4.4 Marxist and Neo-Marxist Perspectives on Religion as Ideology: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For the 6-mark and 12-mark questions write your answers in full sentences and support points with sociological examples where possible. Time guidance: 30 minutes for this pack.

1 Compare classical Marxism and Gramscian neo-Marxism on religion by explaining one difference, developing both sides of the comparison.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Provide an outline and explanation, using examples where possible.

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

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3 Write a balanced, evaluative answer discussing Marxist and neo-Marxist views and criticisms, and reach a supported conclusion.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

4 Define what Marxists mean by religion being an 'ideology' in the context of capitalist societies.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.4 Marxist and Neo-Marxist Perspectives on Religion as Ideology: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies the classical Marxist emphasis on religion sustaining ruling-class domination	**B1**
develops the classical account, e.g. consolation makes exploitation more bearable and reduces pressure to challenge it	**B1**
contrasts this with the Gramscian view that religion can be a contested site of ideological struggle	**B1**
develops the Gramscian account, e.g. subordinate groups may reinterpret religious ideas to resist domination rather than consent to it	**B1**

Answer: Classical Marxism emphasises religion sustaining ruling-class domination: consolation makes exploitation more bearable and reduces pressure to challenge it. In contrast, Gramscian neo-Marxism sees religion as a contested site of ideological struggle, where subordinate groups may reinterpret religious ideas to resist domination rather than consent to it.

Question 2

identifies that Marxists see religion as legitimating class inequality (outline)	**B1**
explains that religion justifies the social order by presenting it as natural or divinely sanctioned	**B1**
provides an example, e.g. teachings about accepting suffering or reward in the afterlife	**B1**
explains consequence, e.g. this reduces class consciousness and collective resistance	**B1**
additional development, e.g. links to ruling-class institutions using religion to promote consent	**B1**
accurate use of Marxist terminology such as ideology or ruling class	**B1**

Answer: Marxists argue religion legitimates class inequality by presenting social arrangements as natural or divinely sanctioned, for example through teachings that encourage acceptance of suffering in this life for reward in the afterlife; this reduces class consciousness and collective resistance and can be reinforced by ruling-class institutions using religious ideas to promote consent.

Question 3

Level 1 Basic statements about religion and ideology, little sociological detail, limited or no use of evidence, no developed evaluation.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear description of Marxist views that religion legitimates inequality, with some application; limited evaluation, for example one criticism or a brief alternative view.	**4-6**
Level 3 Developed analysis, including neo-Marxist refinements such as Gramsci and examples like liberation theology; evaluation present but not fully sustained, some balance and application to evidence.	**7-9**
Level 4 Sustained, well-supported evaluation weighing Marxist claims against strong counterarguments. Covers classical Marxism, Gramscian hegemony, liberation theology, persistence of religion in state-socialist societies, and concludes with a justified judgement on the extent to which religion is mainly conservative.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Classical Marxist claim that religion is an ideology serving ruling-class interests by legitimating inequality and distracting the oppressed through consolation and promises of an afterlife
- How religion functions to legitimate power, for example doctrines of divine order, moralising poverty and encouraging acceptance
- Neo-Marxist refinement: Gramsci's concept of hegemony showing ideology requires consent and is contested, making religion a site of struggle as well as domination
- Examples of religion as a force for change, such as liberation theology in Latin America (Camara, Romero) where clergy supported poor communities and resisted oppressive regimes
- Evidence that challenges Marxism, for example religious movements that oppose ruling elites, or persistence of religion in state-socialist countries, suggesting religion fulfils functions beyond just masking exploitation
- Other critiques: religion's diverse forms and social roles, agency of religious actors, and the need for Marxism to incorporate cultural and ideological complexity
- Balance and conclusion: religion often plays conservative ideological roles in many contexts, but it can also mobilise resistance and social change; on balance it is not solely or invariably a ruling-class tool

Question 4

identifies that an ideology is a set of beliefs and ideas that justify or support a particular social order or interests (oe)	**B1**
development, e.g. Marxists argue religion acts as an ideology by helping to justify inequality and the power of the ruling class	**B1**

Answer: An ideology is a set of beliefs and ideas that justify or support a particular social order; Marxists argue religion acts as an ideology by helping to justify inequality and the power of the ruling class.

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