wishes.

Freud views religious instinct as a product of human weakness. The fact the human body is weak and cannot withstand pain and hardship over time causes an individual to form a belief in a higher being, to whom he can look for strength and support. He recognizes the human mind as a complicated energy system, neurotic in nature.

Freud states that there is a resemblance in the link between religious observances and obsessive acts of neurotics. He views obsessive religious ceremonials to be similar to other forms of psychological acts of the brain such as obsessive thinking, impulses among others. These ceremonials seem to be little variations from the usual activities in the life of man and are either different or carried out in a similar way. These actions may seem to be meaningless but they are not; they are formal.

Of great significance is Freud's view that those who participate in these formal, obsessive ceremonials are not capable of quitting these practices. Any attempts to deviate from these particular activities is met by bouts of

immense anxiety that is intolerable and the individual rushes to seek corrective measures in line with their religious instinct.

Religious instinct, Freud notes, has the possibility of turning to obsessive behavior if repeated many times or given a character with rhythm by having strategic pauses. At this particular point where one's social behavior begins to be affected by obsessive behavior, it becomes particularly dysfunctional. When Freud examines religious instinct, he notes that it becomes increasingly easy for an individual to make the transition from religious acts to obsessive rituals. He points out that a condition of religious instinct among other numerous others is that the patient may act compulsively, without finding out or understanding their core meaning. The motives that push the person to perform religious functions are either not clear to them or are, in consciousness, represented by other reasons which are put in place of the initial motives.

He states that religious instinct is shaped by one's most sacred and intimate experiences and his or her early sexual experiences.

Freud termed as 'humiliating' the fact that a very large section of the human race still defend religion strongly by word and action despite the fact that it is crystal clear to them that religion is not tenable. This shows that Freud knew the amount of influence that religious instinct has on the mind of an individual. It affects the emotions of people, creating a form of dependency.

Freud sought to reduce Christian beliefs into controllable emotion. He described belief in God in his book "The Future of an Illusion" as 'longing for a father'. This was with an aim to show that religious instinct could be

controlled, and those who possess it made a decision to conform to religious practices and rituals.

It is imperative to note that Freud's views on religious instinct as depicted above attempted to explicitly explain human behavior in relation to religion. Most of these behavior he attaches to the human ability to cope in times of hardships, and he postulates that religion has restricted the human race into one way of seeking for solutions to pertinent problems; seeking guidance from a higher being. Freud sees religious instinct as a way of dealing with struggle for existence in a world without cohesion. Karl Marx holds similar views, and is most bothered by the dependence that people have on religion, and the effect religion has on the mindset of the people, recognizing the fact that people have needs, some of which take up a spiritual form. All in all, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud were aware that religion was of particularly strong importance to most people, and sought to seek changes to the way religious doctrines were being administered.