

Religion Topic 3: Fundamentalism

Concepts					Theorists	Examples
Clash of Civilisations	Iterate truth	Patriarchy	Globalisation	Modernity	Giddens	Iran
Postmodernity	Monotheism	Polytheism	Project identity	Resistant identity	Bauman	Evangelical Christians
Cosmopolitanism	Fundamentalist secularism	Reflexive thinking	Uncertainty		Castells	Boko Haram
					Huntingdon	
					Bruce	

Essay Questions (20marks)

- To what extent is fundamentalism a conservative social force?
- Assess the view that the growth of fundamentalism is due to modernisation of society?
- Assess the view that the growth of fundamentalism is due to globalisation
- Examine the sociological explanations for the growth of fundamentalism
- Assess the view that religion is a major source of instability and conflict in society today.

What other topics could I use Fundamentalism in?

1. **Social change** – all fundamentalists want to change society back to traditional way of life
2. **Secularisation** – fundamentalism is increasing, despite religion decreasing as a whole
3. **Post modernity** – fundamentalism is increasing because people seek certainty in an uncertain world
4. **Globalisation** – fundamentalism is spread through the internet and interconnectedness between countries, including through migration.

Note: including fundamentalism in questions from the topics above will build your evaluation marks!

Task 1: What is fundamentalism? (Define it in your own words below)

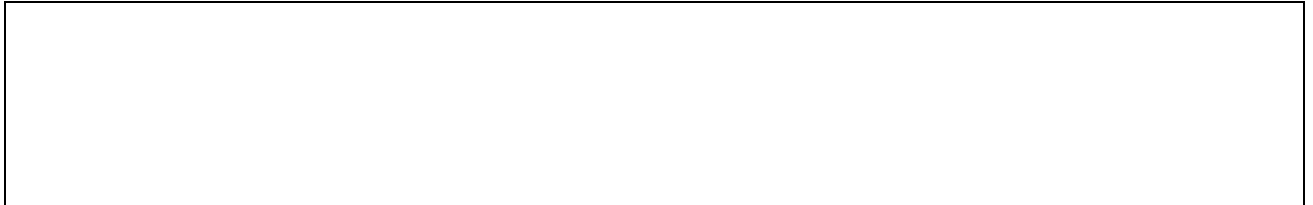
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vT4OBNWqPPU&t=65s>

1. Fundamentalism examples

Bruce argues there are two types of Fundamentalism.

- 1) Fundamentalism in the West (Europe and America) is a reaction to changes taking place from within society e.g. greater sexual & relationship freedoms and the perceived secularisation of society. Fundamentalists in the West seek to return people to the 'true' religion and traditional ways of life.

Video: Murdering abortion doctors: Christian Fundamentalism (US) as result of changes within society <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AbJ92TC2Fs>



- 2) In contrast, fundamentalism in the Third World e.g. (Africa/Middle East) is a response to changes thrust upon society from the outside, which are triggered by globalisation. Western values and ideas are imposed on populations by local dictators e.g. The Shah of Iran. Globalisation is often seen as 'Americanisation' i.e. America spreading its power and culture in these countries.

Video: Iranian Revolution: Fundamentalism as response to western intervention (change forced on society from outside) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJzuRf3Pyjk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtdMFE3gGAA> (watch from 9:15)

1. What role did the British have in Iran?
2. What was the relationship between the Shah and the Western government/important people?
3. What was the response to the Shah's attempt to impose Western ideals on Iran?
4. What type of government did Grand **Ayatollah** Khomeini introduce? (32mins) (41mins)

2. Modernity, Late Modernity and Postmodernity

Modern Society also known as Modernity 1750-1950

Main features

- Strict class, ethnic and gender norms – social structure strongly shape individuals' lives (puppets on a string....)
- People are defined by their work i.e. by what they produce
- People believe that society will progress i.e. it will continually get better
- Scientific and rational thinking replaces religious thinking
- Industrialisation, the growth of capitalism and the decline of agricultural work
- Society changes slowly
- Life is very predictable and people follow tradition – job & relationship for life. Little choice
- Institutions powerfully shape people's lives

All sociologists agree society changed in the 1970's BUT they disagree what type of society we now live in...

1. Postmodernists argue modernity is over and we now live in a fundamentally different type of society known as postmodern society; characterised by

1. Hyper reality: we understand the world through the media
2. Society is chaotic, complex and we cannot expect to understand it. Society is unknowable e.g. it's impossible to make generalisations about anything
3. Institutions have lost the power to shape our lives and we're now completely free to 'choose' our culture and identity.
4. Consumption (buying stuff) and lifestyle are the major sources of identity – people have 'pick and mix' identities. Work no longer defines us.
5. Increasing Social Fragmentation – This refers to break down of communities and the loss of certainty in most aspects of life e.g. marriage, work. This leads to extreme uncertainty.
6. People reject big meta-narratives (big stories) – We have seen meta-narratives e.g. Fascism, Communism, Science turn out to be disastrous. This means we are more sceptical about people who claim to have found the truth, especially when they try to impose this on others.

2. Late modernists argue we're in a period which is different to modernity BUT not quite postmodernity. They believe today's society is mixture of both or an in between phase.

Late-Modernists – believe that while society since the 1970's may be more diverse and uncertain, but there is still an underlying order or structure to that society.

Agents of social control (teachers, police etc), for example, are especially keen to regulate our behaviour in new ways.

1. Tradition and traditional norms governing the family, relationships etc are less important and people are individualistic
2. People actively construct their identities and see them as a project; constantly reflecting on them.
3. Knowledge is still useful, we can know society but it's highly uncertain and rapidly changing.
4. Disembedded from a local context; technology and globalisation mean we're no longer restricted by time or distance. The local and global are blurred. BUT this makes life more impersonal
4. Risk society; society is 'riskier' today due to manufactured risks such as global warming or nuclear war, and other risks such as terrorism. We're much more aware of risk in all aspects of our lives.
5. Surveillance society; our actions, habits and behaviours are observed and monitored by the government, corporations and each other; creating winners and losers.

3. Why has fundamentalism grown in recent years?

1. Fundamentalism has grown in recent years in response to changes in a late modernity resulting from globalisation (Giddens).

Fundamentalism has increased because it provides certainty in an uncertain world and it reduces the anxiety associated with making choices about one's lifestyle or identity.

Our lifestyle and identity is seen as personal choice in late modern society – we create our identity and constantly reflect on our life story. Giddens call this the narrative of the self -i.e. the story we tell ourselves about our lives.

As a result of globalisation, traditional norms and values relating to the family, relationships, politics etc are undermined. There are a far greater number of choices and options when constructing our identity/lifestyle (narrative of the self). With tradition undermined due to globalisation, there is nothing to guide us in family life, relationships, politics etc; individuals have to make a personal choice.

In late modern societies, people test their beliefs and lifestyle against rational thinking i.e. evidence based thinking. People no longer accept tradition or instructions from authority without evaluating the ideas.

However, personal freedom and constantly making choices is actually quite scary when life is so uncertain and risky e.g. Individuals may want to get married and have kids, but they're aware 40% of marriages breakdown! How does one make a decision in such a rapidly changing and risky world? People are aware of the risks associated with any decision.

Fundamentalism has grown because it removes the need to make choices and promises certainty.

Giddens argues it is possible to engage with and tolerate the new ideas we're frequently exposed to in a globalised world. He calls this world view 'Cosmopolitanism'. This refers to people being open to new ideas and lifestyles and testing them against rational and evidence based thinking. People can tolerate a diversity of lifestyles and belief systems whilst making their own decisions.

This can be linked to the growth of New Age spirituality which emphasises personal development rather than submission to authority/traditions.

Giddens contrasts a Cosmopolitanism with Fundamentalism. Fundamentalists seek faith based answers to every question and rigidly rejects alternatives to a traditional faith based society. They do not engage with evidence based thinking.

Evaluation

Positive: Bruce agrees that the main cause of fundamentalism is the perception of religious traditionalists that globalisation threatens their religious beliefs. However, Bruce argues only monotheistic religions (Islam & Christianity) become fundamentalist because they have single almighty God and single holy book which is the word God which can be used instruct/rule followers.

Polytheistic religions e.g. Hinduism, have multiple holy books and Gods therefore no single interpretation or idea can be used by fundamentalists and interpreted in an authoritative way.

Negative: Haynes (1998) disagrees with Giddens that Fundamentalism is primarily a result of globalisation. Islamic fundamentalism is often a result of poverty and exploitation by local ruling elites in Arab or African countries. Therefore, it is due to changes within a society, not change from outside it.

2. Fundamentalism has grown in response to postmodern society (Bauman)

Postmodern society is based on the ideal and happy consumer, someone who continually searches for pleasure and experiences (through buying things). There are no guides in a postmodern society i.e. tradition, class, gender, ethnicity etc no longer guide us; this is an entirely individualised process whereby we can create our own 'pick and mix' identity. Consumerism promises endless choice and endless happiness through new products and experience.

Fundamentalist religion emerges because some people are unsuccessful consumers i.e. they fear all the choices one must make about one's life and the fact that one can only trust oneself. Bauman calls it the 'agony of choice'

Fundamentalism is a safe haven for those who are afraid in a culture where every single individual must build his or her own identity and defend his or her own choices.

For Bauman, fundamentalism is a postmodern form of religion because postmodern society creates extreme forms of anxiety that require equally extreme forms of comfort. Fundamentalist religions position itself as the ultimate authority in all matters and therefore takes away the uncertainty of postmodern life.

Negative evaluation: Bauman (and all postmodernists) exaggerate the extent to which we're free from social structures and traditions. Many people are still guided by tradition, class, gender and ethnicity. We're not as free or individualised as Bauman suggests.

3. Castell agrees we're in a postmodern society and there are two responses to. 1) Resistance identity: A defensive reaction against those who feel threatened and retreat to fundamentalism. 2) Project identity: the response of those who are forward looking, who form new identities by joining social movements e.g. feminism.

Secular Fundamentalism

Secular Fundamentalism: attempts to eliminate the role of religion in public life. It attempts to assert a single cultural identity/way of life on a diverse modern world. It aggressively asserts a world view based on science, rationality (evidence based thinking) and democracy.

Davie argues both religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism are responses to modernity and globalisation. Changes in modern society have caused both types of fundamentalism. She splits modernity into two periods.

Phase 1 gave rise to religious fundamentalism: 1750-1950: This period began with a movement in Europe called the Enlightenment. This refers to a period of rapid scientific, technological, medical and philosophical advances. People believed that human progress based on science and reason was inevitable. This 'Enlightenment world view' dominated European thought and helped secularise all aspects of social life attacking and undermining religious certainties. Religious fundamentalism was reaction to this secularisation process.



Phase 2 gave rise to secular fundamentalism: Since the 1970's, following environmental and technological disasters e.g. global warming and nuclear weapons, and political crises e.g. wars, people have begun to question the Enlightenment belief in progress based on science and rationality. As a result, beliefs in secularisation and the 'Enlightenment world view' have come under attack. Uncertainty and pessimism were replacing a belief in the certainty of progress.



Perceived religious challenges to secularisation and a secular way of life have provoked a secular fundamentalist response e.g. France's response to Muslim women. In an uncertain and rapidly globalising world, secular fundamentalists aggressively seek to reassert the 'truth' and certainty of science and secularisation.

Davies argues both religious and secular fundamentalism is a response to a rapidly changing globalised world. Both seek truth and certainty in response to the uncertainty created in today's society.

Example: 2014 France's response to Muslim women wearing the hijab (veil): Women were banned from wearing the veil in public places or wearing the Burkhini at beaches. The result is that significant numbers of Muslim women no longer work and are effectively housebound because they refuse to remove their veil in public places.

Evaluation

- Ansell (2000) views secular fundamentalism as a form of cultural racism – it uses the language of freedom and universal rights. But in reality it is about preserving a cultural identity and 'our' way of life, and it legitimates (justifies) the exclusion of minorities.
- Hervieu-Leger (2000) argues fundamentalism is a response to cultural amnesia – in a postmodern world defined by choice, younger generations are not following religious and cultural traditions of their parents. Fundamentalists seek to return to their historic religious traditions.
- This theory does not apply to the US. Atheists or people supporting secularisation can face significant opposition and discrimination from religious believers e.g. all Presidential candidates have to be declare their religious beliefs.

Evaluate the view that fundamentalism is a response to modern society (20mark)

<p>Intro</p> <p>Define fundamentalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative Sacred text • Us and the mentality • Aggressive reaction • Use of technology • Patriarchy 	
<p>Point – Fundamentalism occurs when those who hold traditional orthodox beliefs and values are threatened by modernity</p>	
<p>Explanation</p> <p>Giddens Globalisation Cosmopolitanism Reflexive thinking Late modernity</p>	
<p>Example</p> <p>Iranian Revolution</p>	
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Haynes (1998) disagrees that Fundamentalism is primarily a result of globalisation. Islamic fundamentalism is often a result of poverty and exploitation by local ruling elites in countries. Therefore, it is due to change within a society not change outside it.</p>
<p>Point – Some people see the growth of fundamentalism as a response to an increasingly superficial postmodernist society. The growth of the ‘spiritual shopper’ can lead to individuals returning to traditional truths found in holy texts like the Bible or Quran.</p>	
<p>Explanation</p> <p>Bauman Uncertainty Agony of choice Choice Freedom Castells Resistance identity</p>	
<p>Example</p> <p>US Evangelicals</p>	

Evaluation	However, few people in postmodern societies which have been the most effected by postmodernity engage in fundamentalism so it is unlikely this is the main cause.
Point – Bruce argues there are two types of religious fundamentalism and we cannot groups all types of religious fundamentalism together.	
Cultural defence Bruce Bruce: Two types of fundamentalism	
Point - Evidence that fundamentalism is not directly a response to modernisation is that fundamentalism only exists in monotheistic religions.	
Explanation 5. Monotheism 6. Polytheism 7. Single Authoritative texts 8. Hinduism	
Point – Huntingdon argues a clash of civilisation defines has defined global conflict in recent years. Religion is the most important source of conflict in today’s society. The modern world means civilisations increasingly come into conflict with one another.	
Explanation 9. Religious differences 10. Nation States 11. Us and them relationships 12. Progress & Barbarism	
Evaluation Norris Democracy Muslim world	