

Essay

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Essay

# Reimagining the Interplay between Marxism, Belief, and Modernity

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**Abstract:** This essay discusses the complicated relationship between ideology and faith, focusing on the importance of faith. It endeavors to enrich the critical examination of religion by providing a platform to analyze the multifaceted nature of ideologies and their profound influence on human geography. This study is particularly distinctive for its focus on the complex interplay of Marxism, religion, and modernity, deepening our understanding of how these dynamics shape contemporary societies.

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## Introduction

The complex relationship between contemporary Islamic traditions, Marxist ideology, and religious factors' subtle yet influential impact on social structures necessitates thorough scholarly analysis. This essay examines the complex relationship between seemingly unrelated forces, aiming to shed light on the historical developments, philosophical foundations, and tangible consequences that arise from this connection. The study looks at the connections between these concepts and the field of human and social geography. It provides a comprehensive lens to explore the complex interplay of ideology, belief, and societal transformation. By recalling the lives of Khalid Abdul Muhammad (1948–2001)<sup>1</sup>, and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966)<sup>2</sup>, we can observe the convergence of Marxist ideologies and Islamic thought. These individuals significantly impacted the ideologies of specific organizations. As this study mentions their names, it becomes evident that these individuals not only had Marxist inclinations but also started incorporating Marxist ideas into Islamic perspective. The early history of Islam is marked by the efforts of notable figures like Abu Dhar (may God be pleased with him), a distinguished companion of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), who fought for the rights of the poor.<sup>3</sup> The lives of Khaled and Qutb, who transitioned from Marxism to Islam, serve as examples of how ideological frameworks can be adaptable. It should be noted that Islam does not endorse Marxism, nor does Marxist ideology support Islamic doctrines. Certain views of Marxism regarding assistance to the impoverished and vulnerable in society bear resemblance to the teachings of Islam in this regard.

So, the analysis of Marxist thought requires an exploration of its origins. The analytical investigation in this study highlights a critical perspective that views Marxism as inherently atheistic because it rejects metaphysical concepts. This aspect plays a central role as a cornerstone in the study's inquiry.

But who was Karl Marx? Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a man who held atheistic beliefs and experienced health issues, including boils, throughout his adult life. He could not sit down; he was always in pain and hated God. He was also a deliberate racist.<sup>4</sup> You may have read his letters, including the letter to Engels about the Algerians and his description of the Arabs as "ape-like".<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Marxist criticism lacks validity. But the criticism is entirely based on atheism. A

nuanced examination of Karl Marx's personal attributes and biases, including his physical ailments and racial prejudices, offers insight into the complex individual who influenced this ideology. Hence, the personality of Karl Marx, the founder of this ideology, has multifaceted dimensions that require a comprehensive understanding. The life of Marx, who fought chronic illness and faced racial prejudice, reveals a complex personality that played a crucial role in shaping the paradigm of Marxist thought. It is important to note that although his skepticism of religion and subsequent critique of oppressive systems were crucial to the development of Marxist thought, they did not eliminate its inherent limitations. Examination of the foundations of Marxism is inseparable from an exploration of its nature, particularly in relation to the fundamental aspects of atheism.<sup>6</sup> While recognizing some valid aspects of the Marxist critique, it is evident that its atheistic foundation restricts its ability to fully address complex social contexts. This essay mentions the ideas of Islamic scholar Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah (may God bless him), who emphasizes the practicality of Islamic scholarship in contrast to the idealism of Marxism. This comparison offers a remarkable starting point for academic analysis. This study explores the significant impact of religion on modern society and its complicated relationship with social progress, a topic often overlooked in current discussions. Thus, this essay involves a discussion of the complex relationship between Marxism, belief, and modernity. By doing so, it uncovers the sophisticated forces that shape the social structure of the modern world.

### **Examining Ideological Foundations: A Comparative Perspective**

While recognizing the value of certain aspects of Marxist criticism, it is argued that its foundation of atheism limits its ability to comprehensively address the complex fabric of society. This assertion prompts us to consider the perspectives of the contemporary esteemed Islamic scholar, Venerable Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah (may God bless him), who emphasizes the practicality inherent in Islamic scholarship.<sup>7</sup> So, Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah wrote a book in Arabic, its title in English is "*Awakening to the Reference Points*" which explores the foundation of pragmatic jurisprudence, also known as the "Jurisprudence of Reality" ("*Fiqh Al-Waqi`*").<sup>8</sup> What Venerable Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah argues is that Islamic scholars were pragmatists, not idealists. Idealism is always the domain of zealots, and the zealots are always idealists. The zealots desire an ideal world where they aim to "eliminate" evil and make sin illegal. This is their goal: to create a "paradise" on Earth. This is the Marxist dream of creating a "paradise" on Earth as well. They act like, "Once we get rid of all the "evil" capitalists and establish equality among the masses".<sup>9</sup> But there is no equality. Some individuals are more attractive than others. Some individuals are more eloquent than others. So, as you may know, in some cases, taller individuals are more likely to be hired for jobs over shorter individuals. In real life, we may observe that people tend to vote for taller politicians over shorter ones, and this phenomenon falls under the realm of social science. So, you can be too tall, to the point where it becomes a little freakish, but anyway.<sup>10</sup> So, there is a great blessing in just being tall. Thus, we know that people of high social standing will always appear taller because their stature gives them an air of height.

Accordingly, the pragmatic approach advocated by Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah is in direct opposition to the passionate idealism often associated with zealous ideologies. By emphasizing the practical nature of Islamic scholarship, he highlights its realistic essence. This contrast of viewpoints offers an intriguing perspective for academic contemplation, encouraging us to explore the intricacies of how society navigates through a lens that acknowledges both the practical aspects of human existence and the desire for a fair world.

### **Religious Foundations in Modern Social Dynamics: Examining the Interplay**

It is crucial to point out that many of the values we hold dear in modern society, such as individual rights, inalienable rights, and human dignity, have their roots in Christian Western Civilization. Modernity can be seen as a deviation from Christian beliefs in many ways. Just because it removed God but retained many of the principles, we tend to forget how much religion influenced modern Westerners.<sup>11</sup> Then, the participation of religion in credit unions was faith-based. They originated from a faith-based tradition in Germany, and later in America and Canada. Life insurance

was an initiative by the Catholic Church to provide financial protection for families who experienced the sudden loss of a provider. The Evangelicals were the ones who abolished the Atlantic slave trade. William Wilberforce's actions in parliament were entirely informed by his faith.<sup>12</sup> So, we may have forgotten about these things, but one of the most important aspects of faith is the presence of satisfactory dogma. There is this idea that people derive great benefits from having faith. Karl Marx is often misquoted as saying "Religion is the opiate of the masses",<sup>13</sup> but he never actually made that statement, according to one of the renowned Islamic scholars – Venerable Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (May God bless him). It is a complete misinterpretation of what Karl Marx said. What Marx said was, "Religion is a protest against an unjust world. Religion is a sign of the oppressed. It is the heart of a heartless world. It is the soul of soulless conditions; it is the opiate; it is the opium of the people." In other words, it numbs the pain of existing in the world. Now that we have replaced religion with actual opium, we are facing an opium crisis in certain areas. Because people often struggle with the concept of religion.<sup>14</sup> If Karl Marx were writing today, he probably would not have said that religion is the opiate of the masses. Instead, he might have said something along the lines of "such and such a social network is the heart of a heartless world." Or "such and such a social network is often referred to as the opium of the people." Because we are in a different kind of world. But we forget how much faith enables people to navigate. For instance, Buddhism, i.e., the first truth of Buddhism is that the world is suffering.<sup>15</sup> People forget that. There is great suffering in the world, and religion has always been a source of solace for people.<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx's idea was to eliminate suffering in the world rather than relying on religion. This utopian concept, however, resulted in the loss of millions of lives.

So, the contrast between pragmatism and the Marxist pursuit of an idealistic world accentuates a profound disparity that warrants careful reflection. Within the tapestry of modernity, we can distinguish the often-overlooked interweaving of religious elements. Pillars such as individual rights, human dignity, and inalienable rights, which are emblematic of modernity, trace their roots to the foundation of Western Civilization, which was influenced by Christianity. Real-world examples, such as the significant role played by Evangelicals in dismantling the Atlantic slave trade and the faith-based origins of credit unions, highlight the complex relationship between religion and societal progress, which is often overlooked in current discussions. In an era driven by technological advancements, the reassessment of the importance of faith becomes crucial. Reflecting on Karl Marx's oft-misinterpreted maxim. Despite its misinterpretation, the essence remains powerful. Amidst the competition for attention from digital platforms such as social media and streaming services, the role of faith as a sanctuary is amplified. One could argue that in contemporary society, Marx could draw parallels between platforms such as Facebook or TikTok, Netflix or other one, and the societal role that religion played in his era. The complex interaction between Marxism, religion, and modernity creates a diverse tapestry of ideological development. This essay emphasizes the importance of approaching these ideologies with careful thought, considering their historical origins, current manifestations, and their impact on human and social geography. Our exploration of thought, faith, and societal transformation emphasizes their ongoing relevance in shaping our world.

### **A Dualistic Lens of Domination and Progressive Change**

The intricate web of human history is woven with the threads of religious phenomena that have consistently left indelible imprints on societies. This essay boards on a critical exploration of the multifaceted nature of religious thought, examining its potential for both domination and progressive social transformation. It explores the interaction between ideologies, such as Marxism, and religious dynamics, utilizing critical theories to emphasize the inherent dichotomy in religious influences. Religious thought, a potent force that has shaped cultural norms and governance structures for millennia, manifests a dualistic nature. It simultaneously serves as a source of domination, consolidating power structures through dogma, rituals, and moral frameworks. Yet, it has also been a catalyst for progressive social change, inspiring movements for justice, equality, and compassion. This intricate dichotomy calls for a nuanced examination that does not dismiss the negative implications, while also acknowledging the potential for transformative impact. In analyzing the relationship between religious phenomena and ideologies such as Marxism, a critical lens becomes



essential. Drawing inspiration from the critical theory framework of Marxism, which scrutinizes societal structures and power dynamics, we can gain insight into how religious ideologies intersect with other systems of control. This perspective reveals the mechanisms through which religious institutions historically strengthened social hierarchies, often oppressing marginalized groups under the guise of “*divine authority*”. The use of religious ideologies for domination has been a recurring theme throughout history. Religious leaders and institutions have utilized their influence to legitimize political power, uphold societal hierarchies, and stifle dissent. The subjugation of women, the perpetuation of slavery, and the imposition of rigid moral codes are some of the consequences of religious co-optation for dominance. While religious teachings have the potential to inspire ethical conduct, they have also been used to uphold the existing social order and suppress those who challenge established norms.

Religious ideology has frequently acted as a catalyst for change, reshaping social norms. Numerous historical examples demonstrate the role of religious leaders in advocating for justice and equality by using moral imperatives to challenge oppressive regimes. Notable historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi demonstrate the fusion of religious principles and progressive activism. Gandhi’s leadership, inspired by Hindu principles of nonviolence and justice, significantly bolstered the movement against colonial rule and had a profound impact on Indian history.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Martin Luther King utilized the moral principles of Christianity to guide the civil rights movement in the United States and amplify the fight for racial equality and justice.<sup>18</sup> The intricate relationship between Marxism, belief systems, and modernity adds complexity to the interaction between religious ideology and social change. Marxism’s emphasis on class struggle and socioeconomic equality intersects with religious teachings, which can either challenge or support prevailing power structures. The intricate connection between religious thought and social change highlights the multifaceted nature of their relationship. Examining this interaction from a critical Marxist perspective provides a deeper understanding of how religious institutions can either oppress or catalyze social change, depending on their alignment with dominant ideologies. The complex nature of religious phenomena necessitates a thorough study that considers their dualistic possibilities.

## Discussion

The essay explores the complex relationship between Marxism, religious belief systems, and modernity. It examines their historical origins, philosophical foundations, and impact on social structures. By exploring this complex relationship, scholars and thinkers in the field of theology and religious studies can come together in a common meeting place for critical analysis. Religious ideologies have historically played a crucial role in shaping societies and driving social change. Historical role models like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King exemplify the transformative power of religious principles. Their aspirations were not only based on faith but also on a profound understanding of their religious beliefs and their ability to bring about positive social change. This serves as a crucial starting point for further research, prompting scholars to explore the complex mechanisms through which religious beliefs are intertwined with social dynamics to create long-lasting transformations.

The infusion of Marxist ideologies into the religious framework raises interesting questions about the compatibility and divergence of these ideological strands. The clash between Marxist emphasis on socioeconomic equality and class struggle and established religious dogma raises questions about reconciling seemingly incompatible perspectives. This essay also explores the historical links between religious principles and the origins of modernity. The core modern values of individual rights, human dignity, and inalienable rights have their conceptual origins in religious traditions, particularly within the context of Christian Western civilization. Creating a platform for scholarly discussion could facilitate a thorough exploration of how religious paradigms have subtly but significantly shaped contemporary social structures. The technological age introduces a new dimension of consideration. Reevaluating the role of faith in the digital age highlights the ongoing significance of religious beliefs as a guiding force in an increasingly intricate world.

This essay encourages us to envision a shared space where scholars, thinkers, and practitioners can critically analyze the intersection of Marxism, religious ideologies, and modernity. The complexities of this dynamic interaction need thorough investigation. A dedicated space for discourse can serve as a catalyst for uncovering new perspectives, fostering dialogue, and enriching our collective understanding of the forces that shape our constantly changing world.

## Conclusion

The interaction between religious ideologies, Marxist thought, and modernity creates intriguing connections within human societies. These connections have significant implications for comprehending social and political conflicts. The paper has explored the historical, philosophical, and practical aspects of the complex relationship between religion and social and political conflict, offering valuable insights into the diverse role of religion in shaping these dynamics. This question is especially important in situations where conflict arises from disparities in race, class, ethnicity, region, gender, and sexual orientation. These manifestations are closely connected to the intricate web of social, political, and economic inequalities. This essay sheds light on the convergence of seemingly opposing forces and enhances our understanding of how religion can both incite and resolve conflicts. This discourse highlights the role of religious principles in promoting justice and equality, drawing inspiration from historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. It emphasizes how these principles can mobilize societies against oppressive regimes. These examples highlight the complex nature of religious ideologies, which can either contribute to division or serve as a catalyst for positive transformation, depending on their interpretation and application.

It is crucial for this essay to align with the critical studies of religion and social science. This investigation aligns with the principles of critical analysis, as it critically examines Marxism, religious thought, and modernity. Critical analysis encourages scholars to question, dissect, and examine prevailing norms, ideologies, and power structures. The interdisciplinary nature of this study, incorporating theology, philosophy, sociology, and geography, highlights the holistic approach of critical studies. This approach acknowledges that comprehending complex phenomena necessitates a multifaceted perspective.

In this essay, we have discovered the complex relationship between religion, Marxism, and modernity, enhancing our comprehension of their impact on social and political conflicts. This essay bridges disciplinary boundaries by incorporating critical studies of religion and the social sciences. It offers readers a platform to contemplate the intricate interplay of ideologies that influence our world.

**Conflicts of Interest:** This study does not have any conflict or competing interests.

## Notes

1. Khalid Abdul Muhammad was African American Muslim cleric and activist associated with the Nation of Islam and the New Black Panther Party.
2. Sayyid Qutb was an Egyptian author and educator who played a central role within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and is known as the "father of Salafist jihadism".
3. Abu Dharr was the main figure in the controversial case during the reign of Caliph Uthman (may God be pleased with his soul) concerning the use of the state budget to support the poor, and he went down in history as the "lawyer of the poor."
4. McLellan, David. *Karl Marx: His life and thought*. Springer, 1973.
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6. Tucker, Robert C. *Philosophy and myth in Karl Marx*. Routledge, 2017.
7. Venerable Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah is often referred to as a "man of his time" due to his extensive knowledge of Islamic tradition and his understanding of the contemporary world.
8. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah's book in Arabic entitled "Tanbih Al-Maraji' Ala Ta'seel Fiqh Al-Waqi". Al Muwatta Publishing.
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