

### Durkheim on religion

- Society is a system of interrelated parts
- Society has I.E - religion, media needs which are met by different institutions

### The sacred and the profane

**Sacred:** Things that are set apart, are surrounded by prohibitions and taboos and create feelings of awe

**Profane:** Things that are mundane and ordinary

That powerful feelings evoked by the sacred implies that it represents something of great power - **Society**

**Totemism:** The essence of religion could be discovered by studying it in its simplest form in its simplest society

**Collective conscience:** Sacred symbols represent society's collective conscience

### Cognitive functions of religion:

- Religion is the source of our ability to reason and think conceptually
- Religion is I.E. space, time the origin of shared categories
- The splitting of clans gave the first ideas of classification

### \*\*Criticisms of Durkheim

**Worsley:** There isn't a clear division between the sacred and profane

### Durkheim on religion (cont)

- The splitting of clans gave the first ideas of classification

**Postmodernists:** increasing diversity as fractured the collective conscience

### Psychological functions: MALINOWSKI

- Helps individuals cope with stress that could undermine solidarity

### Study: Tribulant Islanders

#### Where the outcome is uncertain:

- Fishing in the Lagoon: no rituals as outcome is certain and safe
- Fishing in the Ocean: had rituals as outcome is uncertain and dangerous

#### At time of life crises:

- Events such as birth and death can cause disruptive changes in social groups
- Religion brings people together and explains why these happen

### Parsons: Value and Meaning

Religion helps people cope with uncertainty  
Creates and legitimates society's values:  
Religion sacralises values thus promoting solidarity

Provides a source of meaning: Religion answers unanswerable questions, helping people to adjust

### Civil Religion: Bellah

A belief system that attaches sacred qualities to society

Integrates society in a way that individual religion can't

Involves loyalty to the nation state and a belief in God = being a true American

### Functional alternatives

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Page 1 of 3.

### Civil Religion: Bellah (cont)

Non-religious beliefs and practices that perform the same functions as religion

Ignores what makes religion distinct

### Marxist view on religion

Society is split into 2 classes: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat

Religion is a feature of a divided society and wouldn't be needed in a communist society

For Marx if we lived in a communist society there would be no need for religion.

**Religion dulls the pain of oppression** It leads the proletariat into a false state of consciousness.

### Religion and Social Control

- Religion distorts reality
- Encourages the belief that supernatural beings control events and there is nothing humans can do about it
- Religion legitimises the inequality which exists in society

**-Engels:** In the 1800s British Bourgeoisie spent large sums of money

**- To support mainstream Christian organisations**

### Religion as compensation

- religion compensates for the misery of those who have been exploited
- I.E. Christianity offers the reward of heavenly escape
- religion promises happiness although the happiness it promises is just an illusion
- true happiness can only be obtained by the exploited shaking off the oppression and practising their freedom



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### Religion as ideology

- religion distorts perceptions of reality to benefit the ruling class
- class that controls the economic base also controls production and distribution of ideas
- religion used as a weapon to justify inequality/suffering
- creates a false consciousness

**Lenin:** Religion is a spiritual Gln, creating a mystical fog

makes the ruling class's position appear divinely ordained

### Religion as alienation

religion is a product of alienation  
workers are alienated because they have no freedom to express their true nature

**Marx:** 'religion is the opium of the people, dulling their pain'

### Karl Marx: alienation

### Feminist Theory of Religion

#### Evidence of Patriarchy

- Religious organisations: Mainly male dominated

*\*BUT...*

Higher rates of female participation

- Places of worship: Often segregate the sexes

Women's participation may be restricted

- Sacred texts: Largely feature male gods

Female stereotypes

Interpreted/written by men

### Feminist Theory of Religion (cont)

- Religious laws and customs: Woman may have fewer rights

Religious influence on culture may lead to unequal treatment

#### Woodhead: religious forms of feminism

- patriarchy may not be true for all religion
- argues the Hijab is liberating for women
- pentecostal groups are empowering for women

### Religion and social change

Sociologists have studied the role of religion in society and observed 2 broad camps

1. Those who see religion as a conservative force: religion - force for stability and order

2. Those who see religion as a force for social change: supporters of this position point to the role of religion in encouraging societies to change

### Perspectives view on Religion's functions

**Functionalists**: religion maintains social stability

**Marxism**: religion prevents social change by justifying exploitation

**Feminists**: religion is an ideology that legitimises patriarchy

### WEBER: Religion as a force for change

Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism

Calvinist beliefs were the beginning of modern capitalism

#### Calvinist beliefs

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Page 2 of 3.

### Religion and social change (cont)

**Pre destination:** God had decided who the elect would be and nothing could change that fate

**Divine transcendence:** No one could claim to know the will of God

- caused Calvinists to feel inner loneliness which combined with pre-destination caused a salvation panic

**This wordly ascension:** Abstaining from luxury

- denial whilst still being part of society

**Calling:** Any wealth made was put back into the businesses

- combined with concept of asceticism

### Hinduism

- ascetic

- other followers focus on spiritual worldly world

### Confucianism

- this worldly not ascetic

#### Evaluation

Marxism: Overestimates the role of ideas and underestimates economic factors

Tawney: Technological changes caused capitalism

Capitalism didn't occur in every country where there was Calvinism



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### American civil rights movement: BRUCE

Churches provided sanctuary and support

Rituals and prayer united members

Ideological resource: Provided beliefs and practices that protestors could use as support

Taking the moral high ground: Pointed out the hypocrisy of the white clergy preaching 'Love thy neighbour'

Channelling dissent: Religion provides channels for expressing political dissent

Acting as the honest broker: Provide a context for negotiation as churches are often respected by both sides

Mobilising public opinion: Campaign for support across the whole country

### The new Christian right: Bruce

- protestant fundamentalist

- seeks to take divorce, homosexuality USA back to God and abortion illegal

- believes in the nuclear family

*\*Why has it been unsuccessful?*

- moral majority = 15%

- found it hard to work with other issues over the same issues

- strong opposition

- comparison to American civil rights

### NEO MARXIST: Religion as a force for change

Relative autonomy - independence from the economic base

Religion can have dual character prompting change as well as stability

**MARX:** 'The soul of the soulless'

'the heart of the heartless world'

### NEO MARXIST: Religion as a force for change (cont)

**ENGELS:** religion inhibits change by disguising inequality but it can also challenge the status quo

### BLOCH: the principle of hope

- religion may inspire protest and revolution

- religion is an expression of the principle of hope which shows images of utopia

- utopian images show what needs changing

### Liberation theology

Emerged in the Latin American Catholic church

Commitment to the poor and opposition to dictators

Due to increased poverty and human rights abuses

**Praxis:** practical action guided by theory

Condemned by Pope John Paul II for being too Marxist

Church continues to defend democracy

**Maduro:** an example of religiously inspired social change

### The pentecostal challenge

**Lehmann** explains why pentecostalism is now more popular among the poor in Latin America



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Page 3 of 3.

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