4.1 Religious Organisations: Churches, Denominations, Sects and Cults: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary. For extended answers write in full sentences. At least two extended answers require full sentence responses.

1 State one criticism of using the church-sect typology as a rigid classification when analysing contemporary religious organisations in Britain.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that the decline of traditional established churches in modern Britain is mainly caused by social and cultural secularisation processes rather than by organisational weaknesses. In your answer, consider competing explanations and reach a supported judgement.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Define the term 'church' as used in sociological typologies of religious organisations, naming the key features of size, relation to society and structure.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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4 State one clear difference Troeltsch used to contrast a church and a sect in studies of religious organisations.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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5 Item A: A national established church reports a steady fall in formal weekly attendance over 25 years, but local small sects report stable or slightly rising membership. Using Item A and your sociological knowledge of Troeltsch, Niebuhr and Stark and Bainbridge, identify two reasons why the established church might decline while sects grow.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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6 Explain one way Stark and Bainbridge's classification of religious groups by degree of tension with wider society helps to understand the difference in appeal between an established church and a sect in a UK local community.

(Total for Question 6 is 3 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.1 Religious Organisations: Churches, Denominations, Sects and Cults: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. the typology is too rigid and many organisations do not fit neatly into a single category **B1**

brief development, e.g. groups may hybridise features of churches, denominations and sects in practice **B1**

Answer: A criticism is that the typology is too rigid: many contemporary organisations hybridise features of churches, denominations and sects, so they do not fit neatly into one category.

Question 2

Level 1 Assertive or descriptive points about secularisation or organisation, with limited development and little use of sociological evidence or concepts. **1-3**

Level 2 Some developed points showing understanding of secularisation or organisational explanations, with at least one sociological concept applied and some attempt to compare views. **4-6**

Level 3 Clear and developed argument considering both secularisation processes and organisational weaknesses, using appropriate sociological concepts and evidence, with a reasoned comparison of viewpoints. **7-9**

Level 4 Balanced, well-developed evaluation weighing secularisation explanations against organisational explanations, drawing on key sociological perspectives and evidence, acknowledging limitations, and arriving at a supported judgement. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- Secularisation explanations: decline in belief, religious pluralism, loss of collective rituals, decline of social authority of religion, modernisation and rationalisation reducing influence of traditional churches.
- Organisational explanations: failure to modernise worship or communication, bureaucratic inertia, poor local outreach, leadership scandals, inability to meet contemporary spiritual or social needs.
- Alternative or complementary explanations: growth of individualised spirituality and New Age movements, competition from denominations and sects, demographic changes and immigration altering religious landscapes.
- Perspectives: functionalist view that institutions adapt but may decline if functions are replaced by others; Marxist or conflict perspectives might stress decline due to loss of ideological relevance or class shifts; interactionist perspectives emphasise conversion and identity factors favouring sects; Weberian ideas on rationalisation and disenchantment.
- Evidence and evaluation: use of attendance statistics, membership records, case examples of church renewal or decline, critiques of secularisation thesis noting continuing private belief or cultural religion, and the role of organisational change in some churches reversing decline.
- Conclusion: a supported judgement might argue that secularisation provides broad structural explanation for decline, but organisational weaknesses determine the extent and speed of decline in particular churches, so both explanations are important and complementary.

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Question 3

identifies a church as a large, established religious organisation, often formally structured and widely accepted in society (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. notes links to the state or broad social acceptance and integration with wider society **B1**

Answer: A church is a large, established religious organisation, often formally structured and widely accepted in society, sometimes having links to the state and integrated with wider society.

Question 4

identifies a difference, e.g. churches are large and inclusive, sects are small and exclusive **B1**

brief development, e.g. notes that sects separate from mainstream society while churches are socially integrated **B1**

Answer: Churches are typically large and inclusive and integrated into society, while sects are small, exclusive groups that separate from mainstream society.

Question 5

identifies a reason, e.g. loss of social authority and state links reduces the church's social role **B1**

explains how this leads to decline, e.g. people no longer see the established church as central to community life so attendance falls **B1**

identifies a second reason, e.g. sects attract those seeking intense commitment and clear identity, appealing to disaffected groups **B1**

explains how this causes sect growth, e.g. sects offer support and meaning that draws members away from less demanding established church services **B1**

Answer: Possible answers: the established church declines when it loses social authority and state links, so people no longer see it as central and attendance falls; sects grow because they offer intense commitment and clear identity, attracting disaffected individuals seeking support and meaning.

Question 6

identifies Stark and Bainbridge classify groups by how much tension they have with wider society **B1**

explains how churches have low tension, being accommodating and integrated **B1**

explains how sects have high tension, offering commitment and distinctiveness that can attract those alienated from mainstream values **B1**

Answer: Stark and Bainbridge classify religious groups by tension with society: churches have low tension and are accommodating, which may suit mainstream members; sects have high tension and distinct demands, attracting those alienated from mainstream values who seek a committed community.

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