

AQA A LEVEL
SOCIOLOGY

tutor2u 

ESSAYS (20 MARKERS)

Beliefs in Society



BELIEFS IN SOCIETY

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- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that belief in science is a religion. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the main function of religion is to promote social cohesion. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion prevents social change. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and elsewhere, evaluate the view that the main reason for the decline in church attendance is the growth of new religious movements. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that racism is the main reason why minority ethnic groups are more religious. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion is less significant in people's lives than science, today. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion no longer acts as a "shared sacred canopy" in the world today. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion today is more about believing than belonging. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that working-class individuals are more religious than middle-class individuals. (20 marks)
- Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the main impact of globalisation on beliefs in society has been the growth of religious fundamentalism. (20 marks)

ITEM J

Most people would argue that religion and science are completely different. Religious belief depends on faith while scientific knowledge depends on evidence.

However, some sociologists argue that the two are more similar than it might appear, with some arguing that both are just big stories that help people make sense of a complex world.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that belief in science is a religion. (20 marks)

In order to conclude whether belief in science is a religion, it is important to define both science and religion. Neither definition is straightforward. As Item J suggests, most would consider these two very different belief systems, but not all sociologists agree.

Three different definitions for religion have been suggested: substantive, functional and social constructionist. The substantive definition (as used by Weber in 1905) assumes a belief in a supernatural power that cannot be explained by science. This definition of religion is set up in direct opposition to science and therefore belief in science cannot be a religion. However, a functional definition of religion (as used by Durkheim and Parsons) focuses on its social function of encouraging social cohesion and a collective conscience. It might be possible for belief in science to perform those functions. Finally, a social constructionist definition of religion suggests that there is no set of criteria by which religion can be defined: instead there are social processes that lead to some beliefs and organisations being deemed religious and others not. Therefore, what is deemed a religion will differ from society to society and time to time. Again, we shall explore whether there are situations when science might be defined in such a way.

Again, not everyone agrees how to define science. However, when sociologists write about science, they generally refer to a value-free, objective, unbiased and rigorous academic discipline which seeks empirical evidence and to test facts, usually via experimentation. As mentioned in Item J, this seems very different from religion. In science, knowledge is based on evidence, whereas in religion it is based on faith. The biblical story of Doubting Thomas reflects this, where Thomas is criticised for requiring proof of the resurrection before he'll believe, whereas others are "blessed" who have

A clear, brief introduction which "decodes" the question, references the item and gives some indication of how the answer will develop.

With this sort of question, it is logical, at an early stage, to attempt to define both religion and science and be able to refer back to these definitions. Where this is straightforward it can be done in the introduction, but sociological definitions are often anything but!

Although in some ways an introductory kind of a paragraph this still has a "sociology sandwich" structure, with explanations and evaluation in the middle and a clear link back at the end.

A similar approach is taken with science.

Good to refer to the item from time to time.

Remember to avoid focusing too rigidly on Christianity. This is a good illustration, but the

not seen proof but still believe. However, most people have not seen the proof of scientific knowledge and are instead prepared to accept the word of professional scientists. Many of those with religious faith are prepared to accept the word of those who do claim to have had direct religious experiences. So, while on the face of it, the difference between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge seems enormous, there are those who suggest it is closer than it might first appear. This often talked about in terms of belief systems.

Karl Popper argued that science is an open belief system and religion is a closed belief system. Religion has traditionally claimed a monopoly on the truth: criticism or challenge is sacrilege or blasphemy. Religious doctrines are set in stone and cannot be challenged or added to, because to do so is to question the word of God. However, science is constantly opening itself up to challenge. Popper describes this as falsification. Scientists try and prove their theories wrong and, if they can't, they remain the best explanation available. Religion never tries to disprove its beliefs: nor does it generally even try to prove them: people should accept them through blind faith. However, Thomas Kuhn has challenged this view. He argues that science actually operates in a paradigm: a set of assumptions about the world and about the way science is done. If scientists challenge current theories in a way that challenges the paradigm, then it will almost certainly be rejected as radical science, unless it is convincing enough to force a paradigm shift. This suggests science is not as open a belief system as Popper claims: challenges that undermine the paradigm will be rejected. At the same time religion does occasionally see major shifts in doctrine or belief, not unlike a paradigm shift in science. On this basis it is possible that science and religion are more alike than they first appear.

Other suggested differences between religion and science include the idea that science is more independent and that religion is close to the state, but this seems an outdated view. Although the Church of England is still the official church of the UK, generally in western liberal democracies there is no longer a close link between church and state. However, there are government scientists who have significant influence over laws relating to health issues, for instance. In this sense, the apparent objectivity of science makes it a powerful ideology which perhaps better fits the functional definition of religion than some contemporary religious beliefs do.

answer could be improved by including a non-Christian example too.

The paragraph links back to the question in the end, as before, but there is also a link forward, to the next paragraph.

The Popper and Kuhn paragraph is a pretty classic PEEEL paragraph/ sociology sandwich. This is the meatiest part of the essay really.

This paragraph feels a little lighter after the previous one, as the idea of science being independent of government has not been established earlier in the essay. However, the point is clear and it's a good way to link both science and religion to ideology.

Postmodernists like Lyotard would suggest that both science and religion are simply metanarratives: ideas that seek to explain everything. While he would argue that these were a key feature of modernity, in a postmodern society both these metanarratives are increasingly rejected by people who seek ideas that help them in a given society, rather than big stories that apply to everything. While many criticise this view, it is possible that belief in religion and belief in science are very similar in that both are rapidly declining in contemporary society.

Postmodernism often finds its way into conclusions! It fits logically here and the question is directly addressed at the end.

Although there is no need to write "in conclusion" it's important to make it clear to the reader that the essay has been concluded.

[809 words]

*Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20***

This is a top mark band essay. It is quite a difficult question that could easily find itself being answered in a rather generalised and non-sociological way. Avoid answering a question like this as an opinion piece: make sure there are real thinkers and sociologists in there, not just an argument (however sound).

The argument flows well here, with good, complete paragraphs that rack up plenty of marks in all assessment objectives. There is more that could be said, but for 20 marks it is also important to be selective and know what not to include too.

ITEM J

Functionalist sociologists see religion as having a number of important functions for individuals and for society. They particularly argue that religion can promote social cohesion.

Other sociologists, including Marxists and feminists, suggest that religion has other important, and less positive, functions.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the main function of religion is to promote social cohesion. (20 marks)

Functionalist sociologists, like Durkheim and Parsons, argue that religion's main function in society is to promote social cohesion and, through this, social stability. This is religion being a conservative force in society, in a positive way: keeping society stable, strong and coherent. Other sociologists like Marxists and feminists also see religion as a conservative force although they see this as a negative feature, and would argue that this is done in different ways from promoting social cohesion. Finally, some sociologists do not think that religion necessarily performs a conservative role at all, and can be an engine of social change. This, at times, can disrupt social cohesion rather than promote it. It is also clear that the roles religion plays in society have changed as society itself has changed.

As mentioned in Item J, functionalists argue that religion has a number of important functions for society and for individuals. A key one is promoting social cohesion. When Durkheim studied the Arunta tribe's religious beliefs he identified four key functions: discipline, cohesion, vitalising and euphoric. Religion performed the role of cohesion by bringing the community together through collective worship, reaffirming and reinforcing their social bonds. But the other functions helped social cohesion too: religion encouraging discipline ensures that people are self-disciplined and do not simply follow their own selfish desires. People acting selfishly undermine the cohesion of society. The vitalising function was ensuring that traditions are passed down the generations. Durkheim saw tradition as also helping social cohesion. The euphoric function was the idea that people needed to understand that they were a small part of something much bigger to prevent them from getting frustrated. Again, this prevents anti-social behaviour and, as such, promotes social cohesion. Durkheim argues that religion promotes social cohesion because really

There is a lot in this introduction, as there is potentially a lot to be discussed in this essay. This does decode the question but mostly contains signposts as to where the essay is going. In a 20-mark question this could be done more efficiently, with a shorter introduction and good linking sentences at the end and beginning of paragraphs.

Quick reference to the Item – always good.

Not too much time spent describing Durkheim's theory. Can be a good source of AO1, but in a 20-marker with lots to say, best to just demonstrate understanding.

This paragraph keeps linking back to the question so it never loses focus.

people are worshipping society itself. Parsons agrees with Durkheim and points out how messages like the 10 Commandments are really the source of the value consensus in society. However, there are a number of criticisms of Durkheim's study, some suggesting that he misunderstood his subject from anthropological and theological perspectives but, more pertinently, that it is outdated. It presupposes a society where everyone shares the same religion. It is much more difficult to argue that religion promotes social cohesion in a society characterised by religious pluralism and indeed where many people have no religion at all. In such a society, it seems that religion is a source of division rather than cohesion.

Bellah suggests that this problem is overcome by what he calls civil religion. He gives the example of the USA which is characterised by religious pluralism. In order for religion to still carry out the function of promoting social cohesion there is a civil religion built around America itself. Phrases like God Bless America are inherently religious, but they can be shared by people from different churches, denominations and religions who do not necessarily believe in the same God. People do not have to have the same belief in what happens after we die to take some sort of comfort from the idea that someone "died for their country". This is based on a functional definition of religion rather than a substantive one: it does not necessarily depend on faith in a supernatural deity.

Marxists and feminists argue that religion does indeed act as a conservative force, but not through promoting social cohesion but by legitimising oppression and inequality and dulling the senses of the oppressed. Marx called religion an "opiate of the masses", Lenin wrote of "spiritual gin" and "mystical fog". De Beauvoir writes about how women are encouraged to be submissive and meek and to perform subordinate roles in society in order to be rewarded in heaven. From these perspectives, while religion manages to inhibit social change, it does not do this by establishing consensus and promoting cohesion: it does it through being an ideological weapon, legitimising capitalism and/or patriarchy in the interests of powerful groups in society.

However, other sociologists have pointed out that religion can in fact act as an engine of social change. While this change can be positive (driving the civil rights movement in the USA, for instance) or arguably negative (the rise of fundamentalist movements and their impact on various

Comparisons and similarities a good source of analysis – also helps pack in knowledge of a range of sources in an efficient way.

Sound evaluation.

Evaluative link back to the question

This paragraph directly relates to the preceding one (good linking). This helps the essay flow as a coherent argument.

This is a long essay, so decision taken to consider Marxism and feminism together and keep it well-focused on the question, despite the temptation to go into greater depth about specific Marxist or feminist theories.

Again an awful lot is packed into one paragraph. This essay is not focused on social change, so it would be drifting to go into detail about Gramsci and

societies, such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979) the immediate impact is certainly not social cohesion. In these situations, religion plays a part in conflict. Indeed, Huntington has suggested that religion and culture are the main factors in global conflict today, in what he terms a “clash of civilisations”. Ultimately the result of religion driving social change might be a more cohesive society (an end to Jim Crow laws and segregation in the USA, for instance) but it would be hard to argue, in those circumstances, that cohesion was the main function.

In contemporary society, characterised by pluralism, globalisation and – in the west at least – secularisation, the idea that religion’s main function is to promote social cohesion is not convincing. Religion today is much more a source of identity and difference than it is a source of consensus, and postmodernist theories lead us to re-evaluate the functions of religion in a postmodern world.

[856 words]

Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20**

This is a top mark band essay. It demonstrates a strong evaluative argument in response to the question and uses supporting sociological evidence well. It manages to pack knowledge and understanding of a broad tranche of relevant sociological material into a reasonably punchy, efficient essay. It manages to be selective, avoiding lengthy descriptive passages or loss of focus.

Sociological theory is clearly communicated and understood and there is a good range of knowledge which has been analysed in response to the demands of the question. A number of sociological studies and a wide range of key terminology is used.

Maduro and Bruce, etc. This paragraph demonstrates good understanding and remains fully-focused on the question.

A neat conclusion that refreshingly comes down on one side of the argument. (This is not necessary, but they are generally easier to write than an equivocating conclusion).

ITEM J

It is often argued by sociologists that religion acts as a conservative force and prevents social change. This comes from doctrines or scriptures themselves, which often seek to justify the existing social structure (such as Christian teachings on family structures or on receiving rewards in heaven, or Hindu ideas about reincarnation).

In many societies, religious leaders are also part of the powerful and elite groups in society.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion prevents social change. (20 marks)

A lot of traditional sociological material on religion is focused on the idea that religion is a conservative force: something that prevents social change. This is either presented in a positive way (functionalism) or a negative way (Marxism and feminism). However, there are other sociologists such as Weber, and also neo-Marxists like Gramsci, who argue that religion can be an engine of social change.

Functionalist sociologists argue that religion helps maintain the value consensus, therefore keeping society cohesive and stable. This prevents social change, which can be destabilising and disruptive. Durkheim considers how religion brings people together and passes down traditions; Parsons focuses on religious rules that form part of the value consensus (such as the 10 commandments) while Malinowski points out religion's psychological functions, that helps individuals cope with what life throws at them. However, many of these ideas do assume a situation where most people believe in the same religion (and indeed believe in a religion at all) which has led some sociologists to question whether religion still performs this role.

However, traditional Marxists and feminists agree with functionalists that religion prevents social change, they just see this as being a negative function of religion rather than a positive one. Marx called religion "the opiate of the masses" meaning it numbed their awareness of their oppression by the ruling class. As mentioned in Item J, religious teachings are full of messages that encourage people to meekly accept their lot on Earth, in preparation for rewards in heaven (what Weber called a theodicy of disprivilege). Again, this might be an outdated idea, as it presupposes that religious organisations are close to the powerful groups in society (the state or elite groups) and work in their interests.

A clear introduction that decodes the question and gives useful signposts to how the answer will develop, in a brief and efficient way. It almost serves as an essay plan for the candidate.

A clear explanation of functionalist views in relation to religion and social change. In order to try and keep the answer brief, Durkheim, Parsons and Malinowski are all taken together with minimal exposition and clear focus.

Some clear evaluation, could be more focused on the question.

The argument is put across very clearly: a clear theoretical framework.

Direct reference made to the Item.

However, in a society characterised by religious pluralism, it is likely that some religious organisations take a more oppositionist position. Many feminists echo traditional Marxist ideas, pointing to the male-dominance of religious organisations and the subservient role that women are afforded in religion and are encouraged to perform in society. However, religious feminists like Linda Woodhead argue that religion does not have to perform this role on behalf of the patriarchy, and gives examples of religion helping female independence and challenging patriarchy. For example, Woodhead suggests that the veil, used by some Muslim women, has allowed them to enter society and obtain employment in the face of highly patriarchal cultures in some Middle-Eastern countries. However, El Sadaawi disagrees, describing the veil as a 'tool to oppress women'.

In a major challenge to the idea that religion always prevents social change, Weber put forward the argument that religion – specifically Calvinism, a form of protestant Christianity – helped create capitalism. For Weber this was an unintended consequence of some aspects of Calvinist beliefs. Calvinists believed that it was already predestined who would go to heaven or hell. Out of salvation panic, they looked for signs that they were among the elect, and took success (business or trading success) as such a sign. However, Calvinists also believed in ascetism (self-denial) and so, rather than use their success to purchase luxury items, they reinvested it into their businesses: the origins of capitalist economics. However, there are plenty of criticisms of Weber's view. Even he acknowledged that it was not the only factor that led to capitalism, but Eisenstadt pointed to the existence of capitalism in places where there was no Calvinism (and lack of capitalism in places where Calvinists flourished) while Tawney has suggested that it was the other way round: capitalism created Calvinism. This leads to a more traditional Marxist concept, where a new religious belief is developed in order to legitimise a new economic system.

However, neo-Marxists also acknowledge that religion has helped to drive social change. Engels wrote about religion having a dual character – it could act as an opiate, or it could provide what Bloch calls the "principle of hope". Hinduism for instance, can be a conservative force in Indian society, justifying the maintenance of the oppressive caste system, and yet also drove Gandhi's successful challenge to the British empire and is seen as a factor in India's rapid economic growth today, according to Nanda. Gramsci

A little evaluation.

Marxism and feminism have been taken together to try and keep the essay tight, but it could have been unpacked into two paragraphs.

Arguably, the essay could have managed without this debate, but it is important to ensure there is sociological content and not JUST argument.

Weber's theory is explained reasonably briefly.

Some good analysis.

Some good explicit evaluation.

Clever linking of the evaluation back to previous points, maintains the flow of the essay.

A useful paragraph on neo-Marxism. Again am awful lot packed in, but it maintains its clarity and readability.

Good examples.

argues that religious leaders can act as what he calls organic intellectuals and help build an alternative common sense to that pushed by ruling class. He calls this counter-hegemony. A good example comes from Maduro and his work on liberation theology. The Catholic Church in El Salvador worked alongside revolutionaries to challenge the military government and expose their use of death squads and torture. However, it is worth noting that Pope John Paul II condemned liberation theology, accusing it of Marxism. Furthermore, there is debate about how central religion really was to some of the examples often cited (e.g. the US Civil Rights movement which was multi-faith and largely secular, despite the religious rhetoric and leadership of Rev. Martin Luther King). Where religious societies change, it is inevitable that religion will play a part, but it might not actually be an engine of the change in the way Gramsci suggested.

Again, if the essay is a little too long (and it might be) perhaps it could lose one or two examples, although the examples often help with the analysis as they illustrate a particular point.

Clear evaluation.

For religion to prevent social change or cause it, it must be socially significant. Secularisation theorists would therefore challenge the whole premise of this debate, suggesting religion is no longer especially relevant, whether as a force of conservatism or of reform. However, this might be a Eurocentric view, disregarding the dominant role of religion in many other parts of the world. From the evidence, we can see that that role is often one which prevents social change, but it also has the capacity to drive it forward

A good conclusion which keeps racking up more marks as it includes relevant evaluation and analysis in it rather than just summing up the discussion.

[930 words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark band 17-20**

This is a top mark band essay. It is rather too long, although it does try and pack an awful lot in, in as efficient a way as possible and it's better to have too much than too little (time constraints allowing).

It is concept rich. If you imagine an examiner underlining all the relevant sociological concepts as they mark the essay, an awful lot of the essay would be underlined: that's a good sign. There is also a very clear theoretical framework: the different perspectives are handled carefully and accurately.

It is evaluative and analytical and reaches a sound conclusion.

ITEM J

Religious organisations are often divided up into churches, sects, denominations and cults. Different religious organisations are often very different from one another.

A study of belief in Kendal found church congregations were shrinking while more and more people were becoming interested in New Age types of groups.

Applying material from Item J and elsewhere, evaluate the view that the main reason for the decline in church attendance is the growth of new religious movements. (20 marks)

There is plenty of evidence that suggests that church attendance is falling in the UK. These come from sources such as the English Church Census that reveals that 50% of the population regularly attended church in the 1850s, compared with 7.5% in 2000. However, some new religious movements (NRMs) are on the rise. NRMs can refer to sects, cults or New Age movements (NAMs). The rise of these new forms of religious organisation might be one factor behind the fall in church attendance, although sociologists disagree about the extent to which this is the case.

Terms used in this essay, such as church, sect, denomination, cult and NAM are based on a number of typologies. The first three are based on Troeltsch's typology. For Troeltsch, a church is a large, mainstream, conservative organisation that people are generally born into rather than choosing. They claim a monopoly over the truth and are often closely associated with the government or the powerful (like the Church of England in the UK or the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland). For the purposes of sociological discussion, organisations in other religions can also be characterised in the same way (Islam in a predominantly Islamic country fits most of the characteristics of Troeltsch's definition of a church). By this definition then it is undoubtedly the case that the formation of sects directly affects church attendance. Sects are formed by a schism with the church: a group breaks away and forms its own new religious movement. Over time, if a sect survives, it is likely to transform into a denomination (such as the Methodists or the Baptists) and ultimately we might include their congregations in our record of church attendance. However, this does not really explain the contemporary decline in church attendance, as schisms

A clear introduction which raises the issues to be explored in the essay and introduces some key concepts.

It is important to consider the various terms used in the essay by considering typologies, etc. NRMs in the title is very broad, so can't just write about NAMs.

Good attempt to use evaluation

leading to the formation of sects and denominations are not just a feature of contemporary religion. Many contemporary denominations began as sects in the so-called “golden age of religion”.

Heelas and Woodhead conducted research in the form of a case study of Kendal, exploring religion in the town. They developed their own typology, referring to the congregational domain and the holistic milieu. The former would include churches, chapels, etc. (religious organisations where a congregation assembled for regular collective worship) while the latter was the wide range of cults and NAMs that had developed in the town. They included anything that involved spiritual belief of some description, so some things that we would not necessarily all think of as religious organisations (e.g. yoga classes). They found that the congregational domain was declining, while an increasing number of people were involved with other sorts of spiritual organisations. Stark and Bainbridge suggest this is because people approach religious organisations like customers in the marketplace. The holistic milieu (which they divide into audience cults, client cults and cult movements) are better at attracting customers than traditional churches. In a society where people are not routinely socialised into a religion and instead can choose, they will often choose those that provide a useful service and demand very little commitment. People can buy a self-help book or attend a course of crystal-healing therapy, without having to buy into a whole belief-system. However, some sociologists would question whether such organisations should be considered religious at all.

Secularisation theorists would dispute that church attendance has declined as a result of the popularity of other religious organisations, and instead argue that religion itself is becoming increasingly irrelevant in contemporary society. Sociologists like Wilson, Crockett and Bruce argue that social change means there is no longer a shared sacred canopy; pluralism and a technological worldview and a decline in religious socialisation means that people no longer find religious claims plausible, nor look to religion to solve their problems. While some critics of the theory suggest religion is changing rather than declining, with people being more private about their religion (what Grace Davie calls believing without belonging) this still suggests that church attendance is falling for reasons other than the popularity of new

to keep even this overview of definitions clearly linked to the question.

Heelas and Woodhead introduced but not too descriptive: keeps focused on the question.

Concept-rich and lots of sociological content.

Evaluative and a good chain of reasoning.

The other side of the argument introduced effectively.

Lots of relevant sociological ideas packed in in an efficient but readable way.

religions. However, others criticise secularisation theory for being Eurocentric: Berger points out that religion is growing, globally, despite its apparent decline in Europe.

Effective links between paragraphs.

While the main cause of Berger's observation is the different demographic trends in the largely-secular west compared with the more-religious developing world, it is also due to something he calls resacrilisation. This fits in with postmodern ideas about people's ability to pick and mix their own religious beliefs from the plethora of religious ideas that are accessible in a globalised society. In this sense, people embracing new religious ideas, possibly in a privatised rather than a collective way, is indeed a key factor in the decline of church attendance. However, the evidence suggests that other factors, such as secularisation, are also of fundamental importance.

A useful, detailed conclusion that does introduce some new ideas but also sums up the discussion and directly addresses the question.

[800 words]

*Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20***

This is a top mark band essay. It is quite a tricky question, combining elements of discussions around religious organisations and the secularisation debate and this response finds a good balance between the two areas of the topic, while maintaining focus on the question. There are problems with terminology that have to be addressed in the question, and yet it is important not to use too much time on definitions and typologies and neglect to address the full scope of the question. This is handled well here.

The answer is concept rich and detailed, while remaining within a realistic word count for a 20-mark essay.

ITEM J

Minority ethnic groups in the UK are much more likely to be religious than their white British compatriots.

There are many possible reasons for this, but one is a response to the experience of racism in society. However, other factors, such as levels of religiosity in countries of origin, are also likely to be influential.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that racism is the main reason why minority ethnic groups are more religious. (20 marks)

There is plenty of evidence that minority-ethnic individuals are more religious than white British people in the UK. Although Modood (1997) found some evidence of declining religiosity among Asian men, many minority-ethnic individuals know more about their religion than their parents. Sociologists suggest a number of explanations for these trends.

A clear introduction which outlines the key debate.

One explanation is certainly a response to experiences of racism in society and in religious organisations, as suggested in Item J. Steve Bruce (2002) writes about the way minority-ethnic individuals might use religion as a form of cultural defence. Bruce found that immigrant communities used religion to defend themselves from the hostility of the majority: religious organisations could provide a safe community away from racism. He uses the example of African Caribbean immigrants in the post-war years who were predominantly Christian. In the face of racial prejudice from those who shared the same religious beliefs as them, in traditional churches, they joined or set up their own black churches (e.g. the 7 Day Adventists). In UK society today, one trend is that young Muslims are becoming more religious, and one explanation for that could be cultural defence in the face of increasing Islamophobia in UK society.

The “main reason” from the question is addressed first. This is a logical structure.

Good use of concepts and examples.

Bruce does present an alternative explanation – cultural transition – which is less focused on the experience of racism. He argued that people migrating to a new community make use of religious communities to make that transition easier and to be surrounded by things that are

Contemporary examples are always useful.

Continuing with Bruce, but moving onto other explanations.

familiar. So new communities built mosques, gurdwaras, etc, in order to better deal with the unfamiliar nature of a new society. If this theory were correct, one might expect second and third generation members of such groups to be less religious than their parents and grandparents. While there is evidence of that in some migrant communities, as previously mentioned the opposite is true with Muslims. Johal (1998) found that religion was becoming more important as a source of identity in a multi-faith society. British Pakistanis and Bengalis are likely to identify Muslim as their principle identity (as opposed to British, Pakistani, Bengali, Asian, etc.) One explanation for this is the need to assert an identity in reaction to hostility to that identity from the majority population.

Some good explicit evaluation.

Links back to the question.

However, there are other reasons why minority-ethnic individuals are more religious than white British individuals. First, as mentioned in Item J, their country of origin is often more religious than the UK, therefore new migrants are likely to have higher levels of religiosity, and subsequent generations might see religiosity as an important cultural connection to their country of origin and to family and friends who still live there. New migrants from Eastern Europe are also more likely to be religious than the native population. Although there are some Polish Catholic churches in the UK, in most places Eastern European catholics would join the existing British catholic congregation (and have given them a significant boost in some parishes). There may be elements of cultural transition in this process, but also simply maintained religiosity. In these cases, religion is not necessarily such a strong element of identity as it is for Muslims and Sikhs, for instance.

Other reasons introduced in new paragraph with a useful reference back to the Item.

Again, good use of contemporary example.

This point could potentially be developed further.

It is important to note that what is measured here is primarily religiosity rather than religious belief. Minority-ethnic individuals are more likely to attend religious ceremonies and practice their religion than white British people, but that does not necessarily mean they are more religious. There could be “believing without belonging” in the white British population, with people choosing to keep their religion private and perhaps worshipping vicariously through others (as Grave Davie suggests). There may be “belonging without believing” in minority-ethnic groups where people attend religious ceremonies or identify as being religious for other reasons. There may be social and economic functions of religious practice in some minority-ethnic groups, because religious observance is the norm.

This paragraph is a little different in that it challenges the whole premise of the question. However, the structure of the paragraph is such that it manages to maintain focus and it does raise some interesting issues.

There are high levels of expectation that people will pursue their religion. Furthermore, for some a religious identity might be more of a symbol of ethnicity than faith. People might really be culturally Muslim or ethnically Jewish, rather than necessarily be believers, but still see it as a key identity. As such, data that shows that minority-ethnic individuals practice religion or identify with their religion more than white British individuals does not necessarily mean that they are more religious.

In conclusion, it is clear that the experience of racism has played a part, and continues to do so, in the high levels of religiosity among minority-ethnic individuals. However, it is less clear that it is the main reason, as a number of other important factors are involved, such as cultural transition and higher levels of religiosity in countries of origin.

A brief but effective conclusion which sums up the debate and directly addresses the question.

[774 words]

Examiner comments: **Mark band 25–30**

This is a top mark band essay. It demonstrates a strong evaluative argument in response to the question and uses supporting sociological evidence well. It makes links to other areas of the specification, such as families and households, and makes direct reference to Item J.

Sociological theory is clearly communicated and understood and there is a good range of knowledge which has been analysed in response to the demands of the question. A number of sociological studies and a wide range of key terminology is used.

ITEM J

Religion still plays an important part in many people's lives.

However, the development of modern society has been accompanied by a growth in scientific thought. Increasingly people look to scientific and reasoned explanations, based on evidence, rather than relying on faith.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion is less significant in people's lives than science, today. (20 marks)

Secularisation theorists like Brian Wilson suggest that society today is becoming ever less religious and instead people have what Bruce calls a technological world view. We understand the world through scientific knowledge rather than faith. However, not all sociologists agree that this is the nature of beliefs in society today.

Item J points out that there has been a growth in scientific thought and that people increasingly seek scientific explanations for phenomena, based on evidence and reason. If this is the case, it is not an especially recent process: Weber wrote about a process of rationalisation occurring since the Enlightenment, in which the world ceased to be an enchanted garden beneath a sacred canopy, and instead began to be understood in terms of modern science. Steve Bruce applies this idea to contemporary society when he talks about people having a technological worldview. He points out that when there is a plane crash, people look to a mechanical fault rather than evil spirits. However, the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in 2014 has led to some pretty outlandish and unscientific theories (9% of CNN viewers thought it likely it had been abducted by beings from another dimension) so where science is unable to provide an answer, people often fill the gap with supernatural explanations, even today.

One reason why it is suggested that scientific knowledge is seen as superior to religious faith is because of the differing nature of the two belief systems. Karl Popper describes science as an open belief system, in contrast to religion which is a closed belief system. Popper argues that scientific knowledge is constantly evolving and is open to challenge: scientists test their theories in an attempt to falsify them, whereas religious faith is set in stone and is not open to challenge. However, this can be challenged in two ways.

This introduction introduces two sociologists, and clearly explains/decodes the question and sets up the debate.

An early reference to the item is always sensible (in case you forget to make a reference later).

This isn't a very sociological piece of evaluation, but it does make a serious point.

The candidate manages to link Popper and belief systems clearly to the demands of the question. It is easy to lose focus when describing a particular theory or study. Keep explaining and linking back.

First, it is not clear that ideas that constantly evolve are necessarily more attractive than fixed ones, as evidenced by the appeal of fundamentalist religion. Second, it is not clear that science and religion really are quite how Popper characterises them. Kuhn suggests science is less open than it seems, as it operates within a paradigm and ideas that challenge that paradigm are marginalised. At the same time religious ideas do change: new doctrines can emerge to bring religions more in line with the norms and values of contemporary society (such as changing views on sexual orientation).

This passage might have benefited from another direct link back to the question at the end.

Many sociologists argue that people still are very religious and that secularisation has not been as extensive as some suggest. Grace Davie points out that people can believe without belonging – worshipping in a private way. Lyon suggests people pick and mix beliefs and ideas from a range of sources and these often remain supernatural and spiritual ideas rather than purely scientific ones. Berger points out that secularisation theory is Eurocentric and that, in fact, globally religion is growing rather than shrinking.

Plenty of sociological content and analysis in this brief paragraph.

Indeed, some sociologists argue there is currently a process of resacrilisation in society, where there is a growth of spirituality, even in countries that have previously seen secularisation. This is sometimes presented as being the result of a failure of science. Drane (1999) found that after people rejected traditional religion following the Enlightenment, they then found that science did not provide them with the answers they needed either. The process of rationalisation included a hope that science would solve the world's problems: it has not, and it has brought a whole load of new ones (like climate change and the risk of nuclear fallout). Drane argues that this has led to people abandoning science in favour of spirituality and New Age religion. However, although there is evidence of a growth in such organisations, there is less evidence of people rejecting scientific knowledge on a large scale, except in some fundamentalist movements.

This paragraph follows on logically from the last, with clear linking.

Postmodernist sociologists would tend to view both traditional religion and science as metanarratives: big stories that try to explain everything. They argue that these were both features of modern society, but that in postmodern society people are more interested in finding ideas that address their current needs, and do not require them to explain everything. However, even this seems quite a Eurocentric idea, as in much of the world people appear to

Sound evaluation.

Good use of postmodern approach in the conclusion.

This is a detailed conclusion that directly addresses the question with some interesting new concepts included.

still have deep faith in traditional religion and would be as hostile to the sort of pick and mix religion articulated by Lyon as to the idea of religion losing its significance altogether.

[739 words]

*Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20***

This essay is clearly in the top mark band. It manages to balance the material on science and the material on secularisation quite well. It might well have been possible to write a good essay where the focus was a little more one way or the other, providing it still directly answered the question.

The answer is concept-rich and analytical. There is clearly a lot more that could have been included, such as most of the secularisation debate. However, it is important to be selective. This essay is a realistic length for producing quickly in exam conditions. A detailed account of the secularisation debate would have either pushed out the material on science, or rendered the essay too long.

ITEM J

Some sociologists argue that society today has changed greatly and people are less religious and also people are aware of more religions and belief systems than ever before.

This, they say, has changed the roles religion plays in society, as it no longer acts as a “shared sacred canopy”.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion no longer acts as a “shared sacred canopy” in the world today. (20 marks)

Peter Berger argued that religion no longer provided a shared sacred canopy. He was referring to the way people today believe different things, because of religious pluralism. This challenges many of the functions of religion suggested by functionalists, Marxists and feminists. However, some sociologists argue that religion can still perform that role, while others suggest contemporary society is characterised not by religious pluralism but by secularism.

The argument, put forward by Durkheim and others, that religion helps social cohesion and value consensus is based on societies with a single faith, which is not the norm in contemporary western societies. The idea that people worshipping a religion were really worshipping society itself and that through religion people learnt a common set of values for the whole of society does not make sense in a diverse, multi-cultural society. Berger pointed to the way in which contemporary society was characterised by religious pluralism and therefore people had very different beliefs from their neighbours. He suggested this had a number of effects, one of which was to undermine the plausibility of all religion. If people are aware of a range of religious beliefs, all of which claim a monopoly of the truth, it is clear that they cannot all be true. People can come to doubt whether their religion is really true, and indeed it is not a large step from there to questioning whether any religion is true. As such, some have used Berger's arguments to contribute to secularisation theory.

However, Stark and Bainbridge argue that religious diversity is good for religion. They point out how secularisation has been notable in European countries with

This introduction decodes the question, interprets it and makes it clear how the candidate will go on to respond to it.

This puts “shared sacred canopy” into the context of the functionalist perspective on the role of religion.

Berger's theory explained.

Berger placed in a larger debate re: secularisation, but needs to be careful not to lose focus.

Stark and Bainbridge is an interesting theory to bring in here: a different perspective on

a history of one dominant faith. They argue that where a religion has a monopoly, it becomes stale and people drift away from it. Where there is diversity – such as in the USA – the different religious organisations have to compete for business. This is religious market theory. They suggest that individuals make a rational choice about the religion they wish to follow and which one suits their needs. They see people as being naturally religious and therefore people will “buy” spirituality from somewhere. They argue this is why there has been a growth in other religious organisations, such as New Age movements, in countries that have witnessed secularisation. So Stark and Bainbridge agree that there is religious diversity in many countries and therefore no shared sacred canopy, but they see this as a positive force for religious organisations. Their theory is ethnocentric though as, while it explains the USA being more religious than western Europe, it doesn't explain high levels of religiosity in Islamic countries, for instance.

religious pluralism.

Strong evaluation of the theory and links to the question.

Bellah argues that religion still does provide a sacred canopy, but that this role is carried out by civil religion. This is the idea of a religion based around the nation-state rather than a specific traditional faith, and it allows people with a diverse range of faiths to still have a collective conscience through ceremonies and beliefs. His example is Americanism, where people of various faiths and denominations can all say God Bless America. While this argument suggests that religious pluralism does not necessarily prevent a religion acting as a shared sacred canopy, others would question whether civil religion really was religion at all. It depends on whether you take a functional or a substantive definition of religion. And if you go with the functional definition, then theoretically football or celebrity culture could provide a shared sacred canopy. However, the process of globalisation is arguably shaking civil religion too, as people are more likely to pick and mix beliefs and identities from around the globe rather than necessarily concentrate on a set of beliefs focused around their own nation.

An alternative view, clearly articulated and evaluated.

Some interesting analysis and evaluation, including a discussion of how religion is defined.

Finally, if society is becoming ever more secular (which not all sociologists agree) then again there is no shared sacred canopy, not because of religious pluralism but because of an absence of religious belief. Theorists like Wilson and Bruce have argued that society is now largely secular and a rational, technological worldview has replaced the sacred canopy. Of course, if science is just another belief system, then the shared canopy might now be faith in science, at

A brief overview of the secularisation debate.

There are many ways this question could have been addressed, and it might have all been a secularisation discussion and, providing focus had been

least in western Europe. But sociologists like Berger argue that there is actually a resacrilisation taking place. Lyon writes about religion being disembedded and therefore people can pick and mix the beliefs and theories they find useful. This leads to extreme pluralism where, instead of a handful of major competing religions, religious belief is almost entirely personal.

maintained, could have got good marks.

Whether it is because of religious pluralism or secularism, in western Europe at least, there appears to no longer be a shared sacred canopy. However, despite the effects of globalisation, in many countries in the world, such a concept still appears to exist, where religion remains a key part of the value consensus in society.

A brief but clear conclusion that sums up the discussion.

[806 words]

*Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20***

This essay gets into the top band. It is quite a tricky question and selecting the appropriate material is not straightforward. However, there is more than one way to tackle it. This response focused on religious pluralism and, as such, was able to bring in quite a breadth of discussion. Lots of concepts and theory included so plenty of marks are racked up. The analysis is clear and the evaluation explicit. The focus is kept on the question reasonably well, although this is one area where the response could perhaps have been improved, as the candidate is occasionally tempted down interesting debating tangents.

ITEM J

There has been a debate in sociology about the extent to which society today is becoming less religious. Grace Davie suggests that lower church attendance does not necessarily mean less religious belief: people might believe without belonging.

However, others suggest that religion is becoming more about identity in an increasingly interconnected and multi-faith world.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that religion today is more about believing than belonging. (20 marks)

One of the big debates in the sociology of religion is the extent to which society has become secular. Many sociologists argue that contemporary society is secular: religion has lost its social significance and evidence for this includes declining church attendance. A counter-argument is that people are believing without belonging: they are still religious but choose not to attend church services. Other sociologists disagree with both these positions.

Brian Wilson (1966) described secularisation as “the process whereby religious thinking, practices and institutions lose their social significance” and there is plenty of evidence of it occurring. Crockett noted a massive decline in church attendances from 50% in the 1850s (what he called “the golden age of religion”) to 7.5% in 2000. Gill et al reported a significant decline in belief in God and the afterlife. Steve Bruce has argued that if numbers of clergy and congregations continue to decline at the current rate, there will be no Methodism in 2030. Not everyone accepts this evidence: church censuses are not necessarily accurate, people may respond in what they consider a socially-desirable way to surveys about belief, etc. As such, some sociologists argue there never was a “golden age of religion” and that what has declined is religiosity rather than religious belief. Fewer people practice their faith (in the UK at least) but we cannot be sure that fewer people actually believe. The data also rather disguises other trends, such as the high levels of religiosity among minority-ethnic groups for example.

Grace Davie argues that reduced church attendance shows that today people are believing without belonging, as suggested in Item J. She argues that belief has become more privatised: it is no longer something in the public sphere

A clear introduction that decodes the question (identifies it as a secularisation question) and signposts how the discussion will develop.

This starts as quite a “standard” secularisation essay, although it carefully maintains a focus on the precise wording of the question.

We get into the key part of the question here, and there’s a reference to the item (which is implicitly referenced)

and is more personal and done at home. She also argues that lots of people worship vicariously, through professional clergy: they don't feel the need to attend ceremonies themselves (except perhaps for "hatching, matching and dispatching" – baptisms, wedding and funerals – or at Christmas and Easter). If people did not believe at all, she argues, they would not see any significance in churches being involved in any of those ceremonies. Steve Bruce is not convinced by Davies' argument. He suggests that people are not believing or belonging. Any religious faith that does not get someone to even put in the very minor commitment expected in something like the Church of England is very weak religion, or not religion at all. Belonging is much easier to measure than believing. It's easy to see the trend in church attendance, much harder to track personal and private beliefs. Some sociologists suggest that, in the "golden age of religion" there would have been significant levels of belonging without believing: church attendance fulfilled other social roles beyond proof or practice of beliefs.

Of course, this in itself is another example of secularisation. What Parsons called structural differentiation is the process by which the state has taken over many of the roles previously carried out by religion. Increasingly people have civil weddings and funerals, for example, so even "hatching, matching and despatching" are becoming less the domain of religion. However, along with other aspects of secularisation theory, this could be seen as being Eurocentric. While it is true that this process has been occurring in countries like the UK, in much of the world religion is still very significant and, indeed, Berger argues that it is growing worldwide. Of course, most religious people, globally, believe and belong.

A number of postmodern sociologists, such as Lyon, have argued that one consequence of processes such as globalisation has been resacrilisation: religion has been disembedded from its original context, but increasingly people are choosing religious and spiritual beliefs to fulfil their own needs: what might be called "pick and mix" religion. While Bruce would again dismiss this as weak religion, it can be seen to support Davie's view, as people who pick and mix religious beliefs can be seen to believe without belonging to any one specific faith. However, it could be questioned whether belief is the key factor, as people can choose to engage in transcendental meditation, acupuncture or crystal healing without actually believing:

elsewhere).

Plenty of evaluation and analysis.

Focus remains on the question – it isn't just a generic secularisation response.

Good linking between paragraphs, maintaining an overall chain of reasoning

Still keeps bringing the focus back to the question.

Another concept-rich, detailed paragraph with plenty of analysis and evaluation.

Focus kept on question through the evaluation.

An alternative view presented, carefully focused on the question and with an element of synopticity in it.

they are accessing a service and giving it a go, without necessarily believing or belonging.

Religious “belonging” is not all about belief, however. Increasingly, in a diverse, globalised and religiously-pluralistic society, religion is about identity. One possible reason for the apparent increase in religiosity among some minority-ethnic groups in the UK, for instance, is a response to racism and hostility. People may increasingly identify with a religion because they are their “team” or “tribe” or subculture, without necessarily sharing the religious faith: a return to belonging without believing.

In conclusion, there is a significant debate in sociology about whether religion has declined or has simply changed. The reality is probably more complex than either of those positions. Religion became less socially significant in many western societies, through the 20th century. The functions and nature of religion has undoubtedly changed in many ways, including for the individual. And there is evidence of growing religious and spiritual practice and identity, while – globally – religion remains very significant to a majority of people on the planet. For that majority, believing and belonging are both important.

A very clear and effective conclusion.

[872 words]

*Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20***

This essay is comfortably in the top band. The question is on secularisation and is something of a classic. It's important to be selective: there are lots of contributions to the debate that can't be fitted into a 20-mark question. The best way to be selective is to retain a clear focus on the question and this answer does that very effectively.

Plenty of sociology in there: packed with sociologists, theories and concepts. There are, of course, many other points that could have been included or areas that could have pursued. There are other ways to answer this question: but this one is direct, focused and reasonably efficient (it is perhaps on the long side for most students in the time constraints).

ITEM J

Statistics do not provide a clear picture about social class and religiosity. It is suggested that religion has different functions for different social classes, and different social classes might be attracted to different religious organisations.

There is a traditional view that working-class individuals are more religious than middle-class individuals.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that working-class individuals are more religious than middle-class individuals. (20 marks)

Although, as Item J suggests, it is often expected that the working class will be more religious than the middle class, what data we have on class and religiosity is not clear on this. Class appears to be a significant factor in religious belief, but more in terms of which religions people follow and their reasons for doing so than with overall levels of religiosity.

Max Weber's idea of a theodicy of disprivilege suggests that the less well-off in society are attracted to religion because it tends to legitimise or explain their social status and promise rewards, usually in the afterlife. Karl Marx's views also suggest that the working class would be the main audience for religion as it primarily existed to act as an opiate and numb them to the reality of the exploitation they faced in capitalist society. However, a survey in 2015 showed that 62% of church goers in the UK are middle class. There are a wide range of possible explanations for this. One is that working-class and middle-class religious people use religion for different purposes. That working-class people might access religion to deaden the pain while middle-class people access it to forge and maintain social networks. If these two explanations are accurate, religion has growing competition for both services, with popular culture, sport and real opiates and alcohol providing the first and online social networking, clubs and work conferences, etc. providing the latter. As attending church becomes a more minority pursuit for everyone (as a lot of data used by secularisation theorists argue it is, at least in western Europe) then its ability to carry out either role is undermined.

A clear introduction, refers to the item and gives some indication of how the discussion will proceed.

Good theoretical framework to the discussion established in the first paragraph.

Evidence presented.

Some interesting analysis/exploration.

Actually, the data on class and church attendance is more complex than just to say middle-class people attend more. In the UK, the Anglican church is more middle class than the Roman Catholic church or the Methodist church, for instance. The Anglican church is the established church and was traditionally seen as close to the elite (once described as “the Tory Party at prayer”). There are Anglican bishops in the House of Lords and the Queen is its head. However, the church today often takes anti-establishment views on social issues. Similarly, the Quaker religion is overwhelmingly middle class and yet is politically radical and anti-establishment.

In contrast, the Roman Catholic church is much more working class in the UK, and yet is often seen as being conservative. While it might be socially conservative, it is political more radical with Catholics in the UK significantly more likely to vote Labour than Anglicans. The reason for Catholics being more working class is because of its dominance among a combination of well-established and newer migrant communities (e.g. Irish and Eastern European). Also areas where there were a lot of Irish immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries have higher levels of Catholicism, and these tend to be industrial areas with a large working-class population, such as Liverpool. Similarly, Methodism developed in industrial areas of the north of England. Methodism also began as a sect, and there have been a number of explanations for why sects appealed to the working class.

A sense that traditional churches were elitist has often fuelled working-class interest in sects and denominations, along with a strong emphasis on ideas associated with the theodicy of disprivilege and spiritual “compensators” for difficult times on Earth. Sects and denominations have also offered practical support to the less well-off, through forms of welfare and advice. On the other hand, spiritual/holistic/New Age beliefs have been more common among the middle class. This might be because of spiritual deprivation or relative deprivation rather than material deprivation. As such, new religious movements (NRMs) are often predominantly frequented by one class or another. This might also tie in with Wallis’ typology of NRMs being world-rejecting, world-accommodating and world affirming, with working-class people perhaps being more attracted to world-rejecting groups because the world appears unjust and unfair.

The general structure of this essay works well, starting on a large scale and then drilling down further in this paragraph.

This is really on the same theme as the last paragraph and they have only really been divided up for readability.

A good link to the next paragraph on new religious movements.

There’s lots in this paragraph. Some of the individual points could have been developed further or differently, but it is important to be selective.

Good contrasting between different types of new religious movement.

Social class often overlaps with other social groups. For example, many minority-ethnic groups are more likely to be working class. High levels of religiosity among British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities contributes to the overall figures of the religiosity of the working class, but their reasons for high levels of religiosity are perhaps more to do with issues like racism and migration than economic class. Similarly, some young people from middle-class backgrounds can be attracted to NRMs for much the same reason that working-class people are attracted. People have a number of coexisting identities and there is no way of determining precisely where social class features in this.

A useful paragraph which considers intersectionality, which is always useful in essays about social groups.

In conclusion, it is not clear, in the UK at least, that social class is a dominant factor in whether people are religious or not. Globally, economic security does appear to be a factor, with Norris and Inglehart's existential security theory suggesting that high levels of religiosity often correspond to high levels of poverty and lack of government welfare and support. In the UK, class is a bigger factor in what religion people follow than whether they will follow one at all.

A good conclusion that introduces yet another set of ideas (existential security theory) to put the discussion in a more global context.

[843 words]

*Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20***

This is a very effective essay that is comfortably in the top band. The candidate here manages to make an analytical and evaluative essay that remains focused in spite of what might at first seem quite a limiting question.

A lot of sociological material is packed into this answer, which is concept rich and well-focused.

ITEM J

Globalisation has caused a significant number of changes in religion today. Some suggest that its main impact has been to increase religious pluralism and further undermine the plausibility of religion's claims to hold a monopoly of the truth.

However, others have suggested that globalisation has also played a part in the growth of religious fundamentalism.

Applying material from Item J and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the main impact of globalisation on beliefs in society has been the growth of religious fundamentalism. (20 marks)

Globalisation is the process whereby the world is becoming ever more interconnected – culturally, economically and politically – so that it is “becoming one place”. Anthony Giddens (1991) has argued one major impact of globalisation on religion and belief has been the increase in fundamentalist religion. Fundamentalism is a militant form of religion, led by self-styled true believers, who consider themselves to be getting back to the core and original principles and values of their faith. However, as suggested in Item J, globalisation has had several other effects on religion too.

Peter Beyer (1994) has suggested three main ways in which religion has responded to the process of globalisation. These are particularism, universalism and marginalisation. The first is the idea that religion has increasingly become a focus of resistance to globalisation: a symbol of how people are culturally different, in contrast to the risk of cultural homogenisation. The second is really the opposite trend: that people increasingly note the similarities between world religions and focus on what unites them. Religious leaders make joint statements about shared values and encourage inter-faith dialogue. The last is that religion is increasingly pushed to the margins of society and plays less and less of a role in public life. While these are three quite different and contrasting responses, all three of them could be engines of fundamentalism.

Giddens suggests that globalisation has increased insecurity in the world and fundamentalist beliefs offer simple answers: clear rules and absolute truths are attractive in a world of confusion and uncertainty. It can, as Beyer

A clear introduction which decodes the question (defines key terms) and sets up the discussion.

An early reference to the item.

Some clear sociological knowledge outlined.

Linked to the question, although the explanation is left to the next paragraph.

Giddens is introduced and then reference is made back to Beyer, and the knowledge from the previous paragraph is

suggested, be a focus of anti-globalisation feeling: people defining their religion in opposition to what is perceived as a secular and westernised global culture. Certainly some of the support for fundamentalist Islam can be seen in that context. Similarly, it can be a reaction against the sort of universalism that Beyer referred to. As the mainstream of world religions seek common cause and shared values, it can be viewed by some members as internal secularisation and a weakening and watering down of beliefs and therefore fundamentalist religion is one reaction. Similarly, a marginalisation of religion – secularisation effectively – can also be responded to with fundamentalism. The rise of the New Christian Right in the USA could be seen in this context.

However, other sociologists argue that fundamentalism is not really a response to globalisation but has instead always existed. What are now seen as fundamentalist beliefs would have been considered mainstream prior to internal secularisation in many religions and the way in which norms and values in society have changed, while some religious beliefs have remained unchanged (because it is a closed belief system rather than an open one, as Popper would say). However, there are clear examples of where fundamentalist beliefs have replaced secular norms. In 20th century Iran and Afghanistan for instance, fundamentalist religion has been a focus of political opposition to a more secular political establishment. However, the religious beliefs associated with fundamentalism did exist in those more secular states and were not created in opposition to them.

It is also suggested that globalisation has had other significant effects on religion that may be more significant than the increase in fundamentalism. For example, Berger suggests that globalisation has significantly increased religious pluralism. This is because, through global communications, travel and culture, we are now much more aware of what is happening elsewhere in the world and that there are a large number of religious beliefs. Lyon writes of how people can pick and mix the beliefs that suit them from a wide range of available beliefs. Of course, one impact of religious pluralism, according to Berger, is a crisis of plausibility. If people are aware of several religions all claiming a monopoly on the truth then they are increasingly conscious that they cannot all be true, and therefore perhaps none are. As such, globalisation could be driving secularisation. However, Berger argues that it is driving

systematically linked to the question.

Examples are given to illustrate the various points. These could be developed much more, but time constraints need to be considered.

A generally evaluative paragraph.

Good evaluation and counter-evaluation through this paragraph.

Other effects of globalisation considered here.

resacrilisation, as people are able to choose from a wider menu of beliefs. However, this could also feed fundamentalism, as secularisation and pick and mix religion are among the trends in contemporary society that fundamentalism is reacting to and in opposition to.

Very good link back to the question, maintains focus.

Nanda has suggested that globalisation in India has led to an increase in Hindu nationalism. While this includes quite fundamentalist Hinduism it is not in opposition to globalisation but instead used to justify and legitimise the success of the new rich in India. Here, Hinduism has become a kind of civil religion in India and the religion is tied up with the nationalism and the economic theory. While on the face of it this might support the idea that a key impact of globalisation is fundamentalism, this is quite a different process from that described by Giddens. Here the economic liberalism of globalisation is being embraced and is coming hand-in-hand with a desecularisation of the Indian state.

Nanda definitely a good study to include here, although it would have been good to develop this further, had time constraints allowed.

Well linked back.

In conclusion, globalisation is having a huge impact on global culture and religion is inevitably part of that. Giddens has shown us how one impact of this is a rise in fundamentalist religion, but this is really a symptom of a larger impact, which is a process of westernisation, including the spread of a technological worldview, toward which fundamentalism is a reaction.

A clear conclusion that directly addresses the question.

[873 words]

Examiner comments: **Mark band 17-20**

This answer is in the top band. It remains well-focused on quite a tricky topic. There are plenty of places where the answer could have been further developed or been taken in a different direction, but time constraints must be considered: this retains focus and is quite comprehensive.

The style remains analytical and evaluative and the answer is concept rich and has a sound theoretical framework.

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