• Islamic fundamentalism e.g. ISIS – Bruce (2008) suggest Islamic fundamentalism consists of ideas based on the literal meanings of the words in the Qur’an and a belief in and a return to the true form of religion that existed in some earlier time.
• Their drive for social change is shown in 9/11, the attacks in Paris, the attacks in Tunisia.

Religion: conservative force or a force for social change?
• Either stabilising, solidarity and integrating or divisive and conflict causing.
• McGuire and Robinson suggest 4 major interrelated factors which influence this debate:
  1. The nature and extent of religious beliefs – if most in a society hold religious beliefs which have strong ideas conflicting with today’s society, it will likely lead to criticism and attempts to change society.
  2. The significance of religion in a society’s culture – if religion is strongly prominent, it will more likely lead to it being used as a means of justifying change.
  3. The extent of social involvement of religion – more likely to influence change if the religious organisations/leaders are close to/involved with the people and play important roles in the political and economic life of societies.
  4. The degree of central authority in religious organisations – in societies where religious organisations have strong, central authority, they are in a better place to either promote change or prevent it.

Religious organisations
Churches
• E.g. Church of England, Roman Catholic.
• Hierarchical power structure, paid officials, wealthy.
• World accommodating – conservative, likely to accept dominant norms and values. Closely linked with the state.
• Commitment levels – integrated with society, few demands/restrictions.
• Membership – Universalist and inclusive, often ascribed.
• All social classes, although lots of higher classes.
• Intolerant to other groups, claiming monopoly of truth.

Denominations
• E.g. Methodists.
• Hierarchy of paid officials with some division of authority roles.
• World accommodating – generally accept dominant norms, some minor differences. Often no links with state.
• Integrate with the world, accepting secular culture, members living conventional lives.
• Members recruited by self-selection or family tradition. Open membership.
• Hardly ever a social majority, less likely to be upper class, but members from all society are drawn.
• Tolerant of other groups and religion, not claiming monopoly of the truth.

Sects
• E.g. People’s Temple.
Five main features:
1. The emphasis is on the self – freeing the self within.
2. Everything is connected – holistic approach with the mind, body and spirit all connected to the environment and supernatural.
3. The self is the final authority – the truth is what the individual believes and what works for them.
4. The global cafeteria – vast range of beliefs, therapies and techniques from across the globe, available to pick and mix.
5. Therapy – making you more successful, healthier and happier.

- Examples of New Age religion includes:
  - Clairvoyance
  - Tai Chi
  - Wicca

Is there a New Age movement?
- Sutcliffe (2003) – cannot be a movement as it lacks premises, leaders and shared beliefs/rituals (too diverse).
- Claims it is more a means for individuals to pursue their own self development.
- New Age ideas are mainly spread through mass media and through specialised New Age shops.
- Very little commitment required, only really involving buying products.
- New Age is therefore best understood to be one of many world-affirming audiences or client cults (a cult offering therapy and sold courses).

Reasons for the appeal and growth of sects and cults
Practical or pragmatic reasons
- Heelas (1996) – New Age idea appeals to more affluent, educated, socially integrated and generally successful middle class people who find something missing in their lives, e.g. helping reduce stress and anxiety, becoming more happy/spiritual.
- Some may find NRM as an escape from stressful life, difficult family, work etc.

Secularisation
- Weber – secularisation became part of a ‘disenchantment with the world’ in which many traditional religions had been watered down or lost.
- Bruce (1996) – the growth of new age and NRM may be due to people’s loss of faith in traditional religions due to them being watered down.

Filling the ‘vacuum of meaning’ in postmodern society
- Lyotard (1984) – loss of faith and metanarratives in a postmodern society has led to a ‘crisis of meaning; in which individuals turn to New Age to fill the ‘vacuum of meaning’ (Heelas 1998).

Identity formation in postmodern society
- Traditional sources of identity e.g. class, gender, ethnicity, have been fragmented and that people try to form their own identities through their lifestyle choices e.g. buying into a sect or cult to provide meaning and purpose and build identity.

Globalisation and the mass media
- People now have access to a huge range of ideas from around the world.
- Not all depend on a charismatic leader.
- Many have been successful in socialising their children to accept practices.
- Many can maintain strict standards of conduct including expelling those who fail to conform.
- Sects such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists are examples of long-standing groups.

Conversionist sects
- The most likely to develop into a denomination.
- Sects that think that the best way to save the world is not to be hostile to and isolated from it, but to be engaged with it.
- Should they be successful, they may turn into a denomination e.g. the Salvation Army.

Introversionist and Adventist/revolutionary sects.
- Not able to survive in denominational form.
- Introversionist – only route to salvation involves total withdrawal from the corrupting influences of the world and becoming inward-looking. Can only survive by being apart from the world.
- Adventist or revolutionary – those that hold millenarian beliefs that suggest there is going to be some form of imminent, sudden, dramatic and catastrophic change in the world, brought about by the Second Coming of Christ, Judgement Day etc.

Gender and religion
- Liberal Feminists:
  - See more equality for women in religion yet patriarchy is still an obstacle for women getting positions of authority in religious groups e.g. priests.
- Radical Feminists:
  - Claim existing religions exist for the benefit of men.
  - Radical feminists attempt to bring a fundamental challenge to religion or reshape it by recapturing the centrality of women from early times.
- Marxist Feminists:
  - Religion acts as the opium of the people, especially working class women, by compensating for their double exploitation of being working class and women.

Patriarchy and religion
- Religious scriptures:
  - Women are either invisible, subordinate or evil temptresses.
  - Example – Eve in Christianity was made of Adam’s rib and nearly destroyed mankind by leading man astray.
  - God is always seen as male.
  - Aldridge (2007) – In the Qur’an, women are legally inferior to men.
- Barred from priesthood:
  - Women are excluded from this position in the Roman Catholic Church until very recently.
  - In Buddhism, female nuns have less status than male monks.
- The (stained) glass ceiling:
  - Facing an invisible barrier of prejudice and discrimination that stops them rising up the hierarchy.