

# Beliefs in Society

# Definitions of Religion

Substantive, Functional and Social constructionist.

- **Substantive**

Focus on the content or substance of religious belief, such as belief in God or the supernatural.

**Exclusive** as they draw a clear line between religious and non-religious belief.

- **Functional**

Define religion through the social or psychological functions it performs.

**Inclusive** as allow us to include a range of beliefs and practices that perform functions.

- **Social constructionist**

Interpretivist approach that focuses on **how individual members of society themselves define/construct religion and religious belief.**

Not possible to produce a single universal definition because *different people mean different things by 'religion'*. Do not assume religion always needs belief in God or the supernatural.

# Functionalism and Religion



# Functionalism and Religion

## (General)

- Society is a system of interrelated parts. Different institutions (the media, religion, education system) perform certain functions in society to help maintain value consensus and social solidarity needed within all societies.
- For Functionalists, religion plays a big part in creating and maintaining value consensus, order and solidarity.

# Functionalism and Religion – The Sacred and The Profane.

- **The sacred and the profane (THINKER: DURKHEIM)**

Key feature of religion was not a belief in God or the supernatural, instead it was the distinction made between the sacred and profane found within society.

**Sacred** – things set apart, special, inspire feelings of awe and wonder.

**Profane** – things that have no special significance, ordinary or mundane.

The fact that **sacred** things evoke such powerful feelings in believers suggests to Durkheim that this is because they represent something of great power. This, in Durkheim's opinion, could only be society itself.

So, when members of society are worshipping sacred symbols, they are *merely worshipping society and all that it stands for, thus uniting society's members into a single, moral community.*

## **Totemism**

Gave the example of Australian Arunta Aboriginal clan system, and how the totems they worshipped represented the tribe, its origins and identity. Meaning that they worshipping society, even if they were unaware of the fact.

# Functionalism and Religion – Durkheim and Mauss

Argue that religion provides basic categories such as time, space and causation. Thus for Durkheim, religion is the origin of human thought, reason and science.

# Criticisms of Durkheim

- No sharp division between the sacred and the profane, all of which are culturally relative.
- Durkheim's theory may apply better to small scale societies with a single religion, very difficult to apply to large scale communities where two or more religions are in conflict with one another, as it does nothing to help promote order, value consensus and social stability.
- Increasing diversity has fragmented the collective conscience , so there is no longer a shared value system for religion to reinforce.

# Functionalism – Psychological Functions of Religion

Thinker: **Broinslaw Malinowski**

Agrees with Durkheim that religion promotes social solidarity, but in his view this solidarity is achieved by performing psychological functions for individuals - by ***helping them cope with the emotions and stress that would otherwise undermine social solidarity.***

1) When the outcome is unpredictable or uncertain.

(Troibrand islanders – Fishing in lagoon = safe, so no need for ritual.

- Fishing in the ocean = dangerous, need for 'canoe magic'.

2) At times of life crises.

Birth, marriage and especially death mark major and disruptive changes in social groups, and religion helps minimise disruption.

For example, funeral rituals reinforce a feeling of solidarity among the survivors, while notion of immortality gives comfort to the bereaved.

(He argues death was the main reason for religious belief.)



# Functionalism - Parsons

- Religion creates and legitimises society's basic norms and values by sacralising them.
- Gives the example of USA, in which Protestantism has sacralised the core American values of individualism, meritocracy etc. Of which serve to promote value consensus and therefore social stability

# Functionalism – Civil Religion

THINKER: **BELLAH**

- What unifies American society is an overarching ***civil religion*** – a belief system that attaches sacred qualities to society itself.
- While no individual church or denomination can claim the loyalty of all Americans, **civil religion can**, as it is the American way of life.
- It is expressed in various symbols and rituals, such as the American flag and singing the national anthem.

# Evaluation of Functionalist Theories of Religion

- Emphasises the positive functions religion performs, but it neglects the negative aspects, such as religion as a source of oppression of women and the poor.
- Ignores religion as a source of division and conflict, where there is religious pluralism (i.e. Northern Ireland), making it hard to see how it can unite people.
- Civil religion overcomes this to some extent by suggesting societies all share overarching belief systems, but can this really be classed as religion? (No belief in God or the supernatural.)



# Marxism and Religion

- Marxism sees religion as a feature of only a class divided society, as it is used by the bourgeoisie or ruling class to legitimate and exploit the suffering of the proletariat.
- There will be no need for religion in a classless society, meaning it will disappear.

# Religion as an Ideological Weapon

Thinker: **Marx**

Religion is an ideological weapon used by the ruling class to legitimate the suffering of the poor as something inevitable and God-given.

Religion **misleads the poor into believing that their suffering is virtuous.**

For example, in Christianity, the Bible states 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven'.

Such ideas create false class consciousness – a distorted view of reality that prevents the poor from truly seeing and therefore not being able to change their situation.

**Lenin** – Describes religion as ‘spiritual gin’ = an intoxicant doled out to the masses by the ruling class in order to confuse and dull their senses as to the ways in which they are being exploited.

Also legitimates the power and authority of the ruling class though making their positions seem divinely ordained .i.e. Kings and Queens were believed to be God’s representative on earth.

**Marx** describes religion as the ‘Opium of the masses’ in the sense that it dulls the pain of exploitation, masking the pain rather than treating its cause.

**TO SUMMARISE:** Religion acts as an ideology that legitimates both the suffering of the poor and the privileges of the ruling class.

# Evaluation of Marxism and Religion

- Marx ignores the positive functions religion can have, such as the psychological benefits it may bring to believers etc.
- In many cases it could be argued that religion usually originates from oppressed or poorer groups from which capitalism then takes these ideas to reinforce their own ideas to the masses.
- Religion does not necessarily function effectively as an ideology to control the population.



# Feminism and Religion

# Feminism and Religion

- Many feminists see religion as a patriarchal institution that reflects and enforces male domination and legitimates female subordination.
- For example, all religious organisations are mainly male dominated. Many religions exclude women from the priesthood, i.e. Catholicism.
- (**Armstrong** sees women's exclusion from the priesthood of most religions as evidence of their marginalisation.)
- Places of worship can often segregate the sexes and thus marginalise women, for example placing them behind screens whilst men occupy the central spaces.
- Sacred texts largely feature the doing of male Gods and are usually written and interpreted by men.

- **Armstrong** argues that early religions placed women at the centre. For example earth mother goddesses. Only about 4000 years ago the rise of monotheistic religions saw the establishment of a single, all omnipotent God.
- Some may argue that in Islam, the Hijab worn by women is evidence of their oppression under Islam. Many others, including **Woodhead** suggest that is in fact liberating for women, giving them access to the public sphere of society without having to tolerate the patriarchal male gaze .
- **Bevoir** – Women are sometimes portrayed in religion as being closer to God, but only if they are passive and obedient.
- **Holm** – Bible written exclusively by men, God, Jesus and Prophets all men. Even made From Adams rib. Even in Sikhism, the most equal of religions, most important roles within the religion filled by men.

#### CRITICISM of feminist theories of religion:

It should be noted that the position of women within some religions is changing. For example, the **Church of England has permitted women to become priests since 1992, and now about a fifth of all its priests are female.**

# Religion and Social Change

# Religion as a Conservative Force

Conservative in **two** different senses:

1. Conservative in the sense of being traditional (Customs, morals). Upholds traditional beliefs about how society should be.
2. Conservative because it functions to preserve things as they are – stabilises society and maintains the status quo.

# Religion's Conservative Beliefs

- Most religions have conservative beliefs on moral issues, quite restrictive for some individuals.
- For example the **Catholic Church** forbids divorce, abortion, gay marriage etc.
- Another example is **Hinduism**, wherein it endorses male domestic authority and the practice of arranged marriage.

# Religion's Conservative Functions

Preserves and maintains the status quo.

- **Functionalism and Religion** – conservative because it maintains social stability and prevents society from disintegrating.
- **Marxism and Religion** – conservative force because it uses ideology that prevents social change through promoting false class consciousness.
- **Feminism and Religion** – see religion as a conservative force because it acts as an ideology that legitimates patriarchal power and maintains women's subordination.

# Religion as a Force for Change

**THINKER: MAX WEBER**

Weber argues that it is the protestant Calvinist work ethic that helped bring about major changes in the form of capitalism in Northern Europe.

Modern capitalism is based on the systematic, efficient pursuit of profit for its own sake, rather than consumption.

He argues that this has an elective affinity or unconscious similarity to Calvinist beliefs and attitudes.

Did not spend their money on luxuries, instead reinvested in their own businesses, causing them to grow and prosper. In Weber's view, this is the spirit of modern capitalism. Calvinism thus brought capitalism as we know it into the world.



# Religion as a Force For Change – Social Protest

**THINKER: STEVE BRUCE**

- Uses two case studies to compare the role of religiously inspired movements in America that tried to change society.

## **1. The American civil rights movement**

Black civil rights movement of the 1960s an example of religiously motivated change. Bruce describes the black clergy as the backbone of the movement, giving moral legitimacy to civil rights activists.

Church provided a meeting place and sanctuary from the threat of white violence, and prayer and hymn singing helped unite people in the face of oppression.

Ideological resource – provided beliefs and practices that protesters could draw on for support.

## **2. The New Christian Right**

# Marxism, Religion and Change

- Marxist are often thought of as seeing religion as a conservative ideology, however this is not always the case. Many Marxists recognise that ideas, including religious ones, can have **relative autonomy**.
- **As a result**, religion can have a dual character and can sometimes be a force for change as well as stability.
- **For example, even Marx himself does not describe religion in entirely negative terms.** He describes religion as 'the heart of a heartless world' able to provide comfort, even if it is only illusory.

**ENGELS** – although religion can prevent social change, it also can challenge the status quo and encourage social change. For example, religion sometimes preaches liberation from slavery and misery.

## **LIBERATION THEOLOGY:**

A movement that emerged within the Catholic Church in Latin America at the end of the 1960s .

**OTTO MAUDRO:** In the case of liberation theology, religious ideas radicalised the Catholic Church in defence of peasants and the poor, changing their theology to support their liberation, making them see that serving the poor was part of their Christian duty.

The Liberation Theology movement did not succeed in redistribution of wealth to the poor, but it did help bring about democracy in some countries, therefore still providing a source of social change.

# Summary of religion as a force for change/ conservative force

- Some sociologists would argue that religion does not always uphold traditional beliefs and function to maintain the status quo. For example, Weber argues the Protestant ethic contributed to the birth of rational capitalism, bringing about economic change in society. Weber is criticised by Marxists, who may suggest that economic factors were the main cause for this change. In this view religion reflects but does not cause change.
- Other Marxists such as Maudro, who gives liberation theology as an example, argue that religion has potential to bring about change.
- Religious organisations have actively supported campaigns for social change, examples of this including the US civil rights movement have succeeded. Others such as The New Christian right have failed to gain support.
- Unlike functionalists, who see religion as only a conservative force, most others would argue that whether religion helps to bring about or **inhibit social change varies according to social or historical conditions.**

# Secularisation

Refers to the decline in the importance of religion.  
There is much disagreement among sociologists  
about whether or how far religion has declined.

**(MODERNISATION UNDERMINES RELIGION)**



# Secularisation in Britain



- Church attendance figures are declining, which has led many sociologists to claim the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the 'golden age' of religiosity. Whether this a fair description is open to much debate, but there has certainly been some changes in religion in the UK since then. FOR EXAMPLE:
- A decline in the proportion of the population going to church
- Fewer baptisms and church weddings
- Greater religious diversity, including more non-Christian religions

**Sociologists put forward different explanations of these trends and reach different conclusions as to whether, and to what extent religion is declining.**



- Bryan **WILSON** argued that western societies had been undergoing a long term process of secularisation. Defines secularisation as the process whereby religious beliefs, institutions and practices lose social significance.
- Church attendance in England and Wales = 40% of people attended church in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Fallen to 10-15% in the 1960s

### **CHURCH ATTENDANCE TODAY(ISH)**

Only 6.3% of adult population attended church on Sundays in 2005.

# Religion Today

Opinion polls and attitude surveys show that:

More people claim they hold Christian beliefs than actually belong or go to church.

## RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS:

- Not only have religious belief and practice declined, but so too has the influence of religions as a social institution.
- *The state has taken over many areas previously run by the Church ...*
- For example, until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the churches provided education, but since then it has been provided mainly by the state. → Although there are still faith schools, these are mainly state funded and must conform to the state's regulations.



- **BRUCE:** a 'steady and unremitting decline.' If the current trends continue, the Methodist Church will fold around 2030, and the CofE will merely be a small voluntary organisation.

# Explanations of Secularisation

- Varieties of theories and concepts to explain the theory of secularisation.
- Common explanation is *modernisation, involving the decline of traditional society religious ideas, being replaced by modern scientific and rational thought*, leading to less religious belief and therefore meaning the church and religions on the whole now hold much less importance to individuals than it did before.
- Industrialisation has broken up small communities once held together by common religious beliefs.
- Another major theme/factor could be considered the growth of social and religious diversity . Growth of diversity has undermined both the authority of religious institutions and the credibility of religious belief. **AS A RESULT OPF THESE CHANGES RELIGIOUS PRACTICE HAS ALSO DECLINED.**

# Explanations of Secularisation – a technological worldview

**BRUCE** argues that the growth of a technological worldview has largely replaced religious or supernatural explanations as to why things happen.

If a plane were to crash, instead of blaming it on 'evil spirits' or as God's punishment of the wicked, instead we look for scientific and technological explanations.

A technological worldview thus leaves little room for religious explanations in everyday life, which only survive in areas which science and technology is least effective (Link to God of the gaps theory).

This worldview does not make people atheists, but encourages them to take religion less seriously.

# Structural differentiation - Parsons

- Specialised institutions now carry out functions that were previously formed by a single institution.
- Structural differentiation has led to the disengagement of religion. Religious functions are transferred to other state institutions and it becomes thus disconnected from wider society.

# Explanations of Secularisation: Social and Cultural Diversity

- Diversity of religions, cultures and occupations undermines religion.
- Even when people continue to hold religious beliefs, they cannot avoid knowing that many of those around them hold very different views, which has the potential to weaken beliefs.

# Explanations: Religious Diversity

- **BERGER:** In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church held an absolute monopoly on faith, As a result, everyone lived under a single '*sacred canopy*' or set beliefs shared by all. Greater plausibility because beliefs were left unquestioned.
- This all changed with the **Protestant Reformation**, when **Protestant churches and sects broke away from the catholic Church in The 16<sup>th</sup> century.**
- **No longer living under shared 'sacred canopy' of values, leading to diversity of religious beliefs.**

# A Spiritual Revolution?

- Some sociologists argue that a 'spiritual revolution' is taking place today, in which traditional Christianity is giving way to 'Holistic Spirituality' or New Age Movements.
- Increased interest in spirituality can be seen through the growth of a 'spiritual market' i.e. Crystal healing to meditation.
- So are these spiritual alternatives a modern adaption of religion to suit our needs and the times we live in?



# SECULARISATION IN AMERICA

- **WILSON** = more part of American way of life now than of deeply held religious beliefs.
- Claimed that America was a secular society, not because people had abandoned the church, but because religion there had become *superficial*.



# CRITICISMS

## of secularisation theory

- Secularisation theorists put forward strong arguments with compelling evidence, but can be criticised on several grounds:
- Religion is not declining but simply changing its form
- Eurocentric = Religion may have declined in Europe but not in America or globally, so secularisation is not universal.
- Religious diversity doesn't cause decline, it simply increases choice for members of society.

# Religion, Renewal and Choice

Three main alternatives to secularisation theory:

- Theories of Late Modernity and Postmodernity
- Religious Market Theory
- Existential Security Theory

# Postmodernity and religion

- Theories of late modernity and postmodernity argue that religion is not declining but merely changing as society develops.
- Therefore reject secularisation theory.
- In this view, changes in religion are result of changes in wider society, such as greater individualism and consumerism – or even as shift from modern to late modern or postmodern society.

## **GRACE DAVIE**

Argues that religion is not declining, but simply taking a different, more privatised form – churchgoing has declined simply because they feel like they do not have to anymore.

## **THIS LEADS TO...**

Believing without belonging: People hold religious beliefs but don't go to church.

# Postmodernity cont.

- Vicarious religion - **DAVIE** notes a trend towards VICARIOUS RELIGION, wherein a small number of the professional clergy practice religion on the behalf of a much larger number of people, who experience it second-hand.
- This Pattern is typical of Britain and Northern Europe, yet in these societies many people still use the church for rites of passage (Baptisms, wedding, funerals) despite low levels of attendance.
- Similar finding in **REGINALD BIBBY'S** Canadian survey, which found that only 25% attended church regularly, however 80% identified themselves as religious/with religious beliefs etc.
- **DAVIE SEES VICARIOUS RELIGION AS EVIDENCE OF BELIEVING WITHOUT BELONGING** (what appears to be a small commitment is actually a much wider one).

- **Davie** argues that modernisation affects every society differently – she argues that there are *multiple modernities*.
- Her view is that religion and science will continue to coexist.

## CRITICISM

- **Voas and Crockett** do not accept Davie's claim that there is believing without belonging. Evidence from the British Social Attitudes surveys show that church attendance and belief in God are declining.
- When people no longer belong, they no longer believe.

# Postmodernity: Spiritual shopping

- **HERVIEU-LEGER:** there has been a dramatic decline in institutional religion.
- This is partly due to what she calls '*cultural amnesia*' or loss of collective memory. Nowadays we have largely lost the religion that used to be handed down from generation to generation → Parents these days let their children decide for themselves what to believe.
- She argues that **individual consumerism has replaced collective tradition.**
- People now feel they have a choice as consumers of religion = they have become spiritual shoppers. We choose the elements of religion that we want to explore/that interest us.

**HERVIEU LEGER's** view can be linked back to ideas of late modernity: trend of individualism explains weakening of traditional collective religious institutions.

# Postmodernity and religion: Lyon

- Globalisation has led to greatly increased movements of ideas and beliefs across national boundaries.
- We live in a postmodern, media saturated society that has led ideas to become 'disembedded'. → media lift them out of original context .
- *AS A RESULT, RELIGION HAS BECOME DE-INSTITUTIONALISED.*

## **RELIGIOUS CONSUMERISM**

- Postmodern society also involves the growth of consumerism, especially the idea that we construct our own identities through what we choose to consume.
- We can pick and mix elements of different faiths to suit our tastes and make them part of our identities – until something more attractive or fashionable comes along.

# RELIGIOUS MARKET THEORY

- Key thinkers; **STARK AND BAINBRIDGE**

They are very critical of secularisation theory, which they see as 'EUROCENTRIC' as it focuses on the decline of religion in Europe, but fails to explain its continuing vitality in America and elsewhere.

Argue that there was no 'golden age' of religion, like secularisation theorists argue.

Instead they propose *religious market theory*, based on two assumptions:

- *People are naturally religious – religion meets human need, therefore the overall demand for religion remains constant.*
- *It is human nature to seek rewards and avoid costs, when people make choices, they are weighing up the costs and the rewards.*

Religion therefore offers us compensators = when real rewards are unobtainable, religion compensates by promising supernatural ones



- According to **Stark and Bainbridge**, churches operate like companies selling goods in a market .
- While some sociologists see competition between religions as undermining religion, religious market theorists would argue that this competition leads to improvements of the religious 'goods' on offer = churches that make their 'product' more attractive will gain more 'customers'. (**televangelism**)

# Criticisms of religious market theory:

- Statistics have shown that diversity has been accompanied by religious decline in both Europe *and* America.
- Unsociological because it assumes that people are naturally religious and fails to explain why.

# EXISTENTIAL SECURITY THEORY

- Norris and Inglehart REJECT RELIGIOUS MARKET THEORY argues that it only applies to America.
- They argue that the **differences in religiosity all come down to different degrees of existential security.**
- Religion meets a need for security, and therefore societies where people feel more secure have a low level of demand for security.

POOR SOCIETIES = face high level risks, starvation, disease, drought = high level insecurity and thus have high levels of religion.

RICH SOCIETIES = less risk = higher levels of security, less need for religion.

- Thus the demand for religion is not constant, but varies within societies. THIS explains why poorer third world countries remain religious, while western countries are becoming more secular.

# Religion in a global context

# Religious Fundamentalism

- In a global context, the issue of religious fundamentalism has emerged as a major area of media and political concern.
- The term fundamentalist is applied to a variety of followers of different religions, including Protestant Christians.
- **GIDDENS** fundamentalists are traditionalists who wish to seek to return to the basic fundamentals of their faith. Believe in literal truth of scripture.
- Fundamentalists believe that theirs is the only true view of religion and the wider world, intolerant of other faiths (Very conservative in their beliefs).
- **GIDDENS** notes that the term fundamentalism is a fairly recent one and seems to have *grown as a product of globalisation, which undermines traditional social norms (i.e. homosexuality, nuclear family.)*
- Retreat into faith based answers, moving away from the globalised world that demands rational answers.

# Cultural Defence

- **Bruce** sees one function of religion in today's world to be cultural defence.
- Where religion serves to unite a community against an external threat.  
(Religion holds a special significance for followers as it symbolises the group or society's collective identity.)
- Two examples of religion as cultural defence are Poland and Iran. Show how it can be used in defence of national identity.
- Poland (defence from external power of communist rule imposed by the Soviet Union → Catholic Church was suppressed at the time but for many it remained to embody their national identity.)
- Iran (Defence in regard to Western culture and capitalism, Islam became more important as times got tougher)

# Religion and the 'clash of civilisations'

- In recent years, religion has been at the heart of a number of global conflicts.
- These include '9/11' Islamist attacks on the United States and the subsequent bombings in Madrid, Bali and London.
- **HUNTINGDON** argues that these conflicts have intensified since the collapse of communism in the late 80s and are symptoms of what Huntington describes as a wider 'clash of civilisations.' Religion creates social cohesion within civilisation but can cause conflict between them.
- This is particularly true in today's globalised world.
- Sees history as a struggle of 'progress against barbarianism'. Believes the West is under threat, especially from religions such as Islam. He fears the emergence of new anti-Western military alliances.

## CRITICISM:

- His work could be seen as an example of *orientalism* – a western ideology that stereotypes eastern nations as untrustworthy or fanatical.

# Short Plan: Assess sociological explanations of the relationship between globalisation and religion (33 Marks)

- World today increasingly more interconnected, due to process of globalisation and has consequences for all areas of life, including religion.
- **Giddens** argues that globalisation has led to a growth in religious fundamentalism, with the term 'fundamentalist' being a recent one.
- Religions come in close contact than before – can leave room for conflict (i.e. religious fundamentalism, easier for this movement to have greater impact on world, spreads their message effectively.) Religion creates social cohesion within civilisation but can cause conflict between them (**Huntingdon**)
- Huntingdon sees globalisation processes as a clash of civilisations – believes western society is at threat from Eastern religions, especially Islam. CRITICISM = orientalism, (western ideology) stereotyping Eastern countries to be fanatical and extremist.
- Not the only influence globalisation has had on religion → **Bruce** = cultural defence, unites one community under external threat. (e.g. Catholic church in Poland was suppressed but did not stop Catholicism remaining part of Poles national identity at time when Soviet union communist rule was imposed.)




Organisations, movements and  
members

# Types of religious organisations

## Church and sect:

- **Troeltsch:** distinguished between two main types of religious organisation, the church and the sect.
- **Churches** are large organisations often with millions of members (i.e. Catholic Church) They are universalistic and aim to include all of society, although they tend to attract the middle classes because of their conservative beliefs. They place few demands on their members.
- **Sects** are by contrast small, exclusive groups. Unlike churches, sects are hostile to wider society and expect a high level of commitment. Draw their members from the poor and the oppressed. Many are led by charismatic leaders rather than bureaucratic hierarchies.

## Denomination and Cult:

- **Niebuhr** – describes **denominations** such as Methodism as lying midway between churches and sects → Broadly accept society's views but not linked to the state, but doesn't appeal to whole of society like a church.
- **Cult** – Highly individualistic, loose-knit and usually small grouping around some shared themes and interests, usually without sharply defined belief system.
- Cults are tolerant of other organisations and do not demand strong commitment from their followers, who are often more like customers than members.
- They may have little involvement with the cult once they have acquired the beliefs or techniques it offers.
-  **WORLD AFFIRMING**, claiming to improve life in this world.

# Similarities and differences

## Wallis:

How they see themselves:

- ***Churches and sects*** claim that their interpretation of the faith is the only legitimate or correct one.
- ***Denominations and cults*** accept that there can be many valid interpretations.

How they are seen by wider society:

- **Churches and denominations** are seen as respectable and legitimate
- **Cults and sects** are seen as deviant.

# New religious movements

- Since the 1960s, there has been an explosion in the number of new religions and organisations, such as the Unification Church (Moonies), Transcendental Meditation, Krishna Consciousness and many more. Leading to new attempts to classify them.
- **WALLIS** categorises these new religious movements (NRMs) into three groups, based on their relationship to the outside world.

- **WORLD REJECTING NRMs**

Similar to Troeltsch's sects. (E.g. Moonies, Branch Davidian.)

Clearly religious with a clear notion of God.

Members must make a sharp break with their former life.

Highly critical of outside world and seek radical change

Members live communally, with restricted contact with the outside world. (often accused of brainwashing members.)

- **WORLD ACCOMODATING NRMs**

Often breakaways from existing mainstream churches or denominations, such as neo-Pentecostals who split from Catholicism. They neither accept nor reject the world, focusing on religious rather than worldly matters.

Members tend to live conventional lives.

- **WORLD AFFIRMING NRMs**

Differ from all other religious groups and may lack some conventional features of religion, such as collective worship, and some are not highly organised. (i.e. Scientology, Transcendental meditation.)

Most are considered cults, whose followers are often customers rather than members.

Non-exclusive and tolerant of other religions, but claim to offer additional special knowledge or techniques.

Accept the world as it is.

# Stark and Bainbridge – sects and cults

- Stark and Bainbridge identify two kind of organisations that are in conflict with wider society:
- Sects result from schisms in existing organisations. They break away from church usually because of disagreement over doctrine.
- Cults are new religions, such as scientology.
- Stark and Bainbridge subdivide cults according to how organised they are.
- **Audience cults** are the least organised and do not involve formal membership or much commitment, with little interaction between members. (i.e. UFO cults)
- **Client cults** provide services to their followers (i.e. Spiritualism)
- **Cultic movements** are the most organised and demand a higher level of commitment than other cults (i.e. Moonies .)

# Explaining the growth of new religious movements

- Sociologists have offered three main explanations for the sudden growth and popularity of NRMs: marginality, relative deprivation and social change.

## Marginality

As noted by Troelstch, sects tend to draw their members from the poor and oppressed. Sects tend to arise in groups who are marginal to society or whom feel disprivileged.

## Relative deprivation

Subjective sense of being deprived, many feel as if they are even if they are not. Thus, although middle-class people are materially well off, they may feel spiritually deprived, meaning they may turn to sects for a sense of community.



# Social change

Rapid periods of social change undermine established norms and values. Those that who are most affected by this disruption may turn to sects as a solution, to offer a renewed sense of community.

(Industrial revolution in Britain led to the birth of Methodism which offered a sense of community, clear norms and values and the promise of salvation)

# The growth of the New Age

- The term 'new age' covers a range of beliefs and activities that have been widespread since about the 1980s. They are extremely diverse and eclectic. They include belief in UFOs and aliens, astrology, tarot, crystals, yoga, medicine etc.
- **HEELAS** = two common themes that characterise the New Age:

Self spirituality: turned away from traditional religions such as churches and instead look inside themselves to find it.

Detraditionalisation: Rejects spiritual authority of traditional sacred texts. Instead it values personal experience and believes that we can find the truth for ourselves.

# Postmodernity and the New Age

- DRANE argues that the appeal of New Age movements is part of a shift towards postmodern society. One feature of postmodernity is a loss of faith in meta-narratives or claims to have the 'truth'.
- People have become disillusioned with churches and mainstream religions failure to meet their needs. As a result they are turning to the New Age idea that each of us can find truth by looking within ourselves.

# Modernity and the new Age

- Some sociologists may argue that the growth of the New Age is the latest phase of modern society, and not a postmodern one.
- Could be argued that modernity leads to secularisation, thereby removing traditional alternatives to new Age beliefs.
- In modern society, the individual has many different roles, which can lead to a fragmented identity. New Age beliefs offer a source of 'authentic' identity.

# Religiosity and social groups

- Important differences between social groups and the beliefs they hold.
- CLASS =
- LOWER CLASSES = WORLD REJECTING SECTS.
- HIGHER CLASSES = WORLD ACCEPTING CHURCHES AND CULTS.

# Gender and religiosity

## Differences in gender and religiosity

- While priesthoods of most religions are usually male, more women than men participate in religious activities and believe in God, the devil, sin and life after death.
- In 2005 1.8 million churchgoers in UK women as compared to 1.36 million men.
- Twice as many women involved in sects.

## Reasons for gender differences

### *socialisation + the gender role*

MILLER AND HOFFMAN: Women are religious than men because they are socialised into being more passive and obedient. These are qualities most valued by religions, meaning that women are more likely than men to be attracted to these were religions. (women also more likely to have part time job then men, gives more time to participate etc.)

### *Women and the New Age*

Women often associated with 'nurture' and a healing role, therefore giving them greater cause to be attracted to New Age movements than men.

HEELAS + WOODHEAD found that 80% of participants in the hollistic milleu in Kendal were female

- Despite women being more religious, there is evidence to suggest that women are now leaving the church at a faster rate than men.
- Callum Brown offers a further explanation of the decline in women's churchgoing by arguing that since the 1960s, women have begun to reject traditional subordinate gender roles. Because the two are so closely interlinked, to reject this traditional concept of religion, women would also have to reject traditional religion at the same time.
- Could also argue that New Age movements are more freeing than oppressive, monotheistic religions that centre around the doings of a male, all powerful God.

# Ethnicity and religiosity

## Differences

- Muslims, Hindus and black Christians are more likely than white Christians to view religion as important.

## Reasons for ethnic differences in religiosity:

- One idea is that most ethnic minorities originate from poorer countries with traditional cultures, leading religious belief to be more important in these areas. On arrival in the UK, they maintain these beliefs and practices from their country of origin.
- *Cultural defence (Bruce's idea)* Religion in certain situations is important in offering support and proving a sense of national identity in an uncertain or hostile environment.
- *Cultural transition* = religion can be a means of easing the transition into a new culture by providing a sense of community and support in an alien environment. This is the explanation given by Herberg for the high levels of religious participation amongst first generation immigrants in the USA.
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# Age and religious participation

- General pattern is that the older the person is, the more likely they are to be religious and attend religious services.

However two exceptions to this pattern:

## THE UNDER 15s

Are more likely to attend church or religious services because they are made to by their parents.

## THE OVER 65s

Are more likely to be sick or disabled and therefore unable to attend.

# Reasons for age differences

## VOAS AND CROCKETT

- The ageing effect

The view that people turn to religion as they get older. As we approach death, we naturally become more interested/concerned by spiritual matters and the afterlife etc. As a result these individuals are more likely to attend church.

- The generational effect

This is the view that as society becomes more secular, each generation is less secular than before. Thus there are more old people than young people at church today, because they grew up at a time during when religion was more popular.

VOAS and CROCKETT argue that the generational effect is the more significant of the two.

Ideology and science

# Science as a belief system

- Many sociologists see science as a product of the process of rationalisation that began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the protestant reformation.
- For many sociologists, advances in scientific thought have acted to undermine religion and religious beliefs by changing the way we now think in society and see the world.

# The impact of science

- Science has had an enormous impact on society over the last few centuries.
- Perhaps most strikingly, science and technology have raised our standard of living to and economic productivity greatly.
- This success has led to a widespread 'faith in science' - a belief that it can 'deliver the goods.'
- Although science has both good and effects, these act to demonstrate its cognitive power. In other words, it enables us to explain, predict and control the world in which non-scientific belief systems cannot do.

# Open belief systems

- **Karl Popper**
- Science is an open belief system (according to **Popper**) where every scientist's theories are open to scrutiny, criticism and testing by others.
- Science is governed by the principle of *falsificationism*, meaning that scientists set out to try and falsify existing theories, deliberately seeking evidence that would disprove them.
- In **Popper's** view, the key thing about scientific knowledge is that it is not sacred or absolute truth – it can always be questioned, tested and perhaps shown to be false.

# The CUDOS norms

## MERTON

Science can only thrive as major social institution if it receives support from other institutions and values.

Also argues that science as an institution needs an ethos or set of norms that make scientists act in ways which serve the purpose of increasing scientific knowledge.

He identifies 4 norms:

**C**ommunism (scientific knowledge is not private property. Scientists must share it with the scientific community, otherwise knowledge cannot grow.)

**U**niversalism (whether scientific knowledge is judged as true or false is judged by universal, objective criteria)

**D**isinterestedness (being committed to discovering knowledge for its own sake)

**O**rganised scepticism (no knowledge claim is regarded as 'sacred'. Every idea open to questioning, criticism and objective investigation.)

# Closed belief systems

- This is where science and religion fundamentally differ.
- Whilst scientific knowledge is provisional, open to challenge and potentially disprovable, religions claim to have sacred, absolute knowledge of the truth held by Gods divine authority (if questioned this in past would be accused of heresy).
- HORTON similarly sees science as an open system where claims are open to criticism and testing . By contrast, religion, magic and other belief systems are closed.
- Unlike scientific knowledge, therefore, it is fixed and does not grow.



# Science as a closed system

Kuhn

Science is a self-sustaining or closed system.

Argues that science is a closed system because a mature science such as biology, geology or physics is based on a set of shared assumptions which he calls a *paradigm*.

The paradigm lays down the broad outlines and the scientists job is to carefully fill in the details.

Closed system as the paradigm influences what you can research etc. If a scientist goes against a paradigm, they will be shunned from the scientific community.

# Marxism, feminism, postmodernism and religion

Critical perspectives see scientific knowledge as far from pure truth. Instead they see it as serving the interests of dominant groups – the ruling class in the case of Marxists and men in the case of feminists.

- For example, biological ideas could potentially be used to justify male superiority and domination.
- In a different sense, postmodernists also reject the knowledge claims of science to have 'the truth'. LYOTARD argues that science is just another meta-narrative or 'big story' that falsely claims to offer the truth.
- In reality science is just another discourse or way of thinking that is used to dominate people. (POSTMODERNIST VIEW)

# Ideology

Ideology = a worldview or set of basic ideas. However the term is used very widely in sociology and had taken on a number of related meanings:

- Distorted, false or mistaken ideas about the world, or a partial, one sided view of reality.
- Ideas that conceal the interests of a particular group, or that legitimate their privileges.

Therefore very often when someone uses the term ideology to describe a belief system, it means that they regard it as factually and/or morally wrong.

There are a number of ideologies, we will focus on three of them.

# Marxism and Ideology

- Society divided into two classes – minority ruling class that own the means of production and control the state, and the majority working class that are forced to sell their labour to the capitalist classes. The capitalist classes exploit this to produce profit.
- It is in the workers interests to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a classless communist society.
- However for this revolution to occur, there must be **class consciousness**, an awareness on the part of the working class as to the fact they are being exploited.
- Capitalist class produce ruling class ideology to maintain this rule over the working class, through this creating **false class consciousness**, meaning that the working class have a distorted view of the reality that they are living in, allowing capitalism to continue exploiting them.
- Gramsci refers to the ruling class' ideological domination of society as hegemony.

He argues that the working class develop ideas that challenge the ruling class hegemony.

This is because workers have **dual consciousness**; a mixture of ruling class ideology and their own ideas through their experience of exploitation. It is therefore possible for the working class to overthrow capitalism, through '**organic intellectuals**' who have developed class conscious and can therefore spread the message to the rest of society.



Hegemony and revolution

# Karl Mannheim: ideology and utopia

- Mannheim sees all belief systems as one sided.
- This results from being the viewpoint of one particular group or class.
- Leads him to distinguish between two broad types of belief system:

- **IDEOLOGICAL THOUGHT**

Justifies keeping things as they are, reflecting the interests/position of the ruling class.  
Tends to be conservative and maintains the status quo.

- **UTOPIAN THOUGHT**

Justifies social change. Reflects the position and interests of the underprivileged, offering a vision of how society should be.

# Feminism and Ideology

- See gender inequality as the fundamental division in society and patriarchal ideology is key in legitimating this division.
- Separate and included within many religions → embedded into religious belief and practice to emphasise women's subordination + reinforce idea that they are inferior.
- For example in some religions, women are seen as ritually impure after childbirth and during menstruation, implying that they are inferior to their male counterparts.

# Example questions:

Assess sociological explanations of science and ideology as belief systems . (33 marks)

Assess the view that religion can either be a conservative force or it can contribute to social change. (33 marks)

Asses sociological explanations for the increasing number of religions and spiritual organisations and movements in society today. (33 marks)

Assess sociological explanations of the relationship between globalisation and religion. (33 marks)

Assess the view that religious beliefs and practices are changing to reflect a new era of diversity and choice. (33 marks)

Identify and briefly explain **three** reasons that support the claim that American society is becoming increasingly secular. (9 marks)

Identify and briefly explain three reasons why the New Christian Right may have failed to achieve its aims . (9 marks)

Identify and briefly explain **one** advantage and **two** disadvantages of functional definitions of religion. (9 marks)