

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)

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)

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 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)

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 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).

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

Item J

Some sociologists argue that religion performs an ideological function and operates in the interests of powerful groups in society. For example, feminists see religion as helping to sustain male domination of society. They point to the patriarchal nature of sacred texts, such as the Biblical story of Eve causing humanity's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and their role of legitimating the subordination of women. Marxists, too, see religion as an ideology that distorts people's perception of reality in capitalist society and helps prevent revolution.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate the claim that religion performs an ideological function in the interests of powerful groups. (20 marks)

Item J

Max Weber argued that religious beliefs can lead to important social changes. According to Weber, Calvinist Protestant beliefs in the 16th century were crucial in bringing about the emergence of modern capitalism in Western Europe. By contrast, the beliefs of some other major religions have acted as a barrier to such change.

Some sociologists argue that religion has a dual character: its beliefs can have both a negative impact on social change and a positive one, for example by inspiring protest against the status quo.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate the extent to which religious beliefs can be a force for social change. (20 marks)

Item J

Some sociologists claim that society has entered a new era, that of postmodernity, in which religion and spirituality take on new forms. In postmodern society, tradition loses its influence over people.

Consumption and choice become more important, and people are free to choose their identity and their beliefs. Postmodern society is increasingly globalised, and the media and information technology become much more important, for example moving religious ideas and images out of their traditional physical home in churches and making them available around the globe.

However, other sociologists argue that these trends merely promote secularisation.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate the impact of postmodernity on religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. (20 marks)

Item J

Religious fundamentalists seek to return to what they regard as the basics of their faith. Fundamentalists believe unquestioningly in the literal truth of their faith's sacred text. They are intolerant of the views of others, believing that their view of the world is the only true one. The growth of fundamentalism is often seen as response to the threat posed by modern society, which challenges and undermines the values and certainties offered by traditional religion.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that fundamentalism is a response to modern society. (20 marks)

Item J

There is a wide variety of different kinds of religious and spiritual organisations and movements in today's society. As well as the major churches, there are now a large number of sects, cults and new religious movements that lie outside the traditional religious mainstream. These terms cover a diverse range of groups, some of which offer their followers worldly success, while others are resolutely hostile to wider society. Some have particular appeal to the poor and oppressed, but others draw support from more affluent groups.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations for the existence of sects, cults and new religious movements. (20 marks)

Item J

The term 'ideology' usually refers to a belief system that serves the interests of a particular social group or class. For example, Marxists argue that the ruling class use ideologies that portray inequality as inevitable and/or desirable. By doing so, they seek to persuade subordinate classes to accept the dominance of the ruling class over society. Institutions such as religion, the media and education play an important role in creating ideology.

From a functionalists perspective, civil religion and political beliefs such as nationalism may be seen as ideologies that can bind society together.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations of the nature and role of ideology. (20 marks)

Item J

Marxist sociologists tend to take a negative view of the nature of religion and its role in society. For example, Marx regards religion as the product of the alienation that is found in all class societies. In his view, its role is to act as an ideology that keeps the proletariat subordinated. Religion acts like a drug to dull the pain of exploitation and oppression.

Applying material from **Item J** and your own knowledge, evaluate Marxist views of the nature and role of religion. (20 marks)

Item J

Postmodernists argue that there has been an increase in spirituality in the United Kingdom. For example, there is increased interest in New Age activities such as yoga, meditation and crystal healing. However, theories of secularisation claim that traditional organised religion has declined, while science and rational thought have become more important.

Applying material from **Item J** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that an increase in spirituality in the United Kingdom has compensated for the decline of organised religion. (20 marks)

Item J

Many functionalist sociologists argue that religion is a universal feature of social life. In their view, this is because it performs indispensable functions without which society would disintegrate.

It symbolizes the power of society and its shared rituals instil a sense of solidarity and loyalty to the community, and it legitimizes society's central values. Religion also performs important psychological functions, answering 'ultimate' questions and enabling individuals to cope with emotional stress and thus to continue performing the roles society requires of them.

However, critics argue that functionalists ignore the negative aspects of religion and that functional definitions of religion disregard the particular nature of religious beliefs.

Applying material from **Item J** and your knowledge, evaluate functionalist explanations of the nature and role of religion. (20 marks)

Item J

Many sociologists argue that religious beliefs and organisations act as conservative forces and barriers to social change. For example, religious doctrines such as the Hindu belief in reincarnation or Christian teachings on the family have given religious justification to existing social structures. Similarly, it is argued that religious organisations such as churches are often extremely wealthy and closely linked to elite groups and power structures.

Applying material from **Item J** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that religious beliefs and organisations are barriers to social change. (20 marks)

Item J

Postmodernists argue that there has been an increase in spirituality in the United Kingdom. For example, there is increased interest in New Age activities such as yoga, meditation and crystal healing. However, theories of secularisation claim that traditional organised religion has declined, while science and rational thought have become more important.

Applying material from **Item J** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that an increase in spirituality in the United Kingdom has compensated for the decline of organised religion. (20 marks)