

Conflict theory and functionalism

Sociology



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Final Examination Essay Question Final Examination Essay Question There are several differences between conflict theory and functionalism concerning religion. Whereas conflict theory views religion as an agent of oppression, functionalism looks at religion as a contributing factor to the continuation and health of the society. The basis of the conflict theory's argument that religion is an agent of oppression is its assumption that religion diverts the attention of people from oppressive situations to supernatural powers where they find false consolation (Blasi, 2011). The thing that underpins the functionalist view of religion as a contributing factor of the continuation and health of the society is that fact that it views it as one of the major components that make up the society besides family, school, education, mass media, economy, and polity (Beckford, 2006).

Both theories view religion as a measure of social control but functionalism looks at religion as a factor for strengthening a sense of group solidarity. According to conflict theory, the element that makes religion a measure of social control is that members of a religion have to observe certain teachings that make their conduct sacred lest they become profane (Luhmann, 2013). Underpinning the functionalist view of religion as a factor for strengthening group solidarity is the fact that it gives people a chance to bond when participating in religious rituals (Kunin, 2003). Conflict theory views the consensus that religion fosters among people as artificial and temporary whilst functionalism views it as natural and permanent for as long as religion remains functional (Kunin, 2006).

The theory that best describes the purpose and impact of religion in contemporary American society is functionalism. The strong belief that life is sacred that some of the Americans opposed to abortion uphold exemplifies

the idea of functionalism that religion categorizes social life as either sacred or profane (Vasquez, 2011). The way the majority of Americans come together and seeks consolation from religion especially in times of catastrophe typifies the notion of functionalism that religion brings social solidarity. Functionalism also holds that religion provides answers to existential questions and this is evident in the way some Americans resort to religion to seek answers to how the world came into existence (Jensen, 2000).

Functionalism predicts that there reaches a time in a society when the influence of religion in a society reduces and this is manifest in America. In America, religion is increasingly losing influence being replaced by scientific thinking and this can be seen in the prohibition to teach religion in school and the ever-growing importance placed on sciences in schools (Christiano, 2002). Functionalism also predicts that society reaches a point of civic religion which is seen in America's patriotism that is more deeply-rooted in many Americans than religious convictions (Lundskow, 2008). In agreement with the argument of functionalism that when society interacts with many other societies its religious systems emphasize universalism, many religious groups in America teach universal values (Turner, 2010).

In conclusion, conflict theory views religion as an instrument of oppression whereas functionalism views religion as an element that enhances the good health of the society. Functionalism is the theory that best describes the purpose and impact of religion in contemporary American society.

References

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