

RELIGION OF HUMANITY (Auguste Comte)

Comte's "theory of religion of humanity" though can be considered one of his contributions to the realm of social thought; it has only an insignificant place in the study of sociology or sociological thought. Comte after successfully establishing the intellectual supremacy of positivism in his earlier works, **devoted his later writings to moral and religious considerations rather than to scientific and sociological inquiries.**

Religion of Humanity as a Product of Comte's Idealistic Imaginations

Comte's focus on sociology as a scientific enterprise could be clearly understood by a glance through his masterpiece "**Positive Sociology**". But, Comte, the promising scientist too had his own normative ideas which figured prominently in his "**Positive Polity**" published in 1852. An important change has taken place in his thinking by this time. Comte purported to establish a new religion, a "**Scientific religion**", or a **religion of humanity**. The irony is, Comte sincerely believed that he was trying to establish such a religion on a firm scientific foundation.

The "Theory of Religion of Humanity" Represents a Radical Change in the Development of Comte's Rational Thinking

It is surprising to note that Comte, a great champion of **science or positivism**, could transform himself into an advocate of a new religion, **a religion of humanity**. Comte in his younger days used to say that a scientist requires the thirst for knowledge and not the divine grace. **He was an atheist**. But he turned out to be a champion of a religion because of several upsets that he had to undergo in his personal life. His own wife deserted him; his lady love Clotilde de Vaux died; he had no friends worth calling by that name, to share his thoughts; the lonely life that he was leading became unbearable; he stopped reading the works of others, he alienated himself from other intellectuals of the day. These biographical accidents did play an important role in this transformation.

SOME SALIENT FEATURES OF COMTEAN RELIGION

1. A Religion Without God

Comte's "religion of humanity" is based upon morality and religion, and not upon a belief in a divine force. Comte was opposed to the theological type of religion. According to Comte, God lives in the ignorance of man. The object of worship should be mankind and not God. Hence, the main slogan of Comtean religion thus reads; "We should have religion but not God".

2. Sociologist-Priest Constitute the Moral Guides of the Comtean Concept of A New Society

Comte was of the opinion that a society which was built upon scientific principles needed a religion which he termed as religion of humanity. Comte conceived of a society directed by the spiritual power of priests of the new positive religion and leaders of banking and industry. These scientific sociologist-priests would be the moral guides and controller of the community. They use their "superior knowledge to recall men to their duties and obligations." They would be the directors of education and the supreme judges of the abilities of each member of the society. They "would sternly hold men to their collective duty and would help suppress any subversive ideas of inherent rights"

3. **New Religion Destined to Begin a New Epoch**

Comte claimed himself to be the high priest of this new religion committed to "**institute a reign of harmony, justice, rectitude and equality.**" The new positivist order, Comte claimed, "**would have Love as its Principle, Order as its Basis, and Programme as its Aim**". The egoistic tendencies of mankind as evidenced in all the previous history "**would be replaced by altruism, and by the command, live for Others.**" Individual men would be imbued with love for their fellows. Comte at this stage made "Love" and "affection" the central points of life. "We tire of thinking and even of acting, he asserted, but we never tire of loving". "The Comtean ideals became a disinterested love of mankind"

4. Religion of Humanity-a Social Religion Based Upon Morality

It is clearly ascertainable that during his later years, Comte “considered himself not only a social scientist but also, and primarily, a prophet and founder of a new religion that promised salvation for all the ailments of mankind” Comte, thus tried to create a purely “social religion.” He made mankind an end in itself.

5. Comte-Not in Favour of Traditional Christianity

Comte’s contact with Christianity gave him the belief that it is chiefly ecclesiastical. “He was of the opinion that Christianity employed the instruments of political pressure and tyranny in order to gain allegiance of people to Christian religion.” Bogardus writes; “Comte did not see in Christianity a social keynote. Hence, he attempted to create a purely social religion.”

6. Comtean Religion is Virtually a Religion of Human Unity

As Raymond Aron has pointed out, “Comte is the sociologist of human unity and one of possible, if not inevitable, results of this” sociology of humanity is the religion of human unity. Comte wanted men.....to be united by common conviction and by a single object of their love.”

CRITICAL COMMENTS

1. Comte's religion of humanity is widely criticised. Christian scholars say that the religion of humanity is ***nothing more than a mixture of science and catholic religion.***
2. Some have commented that ***it is not at all a religion but primarily a code of morality.*** Its architect Comte was, indeed, ***"morally-intoxicated."***
3. **J.S.Mill** rightly remarked that Comtean ideas of religion, **instead of protecting his mental health made him lead an isolated life and develop strange thoughts.**
4. **Thomas Huxley** called Comte's religion ***"Catholicism minus Christianity"***. Some others criticized it as a highly ***"egoistic religion."*** A few others considered it **utopian in character.**
5. **L.A.Coser** has remarked that the normative aspects of Comte's thought may be of importance for the historian of ideas; but **they are of little importance for the sociologist.**

Viewed in the social and intellectual contexts from which Comte's thoughts emerged, **his religious ideas have their own place in social thought.**

Reference Book. Shankar Rao,C.N. (2018) *Sociology Principles of sociology with an introduction to social thought*