Revision
Beliefs in society

Joan Garrod

This issue contains some exercises to help you to develop your knowledge and understanding of concepts associated with the topic of religion, and to give you practice in answering exam-style questions.

In addition, there is a PowerPoint slide show on ‘The white working class’, following on from the one featured in the previous issue. This is a topic which has links to several areas in sociology, such as social class, culture and identity, education and the media.

Although the exam-style questions below are based on the AQA A-level exam structure, they would also be of benefit to students taking the OCR topic of Religion, belief and faith.

As with any topic in sociology, there are some important concepts associated with that particular area of knowledge. Appropriate use of concepts when answering questions not only shows good knowledge and understanding, but is also helpful in displaying the skills of analysis and evaluation.

Exercise 1

Below is a list of ‘paired’ concepts, which means that they are related in some way. Some of them are opposites, some are describing different aspects of the same thing, and some are those which occasionally confuse.

For each pair in Column A and Column B, write a few lines explaining what it means, and bring out two or three additional points — for example, the name of a sociologist with whom it is associated, or why it is thought to be particularly significant, whether it is used as evidence of a particular trend, and so on. The ability to do this is particularly helpful when answering the shorter questions on an exam paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Profane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>Totemism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>Church</td>
<td>Denomination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundamentalism</td>
<td>Ecumenicalism</td>
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<td>Disenchantment</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theodicy</td>
<td>Theocracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sect</td>
<td>Cult</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Theodicy of disprivilege  Liberation theology
New Age beliefs  New Christian right
Atheist  Agnostic
Nominal Christians  Religious ‘nones’

**Exercise 2**

**America’s religious ‘nones’**

The link below will take you to an article published by the Pew Research Center in the USA. It describes research exploring some of the reasons why those who do not identify with a religious faith (religious nones) have abandoned their faith, as over three-quarters of them were raised as a member of a particular religion. Reading the article and making brief notes will give you some useful information when discussing the growing numbers of religious nones.

www.tinyurl.com/h8eybl3

**Exercise 3**

**Sample exam questions**

The next section of these exercises provides practice in answering exam-style questions. The ‘outline and explain’ questions typically carry 10 marks, while the ‘evaluate’ questions typically carry 40 marks. This should give you guidance regarding the amount of detail you provide, and the length of your answer. The print version of the magazine will provide you with more detailed guidance regarding how to tackle both types of question, so be sure to make uses of this.

**Item A**

Surveys are sometimes used to measure the degree of religiosity in society. Respondents are asked questions such as whether or not they believe in God or a supernatural being, and how often they attend religious services.

Critics have pointed out that this method has serious limitations.

Applying material from the Item, analyse two reasons why surveys may not be the best way of revealing the degree of religiosity in society.  

(10 marks)
Item B

While many Christian churches are experiencing a sharp decline in their congregations, others are thriving, particularly those catering for particular social or ethnic groups. At the same time, many people have chosen to adopt beliefs and practices drawn from other, non-Christian, religions. It has also been found that among those who profess to have no religious affiliation, many still admit to a belief in God or another spirit or life force.

Applying material from the Item and your knowledge, evaluate the view that religious beliefs and practices in many Western societies are not declining, but changing. (40 marks)

Joan Garrod is a managing editor of SOCIOLOGY REVIEW.