

SOC 347

Charon, chapter 9

IS ORGANIZED RELIGION
NECESSARY FOR SOCIETY?

Religion

A view of the universe by which beliefs and practices identify a special sacred world apart from our physical world.

It is socially created and has an important impact on human action as the continued existence of the community.

Religion

- Faith
- Religious commitment
- Acceptance of God's word

Sociology

- Religion is a central aspect of society
- Sociology unable to state whether religious beliefs are correct or incorrect

What is Religion

- According to Durkheim:
 - 1. Religion is a set of beliefs and practices that divide the universe into two parts:
 - A. sacred
 - B. profane

Examples

- • Christianity
- • Judaism
- • Islam
- • Hinduism
- • Buddhism
- • Confucianism

Sect

A type of religious organization that stands apart from the larger society.

- (e.g. Amish)

Cult

A religious organization that is substantially outside of a society's cultural tradition. (e.g. Heaven's gate)

Secularization

The historical decline in the importance of the supernatural and the sacred

Fundamentalism

A conservative religious doctrine that opposes intellectualism and the worldly accommodation in favor of restoring traditional, otherworldly spirituality.

What is Religion

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Emile Durkheim

- beliefs—express the nature of sacred things
- practices—determine how people are supposed to act in the presence of the sacred
- more to the universe than physical
- more to life than the everyday mundane affairs
- •

Durkheim

- special feeling when the sacred is acted upon
- people designate what is sacred
- violation of the sacred—violates the community
- sacredness woven into community's values, morals, rulership,
- need to have religion to support continuity of a community

Max Weber

- religion—central to a people's culture
- as an ethic—a tool people use to make sense of the universe
- religion influences government, economy, law, outsiders

Max Weber

- guides—war, peace, goals, failures, family system, democracy, capitalism
- economic development dependent on religion
- concerned about replacement of supernatural explanations for rational scientific

Peter Berger

- religion has a social essence
- as a sacred canopy—to make sense of life
- Explains tragedy, chaos, evil, etc.
- Provides meaning far above science and the profane

Peter Berger

- Religion makes us see our lives as important
- Enables individuals transcend the physical
- Religion will continue to be central aspect of human culture

Functions of Religion

- 1. Social Solidarity
- 2. Protecting Group Identity
- 3. Control Over the Individual
- 4. Defends Democracy Against Tyranny
- 5. Provides Understanding & Meaning
- 6. Defense of Social Patterns

Social Solidarity

- weddings, baptism, funerals bring people together
- shared experiences brings focus on the community
- used to create sacred objects: flag, anthem, pledge, etc.

Protecting Group Identity

- used to claim uniqueness
- used to defend against oppression
- used to protect against the larger society

Control Over the Individual

- makes the moral system look universal
- encourages acceptance of a just universe (criminal justice)
- teaches individuals to sacrifice for the community (soldiers)

Defends Democracy Against Tyranny

- religion inspires people to participate in government
- involvement in community groups leads to civil society

Provides Understanding & Meaning

- helps to make sense of chaos
- gives life purpose and fulfillment

Defense of Social Patterns

- *the opium of the masses*—turns the poor away from the source of their problems
- religion used to defend economic exploitation
- used to justify social patterns
- • used to protect the wealthy, oppressive governments,
- •

Defense of Social Patterns

- religion used to defend slavery, racism, sexism
- Raises religious and political orders as above criticism
- encourages people to accept their positions in society and obey authorities
- promises of on afterlife

Criticism of Social Patterns

- religion used to criticize society
- a force in identifying social problems
- organizes social movements (protests on immigration)
- inspires reform
- a double-edge sword--provides a forum for true and false prophets

DYSFUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

- divides people
- intolerance
- justifies oppression and destruction of others
- tends to blame victims of tragedy (God's punishment)
- •

DYSFUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

- looks for scapegoats (blames non-believers for calamities)
- people willing to blow themselves up (go to war) for the community
- stifles free speech
- religion used to threaten those who do not conform to society's laws and morality

TRADITIONAL	MODERN
Society is dominated by the past	Society focused on the present
The idea of progress is not assumed	Strong belief in progress (technology)
Community more important than individual	Individual more important than community
Life events explained through religion	Science explains life events
Religion is permanent and encompassing	Religion is far less encompassing
One religion dominates the community	Many religions exist side by side

Values that create secularization

- Individual over community
- Science over authority
- The present over the past
- Progress over fatalistic acceptance
- Pursuit of the everyday “profane” rather than pursuit of “sacred” life
- Mobility of place & status rather than embeddedness in place of birth
- Time and efforts in the secular world rather the religious world

Is organized religion necessary for society?

- Religion has become less important to society
- Modernization contributes to a decline in the role of religion
- Societies have become religiously pluralistic
- Many people have become spiritual

Is organized religion necessary for society?

- Modern life has made religion active choice rather than a way of thinking
- So is organized religion necessary?
- YES—it is as important as ever.