

# Activity answers

## Chapter 1: Beliefs in society

### Unit 1: Science and society

#### Activity 1 (page 5)

##### 1 How has Galileo's telescope helped to produce a new universe of meaning?

For Berger and Luckmann (1967) a universe of meaning involves the idea of people organising their experiences in order to make sense of their lives and the world in which they live. Prior to Galileo's telescope the prevailing universe of meaning was a religious one, based on faith and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Galileo's observations, however, helped to create a new universe of meaning by demonstrating that it was possible to understand and explain the world using a scientific approach based on observation, evidence and reason.

##### 2 How might the Large Hadron Collider help to produce a new reality?

By re-creating the conditions that existed at the time of the Big Bang, scientists are able, for the first time, to directly observe the processes involved in the creation of the universe. If these observations radically change our understanding of how these processes work, they may create a new (scientific) reality based on the ability to understand the relationship between matter, space and time.

#### Activity 2 (page 7)

##### What support do Items A and B provide for Kuhn's views on scientific revolutions?

For Kuhn a scientific revolution occurs when 'normal science' – the currently accepted explanation for something – is challenged by the accumulation of new evidence that cannot be explained in terms of the existing paradigm. Where the new paradigm is more successful in explaining something, it eventually becomes accepted as 'normal science', displacing or replacing previous explanations. The items support this idea in two ways. In Item A, Galileo challenged the accepted view (the 'normal science' of astronomers, mathematicians and philosophers of his day) that the Earth was the centre of the universe. Although his work was suppressed for a time by the Catholic Church his new paradigm eventually came to be accepted as 'normal science'. In Item B Darwin argued that species evolved through a process of natural selection – the argument, for example, that human beings, apes and monkeys were descended from a common ancestor. This directly challenged the prevailing religious explanation of human development and led to a revolution in scientific thinking.

#### Activity 3 (pages 9–10)

##### What support do the items in this activity provide for the views of Giddens and Beck?

The items support Giddens' views in several ways.

**1** He argues that people no longer necessarily see science as bringing certainty and 'securely founded knowledge'. This is illustrated in the items where there is no generally agreed scientific evidence about the benefits or dangers of GM crops. **2** Although science may benefit humankind it also brings risk and danger. This is illustrated in Item B which points out that we do not know the long-term health effects of GM crops. Moreover, the accident at Chernobyl demonstrates the real risks associated with the introduction of nuclear power generation (Item C). **3** Giddens suggests attitudes towards science are often contradictory – something demonstrated by the opposing views of Item A, which highlights the benefits of GM crops, and Item B, which highlights the dangers.

Support for Beck's views can similarly be found in the items. **1** His argument that late modernity is characterised by uncertainty and risk is supported by Item C in that the Chernobyl accident has demonstrated the risks associated with nuclear power. **2** Beck argues that risk is magnified by globalisation. In Item B, for example, Greenpeace suggest GM crops are a threat to global environments and biodiversity, while the radiation fallout from Chernobyl, mapped in Item C, can be seen to have crossed an extensive area of the globe. **3** He suggests people are suspicious of 'scientific advances' which lead to technologies such as GM food production (Item B) and nuclear power generation (Item C), since there is no clear answer as to whether or not they are for the benefit of humankind.

### Unit 2: Ideology

#### Activity 4 (page 12)

##### What aspects of Marxist theory are illustrated by the cartoons?

The cartoons illustrate four aspects of Marxist theory:

**1 Social class:** Item A shows the inequality of class systems in terms of wealth, power and prestige. Item B implies inequality in wealth between the 'bloated capitalists' and those that labour in the factories depicted in the background. **2 Exploitation:** Item A describes the middle class as eating 'for' the proletariat. In other words, taking what rightfully belongs to the proletariat. Item B depicts the engorged capitalists enjoying the wealth which the

proletariat have produced in the factories. **3 Repression:** Item A shows clearly that the proletariat are kept in check: firstly, by an ideology dispensed by the priests, and secondly, by force monopolised by the army with their guns.

**4 The ultimate revolution of the proletariat:** in Item A the banner held by the proletariat reads 'To live in freedom, to die in struggle'. It is a clear call to arms for the proletariat.

## Activity 5 (page 14)

### How might these advertisements be seen as examples of patriarchal ideology?

Patriarchal ideology describes the beliefs which justify and support male domination and disguise and maintain female subordination. The advertisements reflect this ideology. They suggest, for example, that a woman's place is in the home (and the kitchen in particular) and that this makes women happy. The advertisements also suggest women should have primary responsibility for housework. There is a further suggestion that 'what makes a perfect woman' is one who cares for and looks after 'her man' – the idea here being that women are defined in terms of male needs. The advertisements also imply that the man is the head of the family: in one advertisement the woman is smiling as she hugs the present (a kitchen sink!) given to her by her husband, while in another advertisement keeping her man happy makes her 'a perfect woman'.

## Activity 6 (page 15)

### How does this cartoon illustrate socialist ideas?

The cartoon reflects socialist ideas in that it suggests the way to solve problems is through collective effort rather than individual self-interest. For example, where the two donkeys pursue their individual efforts (top three pictures) neither is successful in reaching the food; their competitive efforts to reach the food cancel each other out and both, in consequence, suffer. When the two donkeys decide to act collectively, however, they can both reach the food (which they share); by working cooperatively, therefore, each donkey reaches its individual goal.

## Unit 3: Theories of religion

### Activity 7 (page 18)

**1 How can the activities illustrated in Items A and B be seen as religious? Refer to the definitions of religion outlined in the text.**

In terms of a **substantive** definition the activity in Item A can be seen as religious because Barack Obama is pledging his allegiance to a 'higher power', one symbolised by taking the 'oath of office' to the presidency and the constitution of the United States. In Durkheim's terms 'America the Country' takes on a sacred form, one symbolised by its constitution and highest political office and expressed through the

ceremony of swearing an oath to carry out the requisite presidential and constitutional duties. The State, in this respect, is set apart from the lives of individual Americans – it is something even the highest-ranking political officer (the President) swears to serve.

In terms of a **functional** definition of religion the item suggests that actions like 'taking the presidential oath' serve the purpose of uniting the citizens of America into one single moral community by encouraging 'social unity between the fellow-believers who make up a society'. The ceremony, in other words, is symbolic of the 'higher power' of American society because its most powerful political representative (the President) promises to act in the interests of all Americans by taking the oath of office.

Item B represents a more conventional view of religion – one that focuses on the supernatural, for example, the idea that a patron saint 'looks after' the people in a neighbourhood. In **substantive** terms, therefore, this behaviour is clearly religious in the sense of 'a belief in a being' which is in some way superior to humans 'and which cannot be verified or explained by Western science'. It can also be argued that the behaviour corresponds to a **functional** definition in that participation in the religious ceremony both draws people together (promotes social unity) and gives them a common sense of morality and purpose.

### 2 Briefly criticise the view that all of the activities pictured above should be seen as religious.

We can criticise the view that all of the pictured activities are 'religious' in **three** ways. **1** A substantive view of religion argues that activities such as 'Taking the oath', the World Cup or saluting the flag are not forms of religious behaviour because they have no supernatural element. **2** It doesn't necessarily follow that every 'supernatural belief' is religious. For example, predicting the future (clairvoyancy) may be seen as having a supernatural element but might in the future be understood purely in scientific terms. **3** Functional definitions of religion suggest that any type of public ceremony is 'religious' because it functions to promote social solidarity; thus, the World Cup is as much a religious activity as church attendance. If this is the case, however, it is difficult to see how the concept of religion serves any useful sociological purpose.

### Activity 8 (page 19)

#### How might the activities shown in Items A, B and C reinforce the collective consciousness and strengthen social solidarity?

The collective consciousness is reinforced in **two** main ways: **1** Through regular acts of collective worship, such as the Promise Keepers' rally in Item A and the Christmas blessing ceremony in Item B; **2** Through shared rituals of the type featured in Item C. Similarly, social solidarity is strengthened in **three** main ways: **1** By participating in the religious ceremonies featured in the items the members of a

society (or group within a society) are 'renewing their sense of membership and unity'. The repetition of these rituals also strengthens the sense of solidarity group members feel.

**2** Solidarity is strengthened by the fact that the communal worship exhibited in the items gives those involved a sense of their common beliefs and values.

**3** Collective ceremonies and rituals encourage the belief in the individuals involved that, as a group, they are strong and significant – and so further enhance social solidarity.

## Activity 9 (page 21)

**1 Malinowski argued that certain situations threaten psychological and social stability. Using the examples in Item A, show how religion might function to reduce this threat.**

The examples in Item A illustrate the **two** types of event that Malinowski identified as being characteristic of religious involvement:

**1** Those events whose outcome is important but uncertain and uncontrollable. The Gulf War is an example here in that individual soldiers are placed in a situation of great personal danger. As a result they are anxious and under emotional stress; religious ritual, in the form of communal prayer, is a way for the soldiers to cope with this situation by 'increasing their sense of control, diminishing anxiety and unifying the group'. Through prayer the soldiers are enlisting the help of God to see them through a personal crisis while, simultaneously, enhancing group solidarity by coming together in a common activity.

**2** Those events – such as death – that represent life crises for the living. Religion can lessen or resolve the 'mental crises' that surround death by comforting the bereaved, for example, through a belief that the dead individual has gone to Heaven. It may also provide some sort of 'meaning' to death. For example, in Item A soldiers may see themselves as dying for the sake of their country or democracy. Religious rituals, such as the state funeral in the case of Princess Diana, not only serve to bind people together, they also provide a sense of closure – that the period of socially disruptive mourning has officially ended.

**2 According to Talcott Parsons there are situations which can make life appear meaningless. Using Item B,**

**a) Give examples of these situations.**

Examples of situations where life can appear meaningless, illustrated by Item B, include where there is personal suffering, injustice, oppression, sin, exploitation and ultimately death.

**b) Show how religion addresses them.**

Religion addresses these problems by providing answers to the 'eternal' questions such as why God allows suffering, injustice and oppression. More specifically, personal suffering can be satisfactorily explained by religion as a 'test of faith' for believers or as punishment for sins.

**c) Suggest how, in doing so, religion contributes to the wellbeing of the individual and society.**

By providing explanations for apparently 'meaningless situations', religion contributes to the wellbeing of the individual by providing a way for people to come to terms with and adjust to life issues, events and crises. In this respect it provides a form of psychological adjustment to many of life's mysteries (such as what happens after death).

However, although this sense of individual, psychological adjustment is an important function of religion, writers such as Parsons also argue that religion contributes to the wellbeing of society. It provides, for example, significant social values, such as those encouraged by Protestant Christianity (e.g. individualism, self-discipline, equality of opportunity), which are given widespread legitimacy precisely because they are sacralised – they derive, in effect, from God. Where such (religious) values are entrenched in a society a web of norms develops around them – the norm of universal access to legal rights, for example, derives from the general value of equality of opportunity. The existence of 'sacralised values' helps to promote a general social consensus involving, Parsons argues, broad agreement over core values – and this consensus, in turn, is a source of social order and stability which promotes both the wellbeing of society and that of individuals.

## Activity 10 (pages 22–23)

**1 Read Items A and B.**

**a) How are the symbols of Americanism linked to Biblical models? Why might this make them more effective?**

In Item A, the symbols of Americanism associated with migration to the 'new lands in the West' are linked to Biblical models in the sense that 'opening up new land to White settlement' was likened to the way the Jewish people were chosen by God to occupy a certain geographic territory. This association was effective because claims to legal ownership of the 'virgin territories' were legitimised by associating them with the Biblical 'promised land' and, by extension, the idea that the migrants were God's 'chosen people': a particular group (White Americans) who had the God-given right to both occupy land and exploit its natural resources.

In the case of Abraham Lincoln the association is less explicit. In this instance, Lincoln – as President of the United States – has become a symbol of Americanism which, in turn, has become associated with a general notion of 'God'. In other words, God and Americanism become one and the same thing, which is effective since people come to have, in Bellah's terms, 'faith in Americanism'.

In Item B this association and argument are advanced in terms of the idea that American society is so large and diverse that it can only be held together by the existence of a set of beliefs and values to which everyone – of whatever

or no religion – can adhere. In this respect, ‘American values’ involve a collection of general beliefs, symbols and sacred ideas that are given an overarching legitimacy and effectiveness by being tied to powerful religious ideas (such as America being the ‘promised land’ of Biblical tradition).

### b) Why have the wagon train and Abraham Lincoln become symbols of Americanism?

They have become symbols of Americanism because they personify certain traits (such as rugged individualism and independence) and ideas (such as freedom and democracy) with which Americans wish to be associated. In other words these things are used as a tangible, easily understood expression of ideas that do not, in themselves, have a physical existence and which may be complicated to understand.

### 2 How can the symbols of Americanism in Item C be seen as ‘religious’?

The symbols of Americanism identified in Item C, although not ‘religious’ in the conventional meaning of the term, have religious qualities in that they represent ideas and imagery that are ‘set apart’ from everyday life. American society, for example, has its ‘saints’ – important historical figures, such as Lincoln, Kennedy and Davy Crockett, who embody certain American beliefs and values. It also has its shrines, such as the Lincoln Memorial, war memorials and other ‘special’ places. Their function is to symbolise the nation as a ‘people’ – a purpose also performed by ‘sacred objects’ such as the American flag. Finally, civil ceremonies such as Memorial Day or the Fourth of July serve to bring the American people together to celebrate national values and national unity in much the same way that religious ceremonies bring people together to celebrate ‘God’.

### 3 What are the social functions of civil religion in America?

For Bellah the main social function of civil religion was to provide a sense of unity for the American people, something achieved by generating ‘widespread loyalty to the nation state’. In this respect, civil religion functions to bind together the diverse members of American society by encouraging their commitment to an entity (the state) that is greater than the individual.

## Activity 11 (page 25)

### 1 Analyse the information in Item A from a Marxist view.

Religion is seen by Marxists as part of the ideological domination of the proletariat. In Item A religion legitimises the power of the monarch over his subjects. As monarchs represent divine power on earth they can judge their subjects but are themselves only subject to the judgement of God. By teaching that the estates of the realm – the monarch, barons and bishops, knights, freemen and serfs – were ordained by God, religion served to make any rejection of this order not only treason but a rejection of God’s plan.

Even when Elizabeth II was crowned, while not claiming divine right, she was blessed by the archbishops, so legitimising her position of ruler. Marxists believe that the ideological dominance illustrated in the item serves to ‘obscure and distort the true nature of reality’.

### 2 Why does Birnbaum (Item B) argue that it is ‘the very absence of shared values in Great Britain’ which accounted for the attention paid to the Coronation?

Birnbaum’s argument is that if there were a true moral consensus in British society there would be no need for spectacles such as the Coronation; in other words, it is only *because* of the absence of shared values that these events are needed by a ruling class, to provide, ‘for some sections of the populace, some measure of respite and relief’ from the conflict that is, for Birnbaum, the actual condition of our society.

### 3 How and why, in Birnbaum’s view, did the press encourage false class consciousness through their coverage of the Coronation?

In Birnbaum’s view the press represents the class interests of the rich and the powerful and, as such, one reason *why* it encourages false class consciousness is because it seeks to minimise awareness of the real conflicts characteristic of British society. *How* it performed this role was to present the Queen and her family as objects of people’s fantasies, such that they were encouraged to identify with the monarch in a ‘cult of adulation’.

## Activity 12 (pages 26–27)

### 1 ‘Liberation theology sounds like a Christian version of Marxism.’ Comment on this statement.

As Item A demonstrates, liberation theology has a number of features that make it *sound* like a Christian version of Marxism. **1** It recognised the existence of different social classes and class struggle (in terms of a distinction between rich and poor). **2** It took the side of the poor and the oppressed against the rich and oppressive. **3** It argued that social change would come about when the poor understood their own condition and the reasons for it – an idea that reflects the Marxist concept of class consciousness. **4** Just as Marxism sees the need for the oppressed to overthrow a ruling class and take control of their own interests, liberation theology argued that the poor needed to ‘take control of their situation and accept the responsibility for ending their poverty’. In Item B, for example, Father Torres talks about the ‘need for revolution’ as a way of improving the lives of the majority.

### 2 Use the information in this activity to assess the differing views of Marx and Maduro on the role of religion in society. Does the information disprove Marx’s view?

According to **Marx**, religion was a conservative social force that served the interests of a ruling class. There is evidence within the activity that both supports and contradicts this

view. Marx's view is contradicted by the fact that liberation theology in Latin America promoted the interests of the poor and oppressed against the interests of a ruling class. In this case the Church acted as a channel for discontent which encouraged social changes which served the interests of the subject class rather than the ruling class. However, Marx's views are supported by the fact that most of the Catholic Church, including the Pope and the hierarchy in Rome, did not support liberation theology and therefore discouraged changes which could harm the interests of the ruling class.

**Maduro**, on the other hand, considered it possible for religion to play a progressive role in class societies by acting as a channel for the expression of the discontent of oppressed classes. As the text suggests, Maduro believed that 'the anguish and aspirations of the oppressed may be reflected and voiced by members of the clergy'. In this respect, religion can play a revolutionary role by channelling and expressing the discontent of the oppressed, so that they develop class consciousness and take action to change their situation. As discussed earlier, many parts of the Catholic Church did not support liberation theology. However, this does not really contradict Maduro's view because he did not claim that religion *always* acts as a radical force, merely that it *sometimes* does.

Overall, the evidence in this activity supports Maduro's view rather than Marx's. Although there are many examples to support Marx's view of the role of religion in society, liberation theology proves that Marx was wrong to believe that religion always acts as a conservative force.

## Activity 13 (page 29)

### 1 What support do the pictures in Item A provide for feminist views on religion?

The pictures in Item A support feminist views of religion by demonstrating that religion often acts as a patriarchal institution. All three religious leaders pictured here are male. The Roman Catholic religion only allows men to become priests and therefore only a man can become Pope. Similarly, only men can become Ayatollahs and therefore only a man can become the religious leader of Iran. Although there is no rule preventing a woman from becoming the charismatic leader of a sect, in practice such leaders are, like Reverend Moon, invariably men. Perhaps even more than in other areas of social life, religion allows men to exercise power over women.

### 2 How can Items B and C be used to:

#### a) support feminist views?

Item B can be used to support feminist views in a number of ways. Orthodox Judaism offers a range of examples of **patriarchal** assumptions ('traditional' female identity is expressed through being wives and mothers) and practices (control of sexuality and assistance in finding partners). In common with many of the world's religions, religious professionals (rabbis) are male. In terms of **worship**, reading

from the Torah scroll or participating in symbolic actions at festivals is barred to Orthodox Jewish women. Item C is similarly supportive of feminist views because it suggests religions place **limitations and restrictions** on the behaviour of women that are not placed on men. For example, the requirement to wear the veil in public places is a restriction on women's freedom.

#### b) criticise feminist views?

Item B can be used to criticise feminist views because it suggests that Judaism has some positive benefits for women. This religion offers women a special status and it values their role within the home. Orthodox Judaism also encourages men to be fully involved in domestic life which may encourage greater gender equality than is found in many non-Jewish households. The item also suggests that many female converts chose to become Jewish because they found the clear-cut gender roles appealing, not because they were forced to convert by men.

Item C can be used to criticise feminist views in three ways. **1** Simply because women wear the veil in public places does not automatically mean they are discriminated against. Indeed there may be a link between the growing numbers of women in Islamic countries who are wearing the veil and the growing numbers who are entering universities and the professions. **2** The item suggests that the veil is a means of enhancing personal freedom by making the transition from the private sphere of the home to the public sphere easier and more comfortable for women. **3** By seeing the veil as a form of patriarchal social control feminists ignore the possibility that women may freely choose this mode of dress.

## Activity 14 (page 32)

### 1 Read Item A. How does this view differ from Calvinist attitudes?

Item A is the *reverse* of Calvinist attitudes, for two reasons.

**1** Calvinists saw work and the pursuit of profit and wealth as ways of making the best use of their God-given talents and as indications of God's favour. It was, therefore, important to work hard, but not as an end in itself or as a way of making life easier. Wealth could be a sign of God's grace and an indication that the hard-working wealthy were among the Elect – that they had been chosen by God for salvation.

**2** Calvinists believed money should not be 'wasted' on personal luxuries. Spending money in this way was ungodly and self-indulgent – a distraction from doing your duty to God.

In contrast, the medieval Florentine saw work simply as a means to an end and derived satisfaction from spending money on luxuries.

#### 2a) What attitudes, identified by Weber as characteristic of Calvinism, are expressed in Item B?

The attitudes characteristic of Calvinism found in Item B relate, firstly, to the idea of 'work as a calling'. Calvinists

believed God could be most effectively worshipped through both a rigorously disciplined approach to work and the denial of personal adornments, luxuries and indulgences. In this respect, any activity (such as celebrating Christmas) that interfered with work was evil because it detracted from the performance of God's will. In addition, Calvinists believed it sinful to use their wealth for personal aggrandisement (illustrated by the Puritan family's simple dress) or to waste it on frivolities (hence their plain food). The idea of 'discipline' extended into all areas of people's lives. This is demonstrated by children being expected to stand at the table to eat.

Secondly, Wesley argued that Christianity should encourage people to work hard, make money and, if possible, grow rich. However, money should not be wasted (on frivolous things); rather, it should be saved and reinvested. This was designed to show to the world that the successful businessman was one of the Elect. Finally, the ideas of both personal salvation and predestination are reflected in the item. Baxter, for example, argues that everyone has their allotted role in life ('called by God'). By accepting that place – however lowly and mundane – people are obeying God and will therefore achieve salvation.

**b) Using Weber's argument, show how these attitudes could encourage the growth of capitalism.**

Weber argued that modern capitalism developed in the West because it was compatible with Calvinist teachings in a number of ways. Firstly, Calvinists saw 'work as a calling' – a general attitude that encouraged an active life of labour and the denial of indulgence. This laid the groundwork for two attitudes that encouraged the growth of capitalism: the idea of a disciplined workforce and the importance of reinvesting profits rather than wasting them on luxuries. This was crucial because it relates to a second significant attitude – that material success was a sign of God's grace; it was an indication that the individual was one of the Elect who had been selected by God for salvation. This encouraged people to save and reinvest their wealth, thereby ensuring the continued success of their business. This led to the growth of individual businesses and hence the growth of capitalism.

Thirdly, Calvinist attitudes changed not only the behaviour of the rich and successful but also that of the poor. As Weber (1958) argued, the notion of the 'calling' transformed the traditional, easy-going, undisciplined workforce into 'sober, conscientious, and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God'. This transformation encouraged the growth of capitalism by providing a workforce who were disciplined, hard-working and responsive to the new demands placed upon them. Finally, these attitudes created a rational, calculating, efficient and highly committed approach to work, which were key conditions for the growth of capitalist forms of business and industry.

## Activity 15 (pages 33–34)

**1a) With reference to Items A and B, explain what you understand by the 'pluralisation of social life-worlds'.**

Berger argues that the 'pluralisation of social life-worlds' involves the idea that people have an increased awareness of alternative social worlds, lifestyles and belief systems. Furthermore, rapid social changes result in frequent changes in people's experiences. In other words, instead of being confronted by a single, unified and integrated world, people are increasingly living in a life-world that is fragmented, diverse and ever changing. This idea is illustrated in Item A in two ways: **1** The idea of competing religious faiths – no single religion in our society has a monopoly of faith. **2** A further characteristic of our society is a diversity of cultural backgrounds – people from different cultures bring different ideas and practices to our life-world.

Item B further illustrates this idea using the concept of 'homelessness'. This is the argument that, in the past, people were able to 'put down roots' based on particular beliefs (such as religious truths or certainties). In the contemporary world these beliefs no longer hold true in the way they once did because they have to compete against other beliefs for people's attention. Therefore, 'a world in which everything is in constant motion is a world in which certainties of any kind are hard to come by'.

**b) What sort of 'discontents' may pluralisation encourage?**

Pluralisation encourages a range of discontents relating to important life-questions, such as: What is the meaning of life? Why do social injustice and deprivation exist? Why do some people fall ill but not others? What happens after death? and so on. It may also produce 'discontents' relating to a sense of personal identity. Individuals may lose a sense of who they really are, of what their true identity is, which may lead to the loss of a sense of purpose in life.

**2 How might the pluralisation of social life-worlds undermine religion?**

The pluralisation of social life-worlds undermines religion by threatening the plausibility of religious theodicies (religious explanations of human events that give meaning to the experiences of suffering and evil). Prior to the pluralisation process, religion was able to provide largely unchallenged explanations of events. However, once pluralisation took hold, a range of alternative interpretations and explanations of events appeared. Because these explanations compete with one another, no single explanation can ever be wholly dominant (in the way religion was in the past).

Berger follows Weber in arguing that the rationalisation process weakens religion by 'demystifying' the world. The power of religion to explain events is challenged by an 'unprecedented awareness of alternative social worlds, lifestyles and belief systems'. Each individual life-world, which was unified and integrated by religion in the past, is now fragmented and diverse. This situation results in people being faced with a wide range of competing belief systems,

of which traditional forms of religion are but one small part. As a result, no single religion is able to sustain the monopoly of truth it once enjoyed. Furthermore, religion is forced to compete for plausibility against secular world views such as scientific rationalism. The power religion once held to define 'truth' is seriously undermined.

## Activity 16 (page 37)

### 1 How do Items A, B and C illustrate postmodernists' claims about the nature of religion in postmodern society?

The items illustrate three main claims: **1** The decline of dominant religious organisations that has come about through challenges to, and a consequent weakening of, religious metanarratives. Whereas in modern society religions were authoritative institutions that transmitted single versions of truth, the situation is more complicated in postmodern society. As Item A demonstrates, statements of mixed religious belief are now more common.

This undermines the authority of established religious metanarratives and institutions because it suggests there are many different ways to discover 'truth' through religion and no single religious organisation can claim a monopoly of truth.

**2** They illustrate the postmodern belief that truth is relative. Items A and B suggest it is possible to have a range of religious experiences without necessarily linking them to a single authoritative text. This, in turn, changes the nature of religion because religious beliefs have become more individualised. Rather than taking their beliefs from a single authoritative source (such as the Christian Church) people are mixing and matching beliefs from a range of sources to create a cocktail of religious ideas mixed to individual tastes. The nature of religion changes in postmodern society. It is no longer a case of religious truth being handed down to the individual from 'on high' (through a religious hierarchy); rather it is a case of individuals choosing their religious beliefs from a variety of different sources.

**3** The individualisation of religion means that religious identities are no longer shaped by the groups (such as established religious institutions) to which people belong. The personal consumption of religion means that, as in Items A and B, people are more inclined to 'shop around' for religious ideas that suit their personal tastes and sense of identity. One consequence of this is that religious institutions change to cater for this new type of demand. Item C illustrates two main ways in which they change. Firstly, religions are forced to compete in the religious market place (or shopping mall) for customers and, consequently, people are presented with a greater range of religious beliefs from which to choose. In many instances, as the items show, this results in people taking one idea from one religious source, another idea from a different source, and mixing them to produce personalised and individualised religious beliefs and truths.

### 2 How can Item D be used to criticise postmodernists' views?

The implication of postmodernists' ideas about the personalisation of religious beliefs – that they can be 'mixed to taste' – is that religious metanarratives face inevitable decline. No single religious belief system (such as Christianity or Islam) can claim a monopoly of truth and enforce such truth amongst a large population of believers. Item D, however, suggests **two** criticisms of postmodernist views: **1** That religious metanarratives – and the power of religious institutions – have not necessarily declined in significance across the world. On the contrary, Islamic fundamentalism in countries such as Pakistan appears to have increased in both scope and significance. **2** An important explanation for the rise of religious fundamentalism put forward by writers such as Bauman (1992) and Castells (1996) – that religion is a response to globalisation – is undermined by the idea that religious fundamentalism is not a new phenomenon. As Item D suggests, Islamic fundamentalism has been a feature of some societies since the 10th century, whereas globalisation and postmodernity are much more recent phenomena.

## Unit 4: Religion and social change

### Activity 17 (page 39)

#### 1 How does Item A support the traditional Marxist view of religion as a conservative force?

Traditional Marxism views religion as a conservative force in terms of **two** main ideas. **1** It allows the subject class to cope with their oppression rather than trying to change it. This is illustrated by the idea that 'People leave the church ... ready to face the problems of a new week'. In the item people are encouraged to 'take their burdens to the Lord' and are instructed that 'God will carry you through' – an idea that suggests people should adapt to their situation rather than trying to improve it.

**2** Religion legitimises the existing social order by promising that the poor will eventually be rewarded for their suffering. Marxists see this as benefiting the rich and powerful because they have the most to gain from 'keeping things as they are'. The item suggests that gospel music acts in this way by promising people a better life after death.

#### 2 How does Item B question this view?

Item B questions the idea that religion is inevitably a conservative force by suggesting that at certain times and under certain conditions religious ideas, institutions and practitioners can be a force for social change. For example, mass protests in America in the 1950s and 1960s against racial discrimination were led by preachers such as Martin Luther King and religious organisations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Council. These protests were instrumental in achieving a change in American law that made discrimination on the basis of skin colour illegal. Religion was therefore used to support the interests of an

exploited part of the subject class, Black Americans, against those of the ruling class.

### Activity 18 (page 41)

**With some reference to Items A and B, how can Christian fundamentalism be seen both as conservative and as a movement for social change?**

The ideas of Robertson in Item A show how Christian fundamentalism can be seen as conservative in its views. It attacks non-Christian ('satanic') churches, pornography, abortion and homosexuality and therefore supports the traditional moral values of Christianity. However, it can be seen as a **movement for social change** because Christian fundamentalists want to return to what they see as a society that once existed, thereby changing the more liberal values of American society today. Similarly, in Item B, George Bush demonstrates the conservative nature of Christian fundamentalism by advocating a literal interpretation of the Bible and seeing the world in religious terms. However, his hostility to welfare programmes implies substantial changes in which the role of the state is reduced. Seeing the world in religious terms and some enemies as satanic led Bush to invade Iraq which has produced a lengthy war and enormous changes in that country.

### Activity 19 (page 42)

**In what ways do the items illustrate Islamic fundamentalism?**

Item A illustrates the idea that Islamic fundamentalists see themselves as the saviours and moral guardians of their societies (Islam, for example 'was defeated by its own rulers, who ignored Divine Law'). That they must restore true religion in an immoral and decadent society which has abandoned God is illustrated by the idea of the 'West' having captured the imagination of Islamic peoples. One important area where such battles are being fought is to prevent the loss of 'our youth to Western ideology, dress, music and food'.

Item B illustrates why Islamic fundamentalists have rejected the values of Western society. Under the Shah, Westernisation was held up to Iranians as symbolising progress, but Islamic fundamentalists see Western societies as sick and immoral. They see countries such as Saudi Arabia as evidence that those who follow Islamic Law will prosper – both spiritually and materially – while secular societies will not.

In Item C America has come to symbolise everything that is the opposite of Islam. The demonstration shows the hostility to Western secularism. It illustrates the rejection of Western ideas and influences and the acceptance of an Islamic faith that is wholly opposed to 'Westoxification'.

## Unit 5: Religious organisations and movements

### Activity 20 (pages 45–46)

**With reference to Items A and B, why is Roman Catholicism defined as a church and Jehovah's Witnesses as a sect?**

Using Troeltsch's (1931) classification, Roman Catholicism can be defined as a church because **membership** is open to everyone – it requires no special attributes, qualifications or tests of suitability to be a member. Although the Catholic Church may encourage its members to be actively involved in church business, involvement and commitment are neither compulsory nor essential; it is possible, for example, for someone to consider themselves Catholic without ever attending church functions. In terms of **organisation** the Catholic Church has a complex, formal hierarchy, with the Pope as the highest form of authority, followed by cardinals, greater and minor patriarchs and so on. **Worship and ritual** are restrained in the sense that they are governed by detailed rules and regulations, with strict dress codes for the professionals involved. The **religious beliefs** put forward by Roman Catholicism are 'church-like' in that they lay claim to be legitimate and involve a monopoly of religious truth. The Roman Catholic Church's **relationship with wider society** is one of accepting the norms and values of the society in which the church operates – sometimes to the extent that church and state are closely linked.

Jehovah's Witnesses can be classified as a sect because they correspond closely to the attributes noted by Troeltsch. **Membership**, for example, is exclusive rather than inclusive – to be a Jehovah's Witness is to believe that only they have the true faith and only they can offer the path to salvation. In consequence there is a clear barrier between those who are members and those who are not. The **organisation** of sects is much less rigid than that of a church. While Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong central organisation their meetings are less formal affairs than those of a church – they have neither a professional clergy nor a complex organisational hierarchy. In this respect **worship** for sects tends to be emotional and expressive, with members able to participate spontaneously in a meeting, gathering or service (which may have few of the rules and rituals that surround church services). The **relationship with wider society** practised by sects involves separation and hostility. Jehovah's Witnesses tolerate governments but take the authority of God much more seriously. They also separate their members from the general behaviour and activities of wider society, since non-members are seen as both immoral and corrupt.

In terms of a **sense of legitimacy**, both churches and sects share a basic belief that they hold a monopoly of truth. However, in terms of the societies in which they operate, the teachings of churches are similar to widely accepted social norms and values, making their teachings appear more legitimate than those of sects, whose teachings diverge

more from wider social norms and values. One clear sect-like feature of Jehovah's Witnesses is that contact with non-members is generally discouraged except in an attempt to convert them. Sects generally demand greater **involvement and commitment** than churches. This is illustrated by the role of the Watchtower organisation. It is the supreme authority – its word is the only truth and those who take contrary views are excluded from the sect and shunned by members. Furthermore, for Jehovah's Witnesses, 'life revolves around the sect with Bible study groups, meetings, social events and door-to-door visits with the aim of gaining converts'.

## Activity 21 (pages 47–48)

**Using Items A and B, show how a cult differs from a sect.**

Cults differ from sects in a number of ways: they do not, for example, claim a monopoly of truth and are more tolerant of both the beliefs of others and the behaviour of their members. Cults are looser-knit organisations than sects (which tend to be exclusive, closed and tightly-knit). In Item A, for example, whereas 'thousands tried out the technique' of Dianetics, only 'hundreds enrolled for short courses'. Similarly, cult involvement and commitment is different from that demanded by sects, something demonstrated by Item B. Although the Raelians in Britain claim a mailing list of around 300 people, only about a dozen are committed to their beliefs. This is a further example of a significant difference – cults do not have the same kind of membership tests and strict codes of behaviour characteristic of sects and their members have greater freedom to decide what they will or will not accept. As Item A notes, an editor of the Dianetics newsletter said: 'There is no reason to take what I say as the "truth"'.

Cults have a different orientation to wider society than sects. They are more individualistic (people 'join' and 'leave' as and when they like) and cultists generally expect to live 'in the world', with their cult-related activity carried out on a part-time basis. In terms of their general belief system one significant difference is that sects usually consider God as something external to human beings, whereas cults generally see such power as residing within individuals. In Item A Dianetics claims to show people there are 'many, many roads to a higher state of existence', while in Item B Raelians use 'Sensual Meditation' to 'awaken the mind by awakening the body'. In both cases followers look within for spirituality.

## Activity 22 (pages 49–50)

**Each of the items provides an example of one of Wallis' types of NRM – world-affirming, world-accommodating, world-rejecting. Match each item to one of these 'orientations to the world'. Give reasons for your choices.**

**Item A: World-affirming: Scientology and Transcendental Meditation** fall into this category of NRM because they are generally more akin to a business than a conventional religious organisation. Members are offered techniques that promise to help them solve problems by allowing them to live more successfully in the world (Scientology) or cope more easily with the troubles they face in their daily lives (Transcendental Meditation).

**Item B: World-accommodating: Neo-Pentecostalism and Charismatic Renewal** are world-accommodating NRMs. Although their members may be highly critical of and dissatisfied with their place in society, they are encouraged to remain in that world rather than retreat from it. In this respect religious beliefs and practices help individuals reinvigorate and re-equip themselves to face and cope with their worldly problems. Unlike world-affirming NRMs, religious beliefs and practices are not designed to help people become more successful in the secular world.

**Item C: World-rejecting: ISKCON and the Children of God** fall into this category of NRM because of their criticism of and hostility to wider society. 'Hostility' here generally involves maintaining a strict physical and intellectual distance from both the secular world and other religious movements. This frequently involves a literal rejection of the world whereby NRM members live apart from the rest of society. One reason for this is that such groups see themselves as uniquely legitimate; only they know, for example, the secret of achieving spiritual salvation and this may come about in a variety of ways. ISKCON members 'spend much of their lives in ritual prayers and chants, seeking spiritual truth to escape the illusion and corruption of the outside world', whereas the Children of God 'live in a state of high expectation, awaiting the imminent return of Christ who will transform the world'.

## Activity 23 (pages 53–54)

**1 With reference to the items, how would you evaluate the claim that the New Age is:**

**a) a movement?**

Although reference is commonly made in the sociological literature to 'New Age movements' (NAMs) there is a lack of agreement over **two** ideas: firstly, how a 'movement' can be defined and, secondly, whether or not various New Age practices and beliefs, such as those illustrated in the items, are part of a wider New Age movement.

Social movements are usually defined in terms of them having at least a minimal form of organisation which, in turn, is directed towards some generally agreed goal (Sutcliffe, 2003). One problem with New Ageism, however, is that it seems to lack even the minimal coherence and organisational structure of many cults. This 'lack of structure' is compounded by the fact that few of those involved in New Age practices describe themselves in terms of a

movement. Following Sutcliffe (2003), therefore, we can note three basic problems with the notion of a New Age 'movement'.

**1** The diversity of New Age practices and beliefs (as illustrated in Items A, B and C) makes it difficult to identify any common characteristics of these groups that would suggest they are part of a 'movement' in anything but the very widest sense. **2** It is necessary to define the New Age very broadly in order to include the diverse groups associated with it. This makes the definition so inclusive, since such a wide variety of things can be seen as New Age, that the definition becomes almost meaningless. Furthermore, because the different groups involved are so diverse, there is no clear agreement about which groups and practices count as 'New Age', let alone whether they are part of the same 'movement'. **3** The New Age movement lacks the qualities generally associated with the concept of a movement. It lacks, as Sutcliffe notes, 'a leader, headquarters, a prescribed text, organisational boundaries, a public policy and common goals. Nor has it common doctrines or beliefs.'

Although the above suggests the New Age 'movement' is nothing of the sort, an alternative argument can be made if we define the concept of a 'movement' differently. The various forms of practice and belief commonly associated with New Ageism clearly draw together people who are engaged in an individualistic quest for spiritual experience. Although, as the items demonstrate, these people may be going about their quest in a variety of different ways, they are united by **two** things. **1** They are seeking some form of spiritual experience. **2** Although these experiences may be very different in practice (the 'smudging' of Item B, for example, has little in common with the spiritual healing of Item C), they share some features. All New Age practices have their own set of adherents who may meet or make contact with each other at times to share ideas, practices and experiences, and involve individuals and groups who link into wider networks of people who share similar spiritual interests.

#### b) a religion?

The question of whether the New Age can be considered a religion largely turns on how we define the concept of religion and how we apply it to the wide range of beliefs and practices identified in the items. In conventional terms, New Age spirituality falls short of being defined as a religion for a range of reasons: **1** It does not necessarily involve a belief in some kind of supernatural power – neither smudging (Item B) nor spiritual healing (Item C) includes this belief. **2** There is little evidence of collective worship; if anything New Age spirituality is highly individualistic and while beliefs may be shared among a small group or network, spiritual practices (as with smudging and healing) tend to be engaged in individually. **3** There are no overriding moral values, shared by all New Age movements, that guide people's actions – the values that guide spiritual healing,

for example, are significantly different from those guiding The Emissaries of Divine Light or other forms of New Age spirituality. **4** Although New Age beliefs and practices may serve to bring certain individuals together, their individualistic nature means they are not socially unifying; not only is there a wide range of beliefs and practices grouped under the 'New Age' banner (Item D) but within each specific area of belief there are different interpretations and practices. Item D states that: 'Followers pick and mix from this cornucopia of beliefs and practices, concocting a DIY "religion" which fits their individual requirements.'

Although it is difficult to see New Age spirituality as a 'religion' in the conventional sense of the term, two further points can usefully be noted. **1** In contemporary societies the nature of 'religion' and spirituality may be changing, becoming self-orientated rather than the other-orientation of conventional definitions. Sociologists may, therefore, be forced to revise their thinking about the way religious organisations are classified. **2** In line with this idea there is little doubt that New Age beliefs do involve some sense of spirituality and sociologists may have to rethink the way 'religion' itself is defined in society today.

#### 2 How can the items be used to support the claim that the New Age reflects postmodern society?

The items can be used to support the claim that the New Age reflects postmodern society because the examples in the items demonstrate the following characteristics of postmodernity:

**1** They demonstrate the importance of **consumerism** in the New Age. The magazine *Spirituality and Health* is published by a private company for profit, unlike parish magazines distributed free by some churches. Magazines like *Spirituality and Health* include advertisements encouraging readers to buy products and services offered by New Age retailers and practitioners. Eleni Santoro is one such practitioner offering a 'smudging' service to New York estate agents willing to pay.

**2** They show how the New Age reflects **globalisation** and the movement of people around the world. Eleni Santoro uses objects from all over the world in her 'smudging' service. Furthermore, Item D states that practices and techniques used by the New Age, such as herbalism, hypnosis and mantras, originate from different places around the globe.

**3** Some New Age practices mentioned in the items reflect a growing sense of **risk** and **uncertainty**. Item B describes how 'smudging' can be used to remove the uncertainty that might result from 'bad vibes' in a New York property. Item C shows how Ellen copes with the stresses, risks and uncertainties of city life. Item D mentions how different methods of healing, such as herbalism, reflexology and hypnosis, are used to counter a sense of risk and uncertainty.

**4** The items illustrate how the New Age involves the rejection of spiritual or religious **metanarratives**. New Agers do not want to be told that they must follow a single set

of beliefs. Instead they draw on a wide range of beliefs, techniques and traditions. Item D states that New Agers ‘pick and mix from this cornucopia of traditional beliefs and practices, concocting a DIY “religion”’.

5 The items show how the New Age helps people develop their own **identities** rather than having identities which reflect their position in society. For example, Ellen in Item C looks within herself for her sense of identity rather than basing her sense of identity on her office job.

## Unit 6: Explaining religious movements

### Activity 24 (pages 56–57)

Give a sociological explanation for

#### a) the Ghost Dance

A sociological explanation for the Ghost Dance focuses on a range of interconnected ideas:

1 The Native American Sioux developed a sense of their **social marginality** whereby they were pushed to the margins of American society. Their marginality was both literal, in the sense of being confined to a reservation, and metaphorical, in that their traditional way of life (such as hunting buffalo) was systematically destroyed and their traditional customs (such as religious ceremonies) were banned. This situation denied them prestige, occupational status, income and opportunities, and led to what Weber termed a **theodicy of disprivilege**. The Ghost Dance provided both a religious explanation for their situation (the ‘White man’ was to blame) and a solution to these problems. Ghost Dancers were the ‘chosen few’ who would live on the regenerated earth once the White race had disappeared. Belief in the Ghost Dance, therefore, functioned to give sect members a sense of self-respect and hope for the future.

2 Feelings of marginalisation can be related here to concepts of both **deprivation** (such as poverty) and **relative deprivation** – the idea that, compared to other groups (such as White men), the Sioux did not hold the position in society they deserved. The Ghost Dance religion held out the expectation that not only would the White man be destroyed by God, but the Sioux would be able to pursue their traditional way of life once more. As the chosen few, sect members would no longer be deprived.

4 The final part of the explanation focuses on the role of **social change and dislocation** – a feeling of being ‘uprooted’ – which in the case of the Sioux related to both their physical and psychological situation. The rapid social changes they experienced led to the development of an **anomic situation** – a feeling that traditional norms had broken down and that guidelines for action were no longer in place. Their marginalisation in American society, coupled with the experience of deprivation in their new situation,

led some Sioux to develop a way of coping embodied in the Ghost Dance religion.

#### b) Rastafarianism

Two key ideas in any sociological explanation of Rastafarianism are those of **economic deprivation** (the poverty experienced by Blacks in Jamaica) and **relative deprivation** (the idea that Black Jamaicans were deprived compared to Whites). Rastafarianism offered a religious solution to deprivation in two main ways: **1** Through a statement of beliefs (the ‘Rastafarian Charter’) relating to the aims of the sect. These were to fight against the ‘discrimination, ostracism and oppression of the Black people of Jamaica’ at the hands of Whites, the ‘destruction of all vestiges of White supremacy in Jamaica, thereby putting an end to economic exploitation and the social degradation of the Black people’. **2** Through a plan of action – a physical return to Africa (Ethiopia).

In addition, since the appeal of Rastafarianism was mainly to those at the very bottom of society – the Black, urban underclass – a further aspect to any sociological explanation is the idea of **social marginality**: Black people being denied, for example, the prestige, occupational status, income and opportunities they deserved in Jamaican society. Unlike the Ghost Dance, Rastafarianism does not necessarily see the destruction of an oppressor as a solution to the problems faced by the sect’s members; for Rastafarians the solution ultimately lies in a separation from White society through a return to a spiritual homeland in Ethiopia (Africa).

### Activity 25 (pages 61–62)

#### 1 Discuss Item A in terms of Wallis’ view of the development of world-rejecting NRMs.

There are two aspects to Wallis’ argument that can be applied to Item A: **1** The idea that some people feel that their lives and the wider society in which they live cannot be transformed by human effort alone. In such a situation, Wallis argued, they were receptive to movements, such as the People’s Temple, which claimed the world could be transformed by supernatural means. In other words, world-rejecting sects are based on the idea that society is so corrupt and lacking in spirituality that it cannot be reformed. However, sect members do not want just to change the world, as such; rather, they reject the world and desire the creation of a new world for themselves and their families. The People’s Temple promised this – the creation of a utopian community in which everybody worked for the common good.

**2** Wallis argues that some world-rejecting sects develop in such a way that their focus is increasingly inward, something that follows from the intensity of their rejection of wider society and, most importantly, the hostile reaction of that society to this rejection. This seems to have been the case with the People’s Temple whose members, under the

instruction of their charismatic leader, Jim Jones, committed what is perhaps the ultimate act of world-rejection – mass suicide.

## 2 Discuss Item B in terms of Wallis' view of the development of world-affirming NRMs.

For Wallis, a defining characteristic of word-affirming NRMs is that they generally accept the values and concerns of capitalist society. Shambhala illustrates this idea because its teachings can be 'expressed through existing cultural norms' – this allows 'Westerners to practise Buddhism' without the need to either renounce their cultural heritage or radically change their lifestyle. Such NRMs, therefore, affirm the importance of the high value placed on things like social status, achievement, self-confidence, personal attractiveness, happiness and self-fulfilment. The 'problem' for many people is how to achieve these things, and the answer, according to Wallis, is through a range of knowledge, techniques, practices and skills that confer on members the means to achieve personal success in their relationships and employment. This could be through increasing their IQ, or conferring feelings of spiritual growth or self-realisation. 3HO, for example, 'is a worldwide association of people dedicated to the excellence of the individual'.

This type of NRM attracts the well-educated middle classes because it keys into two ideas: **1** A search for personal peace, fulfilment or happiness that some feel are missing in their daily lives. Wallis argues that people attracted to such NRMs 'have paid a high price for their successful careers and lifestyles – a single-minded focus on work, a high level of self-control, and a repression of their inner selves'. An organisation like 3HO offers the chance to 'balance and revitalise the physical body ... and bring balance and peace to your life'.

**2** The notion of balance is important because such people are not necessarily disenchanted with the material side of their life (quite the reverse); rather, they are looking for a spiritual experience that complements their lifestyle without necessarily interfering with it. Shambhala, for example, suggests members can develop according to their 'own interests and commitments', while 3HO offers the ability to 'choose from a wealth of knowledge to find the exact techniques you are looking for to become healthy, happy and holy'.

## 3 The movements in Item B appear to be taking the route to denominationalism. What evidence is there for this statement?

Niebuhr argued that a denomination has a number of characteristics, one of which is that it is part-way between a sect and a church.

In terms of **membership**, both movements in Item B have features of a denomination in that they don't seek to recruit everyone in a society to the movement. In addition, unlike many sects, there is no membership test for entry – anyone can buy into (sometimes literally) the movement.

The fact that denominations tend to be disproportionately middle-class (as is membership of the movements in Item B) also suggests evidence of a move to denominationalism. In **organisational** terms, however, the evidence is mixed: neither of the movements has a professional clergy characteristic of a denomination, but their loose organisational hierarchy is more typical of a denomination than a church or sect. For example, both movements have a class of 'professional teachers' who provide instruction to members. Shambhala has 'group practice programmes' while 3HO suggests members can 'choose from a wealth of knowledge to find the exact techniques ... to become healthy, happy and holy'. **Worship** within a denomination has formal aspects, but with less ritual than a church and less spontaneity than in a sect. Both movements show some evidence of this. Each movement expects members to learn the techniques offered by that movement, some of which may involve participation in group activities or programmes, but there are also elements of individual choice over how and when these techniques are applied to people's lives. An important characteristic of a denomination is its general tolerance of alternative beliefs and there is evidence that this is the case with these two movements. In their **wider social relationships** both movements, in common with denominations, do not seek to reject the state or wider society.

The available evidence suggests we can conclude that both 3HO and Shambhala do appear to be taking the route to denominationalism.

## Unit 7: Secularisation

### Activity 26 (pages 66–67)

#### 1 In what ways do Items A and B support the secularisation thesis?

Wilson (1966) suggests secularisation is 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance' and Items A and B both provide evidence of this process. For example, Item A supports the idea that the **power and influence** of the Church have declined significantly since the medieval period. It suggests that in medieval times people unquestioningly believed that 'divine law governed the universe' and the Church enjoyed great power in society. It played a crucial role in obtaining forgiveness for people who broke 'God's law'. There is also evidence for a decline in power and influence in Item B, where former church buildings have been put to secular use (as a radio station, for example).

Similarly, the evidence from the two items suggests a decline in **religious beliefs**, such that people's thinking and attitudes are no longer based on religious ideas. For example, in 21st-century Britain the vast majority of the population do not explain things like a 'flight of crows' in religious terms. The fact that church buildings have been sold off for

non-religious uses also suggests a decline in the numbers **practising religion** by attending church services. If religious practice had risen we would expect to see newer and bigger churches being built. For most people churches and denominations may offer little more than ceremonial settings for the rites of passage of birth, marriage and death.

### 2a) Briefly describe the trends shown in Items C and D.

The trends in Item C suggest a substantial (nearly 50 per cent) decline in membership of Christian churches. Among non-Christian religions the trend has been for substantial increases in membership (albeit from a relatively small base). Buddhism, for example, has seen a 500 per cent increase in membership over 30 years, but this still only amounts to 50,000 members compared to the nearly 6 million members of the Christian churches.

Both the decline (for Christian churches) and the increase (for non-Christian religions) have been largely consistent over the past 30 years.

Item D shows three main trends: **1** A decline in beliefs relating to the idea of a personal God, higher power or spirit. **2** An increase in the number of people who specifically reject these ideas (such as the concept of a personal God). **3** A decline in the number of people who 'don't really know what to think'.

### b) What support do they provide for the secularisation thesis?

Both items lend support to the secularisation thesis in different ways. Item C demonstrates that over the past 30 years Christian **church membership** has significantly declined in our society. The growth in non-Christian religions over the same period is not sufficient to offset the general decline and some, although not all, of this increase can be explained by immigration to the UK. There has not, therefore, necessarily been a rapid growth in people converting to Islam; rather the increase reflects demographic features of the UK population (higher numbers of Muslims arriving in the UK and birth rates amongst this population). Similarly, Item D suggests that, over the past 50 years, there has been a significant decline in **religious thinking**, both in terms of fewer people believing in 'God' or 'supernatural forces' and an increase in those who reject the idea of 'God' or 'spirit'. The figure given for those who believe 'there is something there' may or may not be significant in this context: while it indicates some form of religious belief, we have no earlier figures with which to compare it to discover whether it has increased or decreased.

### 3 Using Hanson's concepts of the Broad Approach and the Narrow Approach, explain why Bruce (Item E) argues that the rise of New Age spirituality does not contradict the secularisation thesis.

Hanson (1997) argues there are two levels to the secularisation debate that are often confused. The **Broad Approach** asks whether religion has lost significance on the level of the social system and Bruce argues this is clearly

the case. In the 18th and 19th centuries religions such as Methodism were able to lobby for and push through wide-reaching social reforms, but this is not the case today with, for example, New Age forms of spirituality. The impact of New Age spirituality on the individual may be significant, but Bruce argues it makes little or no difference to the social system and social structure. He therefore argues that it does not contradict the secularisation thesis (or at least the broad approach to it).

The **Narrow Approach** focuses on religion at the level of individual consciousness. It is sometimes argued that, in terms of this approach, the theory of secularisation is contradicted by rising individual religious or spiritual consciousness in the New Age movement. To use Davie's (1994) characterisation, people increasingly 'believe without belonging'.

Bruce, however, suggests that even on this level the rise of New Age spirituality does not contradict the secularisation thesis. He argues that the strength of New Age religious consciousness is weak and has little impact on the individual and wider society. He contrasts the idea of the 'anxious, repressed merchant banker who learns to meditate and ... just becomes a happier and more relaxed merchant banker' with the powerful moral Methodist beliefs of previous centuries. The influence of Methodism on the individual was much greater in the past than the influence of meditation and similar practices today.

## Activity 27 (page 70)

### 1 Briefly summarise the trends shown in Item A.

Item A shows two main trends: firstly, consistently falling church attendance since 1970, and secondly, rising levels of holistic milieu activity.

### 2 New Age spirituality is very unlikely to become a majority concern. Discuss with reference to Items A and B.

In relation to Item A, the evidence that New Age spirituality is unlikely to become a majority concern is based around the relationship between falling church attendance and rising levels of holistic milieu activity. The main point here is that the large numbers of those no longer attending church are not reflected in similarly large numbers taking up New Age religious practices – wherever these ex-church attendees have gone, it isn't necessarily into New Age religious practice.

In relation to Item B, the evidence here suggests that there are clear limits to the take-up of New Age spiritual practices. Unlike conventional religious organisations (such as the Protestant or Catholic churches) where membership and participation are spread across a wide demographic (they appeal to a huge range of people of different classes, ethnic backgrounds and age groups, New Age movements attract people from a much narrower demographic. Item B notes that '80 per cent of those involved in holistic milieu

activities are women, and 83 per cent are aged over 40. Over half have attended university or college and many work in people-centred, caring jobs'. Thus, 'given the relatively small number of people with these characteristics, there is not much scope for expansion in the future'.

This suggests, therefore, that while the numbers of those taking up New Age forms of spirituality may increase over time (although even this – as in the case of Item B – is open to dispute), such spirituality is unlikely to become a majority concern in the way that conventional religion has been.

## Unit 8: Contemporary religion – a global perspective

### Activity 28 (page 74)

#### 1 What effect might the Islamic revival in Egypt have on people's identities?

One possible effect is that Islam may provide a **positive, non-Western identity** which draws on traditional culture (such as the wearing of the veil described in the item). It may also help to create an '**Islamic identity**' which crosses national boundaries. The item gives the example of a change in the way Egyptians greet and say goodbye to each other as evidence to illustrate this idea.

#### 2 How can Item B be seen as a positive and practical response?

Pentecostalism in Guatemala can be seen as a positive and practical response to the problems resulting from modernisation and globalisation in **three** main ways:

**1** It emphasises self-improvement. For example, business classes and advice on how to save are offered to congregations. **2** Self-improvement is based on self-discipline, which involves a regime of Bible study and a strict morality that bans drinking, smoking and extramarital relations. **3** The strict morality can encourage people to better themselves (for example, by starting their own business which will help to pull them out of poverty).

Thus, the response illustrated in Item B is **positive** in that Pentecostalism teaches people it is possible to haul themselves out of poverty, and **practical** in that religion gives people the tools, in the form of business advice, help, self-discipline and morality, which can lead to improvements in their lives.