

## Religion

Religion is defined in two ways functional as in the function it perform for society and individuals as was said by Yinger “a system of beliefs and practises by a means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life”. The second definition is substantive which the content of religion i.e. Dirkhyme’s distinction between the sacred and profane.

Marxists (Marx) believe that religion is an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. It is a series of myths that justifies and legitimate the domination of the ruling class. Marx see it as the “sigh of the oppressed creature...it is the opium of the people. Marxists believe that religion comforts and makes life more bearable for working class people as there is a future in heaven which may explain the high number of religious people in third world countries. By comforting people it dilutes the demand for change, religion stupefies its adherents adhere than bringing them true happiness.

For Marxists religion also acts as a mechanism of social control by keeping people in their place. It does this by making difficult lives bearable which discourages people from changing their situation. Religion offers an illusion of hope in hopeless situation and by providing justifications for society religion distorts reality and helps to produce false consciousness. The ruling classes also adopt religious beliefs to justify their dominance i.e. mediaeval Europe kings and queen’s rule by divine right and the Pope.

However there is evidence that suggests that religion does not legitimate power and it simply a justification of alienation or a justification of privilege and can provide an impetus for change. Lastly Marxists believe that religion is the opium of the people as mentioned above. Religion is like a drug that dulls pain and creates a dream world rather than bringing true happiness. Religion promises a paradise of eternal bliss in life after death. Religion can offer the hope of supernatural solutions the problems on earth and when people look forward t an event it makes the time passing more bearable.

Feminists follow similar views as Marxist, by arguing that religion is an instrument of domination and oppression. They see religion as a product of patriarchy and they see it as serving the interests of men rather than those of a capitalist class i.e. Giddens who is not a feminist sociologist says “Christian religion is a resolutely male affair in its symbolism and its hierarchy. While Mary, the mother of Jesus may be treated as if she had divine qualities, God is the father, a male figure, and Jesus took the human shape of a man. Woman is portrayed as created from the rib of man. In many churches today there are more women than men (65% women) participating even though they are excluded from key roles.

Jean Holm argued that women today were subordinated or exploited in contemporary religion and devalued by different religious beliefs. Many religions argue for equality between men and women however they do not practise what they preach. In many religions women are subordinate to men and play a role in the background with men in the front line i.e. Japanese folk – women organise public rituals but cannot take part. In Islam some Mosques do not allow women to enter Mosques for worship and men create all the rules. De Beavouir argues that “religion can be used by oppressors (men) to control the oppressed group (women) and serves as a way for compensation women for their second class status... man enjoys the great advantage of having a God endorse the code he writes: Thus code uses divine authority to support made dominance. Armstrong (1993) pointed out that women occupy a marginal position in

most major religions and although they have made gains in many areas of life but gains in religion are very limited.

Marxist and feminist theories help our understanding of religion in society differently. Both theories explain different parts of religion and how it affects our lives. They both show that religion is used as an instrument of oppression and domination and a product of patriarchy. It explains why more working class people go to church. Working class people use religion as opium as it dulls the pain and create a dream world rather bring true happiness.