Giroux explains the contemporary development of fundamentalist religious movements, Christian and Islamic, in terms of **globalisation**. Global economic and cultural processes expose people to different views and belief systems. This sometimes leads to a feeling of moral relativism, where nothing is wholly good and nothing wholly bad.

Without moral certainties the world appears a more frightening and dangerous place that leaves some people feeling 'alone, vulnerable and largely unconnected with those around them'. In this situation, 'fundamentalism taps...into very real individual and collective needs' by providing moral certainties 'given by God'.

Berer and Ravindran (1996) argue that fundamentalist religions appeal to 'supreme authorities, moral codes or philosophies that cannot be questioned'. They exist to impose a sense of order and stability on a world that, to some, has become disorderly, unstable and confusing. In postmodern societies, therefore, fundamentalist religions of all types provide believers with a sense of:

- **Identity**, based on literal interpretation of religious texts as expressions of 'God's will'.
- **Community**: What Castells (1997) calls a 'collective identity' based on a set of fundamental and unchanging moral certainties shared by believers and imposed on non-believers. As Bauman (1992) puts it, fundamentalist religions draw their strength from the ability to provide certainties in an uncertain world — from a belief in the principles laid down in the Old Testament of Christianity (an 'eye for an eye', for example) to the clear specification of how men and women should dress and behave in Islam.

OCR examination-style questions

1 Identify and explain two difficulties in measuring religious commitment.	(17 marks)
2 Identify and explain two difficulties in measuring religious belief.	(17 marks)
3 Identify and explain two characteristics of religious fundamentalism.	(17 marks)
4 Outline and evaluate the view that the rise of religious fundamentalism is a sign of religious revival	(33 marks)

The role of religion in society

In this section we explore a range of structural and action perspectives on the role of religion in society.

Functionalism

Traditional **functionalist** theories focus on understanding how religion contributes to the maintenance of social order. In this view religion functions as a **cultural institution** charged with the creation, promotion and maintenance of **cultural values**.

These values provide a **moral basis** for s**ocial order**. Cultural institutions (which in contemporary societies include education and the mass media) help to create and maintain order and continuity in society by promoting the **collective conscience** — a set of meanings (beliefs and values, for example) that help people make sense of the social world. One function of religion, therefore, is to encourage people to believe they belong to that collective group we call 'society'.

To do this religion promotes **social solidarity** — the idea we're connected into a larger network of people who share certain beliefs, identities and commitments. For such feelings of solidarity to develop, however, societies must create mechanisms of **social integration** — the precise ways people gain a sense of belonging to something larger than the individual. Collective ceremonies and services, for example, serve this purpose.

On the basis of the above, Alpert (1939) suggests religion serves the following four major functions.

Discipline

Shared beliefs and values are created by following a set of religious moral rules and codes. These 'common values' connect the individual to a greater whole — 'society'.

Organisation

Religious ceremonies bring people together in situations where they put into practice their shared norms, values and experiences, thereby cementing and reinforcing social solidarity.

Ceremonies such as marriages and funerals also involve **symbols** with shared meanings. Ricoeur (1974) argues symbols are important because 'by expressing one meaning directly' (a wedding ring, for example, directly symbolises marriage) they 'express another indirectly' (such as a moral commitment to a partner).

For Durkheim (1912), religious symbols reflected a significant distinction between the **sacred** (or special) and the **profane** (or everyday). The actual form of sacred symbols was unimportant. they could be:

- things (such as a book or an animal)
- ceremonies (like a wedding)
- places (such as the home of a prophet)

Their function was simply to help develop shared values — the fundamental things on which people could agree and, in so doing, be drawn closer together as a society.

Vitalisation

Common values and beliefs are essential (or vital — hence 'vitalisation') dimensions of culture, socialisation and social control (also a function of religion). People use the 'ideas binding them together' as sources of:

- **Identity** ('vitalisation'): We 'understand who we are' through membership of religious groups.

- **Revitalisation** — a common culture is transmitted from one generation to the next, thereby providing social continuities through things like religious traditions and customs.

Euphony (harmony)

There are times of pain and crisis in our lives that require individual or collective efforts to re-establish normality. Religion's euphonic function is expressed in:

- **Tension management**: Parsons (1937) argued the religious rituals surrounding death serve to manage this traumatic situation by providing a social structure (the funeral) that permits and encourages certain forms of social action (such as grieving for a certain length of time). Farley (1990) also notes religion provides psychological support in times of personal crisis.
- **Meaning**: In his study of the Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski (1926) noted how religion provided 'explanations for the inexplicable' (such as what happens when we die). Thompson (1986) suggests 'Religion offers an explanation of the events for which other frameworks could not account.'

D iscipline
O rganisation
V italisation
E uphony

TOPFOTO

Funerals provide emotional support by giving private grief a social structure

? Identify and explain two functions traditionally performed by religions.

Neo-functionalism

Although many of the ideas we have just noted still have currency in contemporary British society, one obvious problem is that the majority of the population is not particularly 'religious'. Relatively few people, for example, actively participate in collective ceremonies and services outside of 'life events' such as marriages and funerals.

Neo-functionalists, therefore, have explored how religion has evolved in **postmodern** society to focus, as Luhmann (1977) argues, on very specific functions — such as to 'explain that which is not currently known or understood'.

Diversity

Religion is seen as functional for some individuals and groups rather than 'society as a whole'. This follows because postmodern societies are characterised by cultural

diversity and, in consequence, the social significance of organised religion (such as the Christian Church) has declined.

Identity

For Kung (1990) the functions of religion have similarly evolved to focus on questions of **identity**. Gans (1971) argues that in culturally diverse societies 'few phenomena are functional or dysfunctional for society as a whole and most result in benefits to some groups and costs to others'. Membership of a religious organisation can confer certain benefits to individuals — by defining who they are, promoting clear moral guidelines and satisfying psychological, social and spiritual needs, for example. Such things, as Perry and Perry (1973) note, are 'particularly important in times of rapid social change, in which problems of identity are critical'.

Dysfunctions

In this respect, neo-functionalism places much greater emphasis on **dysfunctions**. Merton (1957) argues religion is not automatically and inevitably functional. In a culturally diverse society it can be dysfunctional when it creates conflict — some American Christian fundamentalist groups, for example, are violently opposed to abortion. As Bruce (1995) observes:

> Social scientists have long been aware of the role of religion as social cement; shared rituals and shared beliefs that bind people together... What is not so often noted is the idea religion often divides one group from another.

D iversity
I dentity
D ysfunction

Social change

The greater emphasis on small-scale functionality is expressed in terms of **social change**: religion can be a mechanism for change, as membership of a religious organisation may provide oppressed people with the solidarity and sense of purpose they need to challenge unjust laws. The black civil rights movement in 1960s America, for example, was organised and articulated through Christian church membership.

? Identify and explain one difference between functionalist and neo-functionalist perspectives on religion

Evaluation

Methodology

Methodologically, an important question is how to test or measure ('operationalise') the concept of function. How, for example, do we know whether something like religion is actually functional (and do these functions outweigh any dysfunctions)?

In addition, Durkheim (1912) argues that by worshipping an 'all-powerful' and 'all-seeing' (but stubbornly invisible) deity, what people are really doing is worshipping *society* (something that has similar properties). Religion, from this perspective, becomes 'the worship of society' — which is an interesting idea, but one that cannot be proved or disproved.

Inclusive theory

Functionalist theories focus more on what religion **does** (its functions) than on what it **is**, and this means *any* social institution can be considered 'a religion' if it performs the required functions. This idea is *convenient* because it allows functionalists to explain seemingly contradictory or mutually exclusive observations by using **functional alternatives**. For example:

- If religious observance and practice is widespread in a society, this is evidence for the function of religion.
- If religious practices decline (Christian church attendance has fallen steeply in Britain over the past century), the theory can be saved by reference to functional alternatives to religion that take over the role it previously performed. An example here is something like **football** performing a *social solidarity function* (large numbers of people sharing and showing their support for the national team).

Conflict

While neo-functionalism recognises religious conflicts can be dysfunctional for both individuals and societies, we cannot separate functional from dysfunctional behaviour in a culturally diverse society. For example:

- Is religion functional or dysfunctional to atheists?
- Are Islamic beliefs functional or dysfunctional for Christianity?

? Identify and explain one functional alternative to religion in our society

Marxism

The Marxist approach is based on the idea of **conflict** — that capitalist societies, for example, involve conflicts of economic interest between the bourgeoisie (or ruling class) and proletariat (or subject class). The role of religion in such societies is to promote a consensus that ultimately benefits a ruling class.

To understand how and why this happens we can begin by noting that **traditional Marxism** takes an **exclusive view** of religion: the focus is on the particular qualities of religion that make it *qualitatively* different to other forms of belief and practice.

In specific terms, traditional Marxists have explored the role of religion in promoting consensus through its status as a **belief system** — something capable of explaining 'everything about everything' (what postmodernists call a **metanarrative**). Religion shapes the way people see the world, and its role is to 'represent the world' in a way that

reflects and supports the existing social order. In other words, it maintains the political and economic status quo (it keeps things as they are).

For Marx (1844), religion was an **oppressive force** in society — it worked to make people 'feel happy' about themselves and the world, even under conditions (as in England in the nineteenth century) that were grim for all but a small minority. The abject poverty and misery of the working class was a potential source of conflict with the ruling class (those who 'had everything'), and religious ideas and teaching were seen as a way to control the behaviour of the 'dangerous classes'.

For Marx, therefore, religion was a source of **social control** — its message was that everyone, rich and poor alike, should accept the world 'as it is'. Traditional Marxism saw the purpose of religion as to stifle conflict — to stop people questioning why poverty existed in a rich society. Religion was an efficient form of control because a 'belief in God' helped to:

- **Uphold the status quo**: The social world could be portrayed as 'god-given' and beyond the power of anyone to change.
- **Legitimise economic exploitation**: If God made the world, it was not people's place to question why some were rich and most poor.
- **Justify poverty**: Religion portrayed poverty as a virtue — something to be endured in an uncomplaining fashion. It was a means of achieving spiritual riches in heaven (once the individual was conveniently dead).

Marx (1884) called religion 'the opium of the people' because, like a painkilling drug, it 'dulled the pain of oppression' with its promise of eternal life (Christianity) or reincarnation into a higher social caste (Hinduism) for those who did their religious duty.

He also argued it was a form of **false consciousness** because by embracing religious ideas people failed to understand the real causes of their misery and oppression — an all-too-real man-made economic exploitation rather than an invisible 'God'.

Evaluation

One problem with this approach is that Britain in the twenty-first century is a very different place to Britain in the nineteenth century — an observation that leads to major criticisms of traditional Marxist approaches.

False consciousness

There are a couple of problems with this idea:

- **Historical**: Turner (1983) argues that if we measure religious conviction by church attendance, involvement in and membership of religious groups and the like, the working classes have never been particularly religious.
- **Contemporary**: Religion arguably has even less influence now than in the past. For most people it plays a relatively minor public role — restricted, in many instances, to 'hatching, matching and dispatching' (christenings, weddings and funerals).

These ideas cast doubt on religion as a significant form of social control.

Conservative force

If religion supports the status quo and prevents social change, it can be difficult to explain its pivotal role in some secular conflicts:

- The **Iranian Revolution** of 1979 involved the overthrow of the (secular) regime of the Shah of Persia.
- **Liberation theology**: Boff and Boff (1987) note the involvement of Roman Catholic priests in revolutionary political movements in parts of South America from the 1960s onwards.
- The **civil rights movement**: In the USA, from the 1960s onwards, social change was promoted and supported by black religious activists and leaders (such as Martin Luther King).

TOPFOTO

Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech in 1963 was inspirational in the American civil rights movement

Neo-Marxism

Partly as a result of social changes (Britain is a more culturally diverse society now than in the past) and partly because of weaknesses in the idea of false consciousness, neo-Marxism has embraced the idea of **hegemony** to explain the role of religion in contemporary society. Originally put forward by Gramsci (1934) and developed by Poulantzas (1974), hegemony involves the idea that beliefs about the world that benefit a ruling class are not simply imposed by religious organisations, for example.

Rather, as Strinati (1995) suggests, ruling groups maintain their dominant position through the 'consent' of those lower down the social scale that is 'manufactured' by **cultural institutions** such as religion, education and the media (what Althusser (1972) calls '**Ideological State Apparatuses**'); all these, in their different ways, transmit messages supporting the status quo. For example, one common message is the idea that there are legitimate ways to express dissent and discontent — like voting for a change of government or marching to protest against particular social policies — that don't directly challenge the status quo (and the hegemony of the ruling class).

Hegemony makes it possible for 'religious ideas' to be seen as influential in contemporary societies without the majority of people necessarily either believing or supporting them. Strinati, for example, argues the lower classes 'accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated'; rather, they do so because they are powerless to challenge or change them.

Rather than seeing the lower classes 'indoctrinated' by religion into ideas that benefit the ruling class, Turner (1983) argues neo-Marxists see religion as a **cohesive force**

for a ruling class. Religion represents one way the various elements of a ruling class come to see themselves as a 'class apart' that has political and economic interests to pursue. Religion provides a set of moral guidelines for ruling-class behaviour in relation to things like marriage and the inheritance of property (Christianity, for example, laid down the rules for legitimate relationships and hence for the inheritance of property).

? Identify and explain two ways religion supports the status quo in society.

Weberianism

Weberian approaches focus less on what religion *does* (its functions or ideological purpose) and more on what it *means*, for:

- **Individuals**: This involves studying, for example, the motivations, behaviours and beliefs of those who classify themselves as religious.
- **Society**: This looks at 'collective religious beliefs' existing in a particular society and how these influence the development of **cultural identities**, legal systems or, in Weber's case, a complete economic system (capitalism) — an example we can use to both introduce Weberian ideas and demonstrate Weber's argument that religion can be a force for **social change**.

Weber (1905) wanted to understand why capitalism had developed in some societies but not others, even though they had reached similar levels of economic and technological development.

He argued it was religion (or a particular form of Protestant religion called Calvinism) that provided the 'final push', allowing Britain to change, in the late sixteenth century, from a relatively poor, agriculture-based, **pre-modern** society into an immensely rich, modern, **industrial society**. It was Calvinism, Weber argued, that provided the 'spirit of capitalism' — a unique set of ideas, beliefs and practices — that promoted a strong and lasting social transformation.

The basis of this 'spirit' was the idea of **predestination**: Calvinists believed God would know before someone was born whether they were destined to achieve salvation — and nothing they could do would change this situation. However, since God was not going to allow people who sinned into heaven, the way to prove (to yourself and others) you were one of those destined for heaven — the 'Chosen' or 'Elect' — would be, as Bental (2004) notes, to 'associate morality and Godliness with hard work, thriftiness, and the reinvestment of money'. In basic terms, those destined for salvation had to be:

- successful (throughout life)
- hard-working
- moral
- thrifty (prudent in how you spent your money)
- modest

Weber argued that these were just the kinds of attribute required to develop capitalism — an economic system based around creating and reinvesting profits to ensure long-term business success.

? Briefly explain the meaning of predestination.

Evaluation

Evaluations of Weber's analysis focus on:

- **Meaning**: The analysis is a good example of how meaning can be shown to influence social action. Calvinism involved a belief in predestination, which meant believers developed norms and values resulting in a specific form of behaviour.
- **Methodology**: The argument that Calvinism was a 'cause of capitalism' has been questioned. Tawney (1926), for example, argued capitalism came into being through technological developments that revolutionised the way goods could be produced and distributed. Fanfani (2003) argues capitalism developed in some areas of Europe where Calvinism was not a religious force.
- **Calvinism**: Viner (1978) argues that where Calvinism was the dominant religion in a society it acted as a conservative force that put a brake on economic development and change. Calvinist Scotland, for example, developed capitalism much later than England.

Although there are arguments over the role of religion in the development of capitalism, one obvious question is: 'why should events 300-odd years ago concern us here?' The answer, perhaps, is that of trying to establish evidence for a general **principle**: while structural theory suggests religion is always a conservative force, action theories generally argue there is no reason why religion should not be a force for change.

In this respect, contemporary Weberian analyses look at the various ways religion can be a **focus for dissent** — a channel through which discontent can be expressed. Examples here include:

- **Liberation theology**: Bruneau and Hewitt (1992), for example, argue that in Brazil the Catholic Church became a 'vehicle for working with the poor' as a way of promoting social and economic changes.
- **Arab Spring**: In 2011 many Arabic countries experienced pro-democracy protests on a huge scale. In Egypt, for example, religious organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood played a role in organising and channelling dissent.

Neo-Weberian ('interactionist') theories

Contemporary Weberian (or 'interactionist') theories have focused on how 'collective religious beliefs' function as **belief systems** — ways, for Berger (1973), of organising knowledge about the world. Before the development of scientific explanations, for example, religion provided a way to explain events in a seemingly chaotic and threatening world. Religious beliefs, he argues, impose a sense of meaning and order on a world

threatened by things like death, disaster and disease that cannot be explained in any other way.

By its ability to 'explain the inexplicable', religion encourages certainty — there is nothing religion cannot explain — an idea that links into religious fundamentalism. It also links to explanations for the role and persistence of religion in contemporary societies through **culture mapping**: religious beliefs are part of the 'mental maps' that help us to navigate our way through increasingly complex cultural formations (the problems we face, for example, in making sense of our place in a diverse, multicultural society). Religion helps to guide our understanding by:

- explaining our experiences
- interpreting their meaning and significance
- creating common cultural meanings

I Mnemonic
C requested but
E no text given

? Suggest one way religion produces 'common cultural meanings'.

Whether or not we're 'personally religious' is not particularly important because the way we look at and understand the social world is shaped by religious beliefs, behaviours and practices. We can be:

- **Strongly influenced**: Some groups live their lives in accordance with strict moral teachings derived from their religion.
- **Weakly influenced**: While other groups may, at times, make reference to 'Christian', 'Islamic' or whatever values, they have no strong allegiance to a particular religion.

The relationship between belief systems and cultural mapping is significant because it helps us understand how and why religious ideas change and persist throughout the history of a society. It also explains why some groups hold very strong religious beliefs while others have weak or indeed no religious attachment.

This view involves an **inclusive approach** to religion: Neo-Weberian sociology explores how religious ideologies provide an organising structure to our lives. The specific content of religious beliefs is, consequently, of no real importance — what matters is that they are believed because they 'plausibly explain something'. If religious beliefs cease to be **plausible explanations** they are discarded or replaced with more plausible explanations. Luckmann (1967), for example, suggests this 'plausibility test' explains why religious practice is less in contemporary societies although people still seem to hold relatively high levels of individual belief: there are different areas of plausibility:

- **The public**, where religions 'compete for plausibility' with other belief systems (such as science) that may have greater plausibility.
- **The private** — the realm of individual beliefs where questions of identity, what happens when you die and so forth are reduced to private, personal concerns to

which religion may provide plausible answers (sometimes in the absence of any other sort of answer).

Evaluation

Structure and action

Weberian sociology overplays the significance of action and underplays the importance of social structures in explaining religious behaviour. Wuthnow (1992), for example, argues this perspective neglects to examine how and why social conditions influence our beliefs: 'When research finds Christian friendships reinforce Christian convictions, the question still remains why some people choose Christian friends and others do not.' The suggestion, is that religious beliefs and behaviours persist because they serve important and significant functions for both the individual and society.

Inclusiveness

One of the problems with an inclusive view of religion is that just about anything can be considered 'religious' if it seems to perform a particular role in supporting a belief system. This also applies to beliefs and behaviours that are only nominally religious. New Age religions (involving things like crystal healing and an emphasis on 'spirituality') have little or nothing in common with conventional religions aside from their general classification as 'religions'. In this respect it is very difficult to evaluate the influence of 'religious beliefs' in contemporary societies when it's impossible to define what is meant by this idea.

Postmodern approaches

Grassie (1997) suggests postmodernism 'represents a great range of viewpoints' that are frequently difficult to group into a coherent and unified perspective. Taylor (1987), for example, observes 'postmodernist' approaches to religion include those who argue:

- 'God is dead' and religion is disappearing
- we are seeing a 'return of traditional faith' (**resacrilisation**)
- religion is evolving and taking new and different forms

While it is difficult to reconcile these different views under the banner of a 'postmodern perspective', it's possible to identify a range of general concepts that can be applied to a 'postmodern understanding' of religion.

Metanarratives

- **Narrative**: Knowledge about the world consists of stories that compete to explain something. From this position, religion represents just another form of narrative.
- **Metanarrative** (or 'Big Story'): Metanarratives are all-encompassing stories that seek to explain 'everything about something' (or, as Vaillancourt-Rosenau (1992) suggests in the case of both religious and scientific metanarratives, 'everything about everything'). Religious metanarratives represent a general framework around

which individual beliefs, practices and experiences can be orientated and ordered. It follows that metanarratives invariably involve a claim to **exclusive truth** about whatever it is they're explaining.

For Lyotard (1979), postmodernism involves an 'incredulity toward metanarratives'; that is, in postmodern society there is a denial that any single set of beliefs — religious, scientific or whatever — has a monopoly of truth. This also means, as Ritzer (1992) notes, that postmodern approaches reject the idea of social structures and perspectives (such as functionalism and Marxism) that are based on this kind of approach.

Scepticism about religious metanarratives as plausible explanations of the world means two things:

- a decline in the ability of religion to exert significant power and control over people's lives
- a gradual retreat into 'local narratives' — small stories about people's situations and circumstances

Identity

Where religion continues to exert influence, however, is in terms of individual identities. In postmodern society people are exposed to a wide (globalised) variety of sources of information and ideas (both religious and secular) that compete for attention, and this involves a range of choices. This encourages:

- **Scepticism towards metanarratives**: For every 'big story' there are a multitude of 'alternative stories'.
- **Hybrids**: Postmodern society encourages the development of *new* ways of thinking and acting out of the combination of *old* ways of thinking and behaving. This includes new forms of religious belief and experience.

Consumption

In postmodern society identity is related to patterns of consumption ('I shop therefore I am') and religion becomes just one more choice in the consumer market place — if Catholicism isn't to your taste or doesn't suit your lifestyle then when not try Kabbalah?

In the global marketplace:

- Religious **symbols** lose much of their original meaning and power as they are adopted into the everyday (profane) world of fashion and display — an example being the way Rastafarian religious symbols (such as dreadlocks) have been co-opted into some parts of mainstream fashion.
- Religious **practice**, in the sense of attending church services, no longer holds a central place in people's everyday lives or identities (we're too busy or too preoccupied with other aspects of life and leisure). Instead, it lives on as a set of adornments to the construction of identity — something that occurs not only in the world of objects (rings and pendants, for example), but also in the world of beliefs.

New forms of religious belief develop not as metanarratives but as part of individual narratives. These, as with the objects that accompany them, are 'picked up, worn for a time and then discarded', much as one might wear a fashionable coat until it becomes unfashionable.

A good example of the way some forms of religion have become 'identity statements' might be Kabbalah. Graham (2004) describes how:

> Shopping for Kabbalah is the newest new age mantra of anyone who wants to attach themselves to the craze, but doesn't necessarily want to invest years in earnest study. While most of us will never fully appreciate the intimacies of the ancient mystical Jewish religion, enthusiastic consumers often argue that the ritual and the ecstasy of shopping is nothing short of a religious experience.

Kabbalah, in common with other forms of New Age religion, fits the postmodern condition perfectly. It involves little:

- Commitment: All you need are 'Unconditional Love' dog-tags.
- Practice: Just wear a red string on your wrist to 'ward off evil'.
- Difficult belief: Just wear the T-shirt proclaiming 'Listen to your soul'.

Contradictory beliefs

Postmodernism reflects (or encourages) a contradictory set of beliefs about the significance of religious ideas, practices and organisations in both the past and the present. At one and the same time, for example, we see discussion about:

- **Religious decline**: Organised religions lose their ability to control and influence events in the secular (non-religious) world.
- **Religious development**: Religious beliefs and practices shift and change, reflecting perhaps basic beliefs in 'supernatural phenomena', but expressed in ways far removed from organised religious services. In this respect, 'religions' are seen as being constantly reinvented to reflect the ways people choose and discard different forms of personal identity (Kabbalah being a case in point). This idea leads to a further observation:
- **Resacrilisation**: One of the odd things about religion in postmodernity, McLeod (1997) suggests, is that it becomes:
  - less important in terms of practice (fewer people joining or attending church, for example)
  - more important as a source of personal and social identity

Thus the very (globalising) processes that cause people to lose faith in the power of metanarratives also mean that in a world that appears increasingly confusing, unstable, risky and dangerous, religions become beacons of order and stability by their ability to produce moral certainties.

This is reflected in ideas like the **privatisation** and **deprivatisation** of religion. Although there are clear signs of a move towards privatised forms of religious belief (religion as something practised in the private rather than the public sphere), organised religion stubbornly refuses to disappear. On the contrary, there is evidence (with some forms of Islam and Christianity in particular) of a contrary process of organised religion re-emerging as a significant aspect of public life.

? Suggest one reason for seeing religion as a metanarrative.

Evaluation

- **Metanarratives**: Callinicos (1991) argues that postmodernism itself is a form of the 'metanarrative thinking' postmodernists claim to dismiss as being unsustainable.
- **Inclusiveness**: Rtizer (2008) argues it is a mistake to consider different types of belief (such as science and religion) as being more or less the same simply because they are both metanarratives. Theories of evolution, for example, are backed up with logical, empirical, evidence; creationism (or 'intelligent design', a belief about how the earth was created based on a literal interpretation of the Christian Bible) is based on little more than faith in biblical texts and a lot of wishful interpretation.

OCR examination-style questions

1 Outline and evaluate the functionalist view of the role of religion in society.	(33 marks)
2 Outline and evaluate Marxist views of the role of religion in society.	(33 marks)
3 Outline and evaluate the view that religion is a conservative force.	(33 marks)

Religion and social position

This section explores the relationship between religiosity and social position considered in terms of four variables: class, age, gender and ethnicity.

Much of the information we have about the relationship between social position and religiosity is based on survey material from sources such as:

- **government departments** like the Home Office's citizenship survey and the ten-yearly census
- **private polling organisations** such as YouGov, the internet-based polling organisation
- **religious organisations**, some of which produce attendance and membership figures

As we have previously noted when looking at beliefs and participation, we need to keep questions of data **reliability** and **validity** in mind here. Data about sects, new religious and New Age movements in particular tends to be patchy and partial. This