



GSOC.AL18 Marxist and Neo-Marxist Perspectives on Religion as Ideology

AQA 7192 · Calculators not allowed · about 70 minutes

Total Marks

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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: 70 minutes for this pack.

- 1** Which term did Karl Marx use to describe religion when he wrote that it soothed the oppressed while distracting them from real social inequalities?

- ☐ A) a social glue
- ☐ B) the opium of the people
- ☐ C) a moral guide
- ☐ D) cultural capital

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify and explain one way religion can legitimate the power of the ruling class in capitalist societies.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Identify and explain two reasons Marx said religion comforts the oppressed in capitalist societies.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** Describe one neo-Marxist refinement that modifies Marx's account of religion as simply a tool of ruling-class domination.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** Define Marx's phrase 'opium of the people' as it is used to describe religion in capitalist societies.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7** Explain how Marx argued religion can mask the underlying economic causes of poverty and inequality under capitalism.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Item A: A report summarises two church-based campaigns in a Latin American country during the 1970s. Campaign 1 organised literacy classes and community cooperatives. Campaign 2 issued sermons stressing obedience to existing authorities and praying for social harmony. Using Item A and your own knowledge, explain one reason the church could be seen as supporting social change and one reason it could be seen as supporting the status quo.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** Explain Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony and how it changes Marx's account of religion as a simple tool of the ruling class.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Describe one historical example of liberation theology in Latin America and explain briefly how it challenges a Marxist claim that religion only supports ruling-class interests.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** State one criticism that argues Marxism cannot explain religion acting against ruling-class interests.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Explain one reason Marxist theory finds it difficult to account for the persistence of religion in state-socialist countries that aimed to remove class exploitation.

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

- 13** Explain two ways religion can act as a source of social change, using sociological examples.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** Compare briefly two differences between classical Marxism and Gramscian neo-Marxism in their accounts of religion.

(Total for Question 14 is 4 marks)

- 15** Outline and explain how Marxists view religion as legitimating class inequality in capitalist societies.

Provide an outline and explanation, using examples where possible.

(Total for Question 15 is 6 marks)

- 16** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that religion is mainly a conservative ideological force that maintains the power of the ruling class.

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

(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.AL18 Marxist and Neo-Marxist Perspectives on Religion as Ideology

Question 1

- **B1** B (the opium of the people)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies a method of legitimisation, e.g. religion teaches that existing social roles are divinely ordained
- **B1** development, e.g. this encourages acceptance of inequality because people see it as natural or part of God's plan
- **Answer: Religion may teach that existing social roles are divinely ordained, encouraging acceptance of inequality because people see it as natural or part of a divine plan.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies that religion offers consolation about suffering, e.g. promises of reward in an afterlife
- **B1** development, e.g. consolation reduces pressure to challenge exploitation here and now
- **B1** identifies that religion can divert attention from material causes of suffering, e.g. by stressing individual morality rather than structural injustice
- **B1** development, e.g. focusing on personal piety can blame victims rather than the economic system
- **Answer: Religion offers consolation about suffering, for example promises of reward in an afterlife, which can reduce pressure to challenge exploitation; and it can divert attention from material causes of suffering by stressing individual morality, which can blame victims rather than the economic system.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies a neo-Marxist idea, e.g. Gramsci's concept of hegemony or the idea of religion as a site of ideological struggle
- **B1** development, e.g. Gramsci argued ruling-class domination rests on consent as well as coercion
- **B1** further development, e.g. religion can be part of the struggle because subordinate groups may use religious ideas to resist or reinterpret domination
- **Answer: A neo-Marxist refinement is Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which argues ruling-class domination rests on consent as well as coercion; religion can therefore be a site of ideological struggle because subordinate groups may use religious ideas to resist or reinterpret domination.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that the phrase means religion soothes or numbs the pain of exploitation for the oppressed (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. by offering consolation rather than encouraging rebellion against unjust social structures
- **Answer: The phrase means religion soothes or numbs the pain of exploitation for the oppressed, offering consolation rather than encouraging rebellion against unjust social structures.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies that religion diverts attention from structural causes, e.g. by explaining poverty as a result of sin or fate
- **B1** development, e.g. this shifts blame to individuals rather than to exploitative employers or unequal class structures
- **B1** identifies that this diversion reduces class consciousness and the likelihood of collective action
- **B1** further development, e.g. with less class consciousness, workers are less likely to challenge the ruling class or demand systemic change
- **Answer: Religion can divert attention from structural causes by explaining poverty as the result of sin or fate, shifting blame to individuals rather than to exploitative employers or unequal class structures; this reduces class consciousness and the likelihood of collective action against the ruling class.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies that Campaign 1 supports social change, e.g. literacy classes and cooperatives empower poor communities
- **B1** development, e.g. empowerment can challenge economic exploitation and organise resistance, consistent with liberation theology examples
- **B1** identifies that Campaign 2 supports the status quo, e.g. sermons stressing obedience encourage acceptance of existing power relations
- **B1** development, e.g. focusing on prayer and harmony rather than structural reform diverts attention from causes of injustice
- **Answer: Campaign 1 could be seen as supporting social change because literacy classes and community cooperatives empower poor communities and can help them organise against exploitation, reflecting liberation theology; Campaign 2 could be seen as supporting the status quo because sermons stressing obedience and social harmony encourage acceptance of existing power relations and divert attention from structural injustice.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies cultural hegemony as the ruling class securing consent for its rule through culture and ideas
- **B1** development, e.g. domination is maintained by winning ideological consent, not only by force
- **B1** links Gramsci to religion, e.g. religion can be part of the cultural institutions producing consent
- **B1** further development, e.g. this allows for complex interactions where religion can both support and be contested by subordinate groups
- **Answer: Cultural hegemony is the process by which the ruling class secures consent for its rule through culture and ideas rather than only by force; religion can be one institution producing consent but is also a site of contestation, allowing subordinate groups to resist or reinterpret religious ideas, which refines Marx's simpler account of religion as only a ruling-class tool.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies a real example, e.g. Catholic priests and base communities promoting liberation theology, such as Camara or Romero in El Salvador
- **B1** development, e.g. these figures supported poor communities, opposed oppressive regimes and sometimes aligned with social movements
- **B1** explains how this challenges Marxism, e.g. religion here motivates resistance rather than passive acceptance
- **B1** further development, e.g. shows religion can promote social change and solidarity with the exploited, not just ruling-class ideology
- **Answer: An example is liberation theology in Latin America where priests and base communities, for example priests inspired by Camara or Archbishop Romero, supported poor communities and opposed oppressive regimes; this challenges Marxism by showing religion can motivate resistance and promote social change rather than simply reinforcing ruling-class interests.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a valid criticism, e.g. Marxism struggles to explain clergy or religious movements that lead protests against capitalist elites
- **B1** brief development, e.g. such examples show religion can be independent and oppositional, not simply ideological cover for the ruling class
- **Answer: One criticism is that Marxism struggles to explain clergy or religious movements that lead protests against capitalist elites, since these show religion can be independent and oppositional rather than merely ideological cover for the ruling class.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies that religion persisted in some state-socialist societies despite official attempts to eradicate it
- **B1** development, e.g. persistence suggests religion can meet non-class needs such as community, identity or spiritual comfort
- **B1** links to Marxist difficulty, e.g. if religion exists without capitalist class structures, Marxist economic explanation seems incomplete
- **B1** further development, e.g. this requires Marxists to explain other social functions of religion or adapt their account
- **Answer: Religion persisted in some state-socialist societies despite official suppression, suggesting it meets non-class needs such as community, identity or spiritual comfort; this challenges a straightforward Marxist economic explanation and requires Marxists to account for additional social functions of religion.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies first way, e.g. liberation theology encouraging political mobilisation among the poor
- **B1** development, e.g. leading clergy to support protests, cooperatives or literacy which can shift power relations
- **B1** identifies second way, e.g. religion inspiring ethical campaigns, for example civil rights activism led by religious leaders
- **B1** development, e.g. moral authority of religious leaders can legitimise claims for equality and reform
- **Answer: Religion can act as a source of change by liberation theology encouraging political mobilisation among the poor, with clergy supporting protests and cooperatives that shift power relations; and by inspiring ethical campaigns, for example religiously led civil rights activism where moral authority helps legitimise claims for equality and reform.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies first difference, e.g. classical Marxism stresses economic base and religion as ruling-class ideology
- **B1** development, e.g. classical Marxism sees religion primarily as masking exploitation
- **B1** identifies second difference, e.g. Gramsci emphasises consent and hegemony, making ideology contested
- **B1** development, e.g. Gramsci allows religion to be a site of resistance as well as domination
- **Answer: Classical Marxism stresses the economic base and sees religion as a ruling-class ideology that masks exploitation, whereas Gramscian neo-Marxism emphasises consent and cultural hegemony, making ideology contested so religion can also be a site of resistance.**

Question 15

- **B1** 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
- **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 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic statements about religion and ideology, little sociological detail, limited or no use of evidence, no developed evaluation.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear description of Marxist views that religion legitimates inequality, with some application; limited evaluation, for example one criticism or a brief alternative view.
- **Level 3** (7-9): 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.
- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **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