

This Free E-Book is brought to you by Natural-Aging.com.

**[100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment](#)
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!**

The Crucifixion and Escapism: Theories of Karl Marx and Mircea Eliade

By Kathy Simcox

The Crucifixion and Escapism: Theories of Karl Marx and Mircea Eliade by Kathy Simcox

In analyzing Jesus' crucifixion with regard to Karl Marx and Mircea Eliade, I found a startling similarity: the deep desire to escape the world. The cross symbolizes and encompasses this desire, although the two theorists define its manifestation differently.

As always, Karl Marx interpreted most issues of his time using the concept of social struggle. There was always an ongoing battle between workers and their capitalist oppressors. Society was fundamentally corrupt so long as a minority (the middle-class capitalists) had an economic advantage, a sense of superiority, over the masses (the workers). Marx dreamed of a classless society where everyone was treated equally, fairly, and would be completely satisfied both in their work and in their relationships with each other.¹ But the economic reality of society in his day caused alienation between workers and their true selves.

Alienation occurred because capitalist economics took production of labor, the very product supposedly reflecting the worker's true self-expression, and transformed it into a material object that is bought, sold, and owned by others. This economy gave the worker's product to the rich middle-class who was able to buy it and thus ruled and oppressed the working masses.² Physical, social, economic, and spiritual oppression was the result of this alienation, and religion was the way out, an escape:

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.³

The drug opium lessened pain and created fantasies. Marx compared religion to opium because he saw religion playing the same role in the life of the poor. Through religion, the pain workers suffered in a cruel and exploitative world was eased by the fantasy of a supernatural world void of all sorrow and oppression. It is pure escapism.⁴ This escapism shifted the gaze upward to an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-enduring God who occupies a perfect Heaven.

The Crucifixion and Escapism: Theories of Karl Marx and Mircea Eliade

For Marx, the essence of religion, and for purposes of this paper, Christianity, is its voice of suffering, its crying out against the realities of capitalist exploitation and degradation.⁵ The cross is the ultimate symbol of pain and suffering. Marx's working class would identify with this symbol and cling to it with hope of a better life, a better world, to come. Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, and his eventual resurrection, would be proof to the workers that if they just endure this worldly suffering and oppression with patience and long-suffering, they will too be rewarded eternal life in Heaven when they die. The poor would also identify to the humiliation Jesus suffered at the hands of the Romans even before he died. They would say, "Hey, the humiliation that happened to Christ is happening to us. He did nothing to stop it. He endured all the pain and suffering with strength, courage, and patience. If we do the same in our situation, if we imitate our Lord, we will be rewarded in Heaven. Everything here on earth passes away; it doesn't matter."

And, they are even forced to recognize and acknowledge the fact that they are dominated, ruled, and possessed as a privilege from Heaven.⁶

Marx would say this hope in the cross and in Heavenly salvation are all negative concepts that paralyze and imprison. For him, desire for Heaven made the poor content with their situation on earth. It promoted oppression by presenting a belief system (Christianity) that made poverty and misery acceptable and allowed ordinary people the resignation to their lot in life. By keeping their eyes on the symbolic suffering of the cross and staying content with the thought of the next life, what energies will the poor ever put into changing their circumstances?⁷

Not only does belief in the cross have negative connotations, it has evil consequences as well:

The social principles of Christianity declare all vile acts of the oppressors against the oppressed to be either just punishment for original sin and other sins, or suffering that the Lord in His infinite wisdom has destined for those redeemed.⁸

It is the most extreme version of ideology, of a belief system whose motive is simply to provide reasons, excuses even, for keeping things in society just the way the oppressors like them. For the non-oppressed, for those lucky enough to control the means of production, this belief system was used to remind the poor that all social arrangements should stay just the way they are.⁹ In this sense, religion was the ultimate form of control. Again, the poor would look to the cross for answers: they would look to forgiveness:

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. [Luke 23:34]

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. [Matthew 5:3]

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. [Matthew 5:5]

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [Matthew 5:10]

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven.

[Matthew 5:43–44]¹⁰

By adopting this mentality, the oppressed would constantly forgive their oppressors, thus giving their oppressors even more reason to persecute them. The middle class would be surrounded by lower class, factory-oriented doormats who, in theory, would permit the middle class to walk all over them.

Mircea Eliade's ideology does not reduce religion (or in this case, the cross) to economic misery; he doesn't reduce it to anything. For him, in order to interpret the importance and significance of religious experience, we must step out of modern civilization and enter the world of what he calls "archaic man". When we do this, he says, we find these primitive people living on two markedly different planes: the sacred and the profane. The profane realm consists of the everyday, normal business people attend to each day and is relatively unimportant. The sacred is just the opposite. It is the realm of the supernatural, of things extraordinary, memorable, and momentous. While the profane is the arena of changeable and chaotic human affairs, the sacred is the sphere of order and perfection, the home of ancestors, heroes, and gods, of beings not of this world.¹¹

The role of religion in archaic life is to promote encounters with the sacred, to put people in touch with something otherworldly in character; this character makes them feel like they have brushed against a

reality unlike any other. It's felt as a dimension of existence alarmingly powerful, enduring, and strangely different. When archaic people set up their villages, they do not choose just any place, a place with simple "profane" surroundings. A village must be founded at a place where there has been some sacred appearance, or hierophany. Thus, the authority of the sacred controls all decisions. The community can then be built around this center to show its divinely ordered structure - it's a sacred system.¹²

The language of the sacred can be found in symbols and in myth. Here, certain things are seen to resemble or suggest the sacred; they give a hint to the supernatural. In a village, this symbol may be a pole, tree, or stone situated at the center of the village. The Dome of the Rock is another example. Myths are symbolic as well, but in a more complicated way. Where poles and trees are more material and concrete symbols, myths are symbols put into the shape of a story. But stepping outside of all this and entering the realm of the profane for a moment, Eliade notes that most of the things making up ordinary life are in fact profane; they are just themselves taking up space, nothing more. But at the right moment anything profane can be transformed into something more than itself - something sacred. Once recognized as a sacred symbol, an object acquires a double character.¹³ This seems to be the case with the cross.

In Roman times, crucifixion was a very popular way of putting criminals to death. Before the time of Christ, the cross was merely two pieces of wood nailed together; it was something very profane used to crucify mere men, nothing more, nothing less. However, with Christ's death, a transformation, or dialectic of the sacred, occurred: the ordinary cross became a holy object by the infusion of the supernatural. No symbol manages to bring divinity close to humanity as the figure of the savior-god, the divinity who shared in mankind's sufferings, died and rose from the grave to redeem them.¹⁴ When one looks closer at the crucifixion, Jesus was by all means not considered sacred by Romans and Jews alike. Even while on the cross, he was still, in theory, a mere man being punished for a crime. So

how did the cross become such a powerful symbol of the sacred? When did this dialectic of the sacred take place?

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" [Matthew 27:50–54]¹⁵

It seems as though the above quote, coupled with Jesus' proclaimed resurrection, caused the simple profane cross to be transformed into the most sacred symbol of Christianity. And the myth, the story of the crucifixion, makes the material symbol of the cross even more sacred by bringing it to life.

Symbols and myths rarely exist in isolation. They seem to always be part of larger symbol systems. Ever since the cross was declared the symbol of the divine, it has been carved into walls, worn as jewelry, or put on display in churches all over the world. Its gestures like these that give the cross its universality: when people see the cross, most know the sacred symbolic nature of it. In this way the cross, even the crucifixion, is personified and the stories about it and its "adventures" come to expression in myth.¹⁶ And to take it further, we hear claims that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection defeated death. Christians would see the cross in general as a symbol that has truly defeated death. For Eliade, it has defeated the profane.

Now on to Eliade's theory of escapism. For archaic believers, the events of ordinary profane life, the

daily rounds of labor and struggle, are things they desperately wish to escape. They would rather be in the perfect realm of the sacred. This is the most insistent and heartfelt ache in the soul of all archaic peoples: to return to that point when the world began. A constant theme of archaic ritual and myth is the desire to occupy the world as it came from the Creator's hands—fresh, innocent, and strong. These believers long for permanence and perfection, as well as escape from their sorrows. In profane life, existence is drab and primitives have to deal with empty routines and daily irritations. Through symbol and myth, they reach back to the moment of perfection when life starts over, full of promise and hope.¹⁷ Eliade would interpret the crucifixion in the same light. While attending a church service on Good Friday, Christians immerse themselves in the myth of Jesus' death by performing rituals pertaining to the cross. These rituals transport the observer to the time when Christ actually died, taking them out of the troubles and trials of the present day and reliving the events that brought the promise of hope and joy.¹⁸ This would be considered the ultimate form of escapism. With Eliade, however, I don't believe he would interpret this escapism as something negative, like Marx would. Obviously Eliade doesn't consider religion an illusion.

The interpretations of Marx and Eliade hold many truths for me, and although I will defend Marx to the end I don't think Eliade was necessarily wrong. The idea of the sacred and the profane makes perfect sense: a cross is simply a cross until something supernatural is attached to it. It is then regarded as holy and is seen in a whole new light. When people observe the cross, most know what story is attached to it and it's this myth that brings the cross to life and gives meaning to what was once considered something profane. He does make me wonder, however, if his study and theory of myths

has roots in his past.

With the ruinous events of the 1930s, Eliade and the rest of the 'new generation' became casualties of history. Small wonder that he displays little enthusiasm for retelling and hence reliving his own anguish.¹⁹

Perhaps his theories helped him deal with, even escape, his own history in the world, to escape his pain? There comes a time when a person must deal with and eventually accept his own reality, and escaping to a beginning, a time of innocence, doesn't help.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Web Site
2. Seven Theories of Religion, 141
3. Marx on Religion, 167
4. Seven Theories of Religion, 141–142
5. Marx on Religion, 8
6. Ibid, 173
7. Seven Theories of Religion, 142–143
8. Marx on Religion, 185
9. Seven Theories of Religion, 138, 142
10. The NIV Study Bible, 1444–1445, 1584
11. Seven Theories of Religion, 163–164
12. Ibid, 165–167
13. Ibid, 169–170
14. Ibid, 170, 172
15. The NIV Study Bible, 1485

16. Seven Theories of Religion, 176
17. Ibid, 179–180
18. Four Theories of Religion, 75
19. Ibid, 78

REFERENCES

1. "Marx on Religion." edited by John Raines. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002.
2. Barker, Kenneth, ed. The NIV Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.
3. Pals, Daniel L. "Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx." In Seven Theories of Religion, 138–42. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
4. Pals, Daniel L. "The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade." In Seven Theories of Religion, 163–80. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

5. Strenski, Ivan. *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

6. www.faithnet.org.

About the Author Kathy Simcox, Columbus, Ohio, United States hrdude28@hotmail.com Kathy works as an Administrative Assistant in the College of the Arts at The Ohio State University. She holds a BA in Psychology and is currently working on a second BA in Religious Studies. In addition to writing, her passions include hiking, biking, kayaking, photography, and singing in her Lutheran church choir. She is also known to read an occasional book.

Marx Without Marxism? A Study of Karl Marx as an Influential Political Theorist

By Loloa Ibrahim

Marx Without Marxism? A Study of Karl Marx as an Influential Political Theorist by Loloa Ibrahim

The study of human political behavior raises numerous complexities. Although scientific in principle, it is not an exact science due to the unpredictability and changeability of human society. It not only revolves around factual matters but also answers to claims about how the world is and how it should be. It is often shaped by the social environment of its originator. All these factors however, do not disqualify it from the realm of science. Driven by the desire to analyze their environments, political thinkers develop theories or assertions that may not be immediately provable but can be confirmed or denied through forthcoming or historical experiences. Theory is testable. Unlike ideology, political theory need not be accepted as truth in its entirety. It is not a belief system nor is it adhered to or practiced incontestably. With that knowledge in mind it is fairly safe to assume that the ideas of Karl Marx constitute a theory, not an ideology. Through his theories, Marx aimed to explain those aspects of his society that demanded analysis. At no point however, did Marx present his ideas in the form of dogma or belief. This paper will expound on the concept of theory vs. ideology. Furthermore, it will aim to illustrate that Marx was not the originator of ideology but a political theorist and philosopher. That his ideas were later idealized and embraced by the masses is through no advocacy of his own.

Furthermore, the paper will offer an analysis the theories of Karl Marx based on selected writings and explain how and why his message is accepted as ideology by many of his followers even though that is in essence contrary to its true nature.

Marx's ideas take the form of analysis and prediction. Naturally he had a vision for the world and some suggestions on how this vision could be attained. However his work was not a collection of practical recommendations. Ideology is a value system that is accepted as truth or fact by a group of people. The group that adheres to an ideology believes it to be the best explanation of their world and they practice whatever recommendations the system advocates. To its enthusiasts it is indisputable and absolute. But it is precisely this adherence to ideology that Marx himself loathed. He disfavored the practice of religion saying "the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself." In his writings, Marx refers to the superiority of communism and atheism.

Ideology is accepted entirely as truth. For example, the members of Al-Qaeda adhere to an ideology and they unquestionably accept all of its parts as truth. What Marx offers, however, is a series of

theories based on historical and social assumptions and observations. His followers are free to accept or reject some of his theories. This has in fact taken place. History has disproved some of Marx's ideas such as those pertaining to class conflict and the impending fall of capitalism. So while one may accept the core ideas of Marx's work he or she may choose to reject those theories that have been disproved by history unlike with ideology where one must accept a message in its entirety.

Karl Marx observed his environment, located its flaws, and sought to explain them. Among his explanations was the division of human history into phases: primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist. Through historical study he analyzes the stages and then expounds on how Capitalism, a system built on greed and exploitation, would inevitably transform into Socialism. To Marx, these transitions are unavoidable. When he studies the development of technology Marx concludes that due to automation the need for human labor would decrease and therefore reduce wages. He argued that this would divide society into two classes; wealthy capitalists and proletarian workers. Marx's idea that eventually the divide between the two classes would become so severe that a revolution would result is

not entirely without merit. Those who owned the means of production would not willingly concede power to the lower classes and would struggle to preserve their status. So the transition from capitalism to socialism would not take place without revolution. In essence, this was a sound hypothesis. But his theory never materialized. Possibly because the foundations of his ideas were themselves flawed. The labor theory of value for example has today been refuted by economists. But this is what theory is—it is a statement based on scientific observation that can be denied or confirmed by history. Marx's ideas are just that—theories that have been refuted by history.

If a theory is also defined as that which explains and predicts, then Marxism clearly qualifies as theory. Other than the economic theories, Marx's works also contain theories that expound upon the moral and psychological state of humankind. He writes about private property and how its absence ultimately results in "the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities" He writes about alienation and man's metabolic relationship with nature. Through the majority of his work Marx aims to both explain and predict. He asserts that:

"Communism represents...a phase in human emancipation and rehabilitation...Communism is the necessary form and dynamic principle of the immediate future."

In this quote there is both explanation and prediction. There is a clear message of hope for the future. His theories explained the changes taking place in Europe and predicted the end of capitalism and the rise of a new society ruled by the working class. His work also contained predictions about the behavior of humankind which he suspected would erupt into full revolution in response to continued exploitation. By offering both explanation and prediction, therefore, Marx's ideas certainly merit the definition of theory.

Based on his observations Marx develops theories about the nature of capitalistic society; about human emancipation, political alienation, subsistence living, and the class struggle. But what he really wrote about was that there was something wrong with his political community. He set out to change that community. Through scientific observation, Marx developed a philosophy on the relationship between the worker and the product he or she produces. He believed people became enslaved by labor.

"The worker becomes poorer the richer is his production, the more it increases in power and scope. The worker becomes a commodity that is all the cheaper the more commodities he creates."

This idea is manifest in his "Labor Theory of Value." This theory held that only labor affected the value of goods. In Marx's words, "working time is the measure of value." But, what often takes place is that the price of goods does not actually represent their true labor value. What results is capitalist business owners who pay their employees far less than the actual cost of labor that they exert in production. Marx was not the first person to radically criticize capitalist society. But he was certainly the first to form extensive theories on how capitalist societies usurp value from workers and gave it to those who owned the means of production.

Although one may choose to reject some theories, one may still choose to agree with Marx on issues such as the exploitation of producer classes by the ruling classes, or his take on the relationship between man and nature; man and possessions; freedom and private property. In that respect one is free to accept or reject any parts of Marx's theories. What is often confused with ideology is Marx's moral observations about his society. At the heart of his writings is his abhorrence of human exploitation. But one's affinity to Marx's moral and ethical judgments and his underlying philosophies about the state of humankind does not constitute an ideological belief. Primarily because it lacks practicability. One may agree with the labor theory of value but one cannot claim to practice it. Similarly, one may accept Marx's theories on the inevitability of revolution, but that too cannot be practiced. Marx, therefore, does not advocate rites or belief; his message is not an "ism" but simply an explanation.

So what is it that makes people want to associate themselves ideologically with Marx's many explanations? It was the need to transform his ideas into workable form. When Marx died, theories had been left unfinished and questions unanswered. He died before completing his mission and the conditions which he envisioned had not materialized. The world was not a peaceful place, labor unions lacked the revolutionary energy that he anticipated, and nationalism was not a driving force for the working class as he had visualized. He had not lived long enough to explain exactly how the state would cease to exist and how the ultimate goal of human freedom from materialism, labor and exploitation would come into fruition. Marx had created a system that denounced materialism and promised non-material rewards and at the same time indicated the importance of hard work. There were questions to be answered on just how this ideal existence would be possible. Was it through work? Or through social forces that would somehow pan themselves out? These questions prompted thinkers and followers of Marx's philosophy to try to form a workable plan to achieve these ends. It was after his death that Marx's theories begin to take the form of ideology. But this was not by his own doing. His ideas were changed by revisionists such as Edward Bernstein who saw the need to consolidate Marx's theories on industrial society with Russia's non-industrial society. This is how the "ism" in Marxism is born. Not through his own advocacy but through the interpretations of those who read his works and wanted to put his ideas into practice.

Political philosophy is a stepping stone to ideology. Marx's observations served as a stepping stone to communism—which is an ideology. His writings were influential enough to have been embraced by the masses. It is the public that chose to embrace his teachings as ideology even though they were nothing more than a rationalization of the class struggle. Marx was a revolutionary in that he introduced radical ideas into mainstream political thought that enabled human beings to think in a completely different perspective. He left us with theories, explanations, and even aspirations for the world that have had a profound impact on Western thought.

Loloa Ibrahim holds a BA in Government and International Politics from George Mason University.

She is a member of the American Political Science Association and The International Women's Writers Guild. She has been recognized for several academic honors. She currently works for the Department of Human Services in VA. Ms. Ibrahim also teaches English and adult literacy at the Center for Multicultural Human Services.



This Free E-Book has been brought to you by Natural-Aging.com.

100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!