Evaluation of Functionalism
It is difficult to see how religion functions to socialise the majority of individuals into morality and social integration when church attendance is declining in most Western societies. Functionalism ignores the idea that religion can be dysfunctional – rather than binding people together, it has caused many world conflicts (for example, Christians and Muslims across the world). Functionalist theorists assume that society has one religion, but many modern societies are multicultural and multi-faith. In addition, Durkheim failed to consider the fact that religious belief can be expressed individually. It has been argued that Durkheim’s analysis is based on flawed evidence: he misunderstood totemism and the behaviour of the aboriginal tribes. Marxist theorists criticise the Functionalist approach, arguing that their view of religion as an instrument of social solidarity is incorrect. Instead, Marxists view it as an instrument of social control and exploitation. It is debateable how relevant Functionalist theories on religion can be in contemporary society, as religion is no longer the metanarrative of our society – it has been replaced by science.

Marxism and Beliefs
The traditional approach of Marxism looks at the nature of faith and the way in which the working class religion concentrates on the afterlife. Marx referred to religion as “the opium of the people”, and Lenin saw it as “spiritual gin”. Marxists argue that religion is an instrument of social control and exploitation, reflecting the interests of the ruling class and keeping the working class in a false consciousness. Karl Marx suggested that the primary function of religion is to reproduce, maintain and justify class inequality. Religion is just an ideological apparatus reflecting ruling class interests, and dulls the pain of reality, and encourages passive acceptance of one's lot in life (through belief in the afterlife).

Marx argues that the roles of religion are to legitimate social inequality, disguise exploitation and socially control the working class. Marx sees religion as an agent of legitimisation, as it promotes the idea that the hierarchy is God-given and unchangeable. The idea that religion serves to control the population can be seen during the feudal period when it was believed that kings had a divine right to rule. This also enforces a respect for authority onto the proletariat. Religion promises happiness in the afterlife, which prevents the working class from challenging the ruling class directly. While Marx focused on industrialist capitalist societies and Christianity, other religions also enforce this discouragement of change: for example, the Hindu caste system fixes status and promises improvement after reincarnation. Basically, religion is used by the bourgeoisie to justify their higher position.

Evaluation of Marxism
Halevy argues that Methodism prevented working class revolution in 19th century Britain, and distracted the proletariat from their class grievances by encouraging them to see enlightenment in spirituality rather than revolution. Leach suggests that the Church of England recruits from a predominantly upper class – for example, 80% of recruited bishops were educated at Oxbridge. As a result, the Church has lost contact with ordinary people and should be making more of an effort to tackle inequality. The Marxist theory of religion fails to consider secularisation. Their focal argument that religion holds such a powerful ideological function in pacifying the working class is undermined by the fact that less than 10% of people attend church. Marx fails to consider non-oppressive religions. Marxism fails to account for the examples of religious movements that have brought about radical social change and helped to remove ruling elites. Neo-Marxists have recognised the way in which religion can be used as the only means to oppose the ruling class. For example, churches in Britain have provided safe havens for immigrant groups facing deportation.
belief that they will be compensated for their suffering on earth by equality in heaven. Beuvoir concludes that religion “confirms the social order, it justifies her resignation by giving hope of a better future in a sexless heaven”. El Sadaawi, a Muslim feminist, does not blame religion for its oppressive influences on women. Instead, Sadaawi blames the patriarchal domination of religion that came with the development of monotheist religions.

It should not be assumed that all religions are equally oppressive to women. Gender neutral language has been introduced in many hymns and prayers, and the requirement in the Christian marriage ceremony for the bride to promise to obey her husband is now optional. Sociologists highlight how veiling, rather than being a submission to patriarchal control, is in fact a means of ethnic and gender assertiveness. Ahmed suggests that the veil is a means for Muslim women to become more involved in modern society while maintaining a sense of modesty.

Despite a recent drift away from mainstream Christianity, studies have consistently shown that women are more religious than men. Miller and Hoffman report that women are more likely to express a greater interest in religion and have a stronger personal religious commitment. It is only during the last 20 years that women have begun to leave the church at a faster rate than men. Brierly argues that between 1989 and 1998, more than 65000 women were lost from churches each year, 57% of all those leaving churches. Woodhead divides contemporary women into three groups regarding religion: home-centred women, jugglers and work-centred women.

Women tend to participate in sects more than men. Thompson argues that this is due to women being more likely than men to experience poverty and therefore they are more likely to join sects. Thompson notes that “sect members have the promise of salvation”, which is extremely desirable to women struggling with poverty. Glock and Stark identify different types of deprivation in addition to economic, all more likely to apply to women: social deprivation, orgasmic deprivation, and ethical deprivation. In New Age philosophies, women tend to be afforded a higher status than men – this may explain higher female involvement in NAMs. Glendinning and Bruce’s research confirms that middle class women subscribe to alternative therapies associated with New Age movements more often than men.

The resurgence of religious fundamentalism over the past decade has played a major role in trying to reverse the trend of increasing female authority. In the USA, opposition to women controlling their fertility through abortion has ended in violence, with religious pro-life groups adopting terrorist tactics to close clinics down. Cohen and Kennedy suggest that fundamentalism is “associated with the fear that any real increase in women’s freedom of choice and action will undermine the foundations of … male control”.

**Social Action and Beliefs**

Like Neo-Marxism, social action theorists also consider the fact that religion can cause social change. Religion offers answers about fundamental questions about the nature of existence. Berger states that it is a sacred canopy, enabling people to make sense of the world around them. While some theodicies justify maintaining the status quo, others encourage change. Weber, in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, identified a particular theodicy that may encourage radical social change. Calvinists were a 17th century protestant group who believed in predestination; your damnation or salvation was fixed in advance, and there was nothing to be done to change your fate. However, material success that arose from hard work and asceticism would demonstrate God’s favour.