



GCE

Religious Studies

**RS3 CS:
Studies in Religion in Contemporary Society (A2)**

by Gordon Reid

Topic One: Religion and Contemporary Issues

AIM

At the end of this topic you should:

- Know about the relationship between religion and the state in the UK
- Understand what a State / Established Church is
- Explain how a State or Established Church differs from other Churches
- Explain why the Church of England has special privileges and a role in government.
- Evaluate the arguments for and against a close link between religion and state
- Understand issues concerning free speech and blasphemy
- Explain issues of freedom in dress, speech and worship
- Examine issues relating to religion in marriage and civil partnership ceremonies.
- Understand the religious background to conflict in the Middle East
- Evaluate issues relating to religion and the State

Religion and the State in the UK

There is a very important relationship between religion and the State in the UK. Most people in the UK claim to be Christian (though relatively few go to church) and the UK is generally seen as a Christian country even it has citizens of many religions and faiths. UK laws and traditions are broadly Christian in origin and Parliament, when considering the making of new laws, tends to put a Christian emphasis on them – for instance, the recent legislation allowing civil partnerships fell short of being a full marriage arrangement for gay couples because of objections from the Christian Church. In most democracies today, the church and the state are kept separate and independent from each other, though not in all.

State religion and State church

Some countries have a state religion, sometimes called an established church, and is a religion or religious body which is officially endorsed and encouraged by the State. A State without a state religion is called a secular State.

A state church is created by the ruling body of the country though it is not run by the government, or controlled by it. This is slightly different to a state religion, in which the people of a nation choose a faith – for instance, Mexico has accepted Roman Catholicism, which gives the Pope control of the church and therefore a very considerable influence on the hearts and minds of the Mexican people and, indirectly the state or government.

Around the world there are states that give support - often very considerable – to a state church or religion. This can range from simple approval, to huge financial support and even the imposition of restrictions on other faiths. For example, a number of communist states such as North Korea and China have disapproved of all religion and forced religious believers to practice in secret.

There are important differences between state religions and state churches:

- State religions usually have the support of the majority of the people and many have a strong allegiance to it.
- A state religion is fairly open and allows for a wide range of opinions and views to co-exist together.
- A state church may not have the support of the majority of the people and, indeed, relatively few people might worship at state churches.
- However, the views of the state church, because it is supported and endorsed by the State, may have a huge influence in the politics and the way government decisions are made.



Research topic

What does it mean to be a member of a Church? What are the obligations and the benefits?

The Church of England

The Church of England is the established or state Church of England. This means:

- The Queen is the Supreme Governor of the Church
- The Church is linked to the State and has a political role
- The Church performs a number of official functions

This originally happened because King Henry VIII passed the Act of Succession and the Act of Supremacy to break away from the Roman Catholic Church (who refused to allow the king to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon). The Acts made the King '*The Supreme Head of the Church of England*'.

Today, this role continues. The monarch has the power to:

- approve the appointment of archbishops and bishops
- formally open the General Synod (the Church's governing body)
- maintain the power of the Church

In turn, being the state church gives the Church of England unique political power and representation. In Parliament, the Church is allowed to appoint 26 Lords Spiritual. These are bishops who sit in the House of Lords and can use their position to review and amend parliamentary legislation. In this way, the Church of England exercises a considerable influence over the Government. No other church or religious group can do this, although there are some members of the House of Lords from other religious faiths. On the civic side, the Church of England takes exclusive responsibility for national religious events such as

- Royal weddings and funerals
- National memorial services
- Major state occasions such as Coronations.

The Church of England also gets special tax concessions given to it by the state, enabling it accumulate great wealth and it owns land and assets worth £5.7 billion. In contrast, the Roman Catholic Church, which has about the same number of members, has assets of only £297 million.



For reflection

Is this tax privilege right?

Those who support the Church of England having such privileges offer the following reasons why:

- The majority of people in the UK claim to be members of the Church of England, even if they don't actually go to church.
- Britain is a Christian nation.
- Having the Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords helps Parliament to understand the importance of the religious dimension.
- The religious influence of the Church of England in the Parliamentary process protects the interests of Christians all over the UK.
- The Church of England is one of the 'three great pillars of British Society' (the other two being the Monarchy and Parliament).
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Seminar topic

Is Britain really a Christian nation? Why/ why not?

Should the Church of England be allowed such privileges?

Those who are against having the Church of England as the State Church claim that it should not be allowed to enjoy such privilege because:

- The UK is a secular society
- The Welsh, Scottish and Irish Churches do not have any members of the Lords Spiritual
- The privileged role of Christianity is unfair to other faiths in the UK
- Religion can have an unduly negative influence on Parliamentary decisions e.g. over such matters as scientific research.
- Religion can block issues that the secular population find more acceptable e.g. legislation on homosexuality
- The Lords Spiritual are not democratically elected and so should not sit in the House of Lords
- The Anglican Church in Wales is entirely separate from the State.
- Less than one million people attend Church of England services each week and numbers are falling. This means the Church of England has too much influence.
- The system prevents Roman Catholics and members of other faiths from marrying or becoming the Monarch. This is religious discrimination.



For reflection:

One Government Minister, David Cairns, remarked: *'It is simply untenable in this day and age that should the heir to the throne want to marry a Roman Catholic he would have to renounce his rights. It's absurd.'* - Do you agree?



Seminar topic

Is it right that Christianity should have more influence with the UK than other religions? Why/ why not?

Should the Church of England cease to be the State Church?

In recent times, a number of politicians have called for the Church of England to cease being the state Church – in other words, to be ‘disestablished’ on the grounds that the UK is a secular society and one religious group should not have greater privileges than another. This means ending the privileged position of the Church as part of the State. This is because there are an increasing number of conflicts in Parliament between the secular view of the State and the religious view from the Church of England, for instance over homosexuality laws and religious pluralism.

Even the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams seems doubtful about the correctness of such privilege. In December 2008 he said that it would:

‘...by no means the end of the world if the Establishment disappears’.

Alan Michael, the former Welsh Secretary said in support:

‘The Archbishop got it absolutely right. It would not be the death of the Church of England if it were disestablished.’

At the moment, the official position of the UK Government is:

‘The Church of England is by law established as the Church in England and the monarch is its supreme governor. The government remains committed to this position.’ – Ministry of Justice



For reflection:

Would the Church of England be better off if it was not the State Church?

The influence of non-Christian faiths on the UK Government

There are many Members of Parliament, both in the House of Commons and the House of Lords who are not members of the Church of England and are active members of other faiths – for example, in the House of Lords sits Leslie Griffiths who is a Methodist, Lord Ahmed, a Muslim and Sir Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi. They all bring an added dimension to debates concerning religious issues.

Parliament may also be influenced by religious pressure groups, who campaign on issues affecting their faith community – for instance, the Muslim Council of Britain, the Hindu Council UK, the Jewish Council and the Buddhist Council.

In Wales there is the Interfaith Council and the Faith Communities Forum which aim to promote dialogue between the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and major faith communities on matters affecting the economic, social and cultural well-being of Wales. Members of all major religious faiths are represented and the First Minister of the National Assembly and the Secretary of State for Wales are both members.



For reflection

Should a secular government take notice of the views of religious groups?

The Church in Wales

From the middle ages until the early twentieth century, the Welsh diocese had been part of the Province of Canterbury and, after the Reformation, became part of the Church of England which was the established church in Wales. Today, the Church in Wales (Yr Eglwys yng Nghymru) is not an established church, having been disestablished in 1920 and most Welsh Christians are nonconformist, although the Church of England was the largest single Christian grouping.

It is called the Church **in** Wales because this is how it was referred to in the Welsh Church Act 1914, which saw it as the part of the Church of England that was within Wales. In 1920, a Convention of the Welsh Church adopted the name 'Church in Wales' officially.

The Church in Wales is a member of the Anglican Communion and covers six dioceses. It recognises the primacy of the Archbishop of Canterbury, though he does not have any formal authority in Wales. The present Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, is Welsh and held posts in the Church in Wales.

The Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland (the Kirk) is a Presbyterian church. It is not a state church and has completely independent from the State in religious matters since the Act of Union in 1707. Neither the Scottish nor the Westminster Parliaments have any involvement in the Kirk's affairs. The Church of Scotland accounts for 10% of Scottish worshippers, though 42% claim to be members. There is a Kirk in every Scottish community

The Church of Ireland

The Church of Ireland (Eaglais na hEireann) is a Protestant church and part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is, after Roman Catholicism, the second-largest denomination in Ireland.

The Church in Ireland became the state church of Ireland following the Reformation and was given considerable wealth and power by the state, even though the majority of Irish citizens were Catholics. In 1801 it united with the Church of England to form the United Church of England and Ireland and remained so until it was disestablished in 1871.

Writing task

- (a) Explain the arguments for and against the Church of England being the established Church?
- (b) Evaluate the view that having an established Church is a good thing.

Religion and Government

Prayers in Parliament

In both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the daily sitting begins with Christian Prayers. Attendance is voluntary and dates back to 1558. The present form of the prayers dates from the reign of King Charles II. Members of the public are not allowed in the public galleries during the prayers. In the House of Commons the prayers are usually read by the Speaker. The form of the main prayer is:

'Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed. Amen.'

In the House of Lords, a senior bishop, one of the Lord's Spiritual reads the prayers. One such prayer reads:

'Almighty God, by whom alone Kings reign, and Princes decree justice; and from whom alone cometh all counsel, wisdom and understanding; we thine unworthy servants, here gathered together in thy Name, do most humbly beseech thee to send down thy Heavenly Wisdom from above, to direct and guide us in all our consultations; and grant that, we having thy fear always before our eyes, and laying aside all private interests, prejudices and partial affections, the result of our counsels may be to the glory of thy blessed Name, the maintenance of true Religion and Justice, the safety, honour and happiness of the Queen, the public wealth, peace and tranquillity of the Realm, and the uniting and knitting together of the hearts of all persons and

estates within the same, in true Christian love and Charity towards another, through Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour. Amen.'

By tradition, members of both Houses stand for prayers and face the wall behind them. This was because, originally, members could not kneel if they were wearing a sword.



For reflection

What is the point of these prayers?

The Lord's Spiritual

The House of Lords is the upper house and the Second Chamber of Parliament, whose job it is to review proposed legislation from the government in the House of Commons. The House of Lords has 733 members, 24 of which are appointed by the Church of England and are known as the 'Lords Spiritual'. These include the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and 21 other senior bishops. There are no bishops from Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

In practice, the Lords Spiritual rarely attend the House of Lords, though at least one is there to read the prayers on each day where legislation is to be discussed or voted on. Sometimes, they attend and speak in debates, particularly over legislative matters with a religious dimension. However, they cannot vote unless the circumstances are deemed exceptional.



Seminar Topic:

Do the Lords Spiritual have a place in a modern democratic environment?

Defender of the Faith

In 1521, Pope Leo X gave King Henry VIII the title 'Defender of the Faith' (Fidei defensor) in recognition of Henry's book 'Assertio Septem Sacramentorum' (Defence of the Seven Sacraments), which protected the sacrament of marriage and the supremacy of the Pope. Although this title was revoked by Pope Paul III when Henry broke away from the Catholic Church, nevertheless, in 1544, Parliament conferred the title 'Defender of the Faith' back on him – but now a defender of Protestantism against the Catholic Church. Subsequently, all monarchs now hold the title as defenders of Anglicanism. The Queen's official title thus contains the words 'Defender of the Faith.'

This title reflects the monarch's position as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Interestingly, in Commonwealth countries most do not recognise

this title, seeing it as a contradiction to have a monarch defending a minority faith. Indeed, in 1994, Prince Charles said that, when he became king:

'I personally would rather see my future role of Defender of Faith, not the Faith'.



Seminar Topic

Prince Charles is a divorcee. The Bible suggests that divorce is wrong. Can Prince Charles, when he becomes king, really be 'Defender of the Faith'? Should the monarch have any religious responsibilities or duties?

There are many Members of Parliament who belong to faiths other than Christianity and members of all the major world religions play an active part in important state occasions, such as state remembrance services. However, one voice of protest has come from the Spiritualists' National Union, who argue that, as the seventh largest religion in the UK, they have a right to stand alongside members of the major world faiths at the annual Remembrance Sunday Service at the Cenotaph in London. In 2009, the SNU submitted a petition to the government, signed by 1038 Spiritualists asking for the right to take part and lay a wreath at the foot of the Cenotaph, saying:

'Over a number of years, Spiritualists have unsuccessfully made representations to the government to be allowed to be represented among the religions which wish to pay respect to the fallen by laying a wreath at the Cenotaph.'

In reply, Prime Minister Gordon Brown wrote;

'Currently fourteen faith leaders are invited to attend the Remembrance Sunday Ceremony and proceed into Whitehall, where they stand in observance during the two minutes' silence, the formal wreath-laying and the subsequent religious service. The current faith representation was agreed in 1999/2000...there are no plans to change the faith representation.'



For reflection:

Is it right that the Spiritualists are not permitted at the Cenotaph Ceremony?

Writing Task

- (a) Give an account of the role of religion in the work of Parliament.
- (b) Evaluate the view that religion is too influential on the legislative process in the UK

Should religion be involved in the workings of the State?

Christians and members of many other faiths in the UK are divided as to whether or not religion should have an influence on politics and the workings of the State.

Arguments in favour of religion influencing the State

- It is impossible to separate religion and politics, since both are crucial aspects of life.
- Religious believers have a moral responsibility to campaign for political issues that are in line with the teachings of their faith.
- Religious believers have always been involved in politics. For example, William Wilberforce campaigned against the slave trade and Archbishop Desmond Tutu campaigned against racism and apartheid in South Africa.
- It is important to put the will of God before power, money and self-interest.
- Believers can encourage the State to spend money on things that do good for society, such as hospitals and schools.
- Religion can ensure that the government acts in a good and morally correct way, respecting human rights, the elderly, the poor and the needy.

Arguments against religion influencing the State

- The majority, who are non-believers, may resent religious involvement in secular matters.
- Religious believers should be concerned about spiritual development rather than politics.
- UK society is multi-cultural and made up of a number of religious faiths and it may be that to avoid conflict, all religions should stay out of politics.
- The Bible teaches that Christians should obey political leaders because authority has been given to them by God. 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God' (Romans 13:1).

Writing Task

1. Give an account of the role of the Lords Spiritual. In what ways does their presence help and/or hinder the democratic process?
2. “*The Government should treat the views of all religions equally when making legislative decisions.*” – Assess this view.
3. Consider critically the view that the Church of England should not have special privileges over other faiths in the UK.

Debates concerning free speech and blasphemy

Free Speech

In the UK, everyone has the right to freedom of speech, which means the right to speak without censorship or limitation. It is not, however, a complete freedom, for example, people may not make public speeches of ‘hate’ or incite violence towards others. Freedom of speech is protected by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises:

‘...the right to hold opinions without interference. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression.’

Freedom of speech includes the right to express and disseminate information and ideas and also includes the right to seek information, to receive information and to give information to others. It covers not only the spoken word, but also writing, art and through the Internet. In the UK, it also includes the right to speak freely and have public debate about politics and the government should not seek to prevent this, even in a national emergency.

However there are limitations to free speech. For example, people may not make public speeches that might seriously harm or offend others, incite violence or criminal behaviour or make so-called ‘hate speeches’. This also covers racial and religious inflammatory remarks.



For reflection

Can speech ever be truly free?

One of the biggest problems for free speech is the Internet. Whilst it has led to instant communication and the dissemination of information and opinions around the world, it has also caused problems with hate sites, pornography and extremist opinions.

This has led, in some countries, to state sponsored censorship, monitoring and surveillance of the internet, with the control or suppression of material and blocking access to information. For example, Iran and North Korea are among a number of nations known or suspected of censoring the internet. The most well-known example of internet censorship is the so-called ‘Great

Firewall of China' is a network firewall that blocks content over a number of international websites and chat-rooms.



For research

In what ways is the internet censored? What countries censor the Internet and why?

Should everyone have the right to free speech on the internet? Why/ why not?

Blasphemy

Blasphemy means speaking in a derogatory way about God – denying his being, making fun and scoffing at the scriptures and exposing the name of Jesus Christ, or the Bible, to scorn and ridicule.

The last person in the UK to be sent to prison for blasphemy was William Gott in 1921, after he published two pamphlets poking fun at the scriptures and comparing Jesus to a circus clown.

In 1977 a private prosecution for blasphemous libel was taken out by the Nationwide festival of Light, an evangelical Christian society, against the publishers of 'Gay News' who had published a poem called 'The love that dares to speak its name' which suggested that Jesus was a homosexual. Soon after, the Monty Python film 'Life of Brian' was released and met with public protests from religious groups, though no actions for blasphemy were brought.

Later, in 1988, following the publication of his book 'The Satanic Verses', British author Salman Rushdie was accused of blasphemy by many Islamic groups and the Iranian clerical leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa in 1989 calling for Rushdie's death. In the UK a number of prominent Muslims called for Rushdie to be charged with blasphemy, but their requests were refused because, at that time, blasphemy laws only covered Christianity.

In 2002, a Select Committee of the House of Lords suggested that the blasphemy laws, as they stood, were ineffective and they should either be extended to cover all faiths or be abolished. The final straw came when, in 2005, the BBC received 63,000 complaints from Christian viewers who had been offended by a scene in 'Jerry Springer: The Opera' which portrayed Jesus as a homosexual. An organisation called Christian Voice tried to bring a private blasphemy prosecution, but this was rejected.

In fact, many judges and politicians believed that blasphemy was contrary to the freedom of speech provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. Finally, the government, in consultation with religious groups said that the old law of blasphemy was no longer effective. Blasphemy and blasphemous libel were abolished in England and Wales in July 2008. In its place, the Racial and

Religious Hatred Act 2006 makes it an offence in England and Wales to incite hatred against people on the grounds of religion.

In Scotland, although blasphemous conduct is still an offence, it is felt that, because Scotland is also subject to the Human Rights Act 1998, that blasphemy is no longer likely to be treated as an offence.

In Northern Ireland, blasphemous libel remains an offence.

Writing task:

- (a) Examine the development of blasphemy laws in the UK.
- (b) 'Blasphemy laws are ineffective' Assess this view with particular reference to blasphemy trials in the UK.

There have been a number of arguments for and against the Race and Religious Hatred Act. Those in favour claim that:

- The law will protect religious minorities from religious hatred and scorn.
- It will curb race and cultural hatred and anger
- '...such a law is required to protect Muslim communities from Islamophobia.' – Sunday Times 6.2.05
- '*The proposed provision is needed to combat the incited hatred that threatens the cohesion of our communities.*' - The Hindu Council UK 'Incitement to racial hatred fact sheet' 2005

Those against the Act claim that:

- It is contrary to freedom of speech
- Comedy and satire are important aspects of that freedom.
- '*To criticize a person for their race is manifestly irrational and ridiculous but to criticize their religion, that is a right...the freedom to criticize ideas, any ideas – even if they are sincerely held beliefs – is one of the fundamental freedoms of society and a law which attempts to say you can criticize and ridicule ideas as long as they are not religious ones is a very peculiar law indeed.*' - Rowan Atkinson: The Independent' - 4th December 2004
- '*This legislation is likely to undermine freedom of speech, damage community relations and usher in a new climate of illiberalism and repression* - Dr Don Horrocks: Evangelical Alliance - 6 April 2005



Seminar topic:

Should religions be open to satire and criticism or should they be protected in the same way that races are?

Is religious freedom more important than community cohesion?

Law and Conscience

One of the most difficult dilemmas facing members of a democratic society is what should someone do if they find that they are required to obey a law which they find unacceptable and which their conscience tells them to disobey? What takes priority – law or conscience?

Martin Luther King had no doubt that conscience should take priority, arguing that if a law is unfair then it is not a law at all and a person has the right – indeed the duty – to disobey it:

‘An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing their highest respect for the law.’

On the other hand, Theodore Roosevelt believed that obedience to the law was of the highest importance:

‘No man is above the law...obedience to the law is demanded as a right, not asked as a favour.’

Arguments in favour of putting law ahead of conscience:

- Laws are a matter of objective reality.
- In a democracy, the law is the will of the majority
- The law exists so that society can function in a peaceful and ordered way.
- People generally accept the law to be fair and valid and ought, therefore, to obey it
- If we all behave according to our conscience or personal feelings, then the result would be instability and anarchy.

Arguments in favour of putting conscience ahead of law:

- A sense of justice is a more personal, subjective matter.
- The majority do not always do what is right
- If no harm is done to others, then conscience should prevail
- *‘One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.’* – Martin Luther King
- *‘An unjust law is no law at all’.* – St Augustine



Seminar Topic:

When law and conscience are in conflict, which should have priority and why?

Religious Freedom

Freedom of Worship

Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 states the following:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes:

- Freedom to change their religion or belief
- Freedom, either alone or with others and in public or private, to worship and observe their religious faith.
- Freedom not to be obstructed by others in following out their faith.

The main limitations to this freedom are:

- To ensure public safety
- To keep public order
- Not to offend public morals
- Not to infringe the freedoms of others.

Freedom of religious dress

In the UK, people are generally allowed to dress however they wish, so long as they do not infringe the laws of public decency. This means they may wear clothing which reflects and is part of their religion and culture. There have however, been problems in recent years

Case Study 1: The Niqab

In October 2006, government minister Jack Straw wrote in the Lancashire Evening Telegraph that, in his work as a Member of Parliament, he preferred talking to Muslim women who did not wear the niqab (face veil) as he could see their face and would politely ask women who wore the niqab if they would not mind taking it off when they spoke to him, though he was happy for them to decline the request. Straw's views sparked a wide-ranging debate, with some people supporting his views and others accusing him of encouraging religious prejudice.

The issue is a controversial one because there are different viewpoints on religious dress within Islam. The women who wear the veil tend to observe the hadiths (sayings of the Prophet) which instruct women to cover all that is not essential. However, the majority of Muslim women believe that their faces should be visible, though may cover their hair with a hijab.



For reflection

Does it matter what people wear?

In Parliament, those who opposed the niqab commented:

- Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, said on the BBC news on 6 October 2006: that he thought the veil a '*mark of separation*'.
- Gordon Brown said in The Times on 11th October 2006 that it would be '*better for Britain*' if fewer women wore the veil.
- In The Daily Telegraph on the same day, Harriet Harman said: '*the veil is an obstacle to women's participation, on equal terms in society*'

Those in support of the veil disagreed:

- Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone said in a BBC radio interview: '*...that a powerful man can say to a completely powerless woman, I think you should take your veil off, I think is completely and utterly wrong and insensitive*'.
- In the Times on 13th October 2006, Nazir Ahmed, the first Muslim peer in the House of Lords, accused the government of: '*....a constant theme of demonising the Muslim communities*'



Seminar Topic

What are the main issues here?

Which arguments are the most convincing and why?

Case Study 2: The Crucifix

In October 2006, a devout Christian woman called Nadia Eweida, who was employed by British Airways as a member of the check-in staff, was sent home without pay because she refused to cover up a Christian Cross that she wore around her neck. British Airways claimed that their uniform policy prohibited the showing of any kind of jewellery or adornment around the neck. She said:

'I believe that is a very important issue on the matter of expressing Christianity and employees having their say in the way they express their faith.'

British Airways responded by saying that all religious symbols on chains should be worn underneath the uniform, but admitted that they did allow Sikhs to wear turbans and Muslim women to wear the Hijab because these items cannot be covered up.

Nadia Eweida stayed away from work, unpaid, for several months. She has since returned, without the Cross.



Seminar Topic

Is this a religious or secular issue? Why?
Do you agree with the outcome?



For reflection

In a dispute between law and religion, which side should take priority?



Research Task

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the involvement of religion in the State and in government?

Religion in ceremonies

Religion in marriage ceremonies

All major religions speak about the importance of marriage. Marriage is a social and legal union between two individuals, formalized at a wedding ceremony. This may be officiated either by a religious leader or by a state approved celebrant. In the UK a couple may opt for a civil ceremony only, or a religious ceremony – but this must include within it a civil ceremony. This means that the couple, at some point in the wedding ceremony, sign the marriage register and make the statutory declarations to make their marriage legal.

Christians believe that marriage is a gift from God and may be regarded as a sacrament, a contract, a sacred act or a covenant – an agreement with God. They regard marriage as a public declaration of a couple's love and commitment in front of friends, family and God.

A Christian marriage ceremony is usually conducted by a priest and will contain hymns, prayers and readings from the scriptures. The couple make promises of commitment to each other and declare before God that they will love, honour, comfort and protect their partners as long as they live.

Religious believers of most major faiths believe that having a religious marriage ceremony strengthens the marriage and brings God firmly into the heart of the relationship. God cares about the relationship and can give the couple strength, help and guidance and sustain them with his love. A religious ceremony also welcomes the couple into the religious community.



Seminar Topic

Is marriage a good thing? Why/ why not?

Religion in civil partnership ceremonies

A civil partnership is a legal union between two people who are gay or lesbian – it gives the couple similar legal rights and obligations as a marriage does to a heterosexual couple. The couple are called 'civil partners'.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 states that there should not be any form of religious activity during the process of registering the union. The Act does not include a ceremony as such, though the couple speak their vows before signing the register.



For reflection

Is it right that there is no religious ceremony for a civil partnership?

In the UK, the lack of a religious ceremony caused sadness and anger for many Gay Christians. In February 2010, the House of Lords voted to lift this ban and allow same sex couples to hold a civil partnership ceremony in a church. Lord Alli, who proposed the amendment in the House of Lords, said in the House in February 2010:

'There are many gay and lesbian couples who want to share their civil partnership with the congregations they worship with and there are a number of religious organisations that want to allow gay and lesbian couples to do exactly that. In the end, it comes down to an issue of religious freedom.'

Ben Summerskill, the chief executive of Stonewall, the gay rights group said:

'We are absolutely delighted with this vote for religious freedom. It will be warmly welcomed by lesbian and gay people of faith.'

This Lords decision has not yet been approved by the government, but many feel that they are unlikely to stand in its way.



Seminar Topic

What are the main differences between a marriage and a civil partnership?

Do these differences matter? Why/ why not?

The involvement of religion in conflicts in the Middle East

War is an armed conflict between two or more nations. Most countries have military forces to protect their citizens. The causes of war are many and varied – though all are concerned with either protecting a nation's way of life or of improving that way of life. Some experts argue that going to war is part of human nature. Although the main factors which lead to nations going to war with each other are often to do with self-defence, fear and national pride, some of the longest and bloodiest wars have their root causes in religious beliefs and long-standing religious hatreds. Perhaps the most well-known of these is the on-going conflict between Palestinians and Israelis in the Middle East.

Case Study: The Israeli- Palestinian Conflict

The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lie in the distant past. It is a clash of religious ideals and principles. Israel was the biblical homeland of the Jews until it was conquered by the Romans and renamed Palestine. In the centuries that followed, for reasons of war, conquest, economics and social migration, many Jews left Israel and the land became populated by Muslim Arabs, who became known as Palestinians.

In 1917 the British took charge of Palestine under a mandate to build a homeland again for the Jewish people. Trouble followed as the Palestinians resented this encroachment on their land. The Zionist Movement, as it became known, grew in strength and many Jews living in Europe, moved to Israel where they established major settlements. After the First World War, the British, who at that time had control over Palestine, promised both the Jews and the Arabs that they each would have their own land. In 1922 Israel was split into two parts with the land east of the River Jordan becoming Jordan and the land to the west, which was called Palestine. However, almost immediately this led to conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, who fought over who should have control over the government, land and the economy.

In 1947 the United Nations passed Resolution 181, calling for Palestine to be divided into separate Jewish and Arab states. On May 14th 1948, the Jewish state, re-named Israel, declared its independence. Israel was almost immediately attacked by Palestinians and Arabs from the surrounding countries and war followed. Israel defeated the Arab forces and expanded the land under its control and huge number of Palestinians became refugees with no land or home.

In 1967, Israel was threatened with attack and launched a pre-emptive strike in what became known as the Six Day War. Israel was again victorious and

seized more land, and, in the process, more Palestinians became refugees. The Arab states called for the destruction of Israel and a campaign of violence followed, led by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). In 1973 the Arab nations attacked Israel again (the Arab-Israeli War) and, once more, were defeated, but the price in lives and materials was very heavy. The United Nations demanded that the Israelis withdrew from the territories they overran and occupied, but Israel refused to do so.



For reflection

Are these good reasons to go to war?

For years afterwards, peace talks were held on both sides, but little was achieved. In the late 1980s the Palestinians began an uprising to protest against the Israeli occupation of the main areas where they lived – the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Peace talks achieved little and terrorism and bloodshed continued on both sides in the years which followed.

In 1993 under the Oslo Declaration, Israel agreed to give the Palestinians autonomous control over the West Bank and Gaza Strip in return for a promise of peace, but the violence continued, including a major Palestinian uprising in 2000 – the '*Intifadah*', which resulted in riots and many deaths on both sides. In 2002, the Israeli military forces engaged in operation 'Defensive Wall' and re-took the land it had returned to the Palestinians.

In September 2000 Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon made a tour of the al-Aqsa religious complex in Jerusalem, which enraged Palestinians. Violence erupted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and many lives were lost.

After more negotiations and promises of peace from both sides and the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat a semblance of order returned and the Israelis withdrew and granted the Palestinians a degree of autonomy again. In 2006, however, much to Israel's alarm, the Palestinians elected the radical movement Hamas into power – a group who had publicly vowed never to make peace with Israel.

In response, Israel built a massive security barrier called the 'Apartheid Wall' providing a huge concrete barrier between the West Bank and Israel. It has had a very significant detrimental effect on the Palestinian economy, making it very difficult for supplies to get through to the Palestinians and making it hard for the people to find work or to travel without passing through many security checkpoints.

Since then the violence has continued, almost on a daily basis, with a cycle of Palestinian suicide bombings and Israeli military reprisals. Today there are about 4 million Palestinians, mostly very poor, living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Meantime Israel has continued to illegally build settlements and towns in land formerly controlled by the Palestinians, causing still greater resentment.

Today, the conflict continues. The key issues are:

- Mutual recognition
- Borders
- Security
- water Rights
- Control of Jerusalem
- Israeli settlements and towns
- Palestinian freedom of movement
- Refugees
- Human Rights

From the Zionist point of view:

- The land of Israel, according to the Bible, was given by God to the Jews.
- From 11th- 6th centuries BCE the Jews (then known as Israelites) occupied the land.
- It is called 'The Promised Land' because it was promised by God to the descendants of Abraham, the father of the Jewish race and his legitimate son, Isaac.
- Jerusalem is God's 'Chosen City' for the Jewish People.

Their view is:

- Israel is a holy land for Muslims as well.
- Muslims are descended from Abraham too, through his illegitimate son, Ismail.
- Jerusalem is a sacred city for Muslims because Muhammad passed through on his first journey to Heaven.
- Many sacred Islamic sites are located in Jerusalem, including the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.



Seminar Topic

Which of these arguments is the most convincing and why?



For research

Look up the Arab-Israeli wars of the twentieth century. What were their causes and how did they end?

Both sides remain entrenched with each claiming that their point of view is right and that the land of Israel and the holy city of Jerusalem belongs to them. An answer seems impossible to find. Many attempts have been made to bring in a two-state solution, with the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. Opinion polls show that a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians support this, but so far, nothing has changed.

Writing Topic

- (a) Explain the reasons why the conflict in the Middle East has continued for so long.
- (b) *'The conflict in the Middle East will never end'* Assess this view with reference to events in recent times.

The effect on religious communities in Britain

In the UK, the effect of the on-going conflict has been varied. Amongst a number of traditional Christian groups there is broad support for the Israeli viewpoint, because:

- They accept the Jewish claim to own Israel as the 'Promised Land'
- The Jews originally occupied the land.
- They feel that the Palestinians are supporters of Al-Qaeda and other violent terrorist organisations
- The Palestinians are believed to have supported the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001
- The Palestinians took the side of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War

However there is increasing sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians amongst other religious communities because:

- The Israeli government continues to build illegal settlements and small towns on land which the Palestinians believe to be rightfully theirs.
- The blockade of the Gaza Strip and West Bank causes great suffering and hardship and should be eased to provide more supplies of food and medicines to get in.
- The military action by Israel is ruining the Palestinian economy and small business and industries should be allowed to develop so that

Palestinians might get work and be able to look after their families better.

Today there are continuing protests in the UK. Those supporting the Palestinian cause argue that:

- Israeli air raids on Gaza are unnecessary and kill innocent people
- Israel's blockade causes unnecessary suffering for the Palestinians.
- Israeli military action has severely damaged Gaza and Lebanon
- Israel is behaving illegally by building settlements on Palestinian land.

Those supporting the Israeli point of view believe that:

- Israel has the right to defend itself
- The Palestinians have brought death and destruction through terrorist actions such as suicide bombings
- There is a rise in anti-Semitism in the UK and elsewhere.
- Jewish Schools in the UK have had to employ extra security guards as protection



Seminar topic

Which side, if any, has the stronger argument?

How do you think the conflict might finally be resolved?

Could religion help to provide a settlement?

Writing task:

- (a) Explain the reasons for the differing viewpoints of religious communities to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- (b) 'Religion is the cause of the conflict'. Assess this view with reference to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict

Topic Two: Religion in Film

AIM

At the end of this topic you should:

- Know about the relationship between religion and film
- Consider the ways in which film represents members of faith communities
- Explain how films can reflect relationships among faith communities
- Understand various religious ideas in films
- Examine the ways in which film can convey religious and spiritual ideas
- Understand how film can teach about religion
- Explain how films may retell aspects of religious belief
- Understand and use relevant examples
- Evaluate and comment upon the influence of religion in film.

Religious Identity in Film

The first films were publicly shown just over a hundred years ago and revolutionised the world of entertainment and information-giving. In the UK in 2008 there were 170 million seats sold in cinemas – an average of 2.6 per person. Films remain enormously popular and reflect a range of cultural, economic, religious and social issues in modern society.

Today it is almost impossible to think of a film that does not, in some way, draw strong influence from religion, because it is religion that underpins social perspectives and plays an important part in forming, cultural and moral perspectives and community identities. Richard Telford in 'Religion, the Bible and Theology in recent films' (OUP 2004) categorized the religious influence on films in this way;

- Films that are wholly religious – for example Biblical epics – *The Passion of the Christ*
- Films that use religious themes and symbolism in their titles – *End of Days*, *Terminator 2 - Judgement Day*
- Films with supernatural themes – *Dogma*, *Stigmata*
- Films set in the context of religious and faith communities – *Bend it like Beckham*, *Anita and Me*
- Films that use religion for character definition - *Superman Returns*
- Films that deal directly or indirectly with religious characters or places, such as heaven or hell – *Ghost*, *Hell Raiser*
- Films that use religious ideas to explore experiences or conversions of characters - *Bruce Almighty*
- Films that use religious and moral themes - *The Da Vinci Code*



For research

Make a list of more examples of films in each of these categories?
How successful are these films in getting their message across?

How film represents faith communities

A growing number of religious films today feature stories linking issues of religion and belief within a faith community with the often contrasting values of wider, secular society. Such films look not only at religious laws, festivals and rites of passage, but also highlight the problems faced when faith communities attempt to maintain their traditional religious values in an ever-changing world. Such films are often about person identity and can bring religious ideas and concepts to life for the audience. In particular, film-makers can use religion to highlight issues in faith communities and show how members of such communities get on both with themselves, each other and with people outside. In 'What makes a Jewish Home Jewish' (Cross Currents 2000), Vanessa Ochs wrote;

'More scholars of religion are now acknowledging what religious and spiritual people worldwide have long known, from observation, lived experience and intuition, that material objects – things made by people – are vessels that create, express, embody and reflect sacredness.'



For reflection:

Is Vanessa Ochs right?

The relationship between film and religion and faith communities has not always been a happy one and there have been clashes between film makers and religious groups and believers. For example, in Iran, where film making is a respected profession under Islamic law, religious extremists in the 1970's attacked and burned down 180 cinemas. In the UK and USA in the 1970's and 1980's there were large scale protests at 'The Last Temptation of Christ' (1988) and Monty Python's 'Life of Brian' over their allegedly unbiblical portrayal of Jesus Christ.



Seminar Topic

Should films ever be censored on religious grounds? Why/ why not?

Today the relationship is much more amicable and film is seen as a positive medium for depicting issues of a religious, moral and cultural nature. Film seems to fill the need in us, outlined by Rudolf Otto in 'The Idea of the Holy'

(OUP 1926) to highlight and articulate our thoughts and feelings in a metaphorical and symbolic way. Religion, like literature, provides stories and thought-provoking dilemmas and social issues which supply the film industry with the raw material it needs to make good films. In 'Transcendental Style in Film' (UOC 1972), Paul Schrader wrote that religion and film both attempt to bring people;

'...as close to the ineffable, invisible and unknowable as words, images and ideas can take us.'



For reflection

What does Paul Schrader mean? Is he right?

Case Study 1: Bend it like Beckham

This is a film that reflects a clash of religious and cultural beliefs within a faith community and highlights the relationships faith communities have with each other and with wider, secular society.

Directed by Gurinder Chadha, it is the story of an 18 year old British Sikh girl of Asian origin called Jess Bharna. She is a talented soccer player and greatly admires professional footballer David Beckham.

One day the captain of the local team, Jules, sees Jess playing football in the park and is so impressed that she tells her football coach, Joe. He, in turn, seeing that Jess has the potential to be a great player, wants her to go to Santa Clara in California to become a professional player. However, Jess' Sikh parents want her to follow a more traditional Sikh lifestyle and the two sides clash.

'Now do you want a clean-shaven boy like your sister, or a proper Sikh with full beard and turban?'

'Eyes down. Don't smile. Indian brides never smile.'



For reflection

Should religious prejudice be allowed in films?

Both Christian and Sikh religious principles include the requirement for young people to respect their parents and their religious and moral traditions and here is where the religious controversy occurs for Jess fails to do so. She tells lies to her parents, disobeys their moral codes and tries to manipulate and cheat on them. She has cultural values that are not shared with her parents. In some ways, the feeling of defiance to old traditional religious values is, at first, encouraged in the film, which seems to urge Jess to keep on going to pursue her de dream.

'I didn't ask to be good at football, Guru Nanak made me...'

There are many incidents of religious imagery:

- Jess is innocent and virginal
- She depends for spiritual guidance on men
- Her mother prays before an image of Guru Nanak
- Jess talks to the portrait of David Beckham

There are also elements of religious prejudice and bigotry:

- Jess' mother warns her against being associated with Joe by telling her the story of how someone she knew had been expelled from their community because she had a relationship with a 'gora'.
- Jess' father tells her that, years ago, he was '*chased of like a dog*' from cricket grounds
- Jess replies that things have changed and Nasser Hussein is now chairman of the national team
- Her mother replies that Hussein does not count since he is a Muslim.

In Jess' life, Beckham is eventually replaced by the coach, Joe, who displays many religious qualities, including being kind, loving, vulnerable and wise and he shows Jess the way to find her own goals and fulfilment.

Finally, Jess decides to respect her parents' feelings and their Sikh traditions and calls off her soccer ambitions. At this point, her father too, shows wisdom and sets her free to choose her own destiny. – echoing the religious traits of self-sacrifice, forgiveness and love.



For reflection

Is the ending of '*Bend it like Beckham*' a convincing one or a compromise?

Writing task

- (a) Explain the main religious ideas in *Bend it like Beckham*
- (b) '*Films always make faith communities seem old-fashioned and unattractive*' – Discuss this with reference to at least one film that you have studied.

Case Study 2: East is East

A comedy-drama set in a mixed-ethnicity household in Manchester in 1971 with George, a Pakistani immigrant father who has lived in England since 1937 and his Irish-Catholic wife, Ella. They have seven children and run a fish and chip shop. George is a strict Muslim and wants his children to grow up following strict Pakistani traditions. The children increasingly see themselves as British and reject their father's rules on dress, religion and social life.

The eldest son, Nazir, who is secretly gay, cannot face going through an arranged marriage and runs away from the ceremony, leaving his family, and all the guests, behind. George is so angry and ashamed that he later tells people that Nazir is dead.

Later, it is discovered that the youngest son, Sajid, has not been circumcised in accordance with Islamic requirements. He suffers great pain in the operation and Ella is really angry at George for forcing their son to go through with this. Meantime, the other children eat sausages and bacon – against Islamic law to eat pork.

Soon after, George promises a friend, Mr Shah, that his second and third sons Tariq and Abdul will marry Mr Shah's two unattractive Pakistani daughters. Tariq refuses to go through with the arranged marriage and destroys his wedding clothes. George becomes violent and Ella rebukes him for his stubborn attitude which, she says, is the cause of all the trouble.



For research

What is an arranged marriage?

Why have arranged marriages sometimes caused problems within faith communities in the UK?

Can you find some real examples?

The film highlights the problems of inter-faith relationships and attitudes in the UK. George has taken great, possibly excessive, steps to bring up his family in a Pakistani, Islamic way, whilst the children born and raised in Britain, see themselves as British and with British attitudes and values. It gives an insight into the integration of ethnic minority communities into Britain in the 1970's and the conflict between the older generations, which want to keep their traditions alive, and modern secular thinking in the UK.



For reflection:

In what ways are the characters stereotyped in 'East is East'?



Seminar Topic

Is film an effective way of teaching people about their religious heritage? Is it more effective than traditional teaching methods? Say why/ why not.

Further Examples:

Anita and Me

This film shows how humour can be gained from stories of religious and integration in the UK.

Meena, the 12 year old daughter of Punjabi immigrants, grows up in a manufacturing town in the Midlands. It is the story of how she gently resists her parents' attempts to bring her up in a traditional Punjabi way. She is seen enjoying pop music and reading teenage magazines. Trouble comes when Meena makes friends with Anita, a trendy 14 year old blonde girl with a rebellious streak. Meena's world is turned upside-down.

Solomon and Gaenor (1999)

This film deals with inter-religious conflict in the past, in ways that seem strange in the UK today.

This is a BAFTA award-winning Welsh film about a young Jewish man living in Wales in 1911, selling fabrics door-to-door in the South Wales valleys, where he has to hide the fact that he is Jewish. He falls in love with Welsh girl Gaenor, who has a very strong-willed father and an anti-Semitic brother. Solomon and Gaenor become lovers and she falls pregnant and discovers her lovers' Jewish roots. Later, anti-Semitic riots break out and the two are forced to flee and become separated. Solomon is badly beaten up, and is forced to stagger over mountains and through snow until he is eventually re-united with Gaenor.



Seminar Topic

To what extent are these films a realistic portrayal of religious issues?

The issue of stereotyping

Critics of religious films often claim that the characters in the films are religious or cultural stereotypes and argue that this detracts from the message of the film and makes it less believable. Such critics claim that:

- Religious films are often made by individuals who only have a restricted view of a particular faith community.
- Religious beliefs and practices are sometimes incidental to the main theme and so become stereotyped.
- Deliberate stereotyping of a faith group is often used by film-makers to convey a message – both positive and negative.

However, others argue that there are many films where the characters are not stereotyped at all and are true to life. They support this by saying:

- Many films are made by members of the faith communities depicted and are accurate reflections of those individuals.
- Film is often used as a medium to promote anti-stereotyped images
- The huge variety of traditions and beliefs mean that only some are selected and shown and these are portrayed very accurately.



For research

Find out different examples of films that fit these contrasting criteria

Writing Task:

(a) Explain how the beliefs and practices of members of a faith community are portrayed in at least one film that you have studied.

(b) '*Films always give an unrealistic picture of religious people*'.

Assess this view with reference to at least one film you have studied

Religious Ideas in Films

Films have always had a close relationship with religious and spiritual ideas and these have been widely used and conveyed in films. Religious ideas and rituals, stories and communities have been the subject of a huge number of films, ranging from the early biblical epics such as *'The Ten Commandments'* to more recent films such as *'Star Wars'*.

Case Study 3: Star Wars

There are six *Star Wars* films, but that they were not made in chronological order. To clarify issues in this section, the films are;

- Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace (1999)
- Episode 2 – Attack of the Clones (2002)
- Episode 3 – Revenge of the Sith (2005)
- Episode 4 – A New Hope (1977) – the original 'Star Wars' film
- Episode 5 – The Empire Strikes back (1980)
- Episode 6 – Return of the Jedi (1983)

The *Star Wars* saga, created by George Lucas, is perhaps the greatest example of the influence of religion in modern film. In 'Skywalking; the Life and Films of George Lucas', (DCP 1999), Dale Pollock wrote;

'The message of Star Wars is religious; God isn't dead, he's there if you want him to be.'

Such was the religious influence that, in a recent census in Australia, over 70,000 people declared their religious faith to be 'Jedi Knight' and Jedi temples have been established as far afield as London and Romania.



For reflection

Why do some people do this?

The *Star Wars* saga contains religious elements from both Christianity and Eastern religions. In 'The Empire Triumphant; Race, Religion and Rebellion in Star Wars', (McFarland 2005), Kevin Wetmore noted;

'What an interesting fusion of Eastern religion and mythical structure by Lucas may become something of a genuine philosophy or life path, if not a real religion.'

The Force, in particular, has a religious and metaphysical quality. For example, when attacking the Death Star, Luke hears Obi-Wan tell him to 'use the force' to target his weapons, rather than trust his computer technology. Luke shows his faith, uses the Force and destroys the Death Star.

The mix of technology and faith come in other incidents too, for instance, in the same film, Obi-Wan uses a technological remote robot to develop Luke's trust in the Force. He uses the light sabre which, we are told, is a weapon of ultimate technology and spiritual technique. Clearly, a Jedi must be a master of both technology and disciplined spirituality.



Seminar Topic

Can religious faith successfully co-exist with modern technology?

Examples of religion and spirituality include;

- Luke's ability to use the force to return a light-sabre that he has dropped
- Yoda uses the force to raise Luke's X-fighter out of the swamp
- Darth Vader use of the Force to kill his enemies
- To deny the force is dangerous as Vader tells Motti; '*I find your lack of faith disturbing.*'

Star Wars does not just contain strong spiritual and religious undertones – it also contains references to individual religions and religious traditions. Lucas said in an interview in April 1999 that '*almost every single religion*' found elements of their faith in the films.

'They were able to relate it to stories in the Bible, in the Qur'an and in the Torah.'

Writing task:

- (a) Explain the main religious elements in *Star Wars*.
- (b) 'The religious elements in films add nothing to our understanding of serious religious and spiritual issues.' – Assess and comment upon this view with reference to at least one film that you have studied.

In 'The Force of Star Wars' (V.N 1977), Frank Allnut said that the film carried a fundamentalist Christian '*prophetic parable*' about the coming of the Anti-Christ in which;

- The Force is God
- Obi-Wan is Jesus
- Luke represents Hebrew Christians
- Han Solo represents Gentile Christians
- Princess Leia is Israel
- The Emperor is Satan
- Darth Vader is the Anti-Christ



For research

Do you agree with these character representations?
Give examples of where they are true/ untrue.

In 'Saint Paul at the Movies' (Westminster 1993), Robert Jewett said that *Star Wars*;

'...seemed to embody the ultimate Christian value of right triumphing over wrong and a ritualistic re-enactment of a story of salvation.'

There are interesting similarities between aspects of *Star Wars* and the Gospels:

John's Gospel: 'Everyone who believes in him (Jesus) may have eternal life – 3:15

Star Wars: Knowledge of the Force is only open to those who believe.

John's Gospel: Jesus says 'I am the light of the world' – 9:5

Star Wars: Anakin is the chosen one who will bring light and balance to the Force

Luke's Gospel: Mary, a virgin, gives birth to Jesus, who is conceived by God

Star Wars: Qui-gon suggests that Anakin was conceived by the Force and born of a virgin.

John's Gospel: God creates life through Jesus – 'In him was life' – 1:2

Star Wars: Palpatine implies that he has learned how to create life through the force.



Seminar Topic:

What do you think of these connections? Are they convincing?

There are Christian ideas that are reflected in the Force;

- Darkness is linked to evil
- Light is linked to good
- The dark side needs to be overcome



For reflection

Is it right to reflect the Bible so closely in a film like this – or is it an insult to believers?

However, in other ways, *Star Wars* is opposed to Christian traditions:

- *Star Wars* offers a dualistic concept of a light and dark side of the Force
- The Christian God is all light
- The Force is impersonal
- The Christian God is personal
- The Force is not worshipped
- The Christian God is worshipped
- Obi-Wan tells Luke that the Force *'obeys your commands.'*
- The Christian God cannot be controlled by humans



For reflection:

How far do you agree with this?

However, *Star Wars* does reflect traditions in Eastern religions as Wetmore observes;

'Jesus did not come to bring balance to good and evil according to Christianity. Balance, however, remains a key element in Taoism and Buddhism.'

Examples of Eastern religious traditions include:

- The Force as an inner spirituality
- Obi-Wan tells Luke; *'The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds and penetrates us and binds the galaxy together.'*
- In Taoism, Lao Tzu wrote in 'Tao te Ching' of an energy that; *'...gives people life yet claims no possession...it is the steward yet exercises no authority.'*
- The Tao, like the Force, is life-giving, but does not control people nor demand authority or worship.
- Yoda is depicted as a Taoist master who turns his back on civilization.
- Yoda is small and gentle, yet a great warrior because he is powerful in the Force.
- This is very similar to the words of the Tao; *'One who excels in fighting is never roused in anger.'*
- When Yoda raises Luke's X-wing fighter by using the energy of the Force this reflects the Taoist view that a Zen master can harness the power of the Chi.

Wetmore concludes;

'The theology of Star Wars constructs an ultimate reality much closer to Taoism than any western religious philosophy.'



For reflection

Do you agree with Wetmore's views? Why/ why not?

Moreover, Jedi knights reflect both Western and Eastern monastic traditions, in that, like religious monks, Jedi Knights must;

- Stay single
- Take a vow of chastity
- Follow a moral code with strong emphasis of good over evil
- Undertake warrior training reflects the training of Shaolin monks

Writing task:

- (a) Explain how *Star Wars* reflects different religious traditions and ideas.
- (b) 'People take the religious elements in films too seriously'. Assess this view with reference to at least one film that you have studied.

Case Study 4: Superman Returns

Superman was created in 1932 by Jerry Siegal and Joe Shuter, two young Jewish men who grew up in the Jewish neighbourhood in Cleveland, Ohio. Superman has always been rooted in Jewish and Christian imagery. Director of '*Superman Returns*' Bryan Singer, who is also Jewish, said of Superman in 'Wizard Magazine July 2005;

'So it's sort of the American dream combined with a little bit of myth, the concept of Messiah. He's the Jesus Christ of superheroes.'

In the original Superman story, young Kal-El's father, Jor-El realises that their home planet Krypton, is going to be destroyed. To save his son, he puts the baby Kal-El in a rocket which takes him to Earth. There he is adopted by gentle, loving parents, and grows up to become a great superhero.

Incidentally, the name 'El' is also the Hebrew name for God. This bears great similarities to the biblical story of Moses, whose parents save him from death by putting him in a basket and sending it down the river. Moses is found, lovingly brought up and, as told in the Book of Exodus, becomes a great biblical hero.



For reflection

Do you think these names are significant or just coincidence?

In *Superman Returns*, the biblical imagery is very noticeable. Early on Superman's father, Jor-El, tells his infant son about humanity:

'They can be a great people, Kal-El, if they wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all, their capacity for good, I have sent them you...my only son.'

Compare these words to the lines in John's Gospel:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.' – 3:16

The film contains much Christian imagery. For example, early in the film:

- Superman tells Lois that he can hear everything – a world crying out to be saved.
- He claims, like Jesus Christ, to be the saviour of the world: *'You write that the world doesn't need a saviour, but every day I hear people crying for one.'*
- He uses his super-powers to perform miracles.
- Superman rises and carries an entire evil continent away from earth and saves humanity.
- Just like Jesus he takes on the burden of human sin, even though he knows he must die and sacrifice himself to achieve it.



Seminar topic

Is this imagery either convincing or necessary?

Later on, the climax of the bears a very close resemblance to the gospel accounts of the death of Jesus Christ;

- Superman is hurt and his adopted mother cradles him in her arms in a way similar to the biblical images of Mary holding the dead body of Jesus after his crucifixion.
- Luthor stabs Superman in the side with a shaft of Kryptonite, just as Jesus was stabbed with a Roman spear in his side.
- Luthor's girlfriend shows compassion for the dying Superman. This mirrors the sinful woman Mary Magdalene who weeps at the cross of Jesus.

- Superman plunges into the fiery depths of the Earth – just as the Christian image of Hell.
- When Superman dies and falls back to earth with arms outstretched in a classic crucifix pose.
- Superman returns to life.
- A female nurse finds his empty bed – just as the women find the empty tomb of Jesus and he rises back to life – mirroring the resurrection of Christ.



For research:

Find the biblical references that reflect the link between the life and death of Superman and Jesus Christ.

However, the image of Superman differs from that of Jesus in a number of ways. For example:

- Superman only offers salvation from the problems of this world
- There is no mention of prayer or Heaven
- Superman has a sexual relationship with Lois Lane
- Superman is emotionally insecure and jealous

The film also contains imagery from Buddhism, for example, Superman meditates over the suffering of humanity and, like the Buddha, searched for inner-meaning and peace and was distracted by worldly love.

Writing task:

(a) Explain the religious symbolism in *Superman Returns*.

(b) 'The religious imagery in films is stereotyped, excessive and unnecessary.' Assess this view with reference to either *Superman Returns* or *Star Wars*.

Case Study 5: The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe

The Chronicles of Narnia is a film adaptation of the book by C.S. Lewis. Narnia is a strange blend of magic, myth and Christianity. The makers, Disney, promoted it as a religious film and used an evangelical publisher, Outreach, to highlight the Christian message of the film in the UK – with churches being urged to run Narnia-themed services and church-goers being given free tickets to see the film. The film's director, Andrew Adamson was slightly less convincing, saying that the Christian themes in the film were 'open to the audience to interpret.'

In the film, four children enter Narnia through a wardrobe and find themselves in a land that is frozen and always winter under the spell of the evil white witch. She tempts one of the children, Edmund by giving him chunks of Turkish delight, to betray his friends.

- Aslan – Jesus Christ: saviour of the world
- White Witch – Satan
- Edmund – Judas – the betrayer
- Father Christmas – the Holy Spirit



For reflection

Are these character representations right?

The film is full of Christian imagery:

- The children are dubbed '*sons of Adam*'
- Narnia can only be saved from the white witch by the heroic lion, Aslan, sacrificing himself for Edmund and other sinners. Just like Jesus dies to save humanity from sin.
- As with Jesus, Aslan submits himself to be bound, whipped and humiliated by the forces of evil.
- Jesus is crucified. Aslan is executed on the sacrificial table.
- The two girls bow their heads and weep, just like Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus. Wept over the dead body of Jesus.
- Both Jesus and Aslan are restored to life.

However, there are also important differences:

- Jesus is raised to life by the power of God, Aslan is raised by '*deep magic*'
- Aslan is a lion, but Jesus is often portrayed as '*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*' – John 1:29
- Jesus is a man of peace, Aslan is a warrior



For research

Can you find other similarities/ differences between the gospels accounts of Jesus Christ and the Chronicles of Narnia?

Narnia's religious themes have their critics. Polly Toynbee in 'The Guardian' 5.12.05 called the film 'toe-curlingly awful' and argued that Aslan represents muscular Christianity where the good win because God is on their side – indeed, in the final battle, the strongest win and receive all the rewards. For Toynbee, the film was:

'...heavily laden with guilt, blame, sacrifice and a suffering that is dark with emotional sadism... Children are supposed to fall in love with the hypnotic Aslan, though he is not a character: he is pure, raw, awesome power. He is the emblem of everything an atheist objects to in religion.'



Seminar Topic:

Do you think that the religious message in 'The Chronicles of Narnia' makes the film better or worse?

Can you give examples of films that do this more or less effectively?

Writing task

'Religious imagery in films of fiction like *The Chronicles of Narnia* always fails to convey religious or spiritual ideas accurately'. - Discuss

Film as a way of teaching about religion

Some early critics disliked the use of religion in film, fearing that it would lead to the end of traditional faith and the secularisation of society. Yet this has not been the case for, as Melanie Wright points out in 'Religion and film – an introduction' (Tauris 2007):

'Accounts of cinema as an agent of secularisation are, however, misplaced. Religion has not been displaced by a new medium, it has colonised it and found itself challenged and altered in the course of the encounter... film can at times be not simply a descriptor of religious experience, but religion itself.'

Case Study 6: The Passion of the Christ

One of the most controversial religious films in recent years has been Mel Gibson's '*The Passion of the Christ*' – a film which concentrates, often with graphic violence, on the last hours of Jesus' life. The characters speak the ancient languages of Hebrew, Latin and Aramaic and viewers are forced to rely on subtitles, making them concentrate all the more on the images on the screen, rather than the words they are speaking. The story is told with pure imagery and expression.

Most films dealing directly with the life of Christ depict him as a teacher, healer and miracle worker, but in this film, the imagery is of Jesus being brutally whipped, beaten and abused. The close up of Jesus' face shows the flesh torn, eyes swollen, and face bloodied. The film has a mob howling for blood and Jesus savagely whipped, tormented and straining to carry his Cross to the place of his execution.

Most notoriously, the film spends 20minutes on a graphic and close-up depiction of Jesus being whipped and scourged, with the flesh and blood being ripped from his body, with joy in the eyes of blood-splattered soldiers and bewilderment on the faces of the crowd watching.



Seminar topic

Is excessive violence really necessary in religiously-themed films?



For research:

In what different ways has Christ been presented in the films you have studied?

Which portrayals are the most and least effective? Why?

Critics were quick to condemn the film on the grounds that;

- The film was anti-Semitic and, contrary to the declaration of the Second Vatican council declaration that the Jews and Judaism should not be treated with contempt.
- It portrays Herod Antipas as a decadent and effeminate homosexual stereotype.
- The film reflects Gibson's own traditionalist Catholicism, rather than mainstream Catholic views
- The violence is too long and unnecessarily graphic

In reply, Gibson defended his film on the grounds that he wanted his audience to look at, and therefore understand, the sufferings of Christ. In short, the film bears witness to God's salvation for his people.



For reflection

Is Mel Gibson's defence of the film an effective one?

To be effective, the film uses many different film styles. Melanie Wright (ibid) points out that Gibson utilises;

- Classic Horror – the opening scenes of darkness, smoke, a full moon, the demonic children and the gore of the whipping
- Ritual and supernatural – the road to the cross, the encounters with Mary and Veronica
- Catholic tradition – the stations of the cross and the prayers of the rosary
- Compassion – Mary's eyes, her sad gaze, the veneration
- The lack of dialogue makes the eyes and the gaze of the characters more telling

Wright called the film;

'...a series of pictures or tableaux intended to elicit a response of faith.'

The film is one of the highest-earning of all time, and found popularity among many mainstream Christian groups. Why? For Wright, the answer was simple;

'Jesus is a strong, heroic figure who endures extreme suffering but ultimately emerges triumphant'



For research

Do films that attempt to convey complex religious ideas really work? Give examples both ways.

Writing task

(a) Explain the religious symbolism in the crucifixion scenes in *The Passion of the Christ*.

(b) 'Films are never effective in retelling religious stories or aspects of belief.'
– Assess this view with reference to any film that you have studied.

Further Examples

The Miracle Maker

This film, a joint project between Russian and Welsh animators Cartŵn Cymru is a faithful account of the life of Jesus from the gospels which is imaginative, creative and with a great musical score. It is made with puppets and 2D animation. Almost by way of complete contrast, 'The Miracle Maker' tells the story of Jesus in a simple and modest way, that does little more than tell the

story as it appears in the Bible, without excess. Jesus is attractive, composed and commanding. He is compassionate, yet can be angry and has a sense of humour.



Seminar work:

Does the *Miracle Maker* portray Jesus in a more or less convincing way than the *Passion of the Christ*? Give reasons.

Little Buddha (1993)

Little Buddha is the story of a group of monks, led by Lama Norbu, who are seeking out the reincarnation of lama Dorje, a great Buddhist teacher. They believe they have found him as a boy called Jesse Conrad, who is fascinated by the monks and their way of life. Norbu tells Jesse's anxious parents that he wants to take Jesse back with him. Reluctantly, they agree, and Jesse's father goes with them. On the way they meet two other children, also thought to be Dorje's reincarnation.

During the film the life of the Buddha is recalled in vivid detail. The three children are all found to be reincarnations of Dorje – one his body, another his speech and Jesse is his mind. His reincarnations represent the most important aspects of life.



Seminar work

In what ways may films like Little Buddha increase our understanding of world religions? Can you name other films that have or have not succeeded in this respect?



Research task

(a) With reference to one film you have studied, list the ways in which it is effective in portraying a religious theme or character.

(b) In the same way, select a film which, in your opinion, is not effective and explain why.

Topic Three; Religion and the Community

AIM

At the end of this topic you be able to:

- explain the range of definitions of religion
- be able to evaluate the extent to which these definitions work
- develop a functional understanding of religion with reference to the works of Durkheim, Marx and Weber
- be able to evaluate these views
- Understand the nature of religious diversity in the UK
- Explain how communities experience problems arising from religious and cultural plurality
- be able to evaluate critically a variety of different views and draw conclusions based on reasoning and evidence
- be able to see connections between this topic and other topics in this unit

Definitions of Religion

A religion is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe and of life itself. Usually, though not always, it involves belief in a deity or deities and/ or the search for ultimate truth. Religion includes stories, symbols, teachings and practices which are designed to give meaning to a believer's experiences of life. Most often, this is done in the context of worship, devotion and obedience to a moral code governing human conduct.

Religion may also focus on the supernatural or metaphysical aspects of the universe as well as the ancestral and cultural traditions that run through human mythology, history, faith and experience. In a sense, religion is a communal system whereby, through a common faith, moral code and mutually seeking for truth and the divine, communities are tied together – religion can be seen as a way of life.



For reflection

Do you agree with this definition? Why/ why not?

Religion is difficult to be precise about, however, and definitions of religion usually suffer one of three problems:

- They are too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most people think of as religious.
- They are too vague – for example, defining religion as ‘belief in God’ which excludes Buddhism
- They can be ambiguous and seem to include almost anything and everything as a religion –for example defining religion as a ‘worldview’.

A really convincing definition is hard to find and many scholars have tried, for example:

‘...the recognition of all our duties as divine commands.’ - Kant:

‘...a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.’ - Durkheim

‘...a feeling of for the infinite...a feeling of absolute dependence.’ - Schliermacher

‘...a set of institutionalized rituals with a tradition and expressing and/ or evoking sacral sentiments directed at a divine or trans-divine focus.’ – Ninian Smart

Seminar Topic



Which of these definitions do you think is the most convincing and why?

Can these definitions be improved?

A broad definition of religion that fits both religious and non-religious systems is:

- belief in something sacred
- a distinction between sacred and non-sacred (profane) objects
- ritual acts
- a moral code believed to come from a sacred or supernatural agency
- religious feelings of awe, mystery, wonder, adoration and guilt.
- prayer or other communication with the divine or supernatural
- a social group or community bound together by a mutual faith
- a word view or view of the world as a whole and our individual place in it
- to organize one’s life in accordance with that world view

Particular definitions of religion:

1. Inclusive definition

An inclusive definition of religion emphasizes the universal nature of religion – humans are '*homo religio*' because everyone is religious in some way. Religion is seen through human action, social convention, tradition, culture, moral ideas, religious convictions and in belief in what is most meaningful. Tillich in 'Dynamics of Faith' (1957) defined religion as that which is of the utmost importance for people;

'...for every human has ultimate concerns.'

In this inclusivist definition, even atheism and agnosticism can be seen to be religious, for it is concerned with what someone believes, rather than the content or the doctrines that are linked to it.



For reflection

What do you think 'ultimate concerns' might be?

2. Theological definition

This definition looks much more at religious teachings. To be considered a religion, a doctrine must have specific theological teachings including some of the following – the spiritual realm, God or gods who relate to humanity, a system of rewards for the good and punishments for the bad, a moral code, cosmology, symbols and a historical tradition.

The theological definition of religion is achieved by comparing different world religions with one another and finding the common strands of similar teachings and beliefs within them. Or alternatively, by examining believers in different faiths and seeing how and why they repeat certain actions and analyze them, such as going to church, partaking in festivals, group meditation and group prayer and discussion. People find religion as they interpret the views, judgements, morals and the religious phenomena that they encounter.

The theological definition highlights the fact that that religion has to do with the specific beliefs of individuals that have some meaning and purpose for their lives. This may be found from outside themselves as in the existence of a loving God, or from inside, as Buddhism teaches.



Seminar Topic:

What are the main similarities and differences between the inclusivist and the theological definitions of religion?

3. *The Metaphysical definition*

Metaphysics is the view that there is something beyond this way of life – something that transcends the reality offered by science. It is concerned with the explanation of fundamental questions about our being and our world. It comes from the Greek '*meta*' (meaning 'beyond' or 'after') and '*physika*', meaning physical – hence something beyond the physical world. It includes looking at notions such as time, space, existence and causality.

Thus, the metaphysical definition of religion seeks that which is beyond our physical reality – for example, the workings and nature of the universe and the gods or God, how things are linked together in creation and what purpose this serves. It also includes metaphysical aspects such as love, sin, evil and life after death. This is supported by William James in 'The Varieties of Religious Experience' (1902), who defined personal religion as:

'...the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine.'

In a similar vein, Schliemacher in 'The Christian Faith' (1999) suggested that behind all religion was experience – a feeling of the divine which leads to a sense of '*absolute dependence*'.

Rudolf Otto added to this by looking at God's mystery, power, transcendence and majesty and in 'The Idea of the Holy' (1917), he defined religion as the mysterious feeling of awe and wonder conveyed by the ultimate holiness – which enables us to understand the beauty of creation, and the concepts of truth and goodness, together with a great desire to do good. He called this the '*numinous*', which he regarded as a lens through which we can understand the irrational aspects of the universe and the mysteries of reality which are beyond our rational understanding

For Research



Compare and contrast the views of James, Schliermacher and Otto. Is the metaphysical definition of religion convincing? Give reasons

4. The Reductive definition:

Reductionism is the view that complex things can be better understood by reducing them to their most simple or fundamental form. In a religious sense, this means reducing religious concepts and doctrines down to a basic level or explaining religion as a code of human concepts concerned with right and wrong or by using religion to explain the environment, the problem of evil and suffering or the way we understand the world around us. Reductionism has affected religion greatly as scientific approaches to knowledge and understanding have put religious concepts firmly under scrutiny. In 'The God Delusion' (2008) Richard Dawkins wrote:

'If we are gullible, we don't recognize hallucinations or lucid dreaming for what it is and we claim to have seen or heard a ghost, or an angel, or God...such visions and manifestations are certainly not good grounds for believing that ghosts or angels, gods or virgins are actually there.'

Indeed, some now see religion as a hindrance to human progress and advancement and call for a rational and scientific way of looking at the world, unfettered by religion and superstition. – just as the Age of Magic was replaced with an Age of Religion, so, in turn, religion is replaced by an Age of Science and Reason. Dawkins:

'The universe presented by organized religion is a poky little medieval universe.'



For Reflection

Is Dawkins right? Why/ why not?

The reductive definition looks at religion in terms of its function in society - as a psychological or social constraint. Famous reductionist theories include Sigmund Freud's notion that religion is nothing more than an illusion or a mental illness and Marx's view, discussed later, that religion is only the '*sigh of the oppressed*'.

A good example of reductivism in religion concerns the myths in the Bible. A myth is a story or narrative that expresses a truth when it is not known for certain what actually happened. Myths use symbolism and imagery to explain the unexplainable. Famous biblical myths include the stories of creation and Noah's Ark.

Rudolph Bultmann in 'Kerygma and Myth' (1953), argued that, in order to find out the truth a religion, it should be *demythologized* – that is, the myths contained in scriptures must be removed. He believed that it was impossible for humanity in modern times to believe such outdated stories:

'It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries and at the same time, to believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits.'

He gains support from Dawkins who advocates reductivism by claiming that supernatural explanations of the world prevent human from developing further;

'Growing up in the universe...also means growing out of parochial and supernatural views of the universe... not copping out with superstitious ideas' (Royal Institution Christmas lectures 1991).



For research

Make a list of the possible myths in the Bible and any other religious tradition you have studied. Do they help us to understand that religion better, or are they a hindrance? Give reasons

Writing Task

- (a) Explain the metaphysical and theological definitions of religion
- (b) 'Definitions of religion are all inadequate.' Assess this assertion with reference to any two definitions you have studied.

Functional understandings of religion

Functional understandings of religion are concerned with the role of religion in human society – the practices, history, developments and universal themes of religion and its role in human history. It is about the effect religion has had on the creation of social and hierarchical structures and on the lives of individuals and communities. The existence of religion is seen to maintain a social structure of benefit to some, but not others, and can often prevent individuals from realizing their full potential. In some cases, religious beliefs are actually seen to deceive the individual or the group as to what is truly real. Three scholars noted in this field are Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx

Émile Durkheim: Religion as an expression of social cohesion

Emile Durkheim believed that complex human societies were held together by religion, which served to unite and preserve the community. Using anthropological data that he had gained from an extensive study of aborigine peoples in Australia, Durkheim defined religion in 'Elementary Forms of Religious Life' (1912) as:

'A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all who adhere to them'



For reflection

Is this definition convincing?

For Durkheim, religion was not imaginary, but a very real expression of society itself and he believed that there has never been a human society that did not have religious element. He claimed that humans are weak as individuals, but strong in a group. That is why humans express themselves religiously in groups – for they are symbolically very powerful. Religion is the human expression of a collective consciousness – which, in turn, is the fusion of all our individual consciences together – and, in this way, religion creates a reality of its own. In 'Individualism and the Intellectuals' he wrote:

'Religion does not necessarily imply symbols and rites or temples and priests...it is nothing other than a body of collective beliefs and practices endowed with a certain authority.'

Durkheim claimed that religious communities began as primitive clans worshipping a totem, which represented not only the clan god, but also the unity of the clan itself. In fact, the clan and God was actually the same thing - there was no separate being called God for God did not exist. What did exist was a unified community which believed that it owes its existence and identity to God. This belief is expressed in shared rituals, values and a moral code. He wrote:

'If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion.'



For Reflection:

What does Durkheim mean by 'the idea of society is the soul of religion.'?

Durkheim said that the deities that people worshipped together were only projections of the power of the community and that religion was essentially a social activity, where people celebrate festivals and times of sacred significance together. For Durkheim, religion provides:

- a meaning for life
- authority figures
- a moral code for society

In this way, religion gives social cohesion and control by helping people to live peacefully together and to help them to feel that they had a purpose in life. Durkheim observed that, as individuals become more aware of their own significance and importance, so religious ideas adapt to focus on individual salvation and conscience. He wanted to urge people to recognize that they had become dependent on a society to which they had given religious significance, and encouraged them to:

'...discover the rational substitutes for these religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas'



Seminar Topic

What are the most important points that Durkheim makes about religion?
Are they justified?

Criticisms of Durkheim's view

- Religious believers distinguish between membership of their religious community and belief in God. Their loyalty is to God, not to the community.
- The theory does not explain how religious believers are sometimes prepared to go against society and even to reject it.
- Durkheim's thesis was based on primitive Australian aboriginal societies, and is therefore not a true reflection of modern religious belief and practice.
- Society constantly changes; beliefs about the nature of God are timeless and unchanging.



Seminar topic:

To what extent do the criticisms succeed in contradicting Durkheim's views?

Writing Task:

- (a) Explain Durkheim's view of religion
- (b) 'Religion holds society together'. Assess this assertion with reference to the work of Durkheim

Max Weber – the relationship between religion and capitalism

Max Weber looked at religion in the context of modern economic society. In 'The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' (1905), he said that religious individuals and groups were influenced by a whole range of things, but none more so than religion which, he said, gives them their understanding and image of the world and how they live in it.

Weber believed that religion provided the answer to the greatest human worries; why is there so much suffering in the world and what happens when we die? Religion addresses the issue of how a divine God of extraordinary love and power can be reconciled with the imperfection of the world which he has created. Weber understood that people wanted to know the reasons why some had good fortune and others bad and why there was so much suffering in the world. For Weber, religion offered the answers as to how people can achieve salvation and gain eternal life (soteriology). For Weber, the pursuit of salvation, and therefore religion, is part of human motivation.



For reflection

Is Weber right about the purpose of religion? Why/ why not?

For research



Find out more about the reasons religious believers give to answer the problem of evil and suffering. Look up the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus. Are they convincing?

With this in mind, Weber went on to see how religion was harnessed and

used to develop the modern capitalist system. Capitalism began, he claimed, with the Christian Protestant group called the Puritans, whose religious view was that not everyone would be saved by God – only a select and pre-determined few, known only to God, would be saved from damnation. These were the elect.

The Puritans taught that, although nobody knew whom God would save, nevertheless, if people worked hard and behaved properly then, if they prospered financially, this would be a sign that they had earned God's favour. Weber coined the term '*Protestant Work Ethic*' to describe a system whereby religious believers would work hard to gain commercial and financial success. However, they were not to spend it excessively on themselves, but were to invest it wisely and then to use the money to help the poor and those in need. It was believed that if a person could gain wealth yet avoid the temptation it brings and to give it away, then they would get to heaven. There was biblical support for this in the teachings of Jesus;

'Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.' – Luke 18:22

For research



Find examples from the Bible and other religious traditions you have studied that support or oppose Weber's views. Give reasons.

Over the years, the system developed and the pursuit of financial success took a hold on western society – the '*spirit of capitalism*'. Bad habits formed and the religious significance of capitalism was lost in the rush to gain wealth for its own sake. For Weber, capitalism became a 'religion' of its own – encouraging greed, laziness and the making of as much money with the minimum of effort as possible.

'The experience of the irrationality of the world has been the driving force of all religious revolution.'

Interestingly, Weber noted that religion did not have to result in capitalism. In his study of eastern religious traditions, Weber noticed that faiths such as Hinduism and Taoism did not result in Capitalism because;

- No unified, formal priesthood
- strong teaching that pursuit of wealth is wrong
- Emphasis on importance of social status and position, rather than wealth
- Acceptance of things as they are
- Greater emphasis on spiritual, mystic and metaphysical
- No notions of hope for better things to come – no 'Messiah'.
- sale of land often prohibited

Seminar Topic



In what ways does Weber (i) succeed and (ii) fail in his definition of religion?

Overall, do you find his arguments convincing? Why/ why not?

Writing Task

- (a) Examine the contribution of one functional theory of religion to our understanding of the relationship between religion and individual people.
- (b) Consider critically the view that religious faith is linked to a lack of wealth.

Karl Marx – religion as the ‘sigh of the oppressed’

Marx believed that religion is an illusion devised by humans to satisfy their emotional needs. For Marx, religion can only be understood in relation to the economic structures of society – religion depended totally upon economics. In ‘Das kapital’ (1867) he said:

‘...religion is so fully determined by economics that it is pointless to consider any of its doctrines or beliefs on their own merits’.

For Marx, religion is an illusion that creates fantasies for the poor and prevents them from finding true happiness in this life and instead offers them the false hope of happiness in the after-life. Religion is used by the oppressors to make the oppressed feel better about the distress they feel at being poor and exploited. It provides peace and hope – just like an opiate-based drug, and provides reasons to keep society functioning exactly as it is. In ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’ (1844) he wrote;

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.’

Seminar Topic



What does Marx mean when he says that religion is the ‘*sigh of the oppressed creature*’ and ‘*the heart of a heartless world*’?

Is he right? Give reasons.

Religion takes the highest human values and aspirations and places them on an unknowable being called God. He believed that humans are best guided by reason and that religion was a significant hindrance to that

reason. He remarked:

'It eased pain even as it created fantasies.'

He maintained that only when religion was abolished, the oppressed masses could be liberated and that only by loving one another rather than God could people regain their humanity.

'The first requisite for the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion'



For reflection

Do you think that the abolition of religion will bring happiness/ Why/ why not?

Marx had three reasons for disliking religion:

1. It is irrational – a delusion that avoids facing the truth and reality of life,
2. It takes away the dignity of humanity and replaces it with servitude.
3. Religion is hypocritical because it sides with the oppressors. Jesus taught that the poor should be helped, but the Christian Church has, for centuries, sided with the rich and the powerful.



For reflection

Are these reason convincing? Why/ why not?

Critique of Marx

- Marx focuses on Christianity - other religions, particularly eastern ones, do not work in the same way and economics is not such an important issue.
- Marx claims that religion is wholly determined by economics – but this is not so. If it were, then capitalism would have appeared much earlier – it doesn't really appear until 19th century.
- The Roman Catholic Church has been very wary of countries and religious movements with Marxist connections. In the Puebla Conference of Bishops in 1979, the Pope declared that: *'...those who sup with Marxism should use a long spoon'*
- The biblical picture of God is of a deity who transforms situations and lifts up the oppressed.



Seminar Topic;

To what extent are Marx's views compromised by these critiques?

Writing Task

- (a) Explain Marx's view of religion
- (b) 'Society would be happier without religion.' Assess this assertion with reference to the work of Marx

Religious diversity in the UK

The religious make-up of the UK is diverse and multicultural. The approximate figures for religious belief in England and Wales are as follows:

- Christianity – 37 million
- Islam – 1.6 million
- Hinduism – 500,000
- Sikhism – 350,000
- Judaism – 270,000
- Buddhism – 150,000
- Other faiths – 120,000
- No religious belief – 9 million
- * Jedi Knight – 400,000 (not, strictly speaking, a religion)



For reflection

Why are Jedi Knights not considered to be a religion?

In the 2001 census, the racial diversity of the UK was as follows:

- White – 54 million
- Indian – 1 million
- Pakistani – 750,000
- Mixed Race – 700,000
- Black (Caribbean) - 550,000
- Black (African) – 475,000

Taking the multicultural picture in the UK as a whole, there are 4 million non-

white people and a wide range of religious, cultural and ethnic mixes. About half of all ethnic minorities live in London and most of the rest elsewhere in England. There are relatively few sizable ethnic or religious minority groups in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

However, not all racial and ethnic groupings are treated equally. In 'The Observer' in November 2001, Sundar Katwala highlighted issues of ethical and racial imbalance:

- Pakistani and Bangladeshi people tend to live in the poorest and most deprived areas
- These two groups have the lowest fluency in English
- Afro-Caribbean students gain the lowest pass rates at GCSE
- Black and Asian people are under-represented in the police force



Seminar Topic

Find evidence to support or contradict Sundar Katwala's views. Why do you think the situation is as it is?

Today, in this increasingly multicultural society, a range of laws and policies are in place to support communities. For instance:

- Support for newspapers and media in minority languages
- Support for festivals, religious holidays and celebrations
- Acceptance of traditional and religious dress
- Support for arts and music from minority cultures
- Programmes to encourage minority representation in politics, science and education
- The introduction of laws reflecting ethnic needs.



For Reflection

Do laws such as these help or hinder community relations?

The problem of religious pluralism

As a multi-faith society, the UK practices **religious pluralism**, that is, an acceptance of all faiths as having an equal right to co-exist, and all citizens have religious freedom. Members of all religions are free to worship and have equal political rights. However, members of some faiths, notably Christianity, have expressed concern about the effect that religious pluralism has on the status of their religion.

This is because Christians believe that only Christianity has the whole truth and that following Jesus Christ is the only way come into a relationship with

God. They argue that the prominence of other religions in the UK may encourage more people to see all religions as an equally valid route to God. This is called **religious exclusivity** – the view that only one religion can be true – it is a stance which some religions, such as Christianity and Islam hold and can lead to religious community tension as adherents of these faiths believe that it is their religious duty to try to convert all people to their faith.

'The Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelise all men.' (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Jesus said 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me' (John 14:6).

One possible compromise which allows communities to co-exist peacefully is **religious inclusivism** which allows that whilst one religion may be seen by believers to have the whole truth, other religions have 'part of the truth' and should be allowed to continue their search for God unhindered.

'The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search for the God who is unknown yet near'- (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Many churches and religious groups, including the Council of Christians and Jews and the Inter-faith Network for the United Kingdom, have been working together to heal divisions between different faiths communities. Such groups represent a wide range of religious beliefs and seek to increase understanding and awareness based on the view that God created all humanity. Some religious thinkers argue that all who believe in God should be united in a religious community, in which terms such as 'Christian' and 'Muslim' are no longer used.



For reflection

Are all faiths equally valid?



Seminar Topic

How might the tensions caused between religious communities over competing truth claims be resolved?

The strain on communities and problems arising from religious and cultural plurality

Although being a multicultural society has been beneficial and positive to the UK and everyone is free and entitled to celebrate their own culture and religion, there are many problems too, the causes of which are many and varied, but each can have the effect of making religious, cultural and racial communities feel threatened and isolated.

There are three main ways in which problems can cause a strain on communities:

- The sense of discrimination or unfair treatment because of religious faith.
- Problems arising where the beliefs and traditions of one community are not understood or accepted by other communities
- Inter-community racial tension caused by social deprivation.

Case Study 1: The sense of discrimination or unfair treatment because of religious faith – Christianity

In recent years, the Christian Church in the UK has sometimes felt discriminated against. In a confidential document leaked to the Sunday Telegraph in October 2006, called 'Cohesion and Integration', Guy Wilkinson, the interfaith advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury attacked what he saw as the Government's attempts to make minority faith communities more integrated. He claimed that, since the London bombings of 2006, the Government had given '*privileged attention*' to Islam and Muslim communities. He highlighted the following as evidence:

- Government using public funds to fly Muslim scholars to the UK
- Not introducing legislation on forced marriages
- Encouraging financial marriage arrangements to comply with Islamic law

He concluded that the Government's action had not helped community relations and that:

'...one might argue that disaffection and separation is now greater than ever with Muslim communities withdrawing into a sense of victimhood and other faith communities seriously concerned that the government has given signals that appear to encourage the notion of a privileged relationship with sections of the Muslim community.'



For research

Find other examples of where one religious group seems to get favourable treatment over another. Is that treatment justified? Why/why not?

The view that some faiths were given preferential treatment over Christianity was further highlighted in 2008 when the Archbishop of Canterbury controversially said that, in his view, it was likely that the principles of the Islamic Shar'ia law concerning marriage, finance and conflict resolution would become part of the UK legislative system.



Seminar Topic

Should Shar'ia law become part of UK law? Give reasons for and against.

At the same time, two apparent examples of preferential treatment when highlighted in the media when:

- A Muslim policeman was excused armed guard duty at the Israeli Embassy in London
- Christian nurse Caroline Petrie was suspended for offering to pray for the recovery of one of her patients.



For Reflection

Are these two decisions right or wrong? Why?

However, to add to a confusing picture, there are also examples of preferential treatment being given to Christianity. For instance, at the moment, all state schools in England and Wales are required by law to have a daily assembly of a broadly Christian character. Many teachers have spoken up against this rule, claiming that schools should be free to celebrate Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Sikh religious festivals every few weeks, rather than have daily Christian-style worship. Gareth Williams of the Welsh Association of Teachers and Lecturers said:

'Schools should decide if or when they want to hold worship and it should be tailored towards different faiths at different times of the year.'



Seminar Topic:

Should state schools have a daily act of worship? Should they celebrate all religions equally?

Case Study 2: Problems arising where the beliefs and traditions of one community are not understood or accepted by other communities - Islam

Sometimes relations between communities can be strained because one community fails to understand the beliefs or traditions of another. Here are two examples of where members of the Muslim and Christian communities have found it difficult to understand the views of the other.

Example 1: Aishah Azmi

Aishah Azmi, a British Muslim primary school teacher, lost her job in 2006 after refusing to remove her veil when male colleagues were present. She was employed as a classroom assistant at a school in Dewsbury. The school initially agreed that she could wear the veil when a man was present, but a male teacher later objected to her face being covered while she was teaching, claiming that the veil made it difficult for the pupils to understand her.

She refused to take off the veil and was first told to go on sick leave and then suspended for misconduct. She appealed to an employment tribunal on the grounds of religious discrimination. She lost her case on the grounds, though the tribunal said that it was a difficult balance between:

'...the rights of local children to the best quality education possible and Mrs Azmi's desire to express her cultural beliefs by wearing a veil in class.'



Seminar Topic

Do you agree or disagree with the final decision here? Why?

Example 2: Honour killings

An honour killing is the murder of a person accused of bringing shame upon the reputation of a family or community. Most victims in the UK have been young women killed by members of their family for refusing to enter an arranged marriage, committing adultery or being in a relationship that displeases the family.

In the UK, it is thought that there are about 12 honour killings per year, though the true figure is unknown. They occur because the girl, brought up in a country with western values, refuses to follow the age-old family or religious traditions of her community. Although leaders of all world religions condemn honour killings, they are, nevertheless, a religious issue because those who carry them out try to justify their actions on religious grounds.

One recent case is that of 15 year old Tulay Forn who was murdered by her father in 1999 after running away to live with a boyfriend from a different branch of Islam.

Laws to prevent forced marriages and to help victims were introduced in England and Wales in 2008.



Seminar Topic:

Should UK law be used to enforce western values on other faiths and traditions? Why/ why not?

Case Study 3: Inter-community racial tension caused by social deprivation – race and ethnic differences

In 2001 there were race riots in Leeds, Burnley, Oldham and Durham where there is a high concentration of ethnic groups in very small areas – in Rochdale, for instance, 96% of the Pakistani community and 89% of Bangladeshis live in five limited areas. The clashes were caused by a lack of jobs and social deprivation, spurred on by extremist political and militant groups.

Later, in August 2009, there was a large scale conflict in Birmingham, possibly spurred on by Islamophobia, when a group calling themselves 'The English and Welsh Defence League' gathered in the city centre to protest against militant Islam. A counter-demonstration group, 'United Against Fascism', joined by local Muslims, met and a fight developed. 33 people were arrested.



For research:

Find examples of Islamophobia – what it is and why it occurs.
Is Islamophobia a serious issue on the UK today? Why/ why not?

Interestingly, not all community conflicts are between white/ Christians and others. In the Lozells district of Birmingham in 2005 clashes broke out between two ethnic minority communities – Afro-Caribbean and Asian. It was started by rumours of the alleged rape of a black woman by Asian men, but the real cause of the problem was deep-rooted tension and ill-feeling between the two groups, caused by economics and social deprivation. The Birmingham Race Attacks Monitoring Unit spokesperson Maxie Hayles reported:

'We live in a society where you've got whites on top, Asians in the middle and then black at the bottom, particularly in economic terms.'

The conflict between the two communities stemmed from the fact that 40 years earlier, the Afro-Caribbean's were main ethnic group. Today, half the residents are Asian, and Afro-Caribbean's only 20%. Hayles said

'You have to walk miles to find a black-run business in Lozells, even some of the businesses selling Caribbean food like yam, they've been taken over by Asians, forcing Afro-Caribbean's to spend their money with Asian businesses.'



For reflection

Could this have been avoided? How?

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006

To combat racial and religious tension, the Government passed the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 with the aim of giving equal protection to all faiths and communities. It makes it a criminal offence to incite racial or religious hatred through speech, actions, written material or recordings. Home Office Minister Paul Goggins said:

'People of all backgrounds and faiths will have the right to live free from hatred, racism and extremism'

Writing task

- (a) Explain the reasons behind inter-racial and religious conflicts in the UK
- (b) 'Religion keeps communities further apart'. Assess this view.



Seminar Topic:

Can racial and religious tension among communities be solved by the law? If not, what else needs to be done?

Topic Four: Religion and the Individual

AIM

At the end of this topic you should:

- understand the effect of personality, gender, age and environment on religious belief and experience
- be able to evaluate the extent to which these aspects are important for religious belief
- understand developmental theories of religion, including the theories of Fowler and Goldman
- be able to evaluate these theories
- understand theories relating to religion and psychological health, including those of Maslow and Berger
- be able to evaluate arguments that link religious belief/experience with positive attitudes and psychological health
- be able to evaluate critically a variety of different views, and draw conclusions based on reasoning and evidence
- be able to see connections between this topic and other topics in this unit

Religion plays a very influential role in the development and sustaining of the human mind. It enables the human spirit to search for higher meaning in life and seeks to encompass the capacity for wisdom, creativity, love and compassion. These are called '*transpersonal experiences*' and are part of the psychological aspect of religion. This is the study of religious experiences, beliefs and activities which tries, through scientific investigation, to discover how and why religion has an effect on people and why on some more than others. It is about the spiritual dimension of the human psyche. In this section, we shall look at how and why religion affects people and how it influences the way they think, feel and behave.

The effect of personality

What effect does a person's individual personality have on their religious belief? Research has been inconclusive, though it suggests that some personalities are more prone to being religious than other.

Pratt (1924) found that personalities likely to be most drawn to religion are those dominated by feelings of guilt, shame, self-doubt and unworthiness. Later research by Allport (1950) concluded that, where religion was involved, there are two types of personality;

1. Intrinsic – for whom religion is very real and who take their belief seriously.
2. Extrinsic – those who see religion as a means to an end – for example, finding friendships in a religious community.

More recent studies by Ullman (1982) have suggested that many converts to new religious faiths have personalities affected by unhappy childhoods, which are displayed by signs of anger and fear and are often depressed or with little self-esteem. Converts to religion who came feeling depressed or guilty soon report that they feel much better afterwards and reported strong feelings of feeling safe and secure in the religious group. However, many who have been converted leave again after quite a short time.



For reflection:

Why do you think many converts leave quite soon?

Beyond these aspects, there is very little evidence, prompting Argyle in 'Psychology and Religion' (2006) to comment:

'The general finding here is that religion is not much related to the general personality variables known to psychologists.'

The effect of Gender

The effect of gender on religious belief is a complex issue and varies, for different reasons, from religion to religion. It seems to be the case that men and women are religious in slightly different ways. Recent research by Tamminen (1994) into Christianity seems to suggest that women seem to feel closer to God than men. This may be explained by their view of God as being primarily loving, comforting and forgiving, whilst men see God as powerful, planning and controlling.



For reflection:

Is this how you see God? Does it reflect your gender?

Moreover, it seems that women see God as neither male nor female, whereas most men see God as male. Erikson (1958) pointed out that men see God in the world and as outgoing and active, whereas women see him more inside themselves and according to Reich (1997); women value the social aspect of religion more than men.

However, in certain aspects, the religiosity of men and women is markedly different within different faith groups. Research by Loewenthal (2000) shows that Jewish and Muslim men are more religiously active than women, but that Christian and Hindu women are more active than their male counterparts. Why is this?

Religiosity is measured by looking at religious behaviour, namely;

- How often does a person attend a place of worship?
- How often do they pray?
- How often do they study religious texts?



For reflection:

Are these criteria a fair measurement for religiosity? Can you think of other possible factors?

The answer may be cultural and social - Jewish and Muslim women generally attend a place of worship much less frequently than men. Moreover, Jewish women are not required to pray with a congregation, unlike men, and so even very religious Jewish women may not go to the synagogue often. Similarly, Muslim women should not enter a mosque during menstruation.

On the other hand, Christian women are more likely to attend Bible Study groups than men, and women are involved in higher levels of religious involvement, prayer and experience.

So why is this? Loewenthal argues that the gender differences in religious belief are due, in large part, to cultural differences concerned with the role of men and women in particular religious traditions. Thus, men's religious roles in Judaism and Islam are seen as much more prestigious and more likely to be engaged in, whilst women, in these traditions, are much more likely to spend more time in the home raising the family. In Islam and Judaism there are far greater obligations on men to fulfil religious duties such as prayer and text study, whilst, at the same time, less obligations are placed on women due, mainly, to the traditional home making and child care roles of those religious traditions, making them less likely to pray or get involved in religious study.

By contrast, in Christianity, women are much more active and tend to score higher than men on religiosity. Similarly, research by Firth (1997) into Hinduism suggests that, on the whole, Hindu women are more religiously-active than men – puja (prayer) is often carried out at shrines in the home by women and Hindu temples are said to be more frequented by women than men.

Clearly, factors such as personality, social customs, employment issues and status may explain why women are slightly more active in the Christian and Hindu traditions.



Seminar Topic:

Do you think that women in Christianity and Hinduism are more religiously active than women in other faiths? Why/ why not?
In what ways do women's personalities make them more religious than men?

Female clergy also differ from their male counterparts in that they tend to be older, many have had families and other jobs before.

Overall, it might be said, that whilst in specific religious traditions there may be a marked difference between the religiosity of men and women, overall there is no overwhelming evidence to suggest that one gender is more or less religious than the other.



Research Topic:

Gather evidence from religious faiths highlighting the different roles of men and women. Consider the extent to which these affect a person's religiosity within that faith.

The effect of Age

In all human communities, religious beliefs and practices are passed on to the children, through social learning in the family, religious education at home and within the community and, in some cases, specific religious schools. The youngest age group tend to accept the religious beliefs of their family and community without question, often being unaware that there are any other faiths. The greatest religious influence on young children, not surprisingly, is their parents because:

- Close relationship with their children
- Children live at home
- Imitation of parents
- Parents enforce behaviour code
- Conversation with children
- General religious lifestyle



Seminar Topic:

Do you think that parents have the right to force their children into a particular faith or to influence their religious beliefs? Why/ why not?

Research by Petrovic (1988) found that most very young children thought God made the world and many described him as '*a man without a body*'. Most also reported that they felt God was close to them. This figure rapidly declined in the years that follow and God becomes known much more as '*invisible and everywhere*'.

Argyle (2006) notes that although religious participation is high up to age 14, then there is a drastic decline and most drop out of religion by 15-16 years. However, as adults, many return to the religion of their parents.

Kuhlen and Arnold's survey 1944 reported these results amongst adolescents;

- Belief in literal truth of bible – age 12 – 79%, age 15 – 51%, age 18 – 34%
- Belief in God – age 12 – 82%, age 15 – 78%, age 18 – 74%

**For reflection:**

Why do you think many older teens drop out of the religion of their family?

Among adults aged 20-60, most retain their faith, though, with age, comes less belief in heaven, hell and the after-life. In the over 60 age group, there are a range of views. Some had the same faith since childhood, others had converted or abandoned religion altogether. Some much older people have to stop going to church because of illness or infirmity, but many more old than young people watch religious TV programmes.

Writing task

- (a) Examine how personality and age can affect attitudes towards religious belief and experience.
- (b) 'Women are more religious than men.' Assess this view.

More old people than young believe in the after-life and report that religion makes them feel happier and less lonely. However, Argyle noted that;

'It is sometimes believed that the elderly possess some deep wisdom and dignity. From observation of the very old this is obviously not always the case.'

**For reflection:**

Are older people wiser in religious belief than younger people?

Developmental theories of religion

Developmental theories are concerned with the way in which humans develop their religious ideas and beliefs and how they interpret and act upon them. It is about the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning.

James Fowler: the six stages of faith

In his work 'Stages of Faith' (1981), psychologist James Fowler suggested that there are six stages of faith development in humans. As infants, humans learn what he called '*primal or undifferentiated faith*', from their upbringing and environment – warmth, safety, security and love, and this will help them, in later life, to have a sense of trust and safety about the universe and the divine. On the other hand, if they have a negative upbringing with neglect and

abuse, they may well, in future years, develop a distrust of the universe and the divine.



For reflection:

Do you agree with Fowler's assertion? Why/ why not?

With these factors in mind, Fowler offered his six stages of faith:

1. Intuitive-Projective (ages 3-7) – the first stage comes with the development of language and imagination. Young children follow the beliefs of their parents and tend to imagine angels and religious figures in the scriptures as characters in fairy tales
2. Mythical-Literal (school children) – children respond to religious stories, myths and rituals in a literal rather than symbolic way. This is usually accompanied by a strong belief in authority and justice, with deities often seen as superhuman.
3. Synthetic-Conventional (teenagers) - characterised by conformity and acceptance of belief with little questioning of such belief. Fowler suggested that most people do not go any further than this level: *'...for a genuine move to stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority and a relocation of authority within the self.'*
4. Individual – Reflective (young adult) – a shift from believing because others do and instead developing spiritual beliefs of their own. The individual takes personal responsibility for their beliefs and feelings rather than being one of the crowd. Can be a time of deep thought, anxiety and soul-searching.
5. Conjunctive - few people reach this stage. A time of change – people have their own views but move from being preoccupied with themselves and are much more open and tolerant of other points of religious and cultural points of view. This includes the beginning of understanding of paradoxes and transcendent realities behind the symbols and a greater openness to the divine.
6. Universalizing – It is very rare to reach this stage. Those who do are likely to be older adults who look for universal values such as unconditional love and justice. They are less concerned for themselves and more with serving others. Examples include Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi.

Writing Task

- (a) Explain Fowler's notion of the six stages of faith
- (b) 'Fowler's theory fails to explain why people have religious faith.'
Assess this view.

Goldman: Readiness for Religion

In his work '*Readiness for Religion: A basis for developmental religious education*' (1965), Goldman considered how far a child's environment could be enriched so as to enable them to grow into more mature ways of religious thought. His aim was to determine at what age are human beings really ready for religion.

1. Very Young Children

According to Goldman, young children are capable of only very limited religious understanding. They tend to understand things only in a literal way and so cannot appreciate concepts such as love, holiness, justice, good, evil, sin or human freedom. He argues that the Bible should not be taught to the very young because they are unable to grasp its true meaning and significance and that classic Bible stories such as Moses and the Burning Bush and The Crossing of the Red Sea should not be taught to children of an early age:

'The last year in junior school for the most able pupils may be the earliest time when these stories can be understood...'



For reflection:

Do you agree with this view of Bible stories?

In '*Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*' (1964) he claims that the danger of teaching Bible and other religious stories too early is that children not only misunderstand them at the time, but carry on misunderstanding them forever. He challenges teachers who claim that children should be taught religious stories as early as possible as being a '*gross distortion*'. He says such an action crams children's minds with false ideas and focuses only on trivial ideas which will lead to '*arrested development*' where children are satisfied with explanations that are far too simple:

‘...the child is satisfied by his too simple explanation, his thinking is crystallised too soon and he sees no need to think further in relation to the story. ‘Too much, too soon’ is now regarded as a danger.’

Young children see God in physical terms, as an old man who lives in heaven, which is above the sky and who sometimes visits the world. He is big, powerful, sometimes angry, loving and scary – all at the same time. The children have black and white notions of good and bad, heaven and hell. Moreover, if stories are told and re-told, they become too familiar and no longer fresh and the child becomes bored with them.

Goldman also found that very young children tend to pray egocentrically – for themselves, their families and for material possessions. They give little thought for the world beyond. As J.J. Smith (1941) observed:

‘We must expect an infant’s religion to be infantile.’



Seminar topic:

Do you think that young children should be taught religious stories at a young age? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

2. Older Children

Goldman argued that the capacity for religious insight and understanding really begins around the age of 13 years. At this time, young people begin to move away from a literal interpretation of the stories and can more readily consider more abstract and symbolic ideas.

‘The recommendation may have to be faced that very little biblical material is suitable before secondary school...’

At this age, they tend to have slightly confused views – they still hold on to some literal notions of God, but are also growing increasingly aware of science and the views it offers about the origin and nature of the world and our environment. When faced with a dilemma:

‘The evidence is that the great majority resolve their tension by keeping the supernatural and the natural world in separate compartments.’

However, in this age range, they are much more ready and open to understanding religious ideas. They begin to understand about such concepts as the power of God, the problem of evil and suffering and the nature of justice and righteousness. But with this come questions and doubts about why God does not make everything perfect and what is the purpose of life.

Such young people still pray and their prayers are less egocentric – they express desire to be a better person and put great emphasis on health, safety and world peace.

As they grow into mid-teens, young people are much more ready for religion. They can understand higher concepts such as holiness, sin and unconditional love. There is also the time of growing spiritual awareness and a more realistic view of religion and the scriptures

By 17-18 years, readiness for religion is complete as the '*childishness of religion*' is replaced by deeper spiritual insights and greater questioning of religious 'truths'.

Prayers at this age are much more concerned with confession of sins and seeking forgiveness. God is seen to offer calm and peace in a time of great doubt and many questions – a time when seeking the truth of religion really begins, when young people:

'...begin to achieve a deeper understanding of religious faith and a belief in God which is intellectually satisfying.'



Seminar Topic:

Do you agree with Goldman's views about the age of readiness for religion? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his argument?

Writing task:

- (a) Explain how developmental theories of religion help our understanding of the relationship between religion and the individual.
- (b) Assess the view that older people are more religious than younger people.

Religion and Psychological Health

Psychologists have questioned why some people have a natural tendency towards happiness and seem to emphasise good in their lives rather than bad. Are there psychological factors that can enable a person to live a happier and healthier life and does religion play an important role in this?

William James – healthy mind and sick soul

In his work 'The Varieties of Religious Experience' (1902), William James examined the reasons why some people seem to be happy all the time, even

in the face of adversity, whilst others are always sad or melancholy, lacking a point or purpose for their lives: He wrote that there are:

'...two different conceptions of the universe in our experience – healthy-mindedness and the sick soul.'

Healthy-mindedness

For James, healthy-mindedness is characterized by joy, optimism and an inability to feel evil. There are two types:

- Voluntary – seeing the good in something and making that the most important thing. Reality is always seen to be good and bad is ignored or excluded.
- Involuntary – feeling happy and positive about things without any pre-thought or intellectual evaluation of the circumstances. Everything is experienced as good in itself, not as being made good by refusing to acknowledge evil.

In many persons, happiness is congenital and irreclaimable...when unhappiness is offered or proposed to them, they positively refuse to feel it, as if it were something mean and wrong. We find such persons in every age, passionately flinging themselves upon their sense of the goodness of life...'

The healthy-minded tend to feel at one with the world and with the divine and take the view that if the world is good, then, as part of the world, they must be good also. The person sees themselves as being in union both with the world and with the divine in all things. James called such people the *'once born'*.



Research Topic:

To you agree with James' view of healthy-mindedness. Why/ why not?
Can you make a list of real-life people who fit this category?

The Sick Soul

James said that the person with the sick soul maximises thoughts of the evil and ignores the existence of good, believing it to be unreal. For such people, he wrote:

'The world now looks remote, strange, sinister and uncanny. Its colour is gone and its breath is cold...'

There are different levels within the sick soul. Some feel a loss of love for nature, then environment or the world, because they see it as outweighed by the problems of evil. Others feel despair, anguish and the complete lack of joy. Deeper sick soul feelings include loathing, suspicion, mistrust anxiety, fear and, sometimes, suicide.

'There are different levels of the morbid mind. There are people for whom evil means only a maladjustment with things, a wrong correspondence with one's life with the environment. Such evil as this is curable upon the natural plane...but there are others for whom evil may be more radical and general, a wrongness or vice in his essential nature which no alteration in the environment can cure and which requires a supernatural remedy.'

James outlined the development of the sick soul as:

1. Loss of interest in the values of life
2. The world seems strange and unwelcoming
3. nothing seems to make sense in the world anymore
4. Questioning whether there is any point in anything.



For reflection:

Can you think of any real life or historical figures who fit the description of 'sick souls'?

He argued that, although the healthy-minded are happier, nevertheless, sick souls have a greater insight into the human condition and are more connected to religion because, faced with the apparent meaninglessness of the world, they turn to religion to find an answer and a new way to view the world. – perhaps by seeing evil as a trick, concealed the real truth that existence has more to offer than the sick soul can see. He highlighted the very strong link between the sick soul and religious belief:

'The most complete religions would therefore seem to be those in which the pessimistic elements are best developed. Buddhism, of course, and Christianity are the best known to us. They are essentially the religions of deliverance; the man must die to an unreal life before he can be born into the real life'.



Seminar topic:

Do you agree with James' views? Is Christianity a religion aimed at 'sick souls'? Why/ why not?

In fact, James identified much more with the sick souls than with healthy-mindedness because the former, he believed had greater and more profound insight into the reality of things:

He claimed that the sick soul had insight that the healthy minded did not. He identified three forms of consciousness:

1. Religious melancholy – *‘the world looks remote, sinister, strange, and uncanny.’*
2. Melancholy – *‘...desperation absolute and complete.’*
3. The abyss – *a sense of great personal sin and guilt and the need to be saved.*

‘Let us then turn our backs on the once born and their sky-blue optimistic gospel...let us see rather whether pity, pain and fear may not open a more profounder view..’

James believed that if a sick soul could come through these stages they would become *‘twice born’* – which is the deepest realisation of the heart and of religious faith. They have an experience of forgiveness, salvation and the ultimate triumph of goodness and an awareness of the truth of life:

‘...loss of all worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, peace and harmony...’

Writing task;

- (a) Explain William James’ notion of healthy-mindedness.
- (b) ‘The sick soul is closer to God than the healthy mind.’ Evaluate this view

Abraham Maslow – self-actualisation and the peak experience

Self actualisation is the desire in all human beings to fulfil their potential. Abraham Maslow, in *‘A Theory of Human Motivation’* (1964) defined it as:

‘The desire for self-fulfilment and to become more and more of what one is and everything that one is capable of becoming.’

He believed that very few people ever achieve self-actualisation and he gave examples of Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein. He highlighted common traits found in people who, he believed, had reached self-actualisation:

- prepared to face reality and the truth (reality-centred)
- spontaneous
- interested in solving problems (problem-centred)
- accepting of themselves and others
- lacking in prejudice
- happy in their own company
- quite autonomous, but have a few deep personal friendships
- not likely to 'follow the crowd'
- gentle-humoured
- very original and creative thinkers



For reflection

What does it mean to fulfil your potential and why is it so important?

The Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow said that self-actualisation cannot be attained quickly – firstly, a person has to go through and satisfy what he called the '*hierarchy of needs*' before they could go on to achieve the ultimate - self-actualisation. These needs are instinctive – and Maslow believed that if the environment is right, then people will grow up straight and true and fulfil their potential.

Some of the needs are basic and biological and these are the most strongest since, without them, nothing can follow. However, they are also low-level needs, whilst the later needs, which look towards understanding spiritual and other issues, are higher-level. Maslow's hierarchy of needs are:

- Psychological – the individual has basic needs and functions; food, water, oxygen, rest.
- Safety – a sense of security, shelter, employment, comfort
- Belonging and love – personal relationships, sexual intimacy, family, feeling welcome
- Esteem – a sense of recognition, achievement, respect and worth
- Cognitive – the desire for knowledge and understanding of the world
- Aesthetic - an understanding of beauty, order and symmetry.



Seminar work

Do you agree that these are a person's most important needs or are there others? Why/ why not?

For Maslow, self-actualisers are people who have reached the summit of their potential – they are achieving what they were *'born to do'* and they have a sense of humility and respect for others, linked to a strong ethical code.



For reflection

Are we all 'born to do' something?

Peak Experiences

Self-actualisers are the most likely people to have a peak experience, which Maslow saw as an experience that takes a person out of themselves and makes them feel eternal and in touch with God. They feel part of the infinite.

In 'Religions, Values and Peak Experiences' (1964), Maslow described peak experiences as sudden feelings of intense happiness and well-being, with an awareness of ultimate truth and the unity of all things. Those having a peak experience tell of a sense of control over the body and emotions, a greater sense of awareness and a feeling of awe and wonder at the oneness with the world. They have encountered the ultimate truth or the essence of all things:

'...feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space.'

He identified two types of peak experiences:

1. Relative – the person still feels and awareness of subjects and objects – like a gentle extension of their own previous experiences.
2. Absolute – a mystical experience without time and space and a feeling of unity with all things.

Maslow's investigations found that those who had peak experiences said that they were always positive, never negative or evil, they were timeless and accompanied by a loss of fear, anxiety and doubt. They felt blessed or fortunate and the experience reaffirmed the worthiness of life and changed their views forever. Maslow believed that everyone was capable of having a peak experience, but many denied having one.



Seminar work:

Do you agree with Maslow's views on peak experiences? Why/ why not?

Is he right when he claims that everyone is capable of having one?

Peter Berger: 'The Sacred Canopy'

In his work 'The Sacred Canopy' (1987) Peter Berger looked at the sociology of religion. He claims that humans fashion the world by their own activity – what he calls the 'nomos' or the socially constructed ordering of experience.

The main thrust of Berger's argument is that humans have very weak natural instincts and so are constantly forced to choose how they behave and interact with the world. This is called '*externalizing*' and every time we make fresh choices, we change the circumstances and our relationship with the world. We face the danger of becoming 'off balance' with the world.

We long for order and stability, so we can predict our responses to problems and the issues of life. So, human society creates a stable picture of the world by '*objectivation*'. That is, in our societies, we develop a sense of order and imposed it on the world and made it applicable to all people. In this way, people live in a stable, predictable and a safe way to keep out '*...the terror that would otherwise engulf us if we did not have this order*'.



For reflection:

Is Berger right? Why/ why not?

Thus, society tells us, to a greater extent, what to do, what to teach our children and our role in life – child, students, worker, parent, spouse) and how to act accordingly. This is called '*socialization*' and, to work effectively, everyone must accept these principles for themselves. This is called '*internalization*' and is the nomos – society's view of the world and how we should live in it. It is the product of centuries of human choices and norms which have been adapted to guide people into how to behave and protect them from anarchy and chaos.

'The socially established nomos is our shield against terror...the most important function of society is nomization.'

He explains how the nomos works:

By our actions in the world we evolve principles of behaviour (externalisation)
The principles are accepted by most others (objectivation)
People accept them as principles of their own, personal behaviour (internalisation)

For Berger, the worst thing for society would be to be without a nomos – which he called a state of '*anomy*'. To avoid this possibility, society makes its nomos as strong as possible. This is where religion comes in – societies adopt religious principles to underpin their nomos because religion is based on claims of absolute and universal truth. Religion gives humanity symbols

which are rooted in the cosmos itself and have a special 'sacred power' which holds up the whole of cosmic reality. Religious symbols are so powerful because they express the most important values in life – religion brings meaningful order and peace to the cosmos.

For research



Find examples from different religions of the symbols used to express the most important values in life.

Do you agree that the worst thing for society would be to be without a nomos? Why/ why not?

Moreover, we learn our individual roles by reference to religion and by studying the scriptures. Equally, we learn to behave by following religious rituals which constantly remind us of the 'true' way of life. Also, religion gives meaning to dreams, visions and religious experiences. Indeed, for Berger, religion is a form of knowledge that explains to us the meaning of the extraordinary events in our ordinary lives and offers a solution when things go badly wrong – for example natural disasters, evil and death. Happens:

'Religion lies at the heart of this process for, with its religious and moral codes, it provides a foundation for the nomos'.

Writing Task;

- (a) Explain Maslow's notion of self-actualization.
- (b) 'Religious belief leads to more positive attitudes and greater happiness.' Assess this assertion with reference to theories of religion and psychological health.

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