

## **BELIEFS IN SOCIETY KNOWLEDGE ORGANISERS**

The information contained in this knowledge organiser pack is drawn from research regularly used in the teaching of AQA A Level Sociology, for the optional topic, Beliefs in Society. The studies used in this pack align with the tutor2u Beliefs in Society checklist. This constitutes neither a set of compulsory studies that students must know or an exhaustive list. Students may wish to use alternative sources that are available in the study of Beliefs in Society.

The knowledge organisers cover material set out in the AQA A Level Sociology specification, that was first used for teaching in 2015 and reflects the following specification points:

### 3.2.5 Beliefs in Society

Students are expected to be familiar with sociological explanations of the following content:

- ideology, science and religion, including both Christian and non-Christian religious traditions
- the relationship between social change and social stability, and religious beliefs, practices and organisations
- religious organisations, including cults, sects, denominations, churches and New Age movements, and their relationship to religious and spiritual belief and practice
- the relationship between different social groups and religious/spiritual organisations and movements, beliefs and practices
- the significance of religion and religiosity in the contemporary world, including the nature and extent of secularisation in a global context, and globalisation and the spread of religions.

The Beliefs in Society optional topic focuses on more than just religious beliefs. It also examines different beliefs in wider society, such as science and ideology, and compares the features of different beliefs systems and definitions of these. For example, students may be asked to evaluate the extent to which science has replaced religion as the dominant belief system in society, or the extent to which religion can be seen as ideological.

### Defining Ideology:

Ideology is a set of beliefs and values that reflect and legitimize the interests of particular social groups. **Mannheim** Explored the role of ideology in maintaining power structures finding that ideological systems often underpin political, economic, and social institutions, thereby influencing how society is organised.

### Defining science:

#### Positivist/Empirical Definitions:

Science is often defined as the systematic pursuit of objective knowledge about the natural world. Empirical testing, falsifiability (**Popper**), and logical consistency. Under this view, scientific progress is seen through cumulative advancements and occasional revolutionary paradigm shifts (**Kuhn**).

#### Social Constructionist Definitions:

Science is not merely a collection of objective facts but is shaped by social interactions, cultural contexts, and the norms of the scientific community. The influence of social processes, power relations, and debates within the scientific community (as argued by **Woolgar and Sayer**).

### Definitions of Religion

#### Substantive Definitions:

Religion is defined by the content of belief – particularly the existence of a supernatural or transcendent realm.

**Weber's** definition of religion fits this best as it highlights that without belief in something beyond the natural world, a system of religion would not exist.

#### Functional Definitions:

Religion is defined by the role it plays in society rather than by its specific content. The functions of religion in providing moral order, social cohesion, and meaning (as seen in the works of Comte and Durkheim). Here, the focus is less on supernatural beliefs and more on how religion contributes to the stability and regulation of society.

#### Constructionist Definitions:

Religion is seen as a product of social and cultural processes, where meanings are continuously negotiated. The idea that what is considered 'religious' is not fixed but constructed through social interactions (**Aldridge**). This definition highlights the fluidity and context-dependence of religious beliefs, as opposed to a static set of doctrines.

### Comparing and contrasting different belief systems:

#### Nature of Beliefs:

- Science is ideally an **open system** where ideas are constantly tested and revised, whereas religion (especially in substantive definitions) often relies on established, sacred beliefs.
- Ideology, meanwhile, typically consists of **core beliefs that may be resistant to change**, particularly if they serve to maintain existing power relations.

#### Role of Texts and Rituals:

- Science does not depend on sacred texts but instead on **empirical evidence and peer review** processes.
- Religion commonly involves sacred texts, rituals, and traditions that are revered and form the core of its practice.
- Ideology may draw on influential writings and theories, but these are usually not held as sacrosanct in the same way as religious texts.

#### Function in Society:

- Science functions to explain the natural world and drive technological and intellectual progress, operating through a self-correcting process (often guided by norms like **Merton's CUDOS**).
- Religion can provide **moral guidance, social cohesion, and a sense of meaning**, serving both individual and collective needs.
- Ideology **legitimises social arrangements and power structures**, offering a framework through which individuals interpret their social reality.

Functionalist sociologists view religion as a vital institution that contributes to the stability, cohesion, and functioning of society. They argue that religion serves as a conservative force, maintaining social order by reinforcing shared norms, values, and collective identity. While different functionalist theorists emphasise various aspects of religion's role, they all see it as essential for ensuring social integration and solidarity.

## **Durkheim: Religion and Social Solidarity**

- **Durkheim (1912)** studied totemism among the Australian Aboriginals and argued that religion reinforces collective consciousness by promoting shared norms and values.
- He distinguished between the sacred (objects or practices imbued with special significance) and the profane (ordinary aspects of life).
- Religious rituals strengthen the bonds between members of society, creating a sense of belonging and unity.
- View on religion as ideology or science: Religion provides a moral framework that upholds social order, but it is not based on empirical testing like science. Instead, it is a socially constructed belief system that reinforces social solidarity.
- How it aligns with religion as a conservative force: Religion maintains existing social structures by fostering a collective identity and preventing anomie (a breakdown of social norms).

## **Parsons: Religion and Value Consensus**

- **Parsons (1967)** viewed religion as reinforcing core values and providing a moral framework that guides behaviour.
- Religion legitimises social norms, ensuring that individuals conform to society's expectations (e.g. ideas of right and wrong based on religious teachings).
- It also helps people make sense of life events such as death and suffering by providing meaning and purpose.
- View on religion as ideology or science: Religion provides meaning, moral guidance, and social regulation but is not a scientific system of knowledge. Instead, it legitimises values and norms that maintain social stability.
- How it aligns with religion as a conservative force: Religion supports social stability by reinforcing societal norms, legitimising authority, and reducing potential sources of conflict.

## **Malinowski: Religion as a Psychological Function**

- **Malinowski (1954)** agreed with Durkheim but focused more on individual needs, arguing that religion helps people cope with emotional stress and uncertainty.
- His study of the Trobriand Islanders showed that religious rituals were performed in situations of uncertainty and crisis, such as fishing in dangerous waters.
- Religion provides psychological comfort by reducing anxiety and giving individuals a sense of control.
- View on religion as ideology or science: Religion serves an emotional and psychological purpose rather than a scientific one. It does not rely on empirical evidence but instead provides explanations for uncertainty.
- By providing comfort and reassurance, religion prevents social instability caused by fear or anxiety, helping people accept the status quo.

## **Bellah: Civil Religion and National Unity**

- **Bellah (1970)** introduced the concept of civil religion, arguing that in secular societies like the USA, religious symbols and rituals are used to create a national identity.
- Civil religion integrates society through shared symbols, ceremonies, and values that function like traditional religious beliefs (e.g. American patriotism and national anthems).
- View on religion as ideology or science: Even in secular societies, belief systems resembling religion persist to maintain social cohesion. Civil religion is ideological in that it promotes shared values and a sense of national identity, but it is not based on scientific principles.
- How it aligns with religion as a conservative force: Even in secular societies, religion (or its equivalent) continues to reinforce national unity and uphold the social order.

Marxist and neo-Marxist sociologists argue that religion serves as a tool of ideology, maintaining class-based inequalities by legitimising ruling-class power. Classical Marxists such as Marx, Engels and Lenin see religion as a form of false consciousness that prevents revolutionary change, reinforcing religion as a conservative force. However, neo-Marxists like Bloch, Maduro, and Gramsci acknowledge that religion can also be a force for social change under certain conditions.

### Karl Marx: Religion as Ideological Control

- Marx (1844) described religion as "*the opium of the people*", arguing that it serves as a form of **false consciousness** that dulls the pain of oppression.
- It justifies inequality by promoting suffering as virtuous and discourages revolution.
- **View on Religion:** Ideology – It distorts reality to benefit the ruling class.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Maintains capitalism by pacifying the working class.

### Engels: Religion's Dual Role

- **Engels (1895)** agreed religion often supports ruling-class interests but argued it has also inspired radical social movements (e.g., early Christianity).
- **View on Religion:** Mainly ideology – Religion usually controls, but in some cases, it mobilises the oppressed.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Religion justifies inequality but can sometimes promote resistance.

### Lenin: Religion as "Spiritual Gin"

- **Lenin (1917)** built on Marx's ideas, describing religion as "*spiritual gin*" – a tool used by the ruling class to confuse and control the working class.
- He argued that religion distracts people from their real material conditions, preventing them from recognising their exploitation.
- Religion creates a false sense of unity between classes, suggesting that wealth and poverty are part of a divine plan rather than a result of economic exploitation.
- **View on Religion** – Religion is a mechanism of social control that protects the interests of the ruling class.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Prevents class consciousness and maintains capitalism.

### Ernst Bloch: The Principle of Hope

- **Bloch (1959)** introduced the idea of the "*principle of hope*", suggesting that while religion often serves ruling-class interests, it also contains an element of **utopianism**.
- He argued that religion can inspire visions of a better world, which in turn can motivate social movements and revolutionary change.
- **View on Religion:** Mixed – Religion is primarily ideological, but it can contain revolutionary potential if harnessed by the oppressed.
- **Religion as a conservative force:** Religion usually maintains the status quo, but under the right conditions, it can also act as a catalyst for change.

### Gramsci: Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

- **Gramsci (1930s)** argued religion helps maintain hegemony (ruling-class dominance).
- However, religious leaders can act as "*organic intellectuals*", using religion to inspire resistance.
- **View on Religion:** Ideology – A key tool of ruling-class control but can also challenge power.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Usually maintains hegemony but can promote **counter-hegemonic** movements.

### Maduro: Religion and Liberation Theology

- **Maduro (1982)** showed how **Liberation Theology** in Latin America encouraged activism against dictatorship.
- Religion can support social justice movements.
- **View on Religion:** Ideology, but with revolutionary potential.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Religion can resist oppression but often reinforces inequality.

**Weberian and feminist** perspectives offer contrasting views on religion's role in society. Max Weber emphasises the role of religion in shaping social and economic change, arguing that it can be a force for both continuity and transformation. Feminists, on the other hand, see religion as a patriarchal ideology that reinforces gender inequality, though some argue it also offers women opportunities for resistance and empowerment.

### Weber: Religion as a Driver of Social Change

- **Weber (1905)** in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* argued that religious beliefs can directly influence economic and social systems.
- He studied Calvinism, showing how ideas like predestination, asceticism, and hard work created a mindset that encouraged capitalist development.
- Weber argued that **religion is not always a conservative force**—it can drive social change (later examples: the role of religious ideas in the Civil Rights Movement and liberation theology).
- He contrasted the **rationalisation** of the modern world with traditional religious worldviews, arguing that as societies become more scientific, religion loses its influence (a process known as **disenchantment**).
- **View on Religion:** Neither ideology nor science – Religion shapes human action but is influenced by economic and cultural contexts.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Religion can maintain the status quo, but it also has the power to create change, depending on historical circumstances.

### Simone de Beauvoir: Religion as a Tool of Patriarchy

- **De Beauvoir (1953)** argued that religion reinforces women's oppression by promoting the idea that their role is to be passive and obedient.
- Women are taught to accept their inferior position because they are promised rewards in the afterlife, making them less likely to challenge their oppression.
- Religion is used to justify gender inequalities, portraying women as morally superior but socially subordinate.
- **View on Religion:** Ideology – Religion supports male dominance by encouraging female submission.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Prevents women from challenging patriarchal structures by making them accept their subordination.

### Nawal El Saadawi: Religion as Culturally Manipulated

- **El Saadawi (1980)** argued that religion itself is not inherently patriarchal, but has been shaped by male-dominated cultures.
- Religious texts have been reinterpreted to reinforce patriarchy, but originally, many religions had egalitarian elements.
- Practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and veiling are cultural traditions rather than true religious doctrines, showing how men distort religion to oppress women.
- **View on Religion:** Cultural ideology – Religion has been manipulated by men, but it is not necessarily patriarchal in itself.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force: Religion is often used to justify women's oppression, but this is due to cultural rather than religious factors.**

### Mary Daly: Religion and Female Erasure

- **Daly (1973)** argued that mainstream religion is built on **patriarchal** myths that erase female power and reinforce male dominance. She claimed that the Christian Church is inherently sexist, portraying God as a male authority figure and women as subordinate.
- She advocated for the rejection of male-dominated religions and the development of spirituality centred on **female empowerment**.
- **View on Religion:** Ideology – Religion is an oppressive force designed to maintain male power.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** It prevents women from achieving equality by enforcing patriarchal norms.

### Linda Woodhead: Religion as a Form of Resistance

- **Woodhead (2002)** argued that while religion is often patriarchal, some religious practices and groups provide women with agency and power.
- **View on Religion:** Mixed – Religion is not always patriarchal; women can use it to resist oppression.
- **Religion as a Conservative Force:** Religion can reinforce patriarchy, but it also allows for feminist reinterpretation and activism.

Below is an outline for the specification point on Religion and Social Change structured around the key debate—whether religion acts as a conservative force or as a revolutionary catalyst. This outline integrates core concepts and shows how various sociological perspectives contribute to each side of the debate, including the more nuanced arguments that religion can fulfill both functions which is useful for writing conclusions if this were a 20 mark essay.

### Religion as a Conservative Force Consensus Views and Social Order

- Religion as a source of shared values and social cohesion (**Durkheim, Parsons, Bellah**).
- It reinforces consensus views that bind society together.

### Calvinism and the Protestant Ethic

- **Weber:** The role of Calvinism and the Protestant ethic in promoting values of hard work, discipline, and self-control underpin capitalist development and social stability. However, these values also drive social changes such as economic mobility.

### Fundamentalism, Patriarchy, and Oppression

- Fundamentalism can emerge as a reaction against rapid social change, preserving traditional values.
- The role of religion in sustaining patriarchal structures and contributing to social oppression and alienation (**Durkheim's view on tradition; Lenin and Marx's critique on religion as a tool of domination**).
- **The "role of patriarchy"** and how conservative religious doctrines have historically reinforced gender hierarchies. (**De Beauvoir**)

### Theoretical Contributions

- **Durkheim:** Emphasises religion's role in creating social solidarity and a shared moral order.
- **Parsons and Bellah:** Focus on the integrative functions of religion, with Bellah introducing ideas of **civil religion** that bind communities together.
- **Lenin and Marx:** Although critics of religion, their arguments suggest that religion maintains social structures.

### Religion as a Revolutionary Force

#### Liberation Theology and the Principle of Hope

- **Liberation theology (Maduro)** as an approach that interprets religious teachings in the context of social justice and the struggle for human rights.
- **The principle of hope (Bloch)** provides a vision for a reformed, more equitable society.

#### Religion and Civil Rights

- **Baptist Movement and Civil Rights:** religious movements have inspired and mobilised communities in the fight for civil rights and social equality (e.g., the role of churches in the US civil rights movement).
- The emergence of **Pentecostalism** as a dynamic, people-centred religious movement that challenges established authority.

#### Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals

- **Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony** help to understand how religious ideas can both support and challenge dominant cultural narratives. The concept of **organic intellectuals and dual consciousness (drawing on Bloch and Gramsci)** to illustrate how religious leaders and movements articulate alternative visions of society.

#### Revolutionary Interpretations of Christianity and Female Spirituality

- The emergence of female spirituality as a challenge to male-dominated religious practices (influenced by De Beauvoir and Daly).

### Framing the debate:

**Functionalists** largely believe that religion reinforces the value consensus in society and provides individuals with a sense of social cohesion and provides meaning at times of crisis that would otherwise threaten social stability. These ideas are presented through the ideas of **Durkheim, Malinowski, Parsons and Bellah**.

**Marx and Lenin** argue that religion also acts to maintain the social structure, both suggesting religion is a distraction from class struggles. They do not want the capitalist social structure to be maintained. Similarly, feminists like **De Beauvoir** argue that religion is a form of social control - transmitting patriarchal norms and values.

However not all conflict theorists agree. Both **Gramsci and Engels** suggest that religion can be both a conservative force and a force for change, as does Daly. Maduro and Bloch go further and outline the revolutionary potential of religion.

**Weber** offers both explanations - suggesting the protestant work ethic supports capitalist systems, whilst also promoting social change.

Students of AQA A Level Sociology studying Beliefs in Society, need to be aware of sociological definitions of different types of religious organisation including churches, denominations, cults and sects. Being able to identify the differences between these organisations and the social characteristics of who they attract is key to answering questions not only on religious participation, but also wider debates such as the extent of secularisation and changes in the way people practice their faith.

## Churches

### Features of Churches:

- Large, bureaucratic structures with a formal hierarchy.
- Inclusive membership, aiming to appeal to the majority of society.
- Close links with the state and often support the ruling class.
- Monopoly of religious truth (claiming their beliefs are the only valid ones).
- Professional clergy with specialised training.

### Sociological Definitions:

- **Max Weber (1922)** described a church as a dominant, bureaucratic religious organisation that is integrated into society and often aligned with political power.
- **Ernst Troeltsch (1912)** argued that churches are conservative, supporting the status quo and the ruling elite.
- Examples: the Catholic Church and the Church of England—both have historically held religious and political authority.

## Sects

### Features of Sects:

- Small, tightly-knit groups often formed as a breakaway from a church.
- Exclusive membership, personal commitment and conversion.
- Hostile to mainstream society, rejecting its values and norms.
- Charismatic leadership, authority is often based on a single leader.
- Strict rules and high levels of commitment—members may be required to abandon their previous lifestyle.

### Sociological Definitions:

- **Weber (1922)** linked sect membership to the "theodicy of disprivilege", meaning they attract people seeking explanations for their suffering or marginalisation.
- **Niebuhr (1929)** suggested that sects face the "denomination or death" dilemma, meaning they either become more socially accepted and turn into denominations or disappear over time.
- **Examples: Jehovah's Witnesses, The Amish, The People's Temple**

## Denominations

### Features of Denominations:

- Moderate-sized organisations with some bureaucracy but more flexibility than churches.
- Inclusive but voluntary membership—individuals choose to join.
- Not linked to the state but still accepted in mainstream society.
- Tolerant of other religious groups, unlike churches.
- Professional clergy, but members are encouraged to participate in religious activities.

### Sociological Definitions:

- **Niebuhr (1929)** developed the concept of denominations, arguing they emerge when sects become more socially acceptable over time.
- Examples: Methodism, Baptists, Pentecostalism—these groups have distinct doctrines but remain integrated into society.

## Cults

### Features of Cults:

- Loosely structured and individualistic, focusing on personal spiritual experience.
- No monopoly of truth, meaning they accept multiple spiritual paths.
- Often world-affirming, meaning they encourage members to succeed in mainstream society rather than reject it.
- Short-lived and flexible, with members coming and going freely.
- Charismatic leadership but less rigid control than sects.

### Sociological Definitions:

- **Stark and Bainbridge (1985)** divided cults into three types based on commitment levels:
  - **Audience Cults, Client Cults, and Cultic Movements**
- These vary on level of commitment, organisation structure and level of tolerance

New Religious Movements (NRMs) are religious or spiritual groups that have emerged since the mid-20th century, often offering alternative beliefs and practices compared to traditional religions. Roy Wallis (1984) classified NRMs into three types: world-rejecting, world-accommodating, and world-affirming movements. These categories help sociologists understand how NRMs interact with society and why people join them.

## Types of NRMs (Wallis 1984)

### 1. World-Rejecting NRMs

These movements see mainstream society as corrupt and believe they offer the only path to salvation. They often demand total commitment from members, requiring them to reject their previous lifestyles. Members may live separately from society in communal groups.

#### Key Features:

- High level of control over members' lives.
- Clear distinction between "us" (members) and "them" (wider society).
- Often led by a charismatic leader.

#### Examples:

- The Unification Church (Moonies), The People's Temple, Heaven's Gate

### 2. World-Accommodating NRMs

These movements do not reject mainstream society but focus on spiritual renewal. They believe existing religious institutions have lost their true meaning and seek to restore a purer form of worship.

#### Key Features:

- Tend to be offshoots of existing religions.
- Focus on personal spiritual experience rather than societal change.
- Accept mainstream norms but encourage greater religious devotion.

#### Examples:

- Pentecostalism, Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements

### 3. World-Affirming NRMs

These movements embrace society and claim to offer members ways to succeed in life, such as improving mental, spiritual, or financial well-being. Unlike the other types, they do not require major lifestyle changes.

#### Key Features:

- Often operate as self-help or therapy-based groups.
- No strict rules – members can participate while maintaining their normal lives.
- Focus on personal growth, success, and happiness rather than salvation.

#### Examples:

Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, Human Potential Movements

### 1. Marginalisation and Deprivation (Weber, 1922)

Weber argued that NRMs often attract people who feel marginalised or socially deprived (e.g., the poor, ethnic minorities, or those who feel disconnected from society). NRMs provide a "theodicy of disprivilege", meaning they offer an explanation for suffering and promise future rewards. Example: The Nation of Islam gained support among African Americans who felt excluded from mainstream society.

### 2. Social Change and Anomie (Wilson, 1982)

Wilson suggested that rapid social change (e.g. globalisation, technological advancements) creates anomie (normlessness). People seek stability and meaning, which NRMs provide. Example: The 1960s counterculture movement led to the rise of world-rejecting groups like the Moonies.

### 3. Secularisation (Bruce, 1995)

Steve Bruce argued that in a secular society, traditional churches lose influence, but spirituality does not disappear. Instead, people turn to NRMs, New Age movements, or alternative spiritual practices. Example: Declining church attendance in Western societies has led to a rise in self-help religions like Scientology.

### 4. The Growth of Consumer Culture (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985)

Stark and Bainbridge see NRMs as religious businesses offering "compensators" for things people want but cannot attain (e.g. happiness, purpose). World-affirming NRMs, like Scientology, function like a self-improvement industry, attracting middle-class professionals.

### 5. The Cycle of Sects (Niebuhr, 1929)

Richard Niebuhr argued that sects and NRMs follow a "denomination or death" cycle. Sects begin as radical groups but, over time, become mainstream denominations. If they do not adapt, they fade away. Example: Pentecostalism began as a sect but is now a large mainstream denomination.

New Age Movements (NAMs) are a broad category of spiritual and self-help practices that emerged in the late 20th century. Unlike traditional religions, NAMs focus on personal spirituality, self-improvement, and holistic well-being rather than strict doctrines or formal worship. They often incorporate elements from Eastern religions (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism), mysticism, alternative medicine, and psychology.

## Sociological Definitions of NAMs

**Heelas (1996)** describes NAMs as part of a "*spiritual revolution*", where individuals move away from organised religion and towards "self-spirituality" (the belief that the divine is within each person). Heelas categorises NAMs into:

- Self-religion (e.g., meditation, yoga, crystal healing).
- Holistic Milieu (a collection of spiritual practices that aim for self-improvement).

**Bruce (1995, 2002)** argues that NAMs reflect individualistic and consumerist values in Western societies. They lack commitment and structure, allowing people to "pick and mix" their beliefs.

**Wallis (1984)** classifies NAMs as world-affirming movements, meaning they do not reject society but instead help individuals succeed within it.

## Examples of NAMs

**Meditation & Mindfulness** – Popularised by Buddhist practices, aimed at reducing stress.

**Yoga & Holistic Healing** – Focus on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

**Astrology & Tarot Readings** – Used for personal guidance and self-reflection.

**UFO-Based Spirituality** – Groups like the Raelian Movement or Heaven's Gate believe in extraterrestrial beings guiding human spiritual evolution.

**Wicca and Paganism** - Wicca and Paganism represent a revival of pre-Christian European spiritual traditions. They emphasise nature worship, seasonal festivals, and polytheism.

**TM Movement** – Popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, TM is a meditation technique claimed to reduce stress and enhance consciousness.

**The Hare Krishna Movement** – A Hindu-based group emphasising devotion to the deity Krishna through chanting and strict lifestyle practices.

**Reiki** – A Japanese healing technique based on transferring energy through the hands.

**Crystal Healing** – The belief that gemstones and crystals contain spiritual energies that can balance the body's energy fields.

**Aromatherapy** – The use of essential oils for spiritual and physical healing.

## Why Have NAMs Grown Since the Late 20th Century?

### 1. Decline of Traditional Religion (Secularisation) – Bruce (1995)

- As church attendance declined, people still sought spiritual fulfilment but in less formal, more individualistic ways.
- Bruce calls NAMs a form of "*secular spirituality*", offering meaning without the strict rules of mainstream religions.

### 2. Individualism and Postmodernity – Heelas (1996)

- In postmodern society, people value personal choice and self-improvement over institutional authority.
- NAMs offer flexibility, allowing individuals to shape their own beliefs.

### 3. Consumer Culture and Self-Help – Bruce (2002)

- NAMs are marketed like self-help products, offering happiness, success, and well-being.
- Many NAMs sell books, courses, and therapies, making spirituality a consumer product.

### 4. Social Change and Identity Crisis – Heelas et al (2005)

- Globalisation, job insecurity, and uncertainty have led many to seek inner peace and self-discovery.
- NAMs provide a sense of control and stability in an unpredictable world.

## Who Joins New Age Movements?

### 1. Middle-Class Individuals

- Many NAM followers come from educated, middle-class backgrounds, as they have the resources to explore alternative spirituality.
- Women are often more drawn to NAMs due to their focus on healing, well-being, and empowerment (Heelas, 1996).

### 2. People Dissatisfied with Mainstream Religion

- Individuals who feel alienated from Christianity and organised religion

### 3. Environmentalists & Nature Lovers

- Movements like Wicca, Paganism, and Druidry appeal to people with a deep respect for nature.

Secularisation is the idea that religion is losing its influence in society – in people’s lives, institutions, and culture. But sociologists disagree about whether secularisation is really happening, and if so, how far it goes and where it applies. The debates can be examined from different broad perspectives of believing secularisation has and is happening, that religious participation is changing and that secularisation is largely a Western European phenomenon.

## The Case For Secularisation

### Bryan Wilson (1966)

- Defined secularisation as “the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance.”
- Argued that religious influence has declined in Western societies, especially Britain.

### Steve Bruce

- Builds on Wilson’s work. Argues that Britain is becoming more secular.
- Church attendance continues to fall (especially in mainstream churches like the Church of England).
- Religious institutions have less power over laws, education, and moral values.
- Belief in God is also declining, especially among younger generations.

### Max Weber – Rationalisation

- Believed modern societies were undergoing rationalisation: more reliance on science, logic, and evidence, and less on supernatural explanations.
- Talked about “*disenchantment of the world*” – people no longer turn to religion to explain the world or solve problems.
- Scientific explanations now dominate (e.g. medicine for illness, not prayer).

### Peter Berger - Impacts of religious pluralism

- Berger said religious pluralism (lots of competing beliefs) weakens religion’s authority and leads to secularisation. The more religions that exist, the weaker the effect of the ‘*sacred canopy*’.
- However, Berger changed his mind over this, which makes him a useful concluding point in the debate.

## The Case that Religious Participation is Changing

### Grace Davie – Believing Without Belonging

- Argues that people still believe in God or spirituality, but don’t attend church or engage in traditional practices.
- Example: Many people pray or have faith privately, even if they don't go to religious services.

### Daniele Hervieu-Léger – Spiritual Shopping

- In postmodern society, people choose religious beliefs and practices like consumers.
- Religion is now more about individual identity than community belonging.
- Rise of personal spirituality, where people mix beliefs (e.g. astrology + mindfulness + Christian values).

### David Lyon – Jesus in Disneyland

- Argues religion has become disembedded from traditional institutions.
- Religion is now found in media, online platforms, and popular culture.
- People access religious ideas through TV, music, podcasts, Instagram, etc.
- Religion is still present, but in different forms.

### Growth of NRMs and NAMs

- Stark and Bainbridge argue that religion hasn’t disappeared, but evolved into new forms to meet people’s spiritual needs.
- Growth of NRMs (e.g. Scientology, Hare Krishna) and NAMs (e.g. crystals, energy healing) shows continued spiritual interest, especially among young people.
- These movements reflect a more personalised approach to belief.

## The Case that Secularisation is an issue for Western Christianity

### Minority Religions in the UK

- While mainstream Christianity is declining, some minority religions are growing:
- Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the UK, both in terms of numbers and public visibility. **Pew Research (2017)** predicted that Muslims may make up 10% of the UK population by 2050 if trends continue.

### Global Religious Trends

- **David Martin (2002)** argues that Pentecostalism is growing rapidly in Latin America, especially among the urban poor.
- America has higher levels of religious participation than most of Europe – e.g. over 40% of people report attending church weekly.
- However, **Bruce** argues that American religiosity is exaggerated – many people say they attend church but actually don't (a phenomenon known as social desirability bias).
- **Gifford (1998)** documents the rise of charismatic Christianity in countries like Ghana and Nigeria.
- **Islam** remains a powerful social, cultural, and political force in the Middle-East and Northern Africa and continues to expand.

The relationship between religiosity and age, gender, social class and ethnicity is a topic area in the study of beliefs in society. Students should be able to apply different explanations for varying levels of religious beliefs based upon these social characteristics, using sociological research to back up their claims. Below are some of the commonly used explanations for these differences, and how they apply to differing level of religious beliefs, participation and the organisations and practices that people choose.

### Gender Differences:

Women are more likely than men to:

- Attend church
- Pray regularly
- Say they believe in God and the afterlife

They are also more involved in New Age and spiritual movements.

### Socialisation and Gender Roles

**Miller and Hoffman:** Women are socialised to be more passive, nurturing and obedient—qualities that fit with religious values.

Women are also more likely to work part-time or be carers, so they may have more time to participate in religious practices.

### Risk and Religion

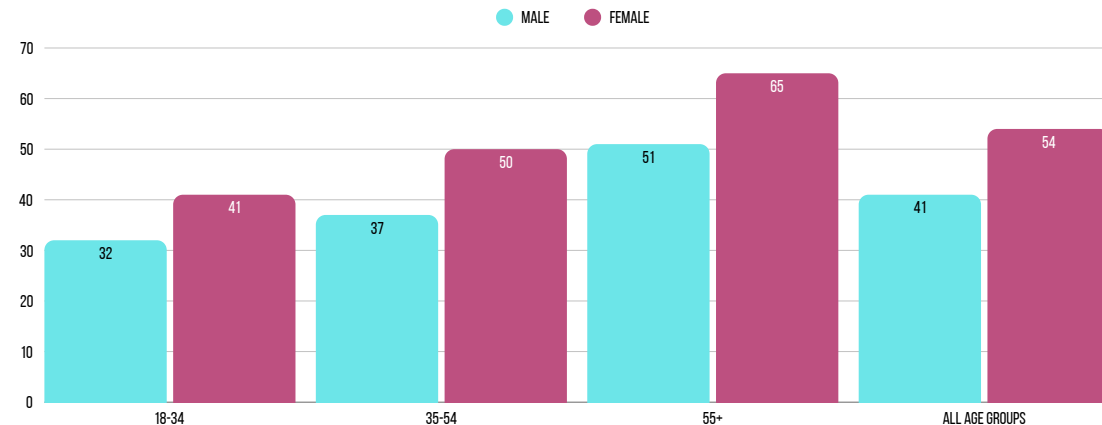
**Davie** argues that women are more risk-averse, and belief in God can be a way of avoiding the ultimate risk (e.g. hell).

### New Age Movements

**Heelas and Woodhead** found that women are more attracted to New Age spirituality (e.g. crystal healing, astrology) because it fits with a focus on the self, healing and emotions. Especially appealing to middle-class women who seek personal growth.

### Status and Paid Work

**Bruce** argues that because women are more likely to face marginalisation (e.g. lone parents, working part-time), they turn to religion for support and community. Furthermore, males are more likely to have undergone rationalisation earlier through processes within paid employment



**Social Attitudes Survey 36 (2019) Percentage of males and females identifying as having a religion**

### Age Differences

- What do we see?
- Older people are more religious in terms of belief and practice.
- Young people are less likely to attend church or follow a religion—but may still believe in some form of spirituality.

### Explanations:

#### Life Cycle Effect

People often become more religious as they age (e.g. facing illness, death, bereavement).

#### Generational (Cohort) Effect

**Voas and Crockett:** Each new generation is less religious than the one before due to secularisation. Young people are raised in a more secular culture.

#### Decline in Sunday School and Religious Socialisation

Fewer children are raised in a religious environment—so religion plays a smaller role in their lives.

#### Appeal of New Age Spirituality

Some young people may reject organised religion but are interested in spirituality (e.g., mindfulness, crystals, astrology), which focuses on personal wellbeing rather than institutions.

The relationship between religiosity and age, gender, social class and ethnicity is a topic area in the study of beliefs in society. Students should be able to apply different explanations for varying levels of religious beliefs based upon these social characteristics, using sociological research to back up their claims. Below are some of the commonly-used explanations for these differences, and how they apply to differing level of religious beliefs, participation and the organisations and practices that people choose.

## Ethnic Differences

- Ethnic minority groups in the UK (especially African-Caribbean, South Asian communities) are more religious than the white British population.
- They have higher levels of belief and participation.

### Explanations:

#### Cultural Defence and Transition

- **Bruce:** Religion acts as a source of cultural defence—preserving identity in a potentially hostile society.
- **Pryce:** Studied African-Caribbean communities in Bristol and found that Pentecostalism helped provide structure and identity during migration.

#### Socialisation and Community

- **Modood:** Religion is central to the identity of many ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.
- In some communities, religion is tied to family honour, tradition, and communal belonging.

#### Social Deprivation and Marginality

- **Weber's** idea of "theodicy of disprivilege" suggests marginalised groups may turn to religion to make sense of inequality.

## Class Differences

- Working-class people tend to be more involved in traditional, institutional religion (though this is declining).
- Middle-class people are more likely to explore individualised or spiritual beliefs (e.g., New Age).

### Explanations:

#### Church Attendance Patterns

- **Brierley:** Church attendance has fallen across all classes, but more sharply among the working class.
- Middle-class people are more likely to attend because they may benefit socially and economically (networking, status).

#### New Age Movements

- **Heelas and Woodhead:** Middle-class people are more likely to join New Age movements because they have the economic and cultural capital to access self-help and therapy-based spirituality.

#### Functionalism and Class Support

- Religion used to offer a sense of stability and hope for the working class (e.g., Marx's "opium of the people")—but with secularisation, this role has weakened.

## Churches and the Middle/Upper Class

- Churches (like the Church of England) tend to attract middle and upper-class members.
- They are seen as hierarchical, conservative, and often aligned with the state.
- The middle class may be attracted to the status, respectability, and stability churches provide.

**Weber (1920)** argued that the Protestant Ethic (especially Calvinism) helped the middle class develop values like hard work and discipline, which contributed to the rise of capitalism. This shows how religion supported middle-class success.

**Sects (like the Jehovah's Witnesses or early Methodism)** often appeal to working-class people who may feel marginalised or deprived. They offer clear answers, strong community support, and a sense of purpose and spiritual reward. **Wilson (1970)** said sects attract people who feel that society has lost its way—what he called anomie. The working class, feeling excluded from mainstream society, may find security and belonging in sects.

Globalisation has changed how religion is experienced, practiced, and understood across the world. It has intensified religious diversity, led to religious adaptations, and in some cases, sparked religious resistance. Below are key ways globalisation has impacted religion in contemporary society.

## Rise of Fundamentalism: A Reaction to Globalisation

Fundamentalism is a reaction to rapid social change, uncertainty, and the perceived threat of modern values.

Giddens (1999) argues fundamentalism offers certainty and truth in a globalised, postmodern world. Bruce says it arises when traditional beliefs feel under threat—e.g. from Western liberalism, migration, or secular values.

Seen in both Islamic and Christian contexts (e.g. the New Christian Right in the US).

## Migration and Cultural Change

- Cultural Defence: Religion helps protect national or ethnic identity during times of threat (e.g. Islam in Iran, Catholicism in Poland).
- Cultural Transition: Religion offers support for migrants adapting to a new culture (e.g. African-Caribbean churches in the UK).

**Pryce (1979):** Studied African-Caribbean Christians in Bristol—found religion helped with identity, belonging, and community cohesion.

**Bruce (2002):** Religion helps immigrants maintain cultural traditions and create a sense of community in a new, unfamiliar environment.

**Bird (1999):** Notes that ethnic minorities in the UK often turn to religion as a form of community support, especially where they face racism, marginalisation or status frustration.

## Religious Diversity and Resilience

- **Davie (1994):** "Believing without belonging"—people still believe, even if they don't attend religious institutions.
- **Voas (2009):** Developed the concept of *Fuzzy Fidelity*—many claim to be religious but don't follow practices strictly.

Religion hasn't disappeared; it's becoming more flexible in form.

## Online Religion & Spiritual Individualism

**Helland (2000):** Identified two forms:

- Religion online: Institutional religion using digital platforms.
- Online religion: Interactive, user-led religious expression.

**Hervieu-Léger (2000):** Religion in postmodernity is shaped by personal choice. People "pick and mix" spiritual beliefs.

Rise of **spiritual individualism**—religion becomes about identity and well-being.

## Clash of Civilisations – Samuel Huntington (1993)

Huntington argued conflicts would be based on culture and religion, not politics or economics. He identified major civilisations (e.g. Western, Islamic, Hindu, Confucian) and claimed these would clash due to incompatible worldviews. Globalisation increases contact between these civilisations, often resulting in religious conflict.

## Consumerism and the Disneyfication of Religion

**Lyon (2000):**

- Religion has become a consumer product, adapted to modern life.
- **Disneyfication:** Religious experiences are made entertaining and accessible (e.g. megachurches, religious theme parks).

## Religious Market Theory – Stark & Bainbridge (1985):

- Religion thrives in competitive environments.
- Explains why the USA (with religious competition) is more religious than Europe.

## Secularisation and Rational Thinking

**Bruce (2002):** Globalisation promotes rational, scientific thinking, reducing the need for religion in everyday life.

**Norris & Inglehart (2011):**

In places with **high existential security** (e.g. Scandinavia), religion declines. In poorer societies with insecurity, religion remains strong.

Many of these arguments can be applied to the wider secularisation debate outlined earlier in this pack that largely focused on secularisation in Western Europe.