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| **Religion and Social Change** |
| **Introduction** |
| * Religion is seen as a conservative force a) because it is seen as ‘traditional’, upholding traditional beliefs and b) it aims to conserve things as they are * Religion also serves functions for a particular reason/preserving things as they are and therefore maintain a status quo: * Functionalists see religion as maintaining social stability, preventing societal disintegrations and increases consensus * Marxism see religion as preventing social change due to its conservative ideology, by disguising inequality and oppression of the working class creating a flase consciousness, all resulting in stabilising a capitalist society * Feminists see religion as a conservative force because it acts as an ideology that legitimates patriarchal power and maintain’ s women’s subordination in the family and wider society |
| **Weber: Religion as a Force for Social Change** |
| Weber argues that the religious beliefs of Calvinism (a form of Protestantism founded by John Calvin during the Reformation) helped to bring about major social change – specifically the emergence of capitalism in Northern Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries.  **Calvinist Beliefs**  ***Predestination*** – God had predetermined which souls would be saved and which would not, even before birth. Individuals couldn’t do anything about it whether through deeds as the Catholics believed (e.g. pilgrimages, prayer, or charity to the Church), or through faith like the Lutheran Protestants believed. God’s decision is made and cannot be altered.  ***Divine Transcendence*** – God was so far above and beyond this world and greater than any mortal, that no human could claim to know his will (other than what he chose to reveal through the bible). This included the Church and its priests leading to ‘an unprecedented inner loneliness’ of the Calvinists. When combined with the doctrine of predestination this created a *salvation panic.* They didn’t know if they had been chosen to be saved, and couldn’t do anything to earnt heir salvation.  ***Ascetism*** – abstinence, self-discipline and self-denial are necessary e.g. monks lead an ascetic existence, refraining from luxury, wearing simple clothes and avoiding excess in order to devote themselves to God and a life of prayer.  ***The Idea of Vocation or Calling*** – a religious vocation used to mean renouncing everyday life to join a convent or monastery (a calling to serve God). Weber calls this *other-wordly ascetism.* By contrast, Calvinism introduces *this-worldly ascetism.* The only thing Calvinist’s knew of God’s plan for humanity came from the bible, which revealed to them that we were put on the earth to glorify God’s name by our work, so they interpreted this as constant, methodical work in an occupation, not in a monestary. But, this work couldn’t earn salvation – it was just a religious duty. Calvinists therefore shun a life of luxury and lead an ascetic lifestyle including working long hours and practising rigorous self-discipline. This hard work had two consequences: firstly their wealth and success allowed them to cope with their salvation panic because it was a sign from God that they deserved it, and secondly their systematic and methodological way of spending meant no luxuries were indulged upon and their wealth was re-invested into business making them grow and therefore bringing in more wealth. According to Weber this is the very spirit of modern capitalism where the bject is to simply acquire more and more money. Calvinists therefore brought capitalism as we now know it into the world.  **Hinduism and Confucianism (evaluation for Weber’s view of Calvinist beliefs)**   * Weber was not arguing that Calvinism is the *only* cause of capitalism, but definitely *one* of the causes. A number of material/economic factors were also necessary e.g. natural resources, trade, a money economy, towns and cities and a system of law etc. * Weber argues there were other societies with higher economic development than Northern Europe had at the time of the 16th and 17th centuries, but it didn’t result in modern capitalism. Ancient China and India were materially more advanced than Europe, but there was no capitalism due to the lack of religious belief system like that of Calvinism that would have spurred its development. * Thus, in ancient India, Hinduism was an ascetic religion favouring renunciation of the material world. But its orientation was *other-worldly* i.e. it directed its follower’s concerns away from the material world to the spiritual world. * In ancient China, Confucianism also discouraged the growth of rational capitalism but for different reasons. Confucianism was a *this-worldly* religion that directed followers towards the material world, but it was NOT ascetic. * Both Hinduism and Confucianism lacked the drive and discipline to systematically accumulate wealth that is necessary for modern capitalism. Calvinism was unique in combining asceticism with this-worldly orientation to enable the spirit of modern capitalism to emerge.   **Further Evaluation**   * Marx saw economic/material factors as the driving force of change, whereas Weber argues that material factors alone are not enough to bring about capitalism: it also needed specific cultural factors e.g. the beliefs and values of Calvinism to bring it into being. * Karl Kautsky (1927) argues that Weber overestimates the role of ideas and underestimates economic factors in bringing capitalism into being – he argues that in fact, capitalism preceded rather than followed Calvinism * R. H. Tawney (1926) argues that technological change, not religious ideas, caused the birth of capitalism. It was only after capitalism was established that the bourgeoisie adopted Calvinist beliefs to legitimate their pursuit of economic gain. * Weber is also criticised because capitalism did not develop in every country where there were Calvinists e.g. Scotland being very slow to develop capitalism. Marshall (1982) argues however that this was because of a lack of investment capital and skilled labour, which supports the Weberian theory. * Others argue that although Calvinists were among the first capitalists, this was not because of beliefs but because they had been excluded by law from political office and many professions, like the Jews in Eastern Europe. They turned to business as one of the few alternatives open to them. However, Weberians reply that other religious minorities were also excluded in this way but did not become successful capitalists. |
| **Religion and Social Protest** |
| **The American Civil Rights Movement**   * Bruce describes the civil rights movement as an example of religiously motivated social change * Bruce describes the black clergy as the backbone of the movement e.g. Dr Martin Luther King, by giving support an legitimacy to civil rights activists – the churches provided meeting places and sanctuary away from the threat of white violence, and rituals such as prayer meetings and hymn singing were a source of unity in the face of oppression * Bruce argues that the black clergy were able to shame whites into changing the law by appealing to their shared Christian values of equality. * Bruce sees religion as an *ideological resource* providing beliefs and practices that protestors could draw on for motivation and support. Using the civil rights movement as an example, he identified several ways in which religious organisations are well equipped to support protests and contribute to social change: * ***Taking the moral high ground*** – Black clergy pointed out the hypocrisy of white clergy who preached ‘love thy neighbour’ but supported racial segregation * ***Channelling dissent*** – religion provides channels to express political dissent e.g. the funeral of Martin Luther King was a rally point for the civil rights cause * ***Acting as honest broker*** – Churches can provide a context for negotiating change because they are often respected by both sides in a conflict and seen as standing above ‘mere politics’ * ***Mobilising public opinion*** – Black churches in the South successfully campaigned for support across the whole of America   **The New Christian Right**   * A politically and morally conservative, Protestant fundamentalist movement which has gained prominence since the 1960s because of its opposition to the liberalising of American society * They seek to take American ‘back to God’ and make abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage and divorce illegal, as well as campaigning for the teaching of ‘creationism’ * However it has been hugely unsuccessful and Bruce suggests these reasons why: * Its campaigners find it very difficult to cooperate with people from other religious groups, even when campaigning on the same issue, such as abortion * It lacks widespread support and has met with strong opposition from groups who stand for freedom of choice * To be successful they need to connect with mainstream beliefs about democracy, equality and religious freedom, which the civil rights movement did but the New Christian Right has failed to do |
| **Marxism, Religion and Change** |
| * Despite popular belief, Marxists do recognise that ideas, including religious ideas, can have *relative autonomy* i.e. can be partly independent of the economic base of society therefore religion can have a ‘dual character’ and can sometimes be a force for change as well as stability * Engels (1895) argues that although religion inhibits change by disguising inequality, it can also challenge the status quo and encourage social change e.g. preaching liberation from slavery and misery   **Ernst Bloch: The Principle of Hope**   * Accepts that religion can inhibit change, but he also says it can inspire protest and rebellion e.g. with the ‘principle of hope’ and our dreams for a better life, a ‘utopia’ * Utopia could be deceptive with promises of rewards in heaven (according to Marx) but it may also alert us to changes needed – gives us a vision of a better world so we try to bring about social change (together with political organisation and leadership)   **Liberation Theology**   * The movement of the Catholic Church (Latin America) was influenced by the following factors: * Deepening rural poverty and growth of slums * Human rights abuse following military take-overs e.g. torture and death squads murdering political opponents in Brazil, Argentina and Chile * Growing commitment among Catholic priests to an ideology that supported the poor and opposed violations of human rights * Priests developed literacy programmes, educating the poor about their situations, raising awareness and mobilising support * During the 70s the priests held their position amongst the oppressed, but in the 80s Pope John Paul II condemned liberation theology, and the movement lost influence * Maduro (1982) and Lowy (2005) see liberation theology as an example of religiously inspired social change, but other Marxists disagree   **The Pentecostal Challenge**   * David Lehmann contrasts Liberation Theology and Pentecostalism: * Liberation Theology offers an ‘option *for* the poor’ i.e. community consciousness-raising and campaigning for social change, led by ‘revolutionary priests and nuns in their jeans and sandals’ * Pentecostalism offers an ‘option *of* the poor’ for individuals to pull themselves out of poverty through their own efforts, supported by the congregation and led by the church pastors, ‘uniformly respectable in their suits, white shirts and black ties’ * So Liberation Theology offers a radical solution to poverty (collective improvement through political action in the public sphere) whereas Pentecostalism’s solution is conservative (individual self-improvement through the private sphere of family and church)   **Millenarian Movements**   * Peter Worsley (1968) states that Millenarian movements expect total and imminent transformation of this world by supernatural means, therefore creating heaven on earth, free from pain, death, sin, corruption and imperfection. This will be *collective* so a whole *group* will be saved, not just individuals * Often appeals more the poor because of the promise of immediate improvement, usually resulting in colonial movements e.g. European colonialism leading to economic exploitation and cultural and religious domination e.g. through Christian missionaries and their schools. At the same time, it shattered traditional tribal structures as local leaders and local gods lost power and credibility when their people are forced to work for colonists who live in luxury * Worsley studied *cargo cults* in Melanesia (Western Pacific) - the islanders felt wrongly deprived when ‘cargo’ (material goods) arrived for the colonists, and they saw this social order as unjust * Worsley describes the movements as *pre-political* – they used religious ideas and images but they united native populations in mass movements that spanned tribal divisions in an attempt to overthrow the colonies * From a Marxist perspective, Engels argues that they represent the first awakening of ‘proletarian self-consciousness’   **Gramsci: Religion and Hegemony**   * *Hegemony* refers to the way that the ruling class use ideas such as religion to maintain control – when established, they can rely on popular consent rather than needing coercion e.g. the immense conservative ideological power of the Catholic Church in helping to win support for Mussolini’s fascist regime * However, the working-class could develop an alternative vision, and Gramsci argues that popular forms of religion can help workers see through the ruling-class hegemony by offering a vision of a better, fairer world * Billings (1990) applied Gramscis’ ideas by studying and comparing two communities; coalminers and textile workers in Kentucky during the 1920s and 1930s. Both were working-class and evangelical Protestant, but the miners were much more militant, struggling for recognition of their union and better conditions, whereas textile workers accepted the status quo. He identified 3 ways in which religion wither supported or challenged the employer’s hegemony; * **Leadership:** the miners benefitted from *organic intellectuals* – many of them lay preachers who were themselves minors and trade union activists. These clergy helped to convert miners to the union cause. Textile workers lacked such leadership. * **Organisation:** the miners were able to use independent churches to hold meetings and organise, whereas the textile workers lacked such space * **Support:** the churches kept miners’ morale high with supportive sermons, prayer meetings and group singing, but the textile workers who engaged in union activity met with opposition from local church leaders |