


Short Article Report

Nietzsche is Dead: The Necessity of Religion in Postmodern Society

John Mark S. Astorga^{1*} 

¹ Granby Colleges of Science and Technology, Philippines

* Correspondence: markapinya14@gmail.com; astorgajms@gmail.com

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Abstract: This paper aims to present the necessity of religion in the postmodern society. It also aims to criticize the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche's *God is dead*. This paper presents two main points to emphasize the need of postmodern society in religion. To do this, the works of a great sociologist Emile Durkheim were used, his studies became the method to debunk the ideas of Nietzsche on religion as unnecessary in the society. The first point discussed about the important functions of religion in the society such as social cohesion and social order and the last point tackled about how religion values life as Durkheim found out that a society with less involvement with religion has higher suicide rate. This paper provided clear insights on how to deal with the thoughts of Nietzsche against religion.

Keywords: religion; postmodernism; Friedrich Nietzsche; Emile Durkheim, sociology

1. Introduction

When Friedrich Nietzsche (1882) declared the death of God in his work "Gay Science" he was able to catch the attention of most intellectuals of his time to abandon religion. His declaration of "God is dead" became the major starting point of atheism to arise not only in Europe but also in the United States of America. Nietzsche's declaration of God is dead surely shook Christianity during the late 1800s.

In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), he emphasized that Christian morality is an inferior moral standard, that is why, he called for the reevaluation of morality. From this, he created the concept of *Urbemensch*, a man who overcame himself and his conventional morality. This *Urbemensch* became the symbol of a superman who overcame his morality taught by his society and was able to create his own.

Nietzsche's criticism of religion was grounded in his idea that religion is for the weak, and it teaches us to be stagnant and illogical. Since science and philosophy can explain things without religion, Nietzsche argued that there is no use for religion anymore. Nietzsche saw that religion teaches us to pray more and act less, for him, faith leads men to be ignorant and it avoids them for self-development (Nietzsche, 1886)

There were atheists, agnostics and other skeptics before Nietzsche. However, nobody can deny that his works became major milestones of Atheism around the world. They were thinkers in the Middle Ages who also criticized Christianity and other religions but they were not as successful as Friedrich Nietzsche. He planted seeds of atheism and skepticism in the minds of thinkers and readers during his time and up to now.

According to the General Social Survey (1970) only 5% of the population of the United States identified themselves as individuals who do not have religion or do not believe in it. Surprisingly, in the 1990's individuals who support atheism increased up to 30% of the actual population. In the second survey conducted with 10,000 adults, 6% said that they do not believe in God as an adult (Ecklund et al., 2020)

In the study conducted by Sumpter (2019) 35% of the millennials that he surveyed concluded that the church is irrelevant because it does not help them in their daily needs as individuals. This study from 2019 shows a negative impression of the younger generation in religion. Therefore, he concluded that millennials do not understand the functions of religion in society.

2. Materials and Methods

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To present the necessity of religion in the postmodern society, the researcher used some of the well-known works of a great sociologist, Emile Durkheim, who is an expert in the field of Religion and Society. This paper focused on the two main points in criticizing Nietzsche's argument that religion is no longer necessary. Within the lens of Durkheim's ideas, the following arguments are presented:

First Point: Religion has crucial social functions in the postmodern world.

Second Point: Religion values life.

This paper aims to elaborate the necessity of religion in the postmodern world by presenting the two main points above. These arguments clearly discussed the benefits of postmodern society from religions and debunk the notion of Nietzsche in the context of philosophy and sociology.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the works of Emile Durkheim, with the use of scientific method in his sociological studies, he gathered enough data to conclude that religion is still necessary even in the modern and postmodern world, while Nietzsche only provided unpolished arguments without any solid sociological bases to conclude that religion is not needed anymore. Nietzsche clearly lacked sociological groundings since religion is a social institution, therefore, it can be concluded that Nietzsche's view of religion is weak.

This paper presents the two main points supporting that religion is still necessary until today.

First Point: Religion has crucial social functions

In *The Antichrist* (1895) Nietzsche questioned the utility of religion in society, for him religion serves as a tool to manipulate and control the potential of individuals to grow. He criticized that Christianity has a negative effect on human development and its values such as altruism, humility and obedience impact individuals to be weak and suppress their human desires and instincts. Nietzsche was so certain that Christianity must be rejected because it hinders human beings to find their true greatness and for him, Christianity does not really contribute anything in the society.

In Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) he came up with sociological terms such as Social Cohesion and Collective Effervescence. In the context of the sociological perspective of Durkheim, Social Cohesion is a social tool to maintain solidarity by the means of shared beliefs, norms and rituals. Social cohesion keeps social control, without it, social structures will be demolished that will bring societal chaos. According to Durkheim (1912) in a society individuals gather together and communicate the same ideas and feelings and they also participate in the same human activities. This is called Collective Effervescence and it serves to unify the society.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim emphasized that religious activities, symbols, rituals, and beliefs bind individuals together to keep the society in order. Religion, as Durkheim argued, is a force that maintains social solidarity which is needed for a peaceful community that avoids conflicts with each other. Solidarity is what the postmodern society needs, social order must be prioritized to attain a peaceful and harmonious society. In addition, religion provides objective moral principles that maintain order in a community of diverse individuals. The moral standards provided by religion shape individuals to behave in the light of morality.

In conclusion, Nietzsche's philosophy and views on religions is not morality sound and it will only cause division in the postmodern society because his idea is grounded with his belief of superiority and selfishness. What the society needs today is solidarity and not division. Thus, Nietzsche's criticism on religions should be reevaluated and doubted.

Second Point: Religion values Life

One of the key philosophies of Nietzsche is the *Will to Power*, he encourages society to always aim for self-transformation and overcoming themselves. Nietzsche values life in his own way, for him individuals should live fully as beings with Will to Power. Nietzsche wrote, "I teach you the Overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" He created the concept of *Overman* or *Ubermensch*. This character pertains to someone who has overcome himself and surpassed his human limitations, conventional morality and lives freely and creatively. (Nietzsche, 1883-1885)

Without a doubt, Nietzsche values life so much. However, this is problematic because his idea of life as a valuable thing relies on his individualistic philosophy. Most of his works



tackle egocentrism and the idea of self-improvement. Nietzsche should have considered that a human being is a social being, he cannot separate an individual from his society. He forgot to consider that debunking religion is invalidating his philosophy that life is important.

In Durkheim's *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897) he argued that religion has an important role to keep human life. This is a mind-blowing study where Durkheim correlated the relationship between religion and suicide. He found out that a society where individuals has strong religious and social belongingness shown to have low suicide rates. He saw that religion serves as social and moral support to its members to cope with life. Religion decreases the feeling of isolation. Durkheim found out that communities with weak religious involvement tend to have higher suicide rates. The results of his study indicate that religion is needed if society wants to keep life.

Therefore, Nietzsche's idea that religion is not necessary anymore is invalid because even he agreed that life is important, and religion is the only social agent that can keep life going. Nietzsche's critique of religion must be reexamined in the context of Sociology as a scientific handmaid of Philosophy of Religion.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, as presented above, religion is still necessary in the postmodern society. Religion has important social functions that the society needs to survive. The two main points of this paper showed that Nietzsche's views of religion are flawed in the context of philosophy and sociology. His criticisms as presented have loopholes and need to be reevaluated. Nietzsche's *God is dead* needs to be reexamined by society if it is the correct philosophy to be considered in the 21st century. As argued, religion is an essential element of society, if it vanishes, there will be chaos in the societal structure and the individuals will suffer as a whole community.

This paper can be used by the future researchers of Philosophy of Religion and Pastoral Sociology to present that religion is still necessary even in the postmodern era. The churches will surely benefit from this as well as organizations that promote peaceful and harmonious society. This paper offers valuable and clear insights about the importance of religion to keep the order of individuals in society.

This paper only criticizes Nietzsche's works which are related to his negative impressions against religion, it does not include his other philosophical themes and ideas. This paper is prone to biases, that is why, careful selection of texts and unbiased statements must be done. Also, this research might be prone to subjectivity, hence, theories, scientific studies and data must be used correctly.

The researcher recommends that to improve this paper, future researchers need more descriptive and correlational studies about the decrease rate of religious individuals in local and global contexts. Since this paper aims to be scientific to debunk the critique of Friedrich Nietzsche against religion, more statistical data must be used. The researcher also recommends writing this paper in a very precise and clear manner, since it is also meant for young readers. The original writing style of this paper might help to attract more readers who are not fond of long articles.

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