|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Marxist theory  LEARNING TABLE 2 – MARXISM/FEMINIST VIEWS OF RELIGION | Feminist role/function religion in society | |
| Key concepts:   * Marxism is a conflict theory, although Marxists do not see religion causing conflict in society; rather religion acting on behalf of the ruling class to stop conflict. Marxists argue society is split into two classes, the working class (proletariat) and the ruling class (bourgeoisies). The proletariat have become **alienated** (removed) from the production process and become exploited by the bourgeoisie, thus creating conflict between those who have money and those who do not. * Marx sees religion as a **social construction** made by the ruling class to transmit their ideas of capitalism to the working people, thus religion becomes a tool for oppressing the proletariat and explaining why they are alienated from the production process. * Marxists believe that Religion is an **ideological force** as religious beliefs aren’t true rather manipulated and presented by the most powerful group in society (the bourgeoisie). Marxists use the term **ideological state apparatus** to explain that religion is performs a similar ideological role as education and the media in controlling the feelings of the workers and stopping them wanting revolution (**social change**). * **Ideological control** leads to **social control**. Through secondary socialisation religion teaches and preaches the norms and values of the ruling class, the value of money and importance of hard work. * Marx also argued that religion has an important role/function in helping the working class escape the alienation of the capitalist production process. Religion disguises the true nature of exploitation by providing an explanation for inequality. The concept of Heaven being at the end of a workers life gives rise to an ignorance of their current plight. In believing that they will go to a perfect place when they die means alienating work becomes something to be suffered to prove worthiness rather than capitalist exploitation. * Marxist key quote concerning religion is that it is “**the opium of the masses**” meaning it acts a type of drug to keep the workers passive and stop revolution (**social change**) * http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/6d/Marx_Engels_Lenin.svg/493px-Marx_Engels_Lenin.svg.pngAn example of Marxist ideas in religion is the church of scientology, which put a great deal of emphasis on wealth creation and enjoys the financial benefits of having rich donors. | | Key Concepts:   * Feminism is a conflict theory although feminists do not see religion as causing conflict in society rather; religion acting on behalf of men to continue **patriarchal control**. Feminists argue that the social explanations of religion put forward by ‘classic’ theorists only account and explain male behaviour. * Much of the empirical research sociologists such as Durkheim and Marx use are part of the ‘malestream’ made up of male participants. Although feminism can be split into a number of branches (Marxist, liberal, Postmodern) they agree that religion, society and sociology is patriarchal, male dominated. * Feminist writer **De Beauvoir (1949)** argues that religion oppresses women in much the same way as Marx suggests religion oppresses the working classes. * Feminists believe that religion is an **ideological force** as religion is controlled predominantly by men. **De Beauvoir (1949)** argues that religious leaders are generally male and much of the doctrine is interpreted from a male perspective, which controls the way women view themselves and reinforces patriarchy * The **ideological control** of women leads to their **social control** in society**.** **De Beauvoir (1949)** that through secondary socialisation religion teaches and preaches the norms and values of the men, helping to suppress and control women. * Women are more likely to believe in a God, an afterlife or a code of ethics than men. Women are also more likely to join and take a greater part of new religious movements. Meaning the impact of the patriarchal control is greater. * **http://tarmojuristo.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/feminism.jpegBruce (1995)** argues that women are more likely to join sects and cults. This could be because they feel disadvantaged by other parts of a patriarchal society and therefore seek out a place out side of society that better understands their needs. However feminists would argue that sects offer no escape from male oppression. In sects women have no chance of being in power, and stand a chance of both physical and sexual abuse. |
| Theoretical evaluation | | Theoretical evaluation |
| * Marxist theory has gained theoretical support from feminist sociologists. **Feminist** theory is sympathetic to the idea of religion suppressing conflict between social groups as well as imparting negative norms and values to certain members of society. For example Holm (1994) argues that much religious doctrine has been interpreted by men and therefore religion passes on inherent gender bias in each teaching. **However** Feminist would argue that Marxist understands of oppression is incomplete as they ignore gender patriarchal oppression entirely. This suggests that Marxist ideas have wider theoretical appeal. * Marxist theory has been criticised by Weberian sociologists on a theoretical level. Weber argues that religion does not operate to impart norms and values to society, but rather is the start point for modern industrial thought. According to Weber the move from feudal cottage industries to large-scale industrialised factories could not have occurred without the protestant work ethic. This suggests that the Marxist approach only offers a partial view on how religion functions within society. | | * Feminist theory has gained theoretical support from Marxist theorists. **Marxists** agree with the feminist idea of **ideological control** and **false consciousness**. Marxist would also support the idea that control come from an unequal power relationship between social groups (although they would disagree as to which groups these are). This suggests that feminist ideas have wider theoretical appeal. **However** Marxists would argue that understanding an individual’s relationship to the economy plays more important than their gender in understanding oppression. * Traditional Feminists theory connected to oppression has been criticised on a theoretical level by postmodern feminists. Postmodernist feminists would argue that women's role in religion is about choice rather than patriarchy. Instead women choose to either be religious or not. This suggests that the Feminist approach only offers a partial view on how religion functions within society. |
| Empirical evaluation | | Empirical evaluation |
| * Marxist ideas have empirical support. Bruce (1988) studied the role the New Christian Right (NCR) played in the 1980 American election. He found out of 27 left-wing (more Marxist) candidates that were targeted for defeat by the NCR, 23 lost their seat to a right-wing more business orientated candidate. Bruce argues that this shows a link between New Christian Right and support for capitalist ideology. This empirical data suggests that there is some validity in the Marxist ideas. * Marxist theory has been criticised on empirical grounds by the developments of Neo-Marxists. Neo-Marxist Manduro (1982) found evidence that religion did not always promote ruling class ideologies within society. He found that in South America although Catholicism often supported the ruling class, increasingly the clergy are acting independently against controlling interests leading to **liberation theology**. This suggests that that Marx lacks empirical data that backs up his theory. | | * http://img.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2007/08_01/vicardibley1208_468x492.jpgFeminist ideas have empirical support. **Jean Holm (1994)** investigated the role of women in religion. She found that although the classical readings of the religions emphasised equality between men and women the reality was very different, with women being generally excluded during religious cerimonies. Saadawi found that women are equally disadvantaged in the Muslim faith. She claims that a female circumcision, an unpleasant mutilation of female genitalia, can be attributed to Islam. This suggests that there is some validity in the Feminist ideas. * Feminist theory has been criticised on empirical grounds. Not all religions can be criticised for being patriarchal. Increasingly women are taking an active role in religion. For example Judaism has allowed rabbis since 1972 and the Church of England has allowed female vicars since 1992. This suggests that feminist theory is based on one very narrow view of society and therefore the evidence lacks validity. |
| Conclusion:   * Contemporary arguments only cloud understanding of religion and oppression. The rise of Fundamentalism has increased the oppression of women to; from wearing the veil in the Muslim faith to control of abortion law in America. However Fundamentalism in The Middle East is not an example of ruling class oppression rather the fight against global capitalism. * It is also difficult to use Britain as an example of either Marxism or feminism being a correct interpretation of religion’s role in society. **Secularisation** has been continuing to reduce the power of religion over British people. If only 24% of people in the UK regularly attend religious service how can it be argued that religion has **ideological** and **social control**? | | |