

Religion and new age movements

[Religion](#)



Using material from item A and elsewhere, assess the view that most people today see spirituality and religious belief as purely private and personal matters. In society today religion can be seen in two different ways, as a private and personal matter or something to share with your community.

Some sociologists would argue that religion and spirituality is a private matter because of televangelism, which is where people watch their religions services on television or go on online churches in the comfort and privacy of their own home when we have free time but other sociologists argue that this does not mean that religion and spirituality is a private matter, but that we have to use televangelism due to the fact we live in a postmodern society which means society is constantly changing and causes us to lead hectic lifestyles.

This also links in with vicarious religion, which is where a small group of people practice for the wider community. Another reason why sociologists would argue that religion and spirituality is a private matter is that there has been a large increase in new age movements, such as; horoscopes, tarot cards and Wicca. Which focus on individualistic beliefs and self-healing, increasing amounts of these springing up indicates that because we live in a postmodern society we are starting to focus on ourselves more meaning that our beliefs are becoming privatised.

Other sociologists would argue against this by saying that they are not a true picture of our religious beliefs, and are in fact, just fads, which we can pick and choose whether, we believe in them and don't necessarily believe in them throughout our whole lives. This is linked to spiritual shopping, which is where we pick and choose which parts of different religions we believe in.

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Our beliefs are not a set structure and we have personal choice in what we believe. Also, another reason why religion may have become privatised is because of industrialisation, which caused us to no longer live in small tightknit communities.

Before industrialisation churches and other religious organisations were often the centre of small tightknit communities and also, there was social stigma attached to not going to church before industrialisation. Industrialisation caused people to go from living in extended families to living in small nuclear families so that they could move round and find work where it was available, This lead to more hectic lifestyles and less time for people to go to churches meaning that they had to practise privately.

Because of this, industrialisation also therefore decreased the amount of social stigma around not attending church allowing people to choose whether they actually wanted to go or not. You could argue that this means that religion is now more pure because we chose what we believe and don't just 'believe' so that we fit into the rest of society. On the other hand, other sociologists argue that there are still other religious people about that still live in tightknit communities such as Muslims.

Muslims tend to use their religion as a form of cultural defence to protect their identity from scrutiny from outsiders of their religion. But other sociologists would argue that this is a Eurocentric argument because Muslims do not use their religion as a form of cultural defence outside of Europe, and the reason they do it here is because of how they are represented in the media and because people connect them with

fundamentalist attacks that happen causing 'islamaphobia,' Which is the irrational fear of Islam.

Structural differentiation has meant that religion has become more privitised because we now live in a multi-cultural society we now have more choice in what we believe in allowing us to ' spiritual shop' Lyon did a study called ' Jesus in Disneyland' believes that we have become religious consumers, meaning that me pick and choose what we believe from all the different religions in the world. This has been made possible because of globalisation creating stronger links between different countries and allowing us to have access to multiple types of religions with all different norms and values.

This gives us greater choice between what we believe in and what we don't. There are many methodological problems with measuring whether religion has become privatized, on of these problems is that ' how do you measure how many religious organisations there are? ' this is a problem because it is near impossible to count every single religious organisation in the world because of the amount of cults and sects that exist that not everybody may now about. Sociologists argue that there has been a decrease on the number of religious organisations, and therefore religious belief is decreasing, but they do not take into account that it may not be religious belief that is declining, but that lack of funding has meant that the religious beliefs could not remain forcing people into practise privately, Also, how do you define what a religious organisation is.

Another problem with measuring whether religion has become privatised is that you can't know what people are thinking, just because they don't visit a religious organisation, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are not religious,

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they may just not have the time to visit the organisation so instead use things like televangelism to practise at home.

Also, just because people don't attend religious organisations often, Stark and Bainbridge believe that the decline in traditional religions has created a demand for newer religions, this includes new age movements that focus on private practice. They believe this is due to people being naturally religious and needing religion as a compensator during times of crisis. They think that people still turn to religion for rites of passage and in times of life crisis, so, when people feel their life is unstable and they need something to make them feel better.