Religion Generates Individual and Social Control: Focusing On Values, Beliefs, Morals, Sex, and Marriage

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In today's society one must ask if religion is used for individual and social control. Prevalent historical arguments include one can do no wrong if they follow god's ideologies, god is persistent in the mind, and that religions form boundaries for those who abide by these guidelines. It is argued that religion is a basis of social control and factors that are affected include values, beliefs, morals, sex and marriage.

[1]Religion embraces the holy, the good, and the truth in individuals; ultimately creating a set of beliefs, norms, and values for society to follow. It has been argued that one of the many reasons for religious existence is to provide an effective means for controlling individuals and society at whole. Whether that is the reason why religion exists is debatable, but it is certainly true that control is one of the functions of religion. The idea that religion is used as a source of individual and social control increases as society, people, and ideas of religiosity progress with time. This paper examines a variety of factors that are controlled by religion: examining values, beliefs, morals, sex, and marriage. Furthermore, it will become evident that religion generates individual and social control.

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Religion controls an individual's actions by referring to God as the main controller of the self or the individual. Anderson (2006) argues that something is good because God commands it and something is morally wrong because God forbids us to take part in it. This simply means that human and social agents do not always behave as they ought to behave, and think as they ought to think. Humans are restrained from their true human nature when trying to follow the right and wrong of God's commands- someone who is physically non-existent. It is almost as though one can do no wrong when one believes in God because God always exists in your conscience and mind. Religion ascends into the mind, takes over, and excludes the true essence of the individual. Religion, in this circumstance alienates the individual from his or her own self. Thus, religious affiliation eventually generates social and individual control.

Religion identifies and associates itself with the right, the wrong, the good, and the bad. As one furthers their relationship with or without religious

affiliation, it is evident that there are disciplines or categories that are set to be either religious (with values) or non-religious (without values). Roccas (2005: 749) uncovered the relationship between religiosity and values to provide a better understanding of what it means to be religious or non-religious: "Values express what people believe to be good or bad, and what they think should or should not be done". This is especially important because this implies that religion provides a basis for prevailing norms and social structure, therefore encouraging the acceptance of the social order and discouraging questioning and innovation. In addition to Roccas' convictions, those who are religious possess a set of good values, while those who are not religious carry bad values or no values at all. With that said, it becomes transparent that religion controls the individual's values, morals, beliefs and meaning system.

Religion constructs the mind, directing the individual into thinking what is perceived as sacred or not sacred in society. Religion dictates a meaning system for individuals. Silberman (2005) stated religion can be described as a meaning system that is unique in centering on addressing the quest for meaning. This greatly impacts society and the individual by establishing a foundation for a belief system. The religious foundation that one acquires allows individuals to give meaning to life experiences, as well as to set goals, plan activities, and most importantly set order to their behavior. It can be said that religion sets social and individual margins that control individual and social behaviors, daily activities, and personal goals. Religions form

boundaries for those who abide by the guidelines. I would believe that these religious laws would make an individual's well-being unsatisfying, but according to Weigand (2006) this is untrue.

Life is not only satisfying to those who participate in religious activities, institutions, or roles. Religion tends to persuade people into believing a certain way, therefore promoting individual and social control. Weigand (2006) believed that religiosity and well-being have a causal effect. The more one participates in religious activities, the more they are satisfied as well-beings. If religion did not come to exist people would find satisfaction and happiness amongst other activities and institutions. People would also find alternate ways to correspond themselves to groups in which they relate and identify with. One's well being cannot simply rely on religion, however people's minds tend to be persuaded into thinking that religion makes life more valuable, pleasant, and meaningful. On a more individual level, religion can make people more cooperative and friendly.

Religion produces social control by promoting the notion that religious affiliation and beliefs bring out the good in people. Morgan (1983) examined the religion-morality link at the individual level in everyday life. His findings indicate that people who are more religious seem more friendly and cooperative than less religious people. This is a significant analysis because Morgan's findings agree with the notion that religion is a driving source that generates cooperation among individuals and society. Religious institutions lure

people in by proclaiming that religion makes and creates the good in people and as well in society. This perception advertises that the more religious one is, the better he or she is as a human being. Alternatively, there have been several cases where Catholic priests have been involved with the molestation of young, innocent children. These priests are known to be God's deliverers and are looked upon as God-like figures. With this example, it can be said that religion does not bring out the good in people. However, religion persuades individuals and society into believing that people are good or bad based on their interests, affiliations, actions, or decisions.

Religion plays a prevalent role in the controversial topic of abortion. O'Conner and Berkman (1995) examined the impact of the Roman Catholic Church and conservative Protestant churches on the state abortion policy. The authors concluded religion is a significant factor in abortion policy. Abortion is a very personal matter that lies mainly in the emotional state of the individual. Religion perceives abortion as sinful and links it to a murderous and inhuman act. The abortion policy that stemmed from religious belief tries to overlook the personal decisions of the individual as the true needs and feelings of the individual are being completely avoided. Religion in this circumstance blinds the individual from making an important decision of their own that can possibly affect their life forever. People should trust within themselves and look past religious beliefs, values, and norms in order to make choices such as aborting a child. Motherhood is an option and should remain a private choice just as one's sex life should be.

Religion also possesses control over an individual's sex life or sexual activity. Examples of this include when you can have sex, how many partners you choose to have sexual encounters with, and who you are allowed to have sex with. In most religious cases, an individual is allowed to have sex after marriage, with the opposite sex, with a partner who is within your religion, and with the person you choose to marry. Barkan (2006) examined the relationship between religiosity and the number of sexual partners among adults. The major findings indicated religiosity reduces the number of partners and does so partly because of moral disapproval and premarital sex. Moreover, religion is used in a way to calm and limit people's sexual desires or thoughts. Sex is based on the ideas of morality and the values of people and society. People should have the free will to choose whom they want to have sexual relationships with and should also have the right to decide the number of people they choose to have sex with. Along with sexual activity, religion impacts marriage as well.

Religion has a tremendous impact on laws of marriage. Olsen, Cadge and Harrison (2006) analyzed the relationship between religion and public opinion regarding same sex marriage, civil unions, and the federal constitutional amendment that would prohibit gay marriage. Denike (2007) is a researcher whose analysis questions the terms by which extending marriage to same sex couples has been posed, advanced, and resisted in Canada and the United States in the past years. The religious standards of same-sex marriages that Olsen et al. examined are difficult for individuals to abide by. A

human is a human regardless of their sexual preference or their choice in life long partners. Why should one's selection in a mate become restricted by ones religious standards? A homogeneous couple should be able to further their relationship and be able to participate in a marital ceremony that officially unionizes their relationship as one. Same-sex marriages should not be resisted but religion continues to override ones sexual preference and prohibit homosexual couples from wedding. If religion is associated with well-being and happiness, one would think religion would accept and ameliorate the idea of gay marriages.

Furthermore, a social group and its religion can tell individuals what they must believe, acknowledge, and do, but in the end the individual must act according to his or her own thoughts or actions. Religion involves personal emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; therefore individuals are free to commit themselves to which ever religious or non-religious system they prefer. Religion, amongst other social agents, influences and modifies the nature of society and most importantly the individual by providing moral beliefs, and values that must be followed. These morals, values, and beliefs greatly impact and influence the believer; generating individual and social control over them.

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