

Assess the view that religion is a source of instability and conflict

Religion



Assess the view that religion is a major source of instability and conflict in society today Religion has held an important role in society since the beginning of civilisation and it has such power over people's minds and shape the way our world developed. Whilst some sociological theories such as functionalist sees religion as performing a positive function in society as it can lead to social solidarity, integrating people into society, other sociological theories such as Marxist and Feminist totally disagrees with this and would argue that religion leads to instability and conflict in society.

Karl Marx a Marxist sees religion as an illusion and that the phenomenon of religion is part of what Marx refers to as an alienation of people which causes conflict in society. He saw society as divided into two social classes with one dominating the other. And he saw religion as promoting inequalities and class conflict in society. He argues that religion is part of a dominant ideology that is the idea that religion is a tool used by the bourgeoisie (Ruling class) to convince the working class to accept low paid jobs and so exploits the working class, reproducing and reinforcing false consciousness.

Marx saw religion as acting two functions. The opium of the masses explains that religion ease the pain or exploitation of the people in three ways as it promises an eventful escape from suffering and oppression in this life and promises a better life after death. Religion also offers hope of supernatural interventions to solve problem on earth and finally religion provides a religious explanation for the justification of inequality for example the rich man at his castle and the poor man at his gate.

The second function that religion does based on Marx is that it legitimises and maintains the power of the ruling class. They see religion as a form of <https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-view-that-religion-is-a-source-of-instability-and-conflict/>

social control and oppression that are used by the ruling class to legitimise the power of the wealthy. The inequality between the rich and the poor can't be challenged without questioning the authority of God. By religion acting this function and promoting inequality it is also promoting class conflict in society and so instability in society.

Marxist however has been criticised for ignoring the fact that religion can also act as a form of resistance to the powerful and so act as an agent of social change for example in south American in the 1960's and 70's, Roman Catholic priests - followers of a doctrine missing communism and Catholicism called liberation theology played a major roles in the fighting against political dictatorship and poverty.

Religion has also produced revolutionary change as some religious such as Islamic fundamentalism is often a vehicle for resisting the global influence of western cultural imperialism, fighting the Americanization of the world culture and resisting dominance of the western corporation in the world economy. While Marxist sees religion as acting as a form of conflict through promoting class inequality, feminist also argue that religion also act as a form of major conflict in society but this is done through religion maintaining and promoting a patriarchal society which is male dominated.

Many feminist regard religions as patriarchal an institution which reflects and preserves this inequality. There are lots of evidence of religion promoting patriarchal such as in religious organisation it is mainly male dominated even though women participate more in the organisations for example catholic and Judaism restricts women from being ordained high priests. Karen Armstrong sees women as being marginalised in religion due to their <https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-view-that-religion-is-a-source-of-instability-and-conflict/>

exclusion from priesthood, also in the places of worship women are often segregated for example seating them behind the screens while the men occupy the central and moral sacred spaces in Muslim religion.

Women are also not allowed to touch the Quran when they are in their period. Holm describes this as the devaluation of women in contemporary religion. Also the fact that in the sacred texts, there are mainly features of male gods, prophets and there are not a lot of women in the scriptures, and if there is, it is only anti-stories about them such as the story of Adam and Eve, eve being the woman and the deceiver and the story of Mary Magdalene the prostitute.

Finally religious laws and customs give women fewer rights than men for example in divorce and how many spouses that they can marry. Simone De Beauvoir sees religion as oppressive to women and used by men to control women. She argues that religion compensates women for their second class status and they get a false belief that they will be rewarded in heaven and gain equality there. All these explanations show how religion promotes social conflict and oppression in society.

Despite highlighting the true reality that some religions treat men and women differently, Feminist however, have been criticised based on the ground that they were being too deterministic as not all religions are patriarchal for example in most religions such as some Christianity for example protestant or evangelical treat women as equal to men and women are allowed to become priests and not marginalised or excluded in religion.

Linda woodhead criticises feminist and emphasises that women use religion to gain greater freedom and respect and she uses the example of Hijab worn by many Muslim women as it may symbolise resistance to oppression. And for most Muslim women, the Hijab may be a symbol of liberation that enables them to enter the public sphere without losing their culture and history. Women also use religion to gain status and respect for their roles within the private sphere of home and family life.

For example belonging to an evangelical group can be empowering for some women, and despite the strong beliefs in traditional gender roles that such groups hold, women are able to use religion to increase their power and influence. Like H. Saudawi argues, religion itself is not oppressive; rather it is the male domination of religion that is the problem and due to the rise of monotheistic religion which are male dominated.

Both Marxist and feminist have been criticised for ignoring the positive function religion plays in society such as bring and integrating individual together and acting as an institutions where people come together and bond. As Marxist and feminist focuses more on the inequality of social class and gender. So in conclusion, despite some of the highlights that is shown on how religion can be oppressive, religion isn't all bad and does not all the time cause conflict and instability to society.