

# Religion acts as a conservative force on modern society essay sample

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



Functionalists and Marxists do not agree that religion causes change within society. This is because they believe that religion acts as a conservative force within society. A conservative force means that religion prevents change within modern society. On the other hand feminists believe that religion does not act as a conservative force as it has helped to bring some changes within modern society, for example equal rights for women. Weber believes that religion is the force for change within society. Although these views are all 'out of date' they still provide an understanding for society which helps to understand why some view agree with the view that religion acts as a conservative force on modern society.

Durkheim is a functionalist who believed that religion acts as a conservative force on society, he believed that there were sacred things and these were symbolic. What these sacred items represented was a collective consciousness which is a basic set of shared beliefs, values and social norms. He believed that the collective consciousness keeps the group together which would mean that religion is a conservative force in society. If people did not share the same interests they would want change and would go through religion to change things. Durkheim believed in the division of labour, he said that as society became more complex the collective consciousness would become weaker because people from one group in society did not see themselves as the same as another group. This would cause a change in society because the groups are wanting different things. Durkheim examined religion in small-scale, non-literate societies. In today's large scale, complex societies usually contain a variety of different religions. It is possible to see how his ideas do relate to modern society.

Marxism believes that religion acts as a conservative force on society, religion is one of the institutions which maintains the capitalist rule within society. Religion distorts reality by encouraging the belief that people are dependent upon supernatural beings or sacred powers. For example the belief that events are controlled by supernatural powers, this means that there is little people can do to change their situation, apart from trying to influence the supernatural powers by prayer, sacrifice or some other means. In this way religion obscures the human authorship of and responsibility for social inequality and thereby discourages the realisation that working for social change may be possible and desirable. Marxists also believe that religion often appears to lend sacred support to the current social order and in doing so reinforces prohibitions against actions which would challenge those in power.

So this would mean that religion does act as a conservative force on society. However in modern capitalist societies innovation and high rates of social mobility are required for the success of capitalist enterprise, religious teachings have been largely abandoned. It can still be argued that mainstream religion continues to legitimise privilege and inequality, this means that religion acts as a conservative force on society. Marx saw religion as a form of ideology which helped to maintain ruling class power. Critics agree there is evidence to support this view from certain times and places. However they reject the claim that this is the primary role of religion.

Feminists agree with the view that religion acts as a conservative force on society. This is because they believe that religion is a patriarchal institution

which keeps men above women. However in modern society it has been shown that feminism has caused change within society, making society equal for men and women. Feminists are concerned about three main points in religion. These are that in almost all the world religions the gods are male. However Hinduism does have its female goddesses. The second point is that the sacred texts overwhelmingly feature males and male activity. The final concern feminists have with religion is that the sacred texts were also written and been interpreted by male stereotypes and biases. For example in the creation story God created Adam then Eve as a helpmate.

This shows that religion acts as a conservative force as Eve was only created to help the man, which feminists believe still happens. Feminists believe that religion acts as a conservative force on society and this is shown by religious professionals. In many world religions the majority of religious professionals are male. This is because in Christianity females are not eligible to become priests in the Roman Catholic, Greek or Russian Orthodox churches, and only became eligible since 1992 in the Church of England. This is because feminists caused the change within society. According to many feminists religion has been a major institutional means for controlling women.

However in many ancient religions, females had key positions. In ancient Greek and Roman religion, goddesses were neither uncommon nor unimportant. The Greek goddess Athena, was god of war, wisdom and the arts.

Weber does not agree with the view that religion acts as a conservative force on society. Although he did accept that religion often functioned to justify

social inequality. He believed that religion existed because people needed a system of basic beliefs to make sense of their existence and to have a sense of their identity. Weber argued that societies developed differently because the religions beliefs and ideas about ethical conduct of their members were different. This means that religion can act as a force for change because religious beliefs and religious movements. Weber wanted to find out why capitalism had developed in some western countries but had not developed in the east. He concluded that eastern religions had certain key teachings and values which had discouraged the development of capitalism and western religions had encouraged it. This proves that religion can act as a conservative force in some places but it can also cause change as it had in the western society. However this was a long time ago it is still useful to learn about today's society as it provides information on how religion acts as a conservative force on society.

John Calvin believed in predestination, this is when someone's destination has already been planned out even before birth. Although no-one could influence the decision so no-one could be sure that they were pre-selected for heaven or hell. Weber argued that the salvation anxiety with which they were plagued with provoked them to find signs that they were amongst the chosen for salvation. So what happened is that they all started to work, which lead to capitalism. This means that religion caused a change within society. there is the criticism that which came first Calvinism or capitalism. Tawney argued that society had already changed radically in a capitalist direction before Calvinism. New technologies had been invented and

introduced a capitalist class had emerged and new ways of viewing society had developed. In this view as Calvinism emerged it was adopted by the rising capitalist class and with some changes in emphasis provided a religious justification for a rational capitalism which was already established and developing.

It has been argued that religion acts as a conservative force in society and this has been proved by the sociological perspectives above. Although these perspectives are 'out of date' they are still useful in understanding society and understanding how it became like it is today. The main perspective that argues against the view of religion acting as a conservative force on society is feminism and they have proven that some religious groups have caused change within society.