

The Role of Religion in Society

Sample intro

There is little more awe inspiring, life changing and passion stirring than religion. It has connected humans and Gods for centuries, resulting in unbreakable communities and unquenchable hatred. But while religion has always been an integral part of human nature, some wonder if its hold is slipping in modern society. Where fifty years ago many families went to church every Sunday, today it seems rare to spot the same faces in the pews two weeks in a row. And while premarital sex used to be viewed as one of the most heinous sins, according to the article “Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers,” today finding an unmarried virgin over the age of eighteen is, in fact, a rarity (Regnerus). Church membership is plummeting, popular culture is celebrating sex and drugs, and slowly but surely parents are watching their children drift away from religion. This is not to say that fewer people believe in God in the 21st century: in fact, sociologists Darren Sherkat and Christopher Ellison report in their article “Recent Developments and Current Controversies in the Sociology of Religion” that only 2.2% of Americans claim that there is no higher power whatsoever, a statistic that has remained relatively stable over the decades. But although many modern citizens still believe in God, their adherence to traditional religious guidelines is waning. As witnessed in the decline of church attendance and the increase of premarital sex, society is no longer willing to be obedient to the ancient, sacred institution of religion—a trend that could have world-changing implications.

Sample background

It’s important to first examine why humans have historically been obedient to religion. Critics gawk at those who adhere to the myriad rules and regulations attached to religious faiths, but psychologists Erich Fromm and Stanley Milgram may be able explain why people are willing to sacrifice personal freedom for their beliefs. Fromm, in his article “Disobedience as a

Psychological and Moral Problem” asserts that humans obey in order to feel “safe and connected” in their respective communities (114). He would argue that people are willing to endure religious stringency in exchange for the sense of spiritual community often found in churches, families, or social groups that hold the same religious faith. Milgram, on the other hand, would claim that fear plays a large role in maintaining religious belief. He would argue that even those who wish to give up their faith might be too afraid of appearing “rude, untoward and arrogant” to make a religious denunciation (100). He may even claim that unhappy believers are afraid of themselves. Religion is often intricately tied to personal identity, and rejecting a belief system that someone has followed their entire lives, miserable though it may be, could seem like self-betrayal. Regardless of whether religious obedience stems from fear or a sense of community, however, there is no doubt that God has traditionally played a role in the majority of Americans’ lives: long-term studies indicate that around 97% of Americans believe in a higher power regardless of the time period, including today (Sherkat and Ellison 5). Thus, despite modern science and popular culture, the idea of God is still thriving in the 21st century.

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A decrease in church attendance and an escalation of premarital sex are but symptoms of a larger plague that is sweeping modern religion. What is the true cause of this overall trend? There are a few possible explanations. Looking to history provides helpful insight into how obedience to traditional values changes over time. Take, for example, the Flapper movement of the 1920s. Until that point, women were heavily sheltered, viewed as fragile, and certainly never dressed flamboyantly. But instead of remaining obedient to those traditional gender roles, the youth of the period decided to forge their own paths, make their own decisions, and disregard the traditional views of their parents. The same was true with slavery, civil rights, and marriage equality. Is it possible that such a transition is currently taking place in modern religion? In an

age of media inundation and technological advancement, is the rising generation choosing to turn to outlets other than religion to fulfill their lives? Popular culture has already been identified as one religious substitute, but many may be turning to another alternative: themselves. From putting oneself through college to starting a new business, modern society celebrates individuality and self-reliance as the keys to success. With such emphasis placed on “self,” is it possible that people are relying on themselves instead of religion? The evidence certainly seems to point to such a conclusion. After all, if the decline in church attendance is due to the fact that people are too busy with other activities, doesn't that mean that they are choosing to obey their personal passions instead of religion? And if more teens are having sex than ever, couldn't that mean that they are being obedient to their physical desires as opposed to religious teachings? The decrease in religious obedience may, in fact, have selfish underpinnings at its roots. Society appears to have become so advanced, so intertwined, so completely self-sufficient, that divine intervention may seem unnecessary to some. People are turning to themselves to solve problems, and given modern resources, they often can. Since obedience to religion has commonly been viewed as a method of finding answers, this raises a question that many appear to be asking: why follow the strict rules of religion to try and accomplish something that is easily attainable through one's own actions?

Sample
conclusion

A characteristic unique to humanity is the yearning to interact with the divine. No matter the details of religious belief, people often spend their lives seeking answers from higher beings. But while this aspect of human nature has long been true and is unlikely to change, the desire to obey the rigorous script of religion is beginning to fade. Religious affiliation is at an all-time low. Church attendance is dropping. Premarital sex has become a celebrated part of popular culture. But while everyone certainly has the right to worship and believe as they choose, what

could the consequences be if such a trend continues? Religion offers a basic framework of morality and many valuable charities are religiously affiliated. Those who began such organizations were being obedient to their religion, but would this generosity continue if society chose to ignore religious tenets? Then again, a more secularized approach to religion could result in a decrease of faith-driven violence, hatred, and pain. Tragedies ranging from the Crusades to 9/11 could have possibly been avoided if people had been less obedient to their religions. Isn't that a desirable outcome? The truth is, there are no concrete answers as to how humanity will treat religion in the future and no concrete answers regarding how society will be impacted accordingly. But a trend is taking place, one that may very well change humankind. A trend that, while leaving hearts turned toward the divine, is shifting minds to focus otherwise. A trend that is permanently altering the religious landscape of the world. What will the final outcome be? Check back in fifty years.