

# Summary of Challenge to Religion posed by Sociology

Thinker	Main ideas	Challenge to religion	Some responses from religious viewpoint	Quotes
<b>Ludwig Feuerbach</b>	<p>This argument is similar to the psychological argument because it tries to give a naturalistic explanation of religious experience</p> <p>Feuerbach noted how the individual feels threatened and creates a protecting god, but said this was also true of society</p> <p>Society uses religious practice to help its members face crises</p> <p>Just as the idea of a loving god is a projection of the human admiration for the quality of love, so the idea of the Trinity, Feuerbach said, was a projection of the value of social unity</p> <p>The god created by the human mind is a little society in the sky</p>	<p>The sociological explanation joins forces with the psychological explanation to explain away God and deconstruct religion</p> <p>Communal religious practice is simply the desire for social unity projected onto a religious backdrop</p> <p>The doctrine of the Holy Trinity, an essential doctrine in Christianity, is explained as simply a human creation expressing that desire for familial togetherness &amp; dressing it up in religious doctrine</p>	<p>The common attempt to explain away God &amp; religion can be met with a common defence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually there is some truth in the attempt – but that's a different thing from saying that the attempt explains away God &amp; religion ...</li> <li>And so Christians could say that <i>if</i> there is a Triune God there <i>ought</i> to be some reflection of the Trinity in earthly society and human lives which image the Trinity</li> </ol>	
<b>Karl Marx &amp; Friedrich Engels</b>	<p>Marx thought that the poor working class, exploited by capitalists found consolation in religion: <b>'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature .... It is the opium of the people'</b></p> <p>Marx also thought that this drug of religion was used by the ruling class to keep the workers down</p> <p>If the workers could revolt, they would throw off oppression and so 'abandon a condition which needs illusion'</p> <p>The ruling class promotes religion and especially Christian virtues such as humility obedience and non-resistance to make sure that the revolution never comes</p> <p>Engels, Marx's friend &amp; collaborator, thought that the idea of a God whom we have to obey is really a fantastic reflection of capitalist society</p> <p><i>Once the people 'has freed itself by taking possession of all means of production', religion will vanish</i></p> <p>You don't have to preach against God, only get people to remove the causes of suffering which makes them want a God as a comfort.</p>	<p>Religion is seen as a drug that dulls the misery of the condition of the poor</p> <p>Religion's power to keep the noses of the poor to the grind is harnessed by the capitalist oppressors – it is in their interest to keep pushing the drug of religion and the Christian virtues that celebrate humility and acceptance of one's lot</p> <p>The only reason for the continuing existence of religion is the continuing oppression of the poor</p> <p>Once the oppression goes, religion will go – there will no longer be any need for the drug</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Religion may prevent revolution but it can also encourage revolution (cf. Oscar Romero)</li> <li>An important part of the practice of many religions is to improve the condition of the oppressed, not just to console but to change (cf. Pope Leo XIII, <i>Rerum Novarum</i>)</li> <li><b>Max Weber</b> rejected the Marxist view that economic power relations are the deepest reality; instead religion is deeper than economics, and gives it shape - His 'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' advanced the idea that the Calvinist view of predestination result in a work ethic that showed one was one of the elect (chosen)</li> <li>Marx assumed religion would simply vanish when the workers were free – religion is still around, while communism is all but dead</li> </ol>	
<b>Emile Durkheim</b>	<p>Durkheim, like Marx, saw religion as society's way of controlling the individual</p> <p>People have a sense of something greater than themselves existing before their lives, caring for them and giving them rules</p> <p>They call this 'God' but this God is really a symbol for society - 'the God and the society are one'</p> <p>He studied Australian aboriginal societies &amp; concluded that there is a strong sense of loyalty to the clan's customs- they are holy and to go against the group mind by breaking these customs is a fearful thing</p> <p>Like a god, society asks us to be its servants, demanding sacrifices which go against our instincts</p> <p>Religion (from the Latin 'ligare' to bind) binds society together &amp; its health</p>	<p>As for the thinkers above, Durkheim's explanation of religion is also an attempt to explain away religion</p> <p>Society, says, Durkheim, is God – it pre-exists us and gives us a community in which to take shape as persons; it seems to nurture us</p> <p>Durkheim's convictions are based on the study of an actual society</p> <p>People's devotion to society – even their willingness to give up their lives for it – is a sign of their religious attachment</p>	<p><b>H.H Farmer</b> writing in 1942 critiqued Durkheim's views:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Durkheim applies his conclusions about Aboriginal society to all societies – a mistake, says Farmer</li> <li>Some religions reinforce our membership of society but many help us to look beyond our own society to feel a responsibility for all people</li> <li>Durkheim's theory fits a closed society where the roles of life do not change</li> <li>The holiest people the closest to God are often prophetic voices criticizing the society. If society is God they would not do this.</li> <li>Society and religion are clearly not identical in our multi-faith pluralist society</li> <li>Holy people can find it is best to distance themselves from society e.g. monks and hermits</li> <li>As <b>Weber</b> pointed out religion is often associated with charismatic individuals. It does not seem to start with the community</li> <li>Religion isn't the only binding force in society</li> </ol>	