



Research Paper

The Importance and Achievements of the Functionalism Theory of Religion

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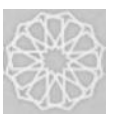
Abstract

The basic question is whether religion should be examined based on the traditional or supernatural view, or should the historical, social and cultural effects of religion on human life and societal changes be considered as the basis of definition? Can we claim, like some religious scholars and sociologists, that religion and its role have ended in the new era, or are we facing the revival of religion and the living parts of religious people? Two basic approaches, traditional and new, explain and define religion with two completely different perspectives. If we don't make the role of religion in human life the focus of research and if we don't realistically consider the role of religion in reducing or healing human pains and sufferings, then we will still move away from the concrete approach in the study of religions and we will not be able to examine the presence of religion as the foundation of life. To give Today, without revealing the function of religion in life, peace, preventing violence and suffering, building the world of humans, providing peace in life, giving meaning to life and showing the value of living, paying attention to the foundations of human ethics, helping others and understanding others. And respecting people, and showing the human position in a glorious way, we cannot properly consider the importance and role of religion in human life. In this article, we intend to present a different meaning of the role of religion and make researchers and those interested in the field of religious studies aware of the importance of studies related to the new functions of religion, and then examine some aspects and different areas of religion in human life.

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Extended Abstract

1. Statement of the problem

Contrary to the Originalism approach, which forms the search for the origin of religion-oriented reflections, in functionalism, the question of the positive and negative role is essential, and the historical approach of religion is not important. Originism can be considered a linear theory that mainly presents a critical and simplistic perspective on religion and emphasizes that religions, like all things, have progressed from the initial stage to the perfection stage. In addition, Originalism considers the essence of religion to be rooted in ignorance and fear due to its focus on the origin. In this regard, this approach is different from functionalism. The question of functionalists is not the history of religion, nor its evolutionary stages, but they question the importance, place, and role that religion has played or will play in societies. From the 1950s to the 1970s, functionalism was the dominant theoretical perspective in the sociology of religion. As a general theoretical approach, functionalism explains "the existence of social institutions such as religion in terms of the needs that the institutions will respond to" in society (Blasi 1998: 193). Although different types can be considered for functionalism, the main viewpoint of this approach is rooted in the attempt of Talcott Parsons (1937), who tried to combine the works and views of Durkheim and Weber. In functionalism, society was interpreted with the help of the biological model or the "organismic" analogy of the body, in which all parts work together to maintain the balance of the whole. Religion is a link that connects society. This connection and cohesion provide the basis for social solidarity. Some researchers believe that functionalism initially seemed to be an irreplaceable and important approach and

could form the foundation of the sociology of religion, but this did not happen and other competing theories, some of whose ideological foundations did not match modern conditions, emerged. In the current research, the researcher examines and evaluates the importance and role of functionalism theory in religion.

2. Method

In the present study, the researcher used the descriptive-analytical method with a critical approach to express and investigate the stated problem, and by referring to the available sources, he tried to measure and evaluate the functionalism theory about religion.

3. Discussion

The substantive definition of religion is certainly different from the functional definition of religion. Durkheim's definition of religion is functionalist, so the question of the nature of religion will no longer be meaningful in his view. However, some people say that such definitions are general and do not solve a problem; therefore, for a definition to be useful in the sociology of religion, it must have a specific framework. But the important advantage of the functional definition of religion is that it avoids both the conventional ideological bias and the "ethnic" dilemmas of the substantive definition of this phenomenon. With this explanation, it can be understood what definitions of religion are considered functionalist. For example, Lockman's definition of religion is beyond the usual descriptions. He explains that the religious phenomenon is based on the functional relationship between oneself and society. The definition of religion by Nicholas Lohmann also belongs to the functionalist perspective. He believes that religion has the duty of transforming the uncertain world for the social system; because religion cannot be limited to outside

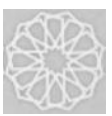


(environment) and inside (system). In other words, based on functionalism, religion must justify and accept all typologies, self-identifications, categories, and any kind of expectation and remain open to criticism. Even religion itself must be based on common sense, compatible with the foundation of reasonableness, and remain accessible and representative.

According to the functionalist definition, religion is a "system" consisting of the world in which religious people live, and naturally, there is an "environment" of unbelievers outside of religion. Both religious and non-religious people are part of the world. So Luman is not interested in the problem of God as a supreme being with whom the believer has a relationship. Instead, he pays attention to the functional adequacy of religion by referring to the complex and contemporary differentiation of society. According to Luhmann's systems theory, the function of religion can only be defined by referring to the relationship between the system, the environment, and the world. In other words, Luhmann rejects the idea of an "integrated systemic function" for religion, which is a typical idea of Durkheim's approach; instead, he suggests paying attention to the difference between the system, the environment, and the processes involved. However, despite Luhmann's statements, there is a problem that the systems theory is not compatible with functionalism and is caught in an iron logic that leaves little room for alternatives in the field of sociology of religion. Luhmann himself has stated that an idea of religion that is exclusively related to a functional determination is often criticized; because an abstract functional meaning is not enough to understand the internal diversity, scope, and various sects of

religion. Therefore, the deficiencies which exist in the formulation of the religion's concept cannot be resolved by limiting the functional determination and showing "how" it functions satisfactorily, and as a result, by describing religion as a belief in a superhuman being.

Examining the differences between the two types of substantive and functional definitions of religion reveals the need for paying attention to the importance of a functionalist perspective on religion; because a proper sociological approach to religion leads us to abandon concepts derived from purely subjective experience, and bases every theory or explanation on a wider range of pluralistic and universal approaches. Functionalism has such a characteristic. This viewpoint seeks to focus on the similar aspect or the most important common features that can include the largest possible number of completely different religions or religious practices. Of course, the difficult part of this approach is to find the constituent elements of this similar aspect, which can be applied in different historical periods and cultures. The first element of this similar aspect can be the concept of meta-empirical reference in assigning meaning to human existence, in its different ways of expression, and to events. But the meta-empirical approach is only a hypothesis for orienting oneself in a complex context. This is what Blumer (1954) called a "sensitizing concept", that is, a minimal theoretical definition, which can be revised and adapted to different specific situations. In this way, there is no conflict between the transcendental world and reality. Basically, it is as if one can look at the non-human presence in reality and on the other hand, from the semantic point of view, provide an explanation that is rooted in this reality.



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