

## Karl Marx

Marxists see religion as a way that oppresses and inhibits social change – it is therefore a conservative force.

In a capitalist society, the polarisation between the ruling classes (bourgeoisie) and the working-classes (proletariat) is so vast that both of their interests conflict with one and other. This is because society works in the interest of the bourgeoisie, whilst exploiting the talents and skills of the proletariat to make profits.

To **Marx** '*religion is the opium of the people*', i.e. it acts as a drug to ease the pain of oppression; however, it does not take it away.

The masses are in a situation of false consciousness as they are not aware of their exploitation as they are promised rewards in Heaven for their suffering, hard work and commitment on Earth.

**Weber** wrote and published *The Protestant Work Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* where he noted that Calvinism caused social change.

Weber realised that Calvinism believed in predestination i.e. that a person's life is already mapped out regardless of what that individual achieves during their life.

Marxists would criticise Weber as capitalism predates Calvinism and the possibility that entrepreneurs were attracted to Calvinism, as it made their interests and exploitation seem legitimate.

**Feminism** - Women have always played an important role in religion.

It is only with the development of patriarchal religions (rather than the more 'primitive') that women have taken on a more subordinate role.

Monotheism (to have one religion/belief) transmitted the fact that women were imperfect (due to menstrual cycle) and a distraction.

In her book *The Second Sex*, **Simone de Beauvoir** argues that religion was exploitative and oppressive towards women due to female suffering on Earth.

**El Sadawi** did not blame religion itself as a way of promoting female oppression and exploitation, but the fact that religion is patriarchal.

In some religions women are not allowed to have any positions of power.

## Functionalism

Functionalists consider religion as having a positive role. **Durkheim**, after his study on Aboriginal societies, discovered that by worshipping their sacred totems they were in effect, worshipping their own society and thereby maintained social harmony. **Malinowski** believed that religion functioned as a way of dealing with emotional situations, e.g. a death in the family. **Parsons** stated that religion is an agent of secondary socialisation that provides guidelines that humans can follow through this process, therefore binding people together in terms of core values. **Bellah** suggested that Civil Religion has now a major role to play in a society that is becoming more secular.

**The growth of New Religious Movements** – they have grown over the years due to marginality, relative deprivation, social change and uncertainty.

**The growth of New Age Movements** – they have grown over the years due to the appeal to the middle classes, explore their own identity, the apparent failure of science as a belief system and part of 'pick and mix' culture.

**Don't forget criticism  
– this is important for the exam!**

## Wallis

Roy Wallis believed that New Religious Movements did not 'fit' into the neat church / denomination / sect / cult categories.

He introduced a classification system of New Religious Movements based on the movements' views on and relationships with the world at large.

Therefore, he attempted to categorise NRMs within three different 'types':

- world-affirming movements
- world-rejecting movements
- world-accommodating movements.