

## Marxism and Religion Notes

**Marxism and Religion** by Alan Woods (2005)

<https://www.marxist.com/marxism-religion-liberation-theology220701.htm>

- This is an important question, as there many supporters of liberation theology and there are groups who describe themselves as Islamic Marxists

What Marxists Want

- Our aim is socialist transformation of society
  - It is the duty of any humane person to support the fight against capitalism, so we wholeheartedly welcome the participation in the struggle of every progressive person irrespective of religious beliefs
  - But to fight effectively it is necessary to work out a serious programme, this is Marxism (scientific socialism)

Philosophical Materialism and Science

- Materialism rules out the existence of any supernatural entity, anything above nature
- Humans are not at all unique creations; the results of the human genome project show we share our genes with other species, going far back into the mists of time
  - We have exact the same genes as rats, mice, cats, dogs, and fruit flies
  - We even share genes with bacteria
  - No divine intervention is required

Life After Death?

- Religion offers men and women the consolation of life after death
  - Materialism denies this possibility
  - Mind, ideas, the soul are all the product of matter organised in a certain way
- The desire to live forever is at least as old as civilization
  - Therefore, early on humans have sought an imaginary communion with a non-material spirit world where a part of us will live on
- But the problem is that life today is so hard, intolerable, and sometimes meaningless that the idea of a life after death seems the only way to invest it with any meaning
  - It is imagined as like waking up after a sleep and being blissfully united with long-lost loved ones, and to live happily ever after
- The soul is supposed to be immaterial, but what is life without matter
  - The destruction of the physical body means the end of life of the individual being
    - Yes, trillions of atoms don't disappear but reappear in different combinations
    - So in that sense we are immortal, because matter can be neither created or destroyed
  - People claim to be able to hear voices of loved ones, but if there is a voice there must be vocal cords
    - You cannot separate a single one of the manifestations of our human life activity from the material body

- All the things that make life worth living: eating good food, wine, singing, dancing, embracing, sex, it is evident that all these activities are inseparably connected with the body and its physical attributes
  - Cerebral pastimes like talking, reading, writing, thinking are equally bound up with our bodily organs
  - So this idea that we continue this life (we can know no other) in death isn't possible
- An existence in which all pain and suffering are absent would be intolerable to us
  - Pain is part of the human condition, and pain and pleasure are dialectically related
    - Without pain, pleasure could not exist
  - A world in which everything is white is the same as a world in which everything is black
- Death is an integral part of life; life is not conceivable without death
  - We begin to die the moment we're born; death of trillions of cells are replaced by trillions of new cells, this is human development
  - To separate life from death is to arrive at a state of immutability, changeless, static equilibrium; but isn't this just another name for death
- But what's the harm in an illusion of life after death?
  - Once we put behind us all illusions and see the world as it really is, and ourselves as we really are, we can acquire the necessary knowledge to change the world and ourselves
- What we are as individual personalities is intimately bound up with our material bodies and has no existence separate and apart from these
- The aspiration to immortality is at bottom egotistical and unrealistic
  - Rather than wasting time striving for a non-existent other world it is necessary to make this world a fit place to live
    - The questions isn't whether there is a life after death, but rather is there a life before death?
- The knowledge that life is fleeting (that our loved ones won't always be here) shouldn't dismay us but instead inspire us with a passionate love of life, and a burning desire to make it better for all
  - the eternal cycle of birth and death that is the essence of every living thing is what gives life its bittersweet flavour, that comedy and tragedy, laughter and tears are what makes life the rich mosaic of human sensations that it is

#### Pessimistic Conclusion?

- Does materialism signify a pessimistic view of life?
  - The first conditions for a full and satisfying life on earth is that we adopt a truthful view of things
  - Since nothing can happen to us but what is in the course and constitution of nature, death is not to be feared
- Most of the peoples of antiquity seemed to have been remarkably indifferent to the question of what would happen to them after death

- The life after death of the Greeks was an uninviting place, a grey, cheerless world of gibbering spirits
- Egyptians thought there would be food, wine, music, dancing girls, every need catered to by slaves
  - But for them the afterworld was the monopoly of the ruling class (see ostentatious tombs)
- In China, life after death was reserved for the aristocracy, chief, and king
- It is in Christianity that heaven is finally democratised, all are admitted at a price
  - The price is to sacrifice one's life in this world in expectation of better things to come
  - Actually the rich are threatened with dire punishments for their sins; but the ruling class doesn't seem to care about wealth and like the riches of their life
  - For the poor, the passive acceptance of a world of pain is the price of the promise of future bliss
    - To us, this seems like deceit and robbery
    - So long as the eyes of men and women are directed heavenwards, they will be unable to fix their gaze on the real problems that torment them and on their real enemies
    - They will exchange the prospect of happiness and fulfillment of their human potential for the false prospect of a non-existent life after death
- The love of life that is a hallmark of materialism must entail a passionate desire to change the world we live in and improve the lives of our fellow man
  - Marxism tells us to fight for a better life on earth; we should fight to transform our lives and to create a society that would permit the human race to lift itself up to its true stature
    - We are fighting for a paradise in this life because we know there is no other
  - We can attain immortality in the memory of future generations, the only immortality to which mortals have any right to aspire
- Although there is a philosophical difference between Marxism and all forms of religions, this doesn't mean we can't agree to fight together for a better world
  - This difference of opinion, which is very important from a philosophical point of view, shouldn't prevent us from uniting in the struggle against earthly oppression and injustice
    - All we have to agree on is the basic programme of the socialist transformation of society and the means whereby this can be put into practice
    - We'll have time after the revolution to discuss other matters
- Religious ideas are an expression of the contradictions of class society
  - The Babylonian god Marduk announced his intention of creating man for the service of the gods, "to free them"- that is, to perform the menial tasks associated with temple ritual and to provide food for the gods
    - Humanity is divided into two classes: the untouchable gods (ruling class) and the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (labouring classes)

- This provides an ideological (religious) justification for the enslavement of the majority by the minority
  - The priest caste was freed from the need to work
- Religion arises out of the division of society into antagonistic classes and is an expression of the insoluble contradictions that flow from this
- There actually is religious stories about that earlier time when all were equal (I.e. garden of eden) which express a sense of loss
  - Religion seeks to overcome this contradiction, to soften its sting, to reconcile men and women to the reality of suffering and exploitation by presenting it as the will of God, or the result of man's failure to obey God, or both. Submit! Obey! Sacrifice!
- The deities of a given society are a reflections of that society's mode of production, social relations, morality, and prejudices
  - God didn't create man in his image, but man created God in man's image
  - But these gods aren't carbon copies of reality but reality seen through the spectacles of religion: a mystical world where everything is stood on its head
    - They are everything that man would like to be but is not
    - They possess attributes that man would like to possess but fall short
    - Religion represents a yearning for the unattainable but also a yearning for a better world and better life
    - Despairing of all possibility of obtaining justice in the real world of men, he resigns himself to the thought that justice may be found - on the other side of the tomb.
- For the majority of written history, man must be the servant of his lord, his king, and his God and woman must be the servant of her husband
  - For women the consolation of religion was the only way to relieve the intense suffering that arises from this slavery
  - This is why in so many societies women are so attached to religion
  - In many religions, the proper place of women is in the service of men
    - The emancipation of women from age-old slavery is thus in direct contradiction to religion
- In most of the great world religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism) there is an element of criticism of the world and a dream of a better one, where there will be no rich or poor
  - In churches and mosques this illusion is maintained of the "communion" or brotherhood of all believers, that all are "equal in the sight of God"
    - But the following day the rich Christian or Islamic bosses return to exploiting his fellow-believers
    - When this flagrant contradiction between the theory and practice of religion is pointed out, they will shake their heads sadly and mumble about the imperfection of human beings in this sinful world

#### Origins of Christianity

- Originally both Christianity and Islam were revolutionary movements of the poor and oppressed

- 2000 years ago the Christians organised a mass movement of the poorest, the Romans accused the Christians of being a “movement of slaves and women”
- If you read Acts the early Christians were also communists
  - Christ moved among the poor and dispossessed and attacked the rich
- The early Christian communities held all wealth in common
  - "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common.....Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, And laid them down at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." (Acts, 4:32)
  - "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship ["koinonia", that is to say, communism], and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.....And all that believed were together, And had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need."
- This communism had a somewhat naïve and primitive character; the real achievement of a classless society was impossible at that time because the material conditions for it were absent
  - Marx explained that the real emancipation of the masses depends on the level of development of the productive forces which will create the necessary conditions for a general reduction of the working day and access to culture for all
  - The material conditions at the time of early Christianity were not sufficiently advanced to permit such a development and therefore the communism of the early Christians remained on a primitive level- the level of consumption (sharing of food) and not based on the collective ownership of the means of production
    - Their communism was of a utopian character

#### Christianity and Communism

- In the early years of the church its representative continued to echo the communist views of the movement: “The use of all things that are found in this world ought to be common to all men. Only the most manifest iniquity makes one say to the other, 'This belongs to me, that to you,' Hence, the origin of contention among men.”
  - St Clement correctly observed that the origin of the class struggle (contention among men) is the existence of private property; the elimination of contention among men thus presupposes the abolition of private property
- St. Gregory: "Therefore, if one wishes to make himself the master of every wealth, to possess it and exclude his brothers even to the third or fourth part (generation), such a wretch is no more a brother but an inhuman tyrant, a cruel barbarian, or rather, a ferocious beast of which the mouth is always open to devour for his personal use the food of the other companions."
- St. Ambrose: "Nature furnishes its wealth to all men in common. God beneficently has created all things that their enjoyment be common to all living beings, and that the earth become the common possession of all. It is Nature itself that has given birth to the

right of the community, whilst it is only unjust usurpation that has created the right of private poverty."

- Christianity had revolutionary roots in its early period
  - The Roman state tried to crush the movement because it represented a threat to the existing order
- But the leadership of the Church, the bishops (the treasurers), came under the pressure of the ruling class and gradually moved away from these communistic beliefs
  - The ruling class realized it couldn't defeat Christianity by repression so it changed tactics
  - The upper layers of the Church were corrupted by emperor Constantine (Council of Nicaea the Church was met in luxury)
    - This is like how the leaders of the trade union and labour movement are brought under the influence of bourgeois ideas and become corrupted and absorbed into the system
    - Ever since the Council of Nicaea, the Church has been the firmest supporter of wealth and privilege
  - Before the Christians refused to recognize the state or serve in the army, now this was reversed
    - The Church became one of the main pillars of the state and persecuted anyone who called its new doctrines into questions

How to forgive sins... and make money

- The Christian Church became absorbed into the state
  - Since, the Church has taken advantage of human weakness and fear of death to enslave men's minds and gain power and riches
  - From being a revolutionary movement of the poor and oppressed it became a bulwark of reaction and the mouthpiece of the rich and powerful
- In the year 1517, Pope Leo X launched the Taxa Camerae, in order to sell indulgences whereby one's soul could be saved for a modest sum of money
  - You could pay a price to absolve you of incest, rape, infanticide, and murder
    - But more expensive than all of these is if you hold different ideas to those of the Church (i.e. a heretic)

Religion and Revolution

- Trotsky: "Religious, as indeed any other, ideas being born out of the soil of the material conditions of life and above all the soil of class contradictions, only gradually clear themselves away and then live on by the force of conservatism longer than the needs that gave birth to them and disappear completely only after the effects of serious social shocks and crises."
- The first stirrings against feudalism were the challenges to the power and authority of the RC Church which found an echo among the masses
- Early outbursts like that Lollards in England and Hussites in Germany had communistic tendencies, which harked back to the early traditions of the Church
- During the rise of the bourgeoisie, the Protestant religion reflected the revolt of the nascent bourgeoisie against decaying feudalism

- Protestantism played a progressive role
- The news sects represented the ideas and aspirations of different classes and sub-classes
- Left wing had a clearly communistic tendency like Thomas Muntzer and the Anabaptists in Germany
  - He was a former Luther who broke with Luther and appealed to the peasants to rise
  - But Luther urged the aristocracy to crush the movement and 100 000 peasants were slaughtered and Muntzer was beheaded

#### The English and French Revolutions

- In the English Revolution the most revolutionary wing (reflecting the nascent proletariat) founds its expression in religious form; this revolutionary wing organized in Protestant sects like the Fifth Monarchy men, the Ranters, and the Anabaptists
  - After the Restoration these radical plebeian tendencies re-appeared as religious dissenters; persecuted by the Monarchy they emigrated to America
    - Over the years their revolutionary and radical origins have been lost and are now a bulwark of reaction
- By the time of the French revolution the consciousness of the masses had advanced to the point where religions played no role in their thinking
  - The close relation between the Church and absolutist state was obvious to all
  - Materialist philosophers such as Diderot and Holback had demolished the spiritual Bastille of religion
  - The Jacobin state was officially atheist but Robespierre tried to cover this fact with the fig leaf of the "Supreme Being"
  - Religion practically disappeared in France after the Revolution
  - Only towards the end of the 19th century, especially after the Paris Commune, when the French bourgeoisie had a shock, did the latter take steps to encourage a reactionary religious revival, utilising tricks like the manufactured "miracles" at Lourdes for the purpose
- Although the Russian working class initially came onto the stage of history in January 1905 with a priest at their head this was swept away when the Christian Tsar orders his Cossacks to open fire on unarmed people
  - After this religion played no role in the movement, which was led by Marxists
  - The influence of the Church collapsed even more than it did in France
  - It is a devastating comment on the way in which Stalinism threw back the consciousness of society that immediately after the collapse of the USSR all the old muck revived (nationalism, anti-semitism, religion)

#### The Church and Socialism

- With the rise of the labour movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>C the Church placed itself on the side of the exploiters and in opposition to socialism
  - The RC Church attempted to split the labour movement by setting up separate Catholic trade unions to compete with Social Democracy
  - Pope Leo XIII hated socialism

- Pope Pius XII even wrote that "The multiplicity of classes correspond fully to the designs of the Creator" i.e. the Church considers class society to be fixed, eternal, and of divine origin
  - This is typical of the attitude of the Church for centuries- an overt defence of the status quo and division of society into classes

#### The Church Today

- The Church today is based on contradictions and hypocrisy
  - The revolutionary traditions of early Christianity bear no relation to the present situation
  - Ever since the 4th Century AD, when the Christian movement was hijacked by the state and turned into an instrument of the oppressors, the Christian Church has been on the side of the rich and powerful and against the poor
- In countries like Spain the Church has reached a deal with the state establishing a privileged position where they get paid in taxes
  - Now Spanish citizens can opt out, but the Church still has a privileged position
- While the Church in the Middle Ages declared usury to be a deadly sin, now the Vatican owns a bank and possesses enormous wealth
  - The Church of England is one of the biggest landowners in Britain
- In the 30s the Catholic bishops blessed the armies of Franco in their campaign to crush the workers and peasants
  - Pope Pius XII backed Hitler and Mussolini
  - Pope Pius XII actually really liked Hitler because he was scared of the Bolshevisation of Europe
- In the field of social legislation the RC has always played a reactionary role (denies women the right to control their own bodies, divorce, contraception)

#### Lenin on Religion

- "The state must not concern itself with religion; religious societies must not be bound to the state. Everyone must be free to profess whatever religion he likes, or to profess no religion, i.e., to be an atheist, as every Socialist usually is."
  - However, in relation to the party: "The party of the proletariat demands that the state shall declare religion a private matter, but it does not for a moment regard the question of a fight against the opium of the people - the fight against religious superstition, etc., - as a private matter. The opportunists have so distorted the question as to make it appear that the Social Democratic Party regards religion as a private matter."
  - Lenin: "no amount of reading matter, however enlightening, will eradicate religion" from the consciousness of the masses, "until the masses, themselves, learn to fight against the social facts from which religion arises in a united, disciplined, planned and conscious manner - until they learn to fight against the rule of the capitalist in all its forms"
- But Marxists must do everything to involve all workers on the struggle against capitalism; we must encourage religious workers to participate actively in the class struggle



- While the masses were religious in January 1905, and even hated the revolutionaries, after the massacre of January 9 those same workers came to the revolutionaries demanding arms (this is how rapidly consciousness can change)
- Also, Father Gapon himself underwent a sudden transformation after Bloody Sunday and called for the revolutionary overthrow of the tsar
  - Lenin didn't push him away but tried to win him
- Lenin's flexible attitude was shown by his attitudes to strikes: "To preach atheism at such a time [i.e., during a strike] and in such circumstances, would only be playing into the hands of the church and the priests, who would desire nothing more than to have the workers participating in the strike movement divided in accordance with religious beliefs."
  - We fight for the unity of workers above all lines of division: religious, national, racial and linguistic
- Marxists have never made the acceptance of atheism part of the party programme
  - Workers convinced of the general programme but unwilling to renounce religion should not be pushed away
    - Probably in time he will see the contradiction between his political and religious beliefs and gradually abandon religion
  - Marxists "are absolutely opposed to the slightest affront to these workers' religious conviction"

#### The Future of Religion

- Although from a philosophical view Marxism is incompatible with religion, we are opposed to any idea of prohibiting or repressing religion
  - What we do say is there should be a radical separation between church and state
  - The churches must not be supported directly or indirectly out of taxation, nor should religion be taught in state schools
    - Churches should be maintained through the contributions of the congregation
  - Our first and overriding task is to unite in struggle with all those who wish to put an end to the dictatorship of Capital that keeps the human race in a state of slavery
- The Theology of Liberation is an expression of the revolutionary ferment in Latin America
  - The lower orders of the priesthood are appalled by the suffering of the masses and will struggle for a better life for them
    - Thus, the class struggle has penetrated the ranks of the RC Church
- A collaboration between Marxists and Christians (and other religions) in the struggle to transform society is necessary, despite the philosophical differences
  - Camilo Torres (Colombian priest): "I have cast off the priest's habit in order to become a real priest. It is the duty of every Catholic to be a revolutionary; it is the duty of every revolutionary to carry out the revolution. The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin."

#### An Alternative Life?

- Although organized religion has lost a lot of ground in recent years, religious ideas have re-surfaced in an array of sects and cults
  - This can reflect a growing dissatisfaction with the capitalist system and can be the first step towards consciousness; but it is not enough to reject capitalism, it is necessary to take steps to abolish it
  - A common feature of all these alternative movement is that they base themselves on individual types of salvation; capitalism can live happily with a few people who have decided to drop out
    - Also, even those who profess to drop out will find in practice that they cannot drop out (need to use money to buy things at the shops)
  - You cannot turn your back on society
- The attempt to find an individual solution is essentially reactionary because the only way to fight against capitalism is to unite the working class

#### Religion and the Crisis of Capitalism

- Marxists would call religion a false consciousness because it directs our understanding away from the world and towards an otherness about which we can know nothing
  - To establish a limit beyond which human knowledge is not supposed to trespass is to open the door to all manner of mysticism
- The whole purpose of acquiring rational knowledge of the world is to change it
  - The inner meaning of all human history for the last 100 000 years is a ceaseless struggle of humanity to win the battle with nature, to control its own destiny, and become free
  - The infantile stage of consciousness should have been left behind a long time ago, but the human mind is infinitely conservative
    - In order to change the psychology of man it is first necessary to change the way in which we live- "social being determines consciousness"
- The layer of modern culture and civilisation built up for thousands of years is still very thin, below it lies barbarism
  - In its period of ascent the bourgeoisie stood on the ground of rationalism, now in the period of capitalist decay irrational trends appear everywhere
- The causes of despair in the world today is not so much religion itself but the crimes of capitalism and imperialism which devastate communities and destroys the fabric of society and the family without putting anything in itself
  - Fearful of the future and despairing of the present people seek solace in the solace in the supposed "eternal truths" of a non-existent past
  - The rise of religious fundamentalism is only a concrete expression of the impasse of capitalist society, which drives people to despair and madness
- Religion's role is not to explain what is happening in the world but to console the masses with dreams and give them false promise
  - Religion is a false consciousness, what is needed is a real consciousness- a scientific view of the universe and our place in it
    - The prior condition for winning our freedom is a willingness to see the world as it is and ourselves as we are

### Humanity Alienated from Itself

- For all time man has been educated in a spirit of servility, taught to think we are weak, impotent, that no matter what we do it makes no difference (fatalism)
  - This fatalistic acceptance lies embedded in all religions
  - Out of this sense of impotence comes the need for a Higher Being who is everything we are not
- To the degree that men and women are able to take control of their lives and develop themselves as free human being, Marxists believe that interest in religions will decline naturally of itself

### For a Paradise in this World

- By eliminating the old and degrading dependence of men and women on material things, socialism will establish the basis for a radical change in the way we think and act
- It will take time, even after the abolition of capitalism to eliminate the psychological and moral scars of slavery
  - But once the social and material conditions are given to permit men and women to enter into a genuinely human relationship, their conduct and way of thinking will be transformed
  - Where men actually control their own lives and destinies in a fully conscious way, what room is there for the supernatural
    - Instead of thirsting for an imaginary life beyond the grave, people will concentrate all their energies in making this life as beautiful and fulfilling as it can be
  - When the human race finally fulfils its destiny and is able to stand on its own two feet and live life to the full, it will no longer require the prop of religion, a supernatural being to whom to pray or the false consolation of life in another world than this

### **Marxism and Religion**

<https://www.marxist.com/audio-marxism-and-religion-ulu.htm>

- Question of religion is really important for Marxists
  - Why is it in the 21<sup>st</sup> C, when mankind has achieved miracles, that the ancient ideas, rooted in a primeval past, still have a grip on men today
- As materialists we believe there is only one fundamental substance in the universe-matter (note matter and energy are the same, see Einstein)
  - Conservation of energy: matter can neither be created nor destroyed
  - Important conclusions from this: God, the devil, Heaven, cannot exist then
    - This world was not created by anyone, its eternal
- Human Genome Project: humans share the same genes with chimpanzees (>98%), fruit flies, worms, insects, which is a striking demonstration of the theory of evolution
- Human consciousness is not very progressive, ideas are conservative, people cling to the existing ideas and morality, and they cling very tenaciously
  - This is why revolution is so difficult, people resist change
  - Ideas of religion go back tens of thousands of years, and yet they persist

- People cling to religion because life is so terrible there must be something after death
    - The question we should ask ourself isn't if there's life after death, its if there's life before death
- “Even if its false religion gives people some consolation”
  - Alan Woods does not believe lies are any consolation
- As a Marxists there is only one life and we are fighting for a paradise in this world
  - The idea that there is another life can demobilize and demotivate people
- Christianity says you must accept the bad shit; i.e. if you're a worker you have to accept your lot in life
  - If you suffer and accept everything quietly then everything will be ok when you're dead
  - But we wish to change society
- Why do people believe there is something in us that can live after death?
  - It comes from a primitive period in human spirit, the word soul or spirit means breath
  - Primitive people had dreams so they thought there must be something separate, the soul jumps out of my body and walks around; this is called animism
    - And animism is the basis of all religion
    - Primitive people believed this soul can be passed from one person to another and even penetrate inanimate objects; everything had a spirit
- The real religion of the capitalist world is money, money is the idol the capitalists really worship
  - The God of the ruling class is money, it's the modern fetish
- From animism there is only one step for the idea of life after death
  - In primitive society old people were very respected because there was no written culture; as the person becomes old and grows weaker he grows wiser and the spirit seems to get stronger, therefore you get the idea of a life after death
    - This is a powerful incentive, especially for women, because their lives are empty, their lives is an unending misery
    - The woman is the slave of the slave
  - Its not surprising people cling to any little hope they have
  - There's another life and there everything will be ok
  - Seneca: “For the poor people religion is true, for the wise people it is false, and for the rulers it is useful.”
- Up until 10 000 years ago all men and women were communists, there was no private property, no state, everything was in common
  - In 10 000 BC the first great revolution took place, the Neolithic revolution; people began to settle down and turned to agriculture
  - But together with this revolution you get private property and classes
  - Before this there were shamans, but he was not a special person, he wasn't a separate caste, didn't represent an organized religion

- With Neolithic revolution you get classes for the first, organized religion, priests
- Man creates God after his own image, and this is why God has constantly changed throughout history
  - And what these changes represent is the distorted reflection in the minds of men and women of changes in society
  - Homer and Hezeog have ascribed to the Gods every sin of man (stealing, adultery), Ethiopians make their Gods black, if animals could make things the ox god would be a god
  - Men create Gods after their own image and the society that they lived in
- The priest caste was a privileged caste
  - Aristotle said men begin to philosophize when the needs of life are provided
  - Real thinking is when men raise their sites above the petty things and think about the stars and the meaning of life
  - Mathematics and astronomy were discovered in Egypt because the priests there didn't have to work, they had other people to work for them
- Ever since official Churches have stood for the interests of the rich and powerful against the interests of the poor and downtrodden
- But there have been times when religion stood for the poor, like early Christianity, Islam in its origins; they succeeded so quickly because they were the religion of the poor
  - When the Roman ruling class attacked the Christians said this is a religion of slaves and women
  - Human society isn't fixed and static, society has changed many times, and with it human nature has also changed, and with all these changes there are changes of religion
    - Changes of society are reflected in changes of religion
  - Each stage of society had its own morality
  - Every socioeconomic society is born, grows, expands, reaches a certain level, and enters into decline
  - Rome was a thriving Republic, and Romans weren't particularly religious and didn't care for life after death
    - Greeks idea was pretty grey
    - Egyptians had a better idea- had wine and women, and song, and slaves; but this was only for the rich
  - We still practice animism, the idea that spirits can get inside you through orifices (like when you sneeze, bless you)
  - Certain ideas continue to persist long after their basis ceases to exist
  - Romans were a practical people and not particularly mystical
  - But in the later parts of the Roman Empire, a period of decline of 400 years, characterized by the lack of ability to develop the productive forces
    - There was also a collapse of morality, orgies, superstition, no one believed in the old Gods anymore but there was a flood of oriental sects coming from the east
    - Superstition today is due to the same cause

- When society everybody is happy to accept the existing morality, religion, Church, state
  - When society is in decline people can sense it so you get superstition
- Roman empire was so rotten it only needed a push, it collapsed from the inside
- The Christians were a revolutionary movement and were communists
  - In order to join you had to give up all your worldly goods and supplies were shared out equally
  - These poor people had to fight the state, they were fighting for a better world
- Roman ruling class tried to crush it and failed, so they took it over, they bought the leaders, and incorporated it into the state
  - Council of Nicea was bougie as fuck
  - This is like the trade union and the labour party
- Within every religion there is always an internal contradiction, one section is part of the ruling class and one wants to emancipate the poor, there are two Churches
- We can be comrades with religious people against the ruling class
  - We Marxists are against any division
  - We must unite all the working class in one united army
- Mohammad and Islamic people were revolutionaries against the privileged merchants and mobilized the poor people
  - The reason why the Byzantine Empire collapsed is because it oppressed the peasants and serfs and the Islamic army appeared as liberators; Islam was progressive in origin
- English Revolution is a good example of a split, the role of political parties was played by religious groups
  - Anglicans and Catholics were the right wing, presbyterians were in the middle, the left were the independents (like Cromwell), and the extreme left were the communists (Levellers, Diggers, Fifth Monarchy Men)
  - Cromwell's army was very democratic; soldiers thought they were fighting against privilege and for freedom and they asked why can't we fight against private property
- French Revolution was even more important, it was atheist
  - They completely eradicated religion in the cities because people hate religion and the priests
  - The Church divides along class lines, some of the priests were revolutionaries and supported the poor people
- As Marxists we believe that men and women should fight to change society and to create a genuinely human society which represents the interests of the humans and for the first time allow the human race to raise up to its real stature
  - When men and women can lead a full life who needs some superior being? You only need that when you lead a spiritually poor existence
- Woods is opposed to the oppression of religion, we will not ban religion; the only way to overcome religion is to overcome the basis of religion which is the fact that most men

don't live a fully human existence, therefore they need something else in order to fulfill themselves, their lives are empty

- Human race still hasn't grown up, we are in a primitive stage, the only way to overcome this is when men and women decide to take their lives in their own hands and run society along rational lines
- The primitive savage in his cage doesn't understand thunder and lightning so you begin to worship it
  - Today people sneer at this, say we're much smarter
  - Not so
  - People are not in control of their lives and destinies, they are being controlled by forces man doesn't understand
  - To the degree that man and woman can understand their environment and control then you're no longer afraid of the world, they are forces you can control and dominate
  - The real solution is that instead of capitalist anarchy is a rational, democratic, socialist planned economy on a world scale
    - When we take control the world will be beautiful
    - When people are fulfilled they don't need this other stuff
    - Under socialism men and women will raise themselves to their true heights

### **Marxism and Religion**

<https://www.marxist.com/audio-marxism-and-religion-berlin.htm>

- Modern science can perform the miracles in the bible, but we don't call them miracles anymore
  - Not through supernatural shit but through science and the intelligence of material men
- Marxism is first of all a philosophy, one based on materialism
  - Materialism asserts there is nothing apart from this physical universe of matter and energy
- One of the cornerstones of modern physics is the conservation laws: energy (and matter) cannot be created or destroyed, it is forever
  - God and the Devil and Heaven can't exist once you accept this
  - What the history of science shows us is that we're constantly discovering and we're elevating ourselves to a God-like process, this is a permanent process
- Science is a constant process of expanding our knowledge such that what was a miracle yesterday can be understood today, and if it can't it will be understood tomorrow
  - Materialism is an optimistic philosophy
- Human Genome Project proves that we also weren't created but evolved from lower species
  - We share common genes with lower species including bacteria
  - This destroys creationism, yet the majority of the human race still clings to these sorts of myths
  - Creationism tends to be called intelligent design

- This isn't just ignorant people, scientists follow this
- Example of dialectics: the human intellect, instead of being a progressive thing that pushes society forward (this is an idealist thinking), on the contrary consciousness is conservative; people don't like change
  - In some senses this consciousness can drag so much that it reflects ideas that have long since ceased to have any bearing in life, but it is still there
- Religion rose initially in the dawn of the human race in the form of magic, it wasn't a bad thing, it was a primitive attempt to understand the world
  - Everything was a spirit, every tree, every blade of grass, they even thought death was caused by evil spirit
  - There are certain tribes who apologize to trees they cut down in case the spirit can harm them
- Even today there are phenomena and forces humans cannot control or understand, an irrational world produces irrational ideas
- There's also an element of selfishness and egotism, religion is an attempt to overcome death
  - They seek to find a privileged relationship with nature that gives them a power to overcome death
    - Religion offers a life after death
  - Life for the majority of human beings is so miserable so painful that if there wasn't something after death then life wouldn't feel like living
- Woman is the slave of the slave, which is why women tend to be so religious
- Once you accept YOLO, then you will treasure this life and you will seek to make life worth living by improving society
  - But if you think "I'm gonna live forever" then that devalues human life
- What Christians say is that if you're good i.e. if you accept punishment and suffering and let the boss oppress you, then everything will be fine when you're dead
- What makes life worth living? All the good things in life are connected to your material body
  - You take away the material body you are left with nothing
- Also if you remove all the negative features of life you would also remove all the positive things
  - You wouldn't appreciate good food unless you know what it is to be hungry
  - Life is black and white, and that's why it's life
- A materialist philosophy is a philosophy that values life and values human beings
  - A philosophy that looks above means you already devalued yourself
- In the ancient world most people weren't bothered about life after death, it's mostly a Christian thing
  - If you read Homer (The Odyssey) the life of death of the Greeks was very unpleasant
  - Egyptians were more cheerful, had wine and food and virgins, but this was only for the pharaoh
  - In China, the ordinary people didn't have life after death



- Religion in the organized sense begins with class society and reflects class society (in a distorted way)
  - Man creates God after his own image
  - In Babylon, the God Marduk created the human race in order to serve him and free the Gods from having to work for their living
    - This was like the Asiatic mode of production: bureaucracy with god-king at the top and people working at the bottom
    - This is the origin of culture (see Aristotle)
    - Mathematics and astronomy began in Egypt because the priests did not have to work
  - Gods created men in order to serve them and that is what men did (well they served the priest caste)
- Even in advanced society you have spiritualism
  - Spiritualism: like mediums
    - If someone hears a voice then there must be vocal cords
- Organized religion is part of the state, part of class oppression, which means that every social revolution implies a change in culture, a change in ideas, and thus a change in religion
  - Of the four big religions of the present time, the other 3 were associated with revolutionary movement (especially Christianity and Islam)
    - Related to the movement of the poor oppressed people
  - Christianity was originally a revolutionary movement during the decline of Roman society
    - At that stage in Rome no one believed in the gods, the temples were empty
    - But there was a surge of mysticism coming from the Middle East, lots of mystical ideas coming in
  - Early Christianity was a revolutionary movement of the poor
    - Romans called it the religion of women and slaves
    - It reflected the aspirations for freedom and justice and communism (see Acts)
  - To join the Church you had to give up your wealth
    - Kautsky draws comparison between early Christians and Social Democracy in the early days when they were persecuted by the state
  - It had a progressive and revolutionary content
    - Christians refused to recognize the emperor as a God and refused to serve in the army
  - The ruling class absorbed it by buying off the bureaucracy
    - The bishops were the treasurers; Judas was the guy who ran off the money (he was a bishop)
    - Gradually the bishops rose above the rank and file and became corrupted
    - Eusebius quote about Constantine; like when the bosses invited the trade union bosses for dinner

- How was the Bible put together? Constantine brought all the bishops together and told them to work out the official text, they weren't given food until they were done
  - All the communist texts weren't included and the communists sects were put to the sword
  - From then on the Church became the servant of the state
- In subsequent history revolution is expressed first of all as a religious movement (England, Germany)
  - Peasant Revolt of 1381 led by a priest
  - These movements combine in the bourgeois revolutions
- Martin Luther starts by attacking the Church, the religion of the feudal system
  - Dutch revolution had religious form, and so did English Revolution
- Reformation: Catholicism vs Protestantism
  - The difference is between salvation by faith and salvation by works
- The bourgeoisie begins with primitive accumulation- they invested every penny
- Catholics said there must be works, it isn't enough to just have faith in Jesus, but you must give money to the Church for salvation
  - Difference between feudal religion and bourgeois religion
- Bourgeois revolution was carried out as an attack on existing religion
  - Within Protestantism there were different sects, at this time there weren't political parties but instead sects
  - In Germany, Luther represented the bourgeois and Muntzer of the Anabaptists were communists and represented the poor and peasants
    - There's a class division present in religion
- In French Revolution religions had disappeared, it was under the banner of atheism
  - Religion disappeared in France except for backwards areas
  - Revolutionaries were ex-priests
  - It was only restored by Napoleon
- We stand for separation of Church and State, we stand against religion being taught in schools
  - We're not in favour of suppressing religion (it arises out of the conditions of life itself)
  - The state must not pay one single penny to religion
    - In Spain the state pays the Church

- If any family wishes to teach religion to their children they can do that on their own time
- From a Marxist point of view religion is a private matter as far as the state is concerned
- But from the perspective of the party it is not a private matter, we aren't neutral, we are opposed to religion
  - But Lenin was flexible
  - If we find workers who believe in all our ideas but still believe in God we don't push these people away
    - We shouldn't immediately attack religions, win them over with our programme, and then gradually they will drop this nonsense
- In LatAm most people are Catholics, the evangelists tend to be imperialists
  - Liberation theology: priests who are close to the masses
    - They've supported trade unions, strikes, even guerrilla warfare
  - What attitude should we take to these people?
    - Try to win them over, because they are actually in the process of moving away from religion
    - Chavez is a sincere believer, he doesn't see the contradiction between Reason in Revolt and his faith
  - In LatAm there are two churches: the church of the rich and powerful (the Vatican) and the Church of the poor and those fighting for their rights
    - We fight for that Church
    - We also stand for one saviour, and the name of that saviour is the people, only the masses will overthrow capitalism
- The basic question of building our org is how do we, as a small org, take the scientific ideas of Marxism and make them link with the necessary confused unfinished ideas of the masses?
  - Marxism is a science but tactics and the way you present Marxism is an art
  - Golden rule: first seek out the point of agreement, and then take it from there

### **Fred Weston on Marxism and Religion**

<https://www.marxist.com/audio-fred-weston-marxism-religion.htm>

- The main discussion isn't whether God exists but how can we change the world we live in
  - Some people believe they need a God to give some sort of meaning to their life and as a way to change the world, we as Marxists don't think we need a spirit to change this world, we are materialists
- Consolation to life being tough is that there is an eternal life beyond it as long as you stick to the rules in this world you will be rewarded in the next
  - Marxists know this is the only world therefore we seek to improve it
  - The planet has changed so many times in 4.9 billion years that has led to the evolution of the human brain, which is capable of a level of thought that any other animal isn't capable of

- Part of the thinking behind religious thought is human nature, religion teaches us human beings are intrinsically bad, they are bad by human nature
  - The so-called perfect God has made humans imperfect and gave them all these bad features?
  - What is human nature? Owning slaves was considered natural for centuries, under feudalism it was considered acceptable that serfs are tied to the land, under capitalism it is acceptable that you can only live if you get a job from a capitalist who pays you a wage
- They also try to put across that humanity is selfish by nature
  - Humans have evolved and developed to what we are now through collective effort; we can't hunt and catch animals alone, we needed to work together in primitive conditions
    - Human nature is not selfish, it is about cooperating collectively; we needed to do this to survive
- Because humans have developed the brains that we have we can learn and pass on what we learn to the next generation which allows for accumulation of knowledge
  - As a result, humans have a consciousness, they can think about tomorrow and 10 years ago
  - We can also ask questions about nature and the world and how it works, this is where the first ideas of religion came from
    - People were taking their own immediate experience of how things come into being, and the bigger things they couldn't explain they explained by magic or animism
    - We dream, imagine being primitive and asking "what was that dream?", we know it's a function of the brain but the primitive person will think its dead people's souls coming to visit you
    - The idea that there is some extracorporeal being like a soul that exists outside of the body, which is why certain peoples would pray for the soul of the animal they just killed
- Religions gradually change, from magic we go to organized religion
  - The Gods look like the people who created them
  - Viking Gods dressed like Vikings; if birds had Gods, they'd have wings
  - All religions had a similar structure, with a Chief at the top, then some lower Gods, and finally humans at the bottom
  - As society moves on it goes from a polytheism to monotheism, the one God
    - It's a reflection of the development of society
  - Marxists see all this in a scientific way, humanity has reached a level of understanding which allows us to look at history in an objective way and try and understand how it evolved from the primitive conditions of humanity
    - We analyze it from a materialist point of view
- Matter in particular conditions can become conscious, we are no different from the elements that make-up the planet, we are made up of the same atoms
  - Matter is capable of thinking and the human brain is the most developed form we know so far

- At a certain point it becomes conscious, and for us this happens without the need for an outside spirit
- The less humans knew about nature, the less we had a scientific explanation, the more the Church could give an explanation
- We are atheists, you prove to me he exists, in the meantime there's this world we need to change
  - But does that make us militant atheists? Those whose aim in life is to fight religion?
  - That is not our aim
  - Stalinism went to extremes, destroying Churches
  - We say everyone has the right to belong to any religion they want, they have the right to practice that religion, but there should be no such thing as a state religion and state and religion must be separated
    - The Church is used consciously by the ruling class as an instrument to control the masses; it's a way of keeping a grip on the consciousness of the people; this is why it must be separate from the state
  - As Marxists we shouldn't get into this habit of meeting a believer and you make fun of them; because there are literally millions, probably billions, who believe in some kind of religion
    - Most of them are working class people
  - Bourgeois liberals think religion is a question of convincing each individual, it's an individual question, they don't understand the social or material forces behind religion and why it has such a grip
- In Thesis number 7 to Feuerbach says "religious sentiment itself is a social product, and the individual religious person belongs to a particular social form"
  - Marx's approach to religion isn't even inserted in the programme itself, he doesn't demand that for workers to fight socialism they first must abandon their beliefs
  - He sees that religion is a product of society and it's not by convincing individuals that you're gonna change things
  - Lenin makes the point that the most stupid thing communists could do during a strike is propagandize atheism because it will divide the workers and the boss will win
  - In actual fact the problem isn't religion but class society, religion is a product of class society
    - Atheists think you remove religion then you remove all war
    - It's class society that produces war, it's used to justify war; "God is on our side"
  - The God that western Christians believe in is the God of the Jews; but read the OT and he was kind of a dick, in Joshua there's this war where God does most of the fighting and kills humans with hail storms
    - Since then God has been a bit more democratic
    - Why did that change? It wasn't God that changed but society that changed

- Our task is to change the material conditions, and this is how we change the approach of the mass of humanity to the question of religion
  - Full Marx quote “Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people”
    - “the criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.”
    - I.e. we don’t limit ourselves to the question of religious belief but we go deeper and look at the society that creates the need for that belief
  - To Dawkins: you will never convince a regular Christian or Muslim by applying scientific logic because Dawkins doesn’t understand that religion is a need for these people
    - Over the year religion has likely saved many from going mad
    - For people who don’t see a future in this world religion offers a hope: there will be paradise after death and religions claim they base themselves on egalitarian, it speaks to the heart of many people and says “it doesn’t have to be like this, it can be better”
- Christianity came into being as the religion of the oppressed, it spread amongst the slaves, poor, downtrodden, women
  - The reason the Roman state did it wasn’t because of the theologic difference (mono vs. polytheistic), it was because the Christians represented a threat to the empire because it was based on egalitarianism and communism
    - To become a Christian you had to give up your worldly good and give the wealth to your community
  - Saint Clement said “the use of all things found in this world ought to be common to all men”
    - He’s saying that the idea something belongs to me that doesn’t belong to you (ie. Private property) is at the root of conflict (i.e. class struggle)
  - In early days Christianity had an egalitarianism to it
- Even early days of Islam was a rebel against the existing class structures and appealed to the masses below
- Religions have this within them
  - Marxists explain for genuine communism to come into being you need the necessary material condition
  - Communism isn’t just about sharing your things but producing these things in a communist way
    - Limits of early Christians couldn’t produce in a communist way because the means of production were owned by the empire
  - After it became a force the state realized they couldn’t beat these people so they joined them
    - Constantine established the Christian Church as the state Church; nothing fundamentally changed in the class structure of society but the religion of the oppressed was taken onboard by the ruling elite (form vs. content)

- 20<sup>th</sup> Century had labour and trade union movement, they were fighting the capitalists
  - Capitalists said “we can’t stop the Labour Party from becoming a major party in Britain but we can win the leaders and corrupt them, invite them to the banquets and hotels, make them MPs with good wages, and use the leadership of the oppressed against the oppressed”
  - The state did this with Christianity and Islam
- To focus solely on the religious aspect alone is wrong for Marxists in a practical sense
  - What does Fred have in common with Dawkins? He’s an objective bourgeois liberal scientific thinking dude
    - But although Fred agrees with him on one question, Fred actually has much more in common with the Egyptian workers who rose up against Mubarak who pray on Friday afternoon, or with the orthodox Greek workers fighting for their rights, or Italian and Spanish workers who are baptized Catholics
    - We have far more in common with workers who believe that are fighting to change society then we do with a bourgeois liberal atheist like Dawkins
  - Our approach: Religion exists as a need created by class society and the oppression that flows from class society, it will not be removed by campaigning against God and religion
    - We will change this world with the millions of religious workers who want to fight for a better world
  - In Nigeria there were Muslim and Christian workers on strike, and both were praying for the success of the general strike; this is who we stand with
  - Also in Nigeria, our comrades are attracting militant workers; both the boss of the company who is brutalizing workers who tried to join a union and the workers are either Christian or Muslim
- If we build a Marxist tendency that can lead the working class in struggle and changing society, by taking control of the resources of society, the Christians today would remain so after the revolution, but the next generation and the one after wouldn’t have the need for religion because they wouldn’t be living in such a divided society but they would be able to have a material effect on their living conditions and change them
  - Also, it would allow for an enormous raising of the cultural level of billions of humans
  - By improving the material conditions of everyone and by removing the class contradiction and apply education at all levels over a period of time the need for religion would wither away
    - Humans would look back at this time and think how primitive we are
  - We can’t get this backward, we can’t first get everyone to be atheist and then do the socialist revolution, the revolution comes first

### **Marxism vs Religion by Alex Grant (2020)**

<https://university.marxist.com/en/marxism-vs-religion>

- Is there a God? As a materialist I would have to say no
  - Matter is primary and thought does not occur with a brain

- Aristotle: “man first begins to philosophize when the necessities of life are provided”
- We have a monist view- everything comes from nature and is potentially understandable by studying nature
- Ideas are just the highest forms to arise out of nature
- Religious idealism is “dualist”, ideas exist above and independent of nature, and the biggest idea is God
  - If there’s something we don’t know, a materialist will say “I don’t know let’s investigate” whereas an idealist will say “God did it, no need to investigate”
- Religion attempts to give answers to the big questions of life: why do I exist? Why does the world exist? Why do bad things happen? What happens when you die?
- Why do I exist?
  - “Because God made man in his own image”; Gods look like their worshippers: viking Gods dressed like Vikings, Greek gods dressed like greeks, if birds had a god, they probably have wings
    - Its not God that creates man in his own image but man that creates gods that look like them
  - Materialism has no problem answering this question: natural selection
    - Organic life came from inorganic molecules, single cell life appears, multi-cellular, vertebrates, mammals, and eventually primates
    - Through collective labour, a primate emerged that had the ability to think abstractly and plan (i.e. chase that deer behind the tree and I’ll get it with a stick)
    - Eventually consciousness evolves, and then even religion
  - The best argument for natural selection isn’t how perfect everything is, but how imperfect it is
    - Why would an intelligent designer give us an appendix if it’s useless and can actually give you appendicitis
    - Appendixes are good for digesting vegetation but as we evolved and our diet changed we no longer need it, it’s a vestigial structure
- Why does the world exist?
  - The Bible says “in the beginning there was the word” but this is wrong, in the beginning was the deed, nobody was around to speak words until a mouth and brain that could articulate language developed
  - Between what is known and what is unknown is where religious and scientific debate happen, but the march of history shows science advancing and religion falling back
    - Religion says that God stands before the Big Bang, lighting the match
    - Materialists say nothing is unknowable, we just don’t currently understand the structure and evolution of the universe but in time we will
  - We want an answer for why the universe exists because it is a large and complicated phenomena that affects our lives, the answer that “God created the universe” isn’t actually an answer



- It is replacing one large complicated thing with another
  - If explaining the origin of the universe is interesting, surely explaining the origin of the thing that created the universe is even more interesting
  - Religion moves the question one step back and then says you're not allowed to ask questions about God
- Why do bad things happen"?
  - Religion has two answers: either you angered the Lord (like the OT God, or that God created AIDS to punish homosexuals) or that there is a divine plan and everything will turn out for the best eventually
  - Materialism also has two answers: because we don't understand what's going on (like COVID at the beginning) or because of class society (we understand what's going on with COVID now but the ruling class just doesn't care)
    - For example, COVID is far worse for poor people and black people, this is an expression of class society
- What happens when you die?
  - Its comforting to know that you'll meet your loved ones when you die, the fear of Hell and the comfort of Heaven help keep people 'in line'
    - Napoleon: "In religion I see the social order. The idea of Heaven saves the rich from being massacred by the poor."
    - If people didn't think there was something better later, then many could not survive
  - Materialism says "from atoms I came and to atoms I shall return"
    - Blood cells contain hemoglobin and at the centre of that hemoglobin is an iron atom, that atom was created at the centre of a dying star that went supernova, we are literally made of star dust
    - Eventually our atoms return to the universe
    - The only immortality we can have is by doing good deeds that are remembered, that's why we fight for the working class and fight for a better humanity
- Rational arguments historically don't work against religion
  - Religion has a materialist base and will not disappear while that material base continues to exist
  - Full Marx quote: "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. The heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."
    - It won't disappear while suffering, oppression, and poverty exist
  - The key question isn't whether there is life after death, the question is if there is life before death
- At one time religion actually represented a revolution in human consciousness
  - Humans started asking "Why?" (animals don't do this), asking why is a necessary stage in consciousness
    - The answer to "why" of the sun, river, and tree was the sun-god, river-god, and tree-god; this is wrong but the question itself is revolutionary

- This is called Animism: spirits are given to inanimate objects and it corresponds to a primitive classless society
  - Birth of class society corresponds to the transitions from spirituality to religion
    - A surplus allowed the formation of a priest caste, they were able to live off the labour of the other and study the stars
    - It is in the interest of religion to promote ideas over the material world, this bolsters the privilege of the priest caste over the labouring masses
    - Seneca: "Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful".
  - As class society changed so did religion: slave society with many masters had parallels in polytheism (many masters many Gods)
    - The Roman Empire came into crisis and Christianity rose, an anti-imperialist movement of Jews, the "religion of women and slaves"
- The early Christians were communists and shared their wealth
  - Quotes from the Bible: "money is the root of all evil", "a rich man cannot enter Heaven"
  - Christians also provided some sort of collective welfare in collapsing Roman society
  - The state tried to oppress them, Emperor Nero threw the Christians to the lions, creating martyrs that were used to rally the cause
    - Religion grows on oppression, if you really believe that Heaven is the only way out of suffering, there's no reason to recant because you're about to enter paradise anyways
  - Crisis in Rome led to a split in the ruling class, and Constantine leaned on the Christians to win power
    - He convened the Council of Nicaea and brought together the Christian factions to have a "common doctrine"
    - That Council effectively made Christianity the state religion, ditching the communist baggage
    - This gave Rome a period of relative stability before its inevitable collapse
    - In power, the Christians enacted terrible oppression against the pagans
- Catholicism was the perfect religion for feudalism
  - "One Church, One God, One King"; Church was an intrinsic part of the state and a major landowner, it was opposed to progress
  - In response to religious oppression and state repressing the rising Bourgeois turned to Protestantism
    - Luther translated the Bible, previously it was only in Latin so only the priests could read it
  - Differences between Catholicism and Protestantism: Catholic Churches are very grand with gold everywhere but Protestant ones are more plain
    - "protestant work ethic" is linked to the bourgeois
    - But the major difference is Catholics believe in salvation by deeds and Protestants believe in salvation by faith; for Catholics you could buy forgiveness for sins, this is how they got the money for cathedrals

- But since Protestant salvation by faith is cheaper this allowed the bourgeois to use their capital to reinvest in production instead of building cathedrals
- English Revolution: the only way that political tendencies could express themselves was via religious sects
  - Reaction was Catholic, 'Big Bourgeois' were Presbyterian, and the Vanguard were the Anabaptists and Independents
    - This shows there are two Gods: the reactionary god of the ruling class, and the potentially revolutionary god of the masses.
- We unite with believers when their faith is how they express their opposition to oppression
  - Liberation Theology
  - In 1905 the masses lined up behind Father Gapon
  - Lenin: during a strike is the worst time to bring up atheism, we need unity to win a strike, we can discuss God after the fight with the bosses
- French Revolution didn't need religion like England, French bourgeois were atheists and the counter-revolution were religious
- We open our arms to religious workers who want to fight oppression but we must also be clear on the reactionary role of the Church
  - Doctrine of Discovery of 1493 by Pope Alexander VI: papal justification for the murderous colonization by Columbus; it is estimated that 175 million indigenous people were killed
  - Lots of corruption scandals in all the Churches, and covering up of sexual assaults
    - Church was involved in native residential schools
  - This is why Marxists believe in a total separation of Church and state, freedom of religion and freedom from religion
    - Nobody will oppress you for your belief, but you cannot oppress anybody else, you can't demand tax breaks or state funding
    - Religion with respect to the state should be a totally private affair
    - Marxists believe that the state shouldn't stop telling women what to wear and we unite with them against state repression (Loi 21)
- Imperialists have used religion to stop socialism: they funded the Taliban to destabilize the Soviet-backed regime
  - The CIA and Mossad built up Hamas as a counterweight to Palestinian factions
  - Now Al Qaeda, ISIS, and most recently the Taliban have bit the hand that feeds
- Religion is on the decline: In 1998, 70% of Americans were a member of a church. By, 2018, that had been reduced to 50%
  - In the early 1970s, only 6% of Americans were non-religious, and now it is about 22
  - But as you see a growth in non-religious attitudes, you also see that those who stay religious become a more fundamentalist Christianity

- The born again Christians tend to be quite reactionary, mostly Republican, oppose evolution and abortion, and make up 25% of the population
- Stalin persecuted religion and this made the Church the centre for pro-capitalist opposition in the USSR and Eastern Europe
  - After the fall of Stalinism you see how the former-Stalinist states were invaded by a wave of religious sects
- You can't ignore the class question when you're discussing religion
  - We fight for class solidarity and unity of workers across religious lines
- Lenin's position on religion as it relates to the party?
  - You do not have to be an atheist to join the International Marxist Tendency, but the International Marxist Tendency is atheist
  - We don't close our doors to good class fighters if you believe that: capitalism must be overthrown, the working class needs an organization to help them do this, and you are willing to build the IMT as that organization
  - In our view, the best method of analysis is dialectical materialism, this is what will help us win victory for the workers and overthrow capitalism
- While religion has fallen in the newer generations there has been a rise in spirituality; it rose from 19% of Americans in 2012 to 27% in 2017
  - It encompasses "New Age", astrology, and tarot; they hold a belief in the supernatural but reject the Church
  - In some ways its progressive to reject organized religion but it isn't harmless necessarily
    - It can be just a bit of entertainment to check your horoscope
    - But this spirituality must give people something more than entertainment, tarot and astrology are all linked in some ways to predicting the future
  - Capitalism is unpredictable for working people and terrible things happen, people want some sense of control
    - Predicting the future, spirituality, gives people that control, but it is a false control
    - While spirituality is not part of the state, it is part of capitalism
    - Fortune telling is a \$2 billion industry and people are always scammed by psychics
- The best view of the world, if you want to change it, is a view of the world derived from the world itself
  - Rejecting notions of the supernatural will help you change the world
  - Having a clear-eyed understanding of reality is what's going to help you change reality
- We can't demand a perfect working class to overthrow capitalism, we're going to do that with the working class that exists today

- Believers and non-believers make up the working class today, we will unite all those workers against capitalism to build a new society without oppression, exploitation, and poverty
- We believe that under these improved conditions, religion will tend to wither away, this may take a few generations

#### Interventions

- Lenin: ““everywhere the reactionary bourgeoisie has concerned itself with the fomenting of religious strife in order to divert the attention of the masses from the really important and fundamental economic and political problems.”
- In 2004 the right wing government of France proposed a law forbidding the veil in public schools
  - Bourgeois feminists supported this law and joined the chorus against Muslims
  - The Muslim private schools had an influx of new students because of this
  - Also, the French state literally pours billions into Catholic private schools
  - With the crisis of capitalism and intensification of the class struggle, this strategy of divide and rule is going to intensify
    - We must clearly oppose every attempt to divide our class along religious lines
    - We can't fall into the abstract propaganda against religion
- Christianity rose in a period of decay of Roman society, slave economy was in decline, main state spending were the military and public buildings and the empire let its buildings go to pieces while trying to bolster its declining army
  - The state took everything it could through taxes, labour services, so hostility towards the state grew massively
    - Ruling class became completely degenerate
  - There was decay in all field of life, individuals felt no attachment to the community or the state that plundered them; everyone was left alone in a world in the decline
  - It is in this context that Christianity took hold, promising life after death
    - Early Christians had a class hatred for the rich and shared their good and distributed them according to need
    - Kautsky: ““the only organizations that could exist under the Empire were those that had a broad social goal, a high ideal...only the most revolutionary or the most ideal of motives that could give an organization the strength to live.”
    - Christianity had something to offer the masses and this shows the power of ideas, and how ideas can unite people in a cause greater than themselves
- Liberation Theology developed in the 60s and 70s among the lower ranks of the Catholic Church that were appalled by the poverty, oppression, and repression against the masses
  - Camilo Torres, Colombian priest who took up arms: "It is the duty of every Catholic to be a revolutionary... The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin."

- In the future we will see other splits in religious communities along class lines
- Material conditions at the time of early Christianity did not exist for communism
  - Instead of the Christians being able to transform society on communist line, it was class society that transformed Christianity
  - It became state religion and has played a reactionary role ever since
- Important distinction between now and then: there was no class able to carry out a successful revolution to overthrow slave society so you had a slow decline of the empire over hundred of years
  - Capitalism is doing a similar thing now, and today there is also a movement that gives us hope, that call on us to build a paradise in this world, and that is the socialist movement; this time there is class that can stop us from falling into barbarism, and that is the working class
  - And as a Marxist I do have faith, I have faith in the working class
    - But this is not the same as religious faith, it's based on a historical and materialist analysis that show how the working class developed historically and is in position to take control of the economy and abolish class society altogether
  - At the time of the Roman Empire only organizations with high ideals could survive, this is the case today
    - Fighting to reform capitalism is demoralizing, reformists orgs will be discredited and decline
    - There has never been a better time to join the fight for a socialist world
- Brazilian Bishop Helder Camara: "when I feed the poor, they say I am a saint, when I denounce the causes of poverty, they say I am a communist".

#### Sum up

- Obviously the religious establishment united with the state is hypocritical, but so are the so-called liberal secularists who also promote state oppression
  - These two lean on each other, you see how Islamophobic secularism debates actually serve to drive people towards Islamic fundamentalism
  - This underlines a failure of the reformists and the labour movement
    - If the trade unions and the left parties were at the forefront of fighting against this oppression then the oppressed youth would flock to the labour movement and socialist
    - We have to fight for a militant socialist policy in order to win these oppressed youth to the struggle for socialism