

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

The secularisation debate A2

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to explain and evaluate:

1. **The secularisation thesis.** The claim, first made by sociologists in the 1960s, that modern societies are steadily becoming less religious; where the idea came from (Comte, Marx, Weber, Durkheim); who argued it (Wilson, Berger, Bruce, Wallis); the causes they give; and the main lines of attack on it.
2. **Evidence for a decline in religious belief.** What the figures on attendance, membership, weddings, census answers and belief surveys show, how strong each kind of evidence is, and how the other side reads the same figures.
3. **Whether rationalisation is leading to a decline in religious belief.** Weber's idea that scientific, calculating ways of thinking leave less room for faith, and the arguments that faith survives or even grows alongside them.
4. **Whether religion has lost its social significance.** The difference between religion losing its place in **society** (law, politics, schools, welfare, moral authority) and individuals becoming less **religious**, and the evidence on each side, including revival, resacralisation, fundamentalism and new forms of religion.

What this note assumes. The prerequisite note *Religion and society* explains how religion is defined and measured, how religiosity varies by class, gender, ethnicity and age, the types of religious organisation and Wallis's three kinds of new religious movement (NRM). It also has a short recap of this debate. This note does not repeat those foundations; it builds the full debate on top of them, organised around three questions: **where** religion still matters, **how much** religion people have, and **what kind** of religion is growing.

Understand it

What the thesis claims

Secularisation means religion matters less and less: in how a society is run, in what its organisations can do, and in what people believe and do. **Bryan Wilson** (*Religion in Secular Society*, **1966**) put the stress on **social significance**: the question is whether religion still shapes the way society works, not just whether some people still pray.

The word hides several separate claims. **José Casanova (1994)** showed that the thesis is really three claims bundled together, and that each can be true or false independently:

Strand	What it says	What would show it	Where it fits best
Differentiation	the state, law, science, medicine, schools and welfare break free of church control	church courts gone, state schools and hospitals, laws passed against church wishes	almost all modern societies
Decline	fewer people believe and take part	falling attendance, membership, rites of passage, belief in God	Western and Northern Europe, Canada, Australia
Privatisation	religion retreats from public life into the home and the individual conscience	faith treated as a private choice; religious voices absent from politics	patchy: the USA, Poland and many Muslim societies show the opposite

Casanova's own verdict was that differentiation is well supported, decline is real mainly in Europe, and privatisation is often wrong. Keep this table in mind: almost every essay in this topic is won by saying **which strand** the quotation is about.

Where the idea came from

The thesis predates sociology's research on it. The founders each expected religion to weaken, for different reasons:

- **Auguste Comte** saw human thought passing through three stages: the **theological** (events explained by gods), the **metaphysical** (explained by abstract forces) and the **positive** or scientific. Religion belongs to the first stage, so science should replace it.
- **Karl Marx** expected religion, as the comfort of exploited people, to wither once a classless society removed the exploitation it covered up.
- **Max Weber** described **rationalisation**: action guided by calculation, rules and evidence rather than tradition or magic. The result is **disenchantment**: the world stops being seen as full of spirits and miracles.
- **Émile Durkheim** worried that the old gods were growing old or dying, though he expected new forms of shared sacred life to arise.

The case for the thesis: why religion might be fading

The modern version comes from Wilson, **Peter Berger** (*The Sacred Canopy*, 1967), **Roy Wallis** and **Steve Bruce** (*God is Dead*, 2002). Bruce links secularisation to a bundle of changes he calls **modernisation**. Think of them as six pressures, each of which squeezes religion from a different side:

1. **Structural differentiation.** **Talcott Parsons** described how, as societies grow more complex, specialised institutions take over jobs one institution used to do. Clergy once ran schools, poor relief, hospitals, record-keeping and even some courts; now the state and professions do. Religion is left with a narrower, specialised job: worship and spiritual care.
2. **Societalisation.** Wilson argued that religion grew from small, close **communities** where everyone knew everyone and the church was the centre of life. Modern life is lived in large, impersonal **societies** run by bureaucracies, so religion loses its base.
3. **Rationalisation.** Weber's disenchanted world (see the next section).
4. **Pluralism and diversity.** When one faith covered everyone, it worked like a **sacred canopy** (Berger): a shared roof of meaning that nobody questioned. Once many faiths, denominations and non-religious outlooks sit side by side, each becomes one opinion among many, and none can claim to be simply "the truth". Bruce adds that **social diversity** (people of many classes and backgrounds) makes a single church that speaks for everyone impossible.
5. **Individualism.** Modern people are taught to choose for themselves. Bruce argues that once religion becomes a personal choice, parents stop insisting, children drift, and each generation holds it more loosely.
6. **Existential security.** **Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart** (*Sacred and Secular*, **2004**) argued that people who are safe from hunger, disease and violence feel less need for supernatural help. Welfare states and prosperity therefore reduce demand for religion. (The prerequisite note uses this idea for differences between social groups; here it matters as a **cause** of decline over time.)

Internal secularisation. Wilson and Will Herberg (*Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, **1955**) noted that American churches stayed full in the 1950s, yet what people found there was often more about being a good, successful American than about doctrine. A church can be busy and still secular **inside**: its message has adapted to the world rather than challenging it.

One-way change. Bruce treats these pressures as irreversible: once the state runs schools and hospitals and many faiths live side by side, there is no route back to a single church directing public life. He calls the overall pattern the **secularisation paradigm**: not a law of history, but the best explanation of what has happened in the West.

The evidence on belief and practice

The prerequisite note explains **how** each measure can mislead (attendance is not belief, people over-report, the past is poorly recorded). Here the question is different: **when you put the measures side by side, what do they add up to?**

Kind of evidence	What it shows for Britain and much of Europe	How the other side reads it
Sunday attendance	Peter Brierley's English Church Census of 2005 found about 3.2 million people, roughly 6.3% of the population of England, in church on an ordinary Sunday, far below earlier counts	attendance is a habit, not a creed; "regular" churchgoers now come monthly rather than weekly, which lowers the count without anyone losing faith

Kind of evidence	What it shows for Britain and much of Europe	How the other side reads it
Membership	most large Protestant churches have lost members every decade since the early twentieth century	denominations count members differently; Pentecostal, Orthodox and migrant churches have grown
Rites of passage	civil weddings have outnumbered religious ones in England and Wales since the late 1970s; by the late 2010s fewer than a quarter of weddings were religious; fewer infant baptisms	many people still want a religious funeral; choosing a venue is not choosing a belief
Census identity	in England and Wales, "no religion" rose from 25.2% (2011) to 37.2% (2021), an increase of about 48% in ten years, and "Christian" fell below half for the first time	ticking "Christian" or "no religion" records identity, not belief; nearly half still identify as Christian although only a few percent attend
Belief surveys	the British Social Attitudes survey has found around half of British adults, and in several years more than half, saying they belong to no religion	belief in some "spirit or life force" stays high even where belief in a personal God falls
Generations	David Voas and Alasdair Crockett (2005) found each generation less religious than the one before, on belief as well as attendance	the young are drawn to other forms: Pentecostal worship, spirituality, online faith

The key argument about this evidence is between two readings of the gap between identity and attendance.

- **Grace Davie (1994)**: Britain shows **believing without belonging**. People have stopped going but have not stopped believing; religion has become private. She also describes **vicarious religion**: a small active minority keeps religion going on behalf of a wider public who expect the church to be there for funerals, national memorials and moments of crisis, rather as most people never visit a hospital but want one to exist.
- **Voas and Crockett (2005)**, in a paper called "Neither believing nor belonging", tested Davie's idea with survey data and found that **belief** is falling at about the same rate as **attendance**. If belief and belonging decline together, Davie's gap is a stage on the way down, not a stable new form of religion. Bruce adds that unsupported belief is fragile: a faith that is never practised in company is hard to pass on to children.

Was the past really more religious? Critics (David Martin's "golden age" myth; Rodney Stark's picture of medieval peasants who rarely attended) say the decline is measured from an imagined peak. Bruce answers that the debate about what medieval villagers privately felt does not touch the paper trail: parish registers, church courts, charity schools and bishops in Parliament are hard evidence of a church built into public life, whatever went on in people's heads, and that public presence has plainly shrunk. This is why the debate turns so often on **which strand** is being measured: doubts about **past belief** do not touch the evidence on **differentiation**.

The timing point. Wilson and Berger wrote in the 1960s, using the Western data of the post-war decades, when church decline was the obvious story. Since the 1980s, the picture beyond Europe (Pentecostal growth, Islamic revival, religion in politics) has been more mixed, so a thesis that fitted its own time and place may fit the world as a whole less well.

Rationalisation: does modern thinking push out belief?

The case. For Weber, rationalisation began inside religion itself. **Protestantism** stripped out much of the magic of medieval Catholicism: saints, relics, miracles and priests who could change God's mind. Berger argued that this made God more distant and the world more ordinary, opening the door to explaining it without God at all. Science and technology then did the rest:

- **Bruce's technological worldview.** When a harvest fails, a modern farmer calls an agronomist, not a priest. Science rarely **disproves** religion head-on; it simply removes the everyday occasions on which people used to turn to prayer, so religion shrinks to matters science cannot reach (death, grief, meaning).
- **Comte's stages:** scientific explanation is expected to replace religious explanation.
- **Disenchantment** shows up in attitudes: fewer people believe in miracles or that illness is a punishment; medicine, insurance and weather forecasts handle risks that once called for ritual.

The case against.

- **Science leaves the biggest questions open.** It explains **how** but not **why**: what life is for, why suffering happens, what follows death. Religion may lose its explanations of nature and keep its answers to meaning.
- **Rationality can choose religion.** **Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge** (*The Future of Religion*, 1985) built a **rational choice** theory: people weigh costs and rewards, and when real rewards (health, long life, justice) are out of reach, religion offers **compensators** (promises of future reward). Choosing faith is then a reasonable decision, not a failure of reason.
- **Re-enchantment.** David Lyon argued that religion has been **relocated** into the media and consumption rather than removed; interest in angels, healing, astrology and the supernatural on screen suggests the world is not fully disenchanted.
- **Loss of faith in science.** Postmodernists such as Lyotard argue that people now distrust all **metanarratives**, science included, and Ulrich Beck's **risk society** describes risks (climate change, pandemics) that science created as well as solved. Distrust of experts may help faith.
- **Spiritual practice in the language of health.** Some newer movements present prayer, chanting or mindfulness as ways to reduce stress and improve sleep, borrowing the vocabulary of psychology rather than fighting it.
- **Highly educated and religious.** The USA is among the most scientifically advanced societies and among the most religious in the West; many scientists are believers. If rationalisation were enough, these cases should not exist.
- **Security, not reason?** Norris and Inglehart's data suggest that wealth and safety, more than scientific thinking itself, predict decline.

Has religion lost its social significance?

This is the **differentiation and privatisation** question: religion's role in running society.

Signs that it has.

- **Disengagement.** Martin's term for churches withdrawing from political and social affairs to concentrate on worship and spiritual care.
- **Laws against church teaching.** Divorce, contraception, abortion and same-sex marriage have been legalised in most Western countries in spite of church opposition. The clearest case is the Republic of **Ireland**, once among the most Catholic countries in Europe: voters approved same-sex marriage by **62%** in **2015** and removed the constitutional ban on abortion by **66.4%** in **2018**.
- **Loss of moral authority.** A bishop's view on assisted dying or IVF is now reported next to the views of doctors, lawyers and campaigners and weighed like theirs, rather than settling the matter. Scandals over the abuse of children within several churches deepened the loss of trust.
- **Less protection for the sacred.** England and Wales abolished the old offence of **blasphemy** in **2008**; swearing, satire and art mocking religious figures pass with little public reaction.
- **Competitors for meaning:** consumerism, media celebrity, therapy, humanism and atheism offer identity and purpose without religion.
- **Bruce's reply to "people still believe":** even if private faith continues, a religion confined to private life no longer shapes laws, schools or public morality, which is exactly what secularisation means.

Signs that it has not.

- **Public religion** (Casanova): religions have moved **back** into public debate. Examples: the US Christian right in elections and in campaigns over abortion and schooling; the Catholic Church's part in the fall of communism in **Poland**; Islamic parties across the Middle East and South Asia.
- **Formal roles survive.** The Church of England has **26** bishops sitting in the House of Lords; about a third of state-funded schools in England have a religious character; coronations and national memorials are religious services.
- **Civil religion** (Robert Bellah): in the USA, the flag, the pledge and "In God We Trust" make the nation itself an object of semi-religious devotion.
- **Welfare and community work.** Food banks, night shelters, refugee support and youth work are often run from churches, mosques, gurdwaras and temples, giving religion a practical public role even where attendance is low.
- **Theocracies and religious states.** In **Iran**, **Saudi Arabia** and **Afghanistan** since the Taliban returned in 2021, religious law is state law; in **Pakistan** religion shapes the constitution.
- **Significance may vary inside a country.** For many minority ethnic communities in the West, religion organises family life, festivals, food, marriage and community leadership.

The analytical point. Most "against" evidence is about **personal** faith or about **non-Western** societies; most "for" evidence is about the **public role** of religion in the **West**. A good essay says this out loud and decides which kind of evidence the quotation's wording calls for.

Revival, resacralisation and religion in new forms

Resacralisation means the sacred returning to social life; **desacralisation** is the opposite (Weber's disenchantment). Berger, who once led the secularisation camp, edited *The Desecularization of the World* (1999) and argued that, outside Europe and an educated elite, the modern world had not become less religious.

Evidence offered for revival.

- **Pentecostal and evangelical growth.** David Martin (*Tongues of Fire*, 1990) traced rapid Pentecostal growth in Latin America; it has since spread across sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. Megachurches and **televangelism** use modern media to reach millions.
- **After communism.** In **Russia** the Orthodox Church regained public status and many followers after 1991; in **China** temples reopened after the Cultural Revolution and Christian numbers have grown.
- **Fundamentalism** (next section) in several faiths.
- **Spirituality.** Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's **spiritual revolution** thesis: as congregations shrink, the **holistic milieu** (yoga, reiki, meditation, healing) grows. The prerequisite note gives the Kendal Project figures.
- **Spiritual shopping.** Danièle Hervieu-Léger describes people building a personal faith from many sources ("pilgrims"); Thomas Luckmann called this **invisible religion** (1967): religion that has left the churches without leaving people.
- **Religion online.** Streamed services, prayer and scripture apps, online sermons and faith influencers let people practise without a building.
- **Migration.** Migrants to Europe and North America from more religious societies have raised attendance in Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh congregations; some of London's busiest churches are migrant-led.
- **Demography.** The **Pew Research Center (2015)** projected that the share of the world's population with no religion would fall from about **16%** in 2010 to about **13%** by 2050, mainly because religious populations, Muslims especially, have more children.

The religious market theory. Stark and Bainbridge, with Roger Finke, argue that demand for religion is roughly **constant**, and that what varies is **supply**. Where one state church holds a monopoly (much of Europe), it grows lazy and people drift away; where many groups compete for followers (the USA), religion stays lively. They also describe a **cycle**: as established churches become worldly, **sects** break away to restore strict faith and **cults** offer new faiths, so secularisation sets off its own revival. On this view the European decline is a problem of supply, not proof that religion is ending.

Why the revival case is contested.

- **What would count as revival?** Ask four questions: are **more** people religious, **more intensely**, **more publicly**, and **for longer** than one passing trend? Most evidence meets one or two, not all four.
- **Small numbers.** Heelas and Woodhead's own figures showed the holistic milieu far smaller than the congregations it is said to replace (Bruce's point).

- **Self-spirituality is weak glue.** Spiritual shopping asks "what works for me?" It binds nobody to a community, makes few demands, is easily dropped and is rarely passed to children; to Bruce, a faith that cannot be handed on is a sign of decline.
- **Even the USA is declining.** Gallup found that the share of Americans who belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque fell from **70%** in **1999** to **47%** in **2020**, the first time it had been below half. Bruce also argues that American diversity grew from immigration, not from competition creating demand, and that European countries with more choice did not see attendance rise.
- **The cost of not taking part.** Where leaving the faith can cost a person their family, job or freedom (apostasy is a crime in several states), full mosques or churches tell us about that cost as much as about belief; the same caution about the past applies to some societies today.
- **Revival is uneven.** Some countries (Italy, Poland until recently) never secularised much, so nothing there has come back, because nothing went away; others (Ireland) are secularising quickly now.

Fundamentalism: a reaction to secularisation?

Fundamentalism means a movement that calls for a return to the basic, literal truths of a sacred text, rejects liberal or modern reinterpretation, draws a sharp line between believers and outsiders, and often seeks to bring law and politics under religious rule. The term was first used of American Protestants in the 1920s; it is now applied, sometimes loosely, to movements in Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism.

As a response to secularisation.

- **Bruce's cultural defence.** Fundamentalism is a defensive reaction by traditional believers who see their way of life under threat. Bruce distinguishes two settings: in the **West** (the US Christian right) it reacts to change **from inside**: liberal values, the women's movement, gay rights, secular schooling; in the **developing world** (much Islamic fundamentalism) it reacts to change arriving **from outside**: Western culture, secular governments backed by Western powers, globalisation.
- **Anthony Giddens**: fundamentalism is a product of **globalisation**. When traditions are exposed to a world of competing choices, some people respond by insisting on certainty and refusing to discuss it.
- **Manuel Castells** (*The Power of Identity*, **1997**): groups threatened by globalisation build **resistance identities** around religion, nation or ethnicity, defending a community against a world they cannot control.
- **Fighting back into politics.** The US Christian right built voter networks, lobbying groups and television channels to win back ground lost in the courts over school prayer and abortion; on this reading fundamentalism is secularisation's mirror image.

Other explanations.

- **Timing problems.** In the USA, differentiation and pluralism go back well over a century, yet the Christian right became a political force only from the late 1970s. A cause that had been present for a century cannot by itself explain a sudden rise; specific events (court rulings on prayer in schools and abortion, television preachers) need to be added.
- **Poverty and exclusion.** Jeff Haynes argues that local conditions matter more than a global clash: in parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Islamic movements gained support by providing schools, clinics and welfare where corrupt or failing states did not. Support is strongest among the poor and the excluded,

which points to **inequality**, not secularisation, as the driver.

- **A modern, not traditional, choice.** Fundamentalist movements run on the internet, television and modern organisation, and many recruits are young, urban and university-educated, using the movement to answer "who am I?" in a confusing world. That question belongs to modern life, not to tradition.
- **Migration.** Second-generation migrants caught between two cultures may adopt a stricter faith than their parents as a firm identity.
- **Distrust of science and experts** can make literal readings of scripture more attractive.

Who still takes part? Class and other factors

One older question asked whether **social class** is the main influence on religious participation. The prerequisite note sets out the patterns for class, gender, ethnicity and age. For this topic, the useful step is to link those patterns to secularisation:

- **The class link.** Weber's **theodicy of disprivilege** and Stark and Bainbridge's **compensators** predict more religion among the poor; Norris and Inglehart extend this to whole societies through **existential security**. In Britain, though, established churches draw more on the middle class, while sects, Pentecostal and many migrant churches draw on the poor. So class predicts **which kind** of religion more than **how much**.
- **Where decline has hit hardest.** Secularisation in Britain has been fastest among white, younger, male and less religiously raised groups; women, older people and most minority ethnic groups remain more involved. This lets you argue that **age** (generational decline) and **ethnicity** (cultural defence, cultural transition) now explain participation better than class.
- **Interaction.** The strongest answers note that the factors combine: a young, middle-class Muslim woman and an elderly working-class white man cannot be predicted from class alone.

New religious movements and the thesis

The prerequisite note explains Wallis's types and the first round of the NRM debate (Wilson, Barker, Bruce, Hervieu-Léger, Lyon). The point for this topic is that **the same facts give opposite verdicts depending on which strand of secularisation you test:**

If secularisation means...	then NRM and New Age growth is...	because...
established churches losing their authority (differentiation, privatisation)	evidence for the thesis	the old single source of authority has split into many small, private, competing options; Wilson saw this fragmentation as secularisation itself
people losing interest in the sacred (decline)	evidence against the thesis	people are still looking for the sacred, just from new suppliers; demand is constant (Stark and Bainbridge)

Points that cut across both readings.

- **Scale.** Most NRMs are tiny next to the congregations that have been lost; Eileen Barker found high drop-out even from well-known movements.
- **Sects can become churches.** H. Richard Niebuhr argued that sects that survive settle down into denominations. The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (Mormons), founded in 1830 as a small, persecuted sect, now claims millions of members worldwide: a movement mocked as a cult in one century can be a respectable church in the next.
- **The secularisation cycle.** Stark and Bainbridge expect new sects and cults to rise **because** older churches become worldly, so NRM growth is the system renewing itself rather than ending.
- **Durkheim's point.** If religion meets lasting needs for shared meaning and ritual, new sacred forms should appear as old ones fade, so NRMs may be early signs of that replacement.
- **Political weight.** Most world-affirming movements and New Age groups make no claim on law or government, which supports Bruce; but Pentecostal churches in Brazil, for example, organise voters and elect members of Congress.

Different societies, different stories

The thesis was built in Western Europe. Testing it worldwide shows the pattern is not uniform:

- **Martin's patterns** (*A General Theory of Secularization*, **1978**): secularisation takes different paths depending on a country's history. Where one church was tied to an unpopular state (France), people turned against religion; where a church stood for the nation against outsiders (Poland, Ireland under British rule), it stayed strong; where many denominations competed and none was official (the USA), religion stayed popular.
- **Davie's "exceptional case":** Davie argued that **Europe** is the exception, not the model; the rest of the world is not following its path.
- **Existential security:** Norris and Inglehart found the most secular societies are the richest and safest (Scandinavia, Japan) and the most religious are the poorest and least secure (much of Africa and South Asia).
- **Religions rise and fall at different speeds.** Pew projects Islam to grow faster than any other major religion, mainly because its followers are younger on average; Pentecostal churches have grown fast in Nigeria, Brazil and South Korea while older Protestant churches in Europe and North America shrink; Hinduism and Buddhism, centred in Asia, barely appear in the Western data the thesis was built on. So "religion" is not one thing that rises or falls together.
- **Globalisation in both directions.** Global media and consumerism may carry secular values to new places, but globalisation also spreads evangelical missions, televangelism and online preaching, and provokes the defensive reactions described above.

So "all societies" is almost always too strong. Decline is clearest in Western and Northern Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and among young people in the USA; it is not the general picture across Africa, the Middle East, South Asia or Latin America.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Secularisation: religion losing social significance (Wilson); Casanova's three strands: differentiation, decline, privatisation	Learn it
Founders' predictions: Comte's three stages; Marx (religion ends with exploitation); Weber's rationalisation and disenchantment; Durkheim's old gods	Learn it
Causes in the thesis: structural differentiation (Parsons); societalisation (Wilson); rationalisation; pluralism and the sacred canopy (Berger); social diversity and individualism (Bruce); existential security (Norris and Inglehart)	Learn it
Internal secularisation (Herberg, Wilson); disengagement (Martin); the secularisation paradigm (Bruce)	Learn it
Believing without belonging and vicarious religion (Davie); "neither believing nor belonging" (Voas and Crockett); golden-age myth (Martin)	Learn it
Technological worldview (Bruce); compensators and rational choice (Stark and Bainbridge); relocation and re-enchantment (Lyon); metanarratives; risk society	Learn it
Public religion (Casanova); civil religion (Bellah); resacralisation, desecralisation, desecularisation (Berger)	Learn it
Spiritual revolution and the holistic milieu (Heelas and Woodhead); spiritual shopping (Hervieu-Léger); invisible religion (Luckmann)	Learn it
Religious market theory and the cycle of sects and cults (Stark, Bainbridge, Finke)	Learn it
Fundamentalism; cultural defence (Bruce); resistance identity (Castells); Giddens on globalisation; Haynes on local conditions	Learn it
Martin's national patterns; Europe as the exceptional case (Davie)	Learn it
Paper 4: two essays from different sections, each 35 marks: AO1 9, AO2 11, AO3 15, so $9 + 11 + 15 = 35$	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 29 questions for this topic (2021–2026). Five were set twice (four in two papers of one session, one again in a later session), so there are 24 different questions. All are 35-mark "Evaluate this view" essays from Paper 4, and none mixes types, so the counts add up to 29.

Question type	Questions
Evaluate whether religion has lost its social significance	8
Evaluate whether people are less religious or religion matters less in their lives	8
Evaluate what the growth of new religious movements shows about secularisation	5
Evaluate whether a religious revival is happening	4
Evaluate whether religious decline is happening in all societies	2
Evaluate the view that fundamentalism is a response to secularisation	1
Evaluate the view that social class is the main influence on religious participation	1

Paper 4 lasts 1 hour 45 minutes for two essays, so allow about 50 minutes for each, including 5 minutes to plan.

Before every plan, answer three questions in the margin:

1. **Which strand?** Is the quotation about religion's **public role** (social significance, influence in society), **people's religiosity** (belief, practice, importance in their lives), or the **form** religion takes (NRMs, spirituality, fundamentalism)?
2. **Which way round?** Does agreeing with the quotation mean agreeing **with** the secularisation thesis ("lost its significance", "less religious") or **against** it ("just as religious", "revival", "exaggerated")? Build the first half of the essay to support the quotation as worded, even when it is the anti-secularisation side.
3. **How wide?** Does it say "all", "many" or "Western" societies, "people" in general or "today"? Every limit word is something to test.

1. Evaluate whether religion has lost its social significance (8 questions)

Asked as: religion has little influence in Western societies today (1); religion has less social significance today than in the past (1); religion has lost its social significance (2, the same question in two papers); there is clear evidence that religion has lost its social significance (1); the extent to which secularisation has occurred has been exaggerated (1); there is little evidence to support the secularisation thesis (1); religion has just as much social significance today as in the past (1).

1. **Introduction.** Define secularisation with Wilson's stress on social significance; set out Casanova's three strands; say that the essay will judge mainly the **differentiation and privatisation** strands, because that is what "social significance" means, and use belief evidence as support.
2. **The case that significance has gone** (lead with this if the quotation agrees with the thesis):
 - **the theory:** Comte, Weber and Marx's predictions; the six pressures of modernisation (differentiation, societalisation, rationalisation, pluralism, individualism, existential security);
 - **institutions:** schools, welfare, health and record-keeping taken over by the state; church courts gone; disengagement (Martin);

- **law and morality:** Ireland's referendums of 2015 and 2018; legal divorce, abortion and same-sex marriage across the West; the end of blasphemy law in England and Wales; church rulings on family life treated as advice, not law;
- **ceremonies and identity:** civil weddings outnumbering religious ones; the 2021 census rise in "no religion";
- **Bruce's reply to private faith:** private belief, however sincere, does not shape society, so it does not answer the claim.

3. The case that significance remains:

- **public religion** (Casanova): US Christian right, Poland, Islamic parties; Bellah's civil religion;
- **formal roles:** bishops in the Lords, faith schools, religious national ceremonies;
- **practical roles:** food banks, shelters, refugee and youth work run by faith groups;
- **outside the West:** theocracies and religious states (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan); Pentecostal growth; Davie's view that Europe is the exception;
- **minority communities:** religion organising family and community life for many migrant and minority ethnic groups.

4. Evaluate the evidence itself:

- the **golden-age** problem (Martin, Stark) against Bruce's reply that past **public** involvement is well recorded even if past **belief** is not;
- nobody has agreed how to put a number on "social significance", so each side chooses the indicators that favour it;
- the **timing point:** the thesis fitted 1960s Western data better than recent global data;
- apply the **analytical point** from "Has religion lost its social significance?": sort each piece of evidence by whether it concerns society or individuals, and the West or elsewhere, before weighing it.

5. **Conclusion**, for example: in most Western societies religion's institutional and legal power has clearly fallen, so the thesis holds for differentiation; but religion keeps public influence in many other societies and in parts of Western public life, so "lost" overstates it.

Variants.

- **"Clear evidence" / "little evidence":** the essay is about **evidence quality**. Spend more of the evaluation on what each kind of data can and cannot show, and on the gap between identity and attendance.
- **"Exaggerated" / "just as much significance":** the quotation is **against** the thesis. Lead with public religion, revival, the golden-age myth and variation between countries; then use the thesis's evidence as the evaluation.
- **"Western societies":** keep examples Western; contrast countries **within** the West (Italy, Poland, the USA against Britain, France, Scandinavia) rather than leaning on Iran.

2. Evaluate whether people are less religious or religion matters less in their lives (8 questions)

Asked as: religion has little role in people's lives today (1); religion is still an important influence in people's lives (1); people are less religious today than in the past (2, the same question in two papers); people are just as religious today as in the past (1); religion has become less important in people's lives (1); there is clear evidence that people are less religious today (2, the same question in two papers).

The examiners want the focus on **individuals' belief and practice**. Answers that only discuss religion's role in society, or that describe functionalist and Marxist theories, drift off the question.

1. **Introduction.** Define religiosity (with the dimensions from the prerequisite note: belief, practice, experience and so on); say that the answer depends on which dimension is measured and on which people and places.
2. **Evidence that people are less religious** (organise by dimension, not by study):
 - **practice:** Brierley's attendance counts; monthly instead of weekly churchgoing; fewer religious weddings and baptisms;
 - **identity:** the census rise in "no religion" from 25.2% to 37.2%; the BSA majority with no religion;
 - **belief:** Voas and Crockett's finding that belief falls with attendance ("neither believing nor belonging"); falling belief in a personal God, miracles and life after death;
 - **consequences for behaviour:** church teaching on sex and marriage widely ignored; swearing and mockery of the sacred met with indifference; more time spent on consumption and media;
 - **why:** rationalisation and Bruce's technological worldview; existential security; individualism making faith optional so that it is not passed on.
3. **Evidence that people are still religious:**
 - **believing without belonging** and vicarious religion (Davie): practice falls faster than belief;
 - **new forms:** spiritual shopping, the holistic milieu, invisible religion (Luckmann), streamed services and faith apps;
 - **growing groups:** Pentecostal and evangelical churches, migrant congregations, NRMs; fundamentalism in several faiths;
 - **other people, other places:** minority ethnic communities; the USA compared with Britain; the global South;
 - **was the past really religious?:** attendance once reflected law, landlords and neighbours, so people may simply have stopped pretending.
4. **Evaluate the evidence:** there is no agreed yardstick for "religious"; self-reports and identity answers inflate belief (Hadaway's over-reporting); the new forms are small, loose and rarely passed on (Bruce); even the USA shows falling membership (Gallup, 70% to 47%).
5. **Conclusion**, for example: in Western Europe people are less religious on almost every measure, though some belief survives without practice; elsewhere, and among some groups, religion remains central, so the claim holds for some people and places but not as a universal statement.

Variants.

- **"Still important", "just as religious"**: argue the anti-secularisation side first (believing without belonging, revival, new forms, minority and global religion), then evaluate with the decline evidence.
- **"Clear evidence"**: put measurement at the centre of the evaluation.
- **"In people's lives"**: give at least one paragraph on everyday influence: diet, dress, prayer, family decisions, how people cope with death, not just church attendance.

3. Evaluate what the growth of new religious movements shows about secularisation (5 questions)

Asked as: the growth of new religious movements is evidence that secularisation has occurred (2, the same question in two papers); growth in support for new religious movements and New Age ideas shows that religion has lost its social significance (2, the same question in two papers); growing support for new religious movements disproves the secularisation thesis (1).

The examiners reward answers that make the definition decide the verdict. Answers that describe NRMs without linking them to secularisation score low. For the basic readings of NRM growth (Wallis's types, Wilson, Barker, Bruce, Hervieu-Léger), see *Religion and society*; the plan below goes further by testing the growth against each of Casanova's strands in turn.

1. **Introduction.** Define NRMs and New Age spirituality in a sentence each; then say that "secularisation" bundles three claims (differentiation, privatisation, decline) and that NRM growth may confirm one while contradicting another.
2. **Test 1, differentiation: are NRMs taking back public jobs?**
 - mostly not: they run few schools, hospitals or courts, and none has the legal standing a state church once had; Bruce sees no route back to religious control of these institutions;
 - the exception to weigh: newer Pentecostal churches in **Brazil** own television networks, organise voters and elect members of Congress, so in some countries new religion does regain public power;
 - judgement: on this strand the growth mostly **supports** the thesis.
3. **Test 2, privatisation: is the new religion a private choice?**
 - world-affirming movements and the holistic milieu are chosen one person at a time, for self-improvement or wellbeing, and ask for little loyalty; Wilson read this splintering of one shared authority into many personal options as secularisation itself;
 - but world-rejecting groups demand the opposite: shared homes, strict rules, all of a member's time; and some movements campaign in public;
 - judgement: mostly **supports** the thesis, with exceptions by type of movement.
4. **Test 3, decline: are people losing interest in the sacred?**
 - the growth itself says no: Stark and Bainbridge argue that demand is steady and simply moves to new suppliers when old ones fail;
 - **the sect and cult cycle**: as established churches grow worldly, sects split off to restore strict faith and cults bring in new faiths, so secularisation produces its own religious renewal;
 - Durkheim expected new objects of shared reverence to emerge as the old gods faded, which fits a shift in form;

- judgement: on this strand the growth **challenges** the thesis.

5. Scale and time, which cut across all three tests:

- **now**: most NRMs count their members in thousands while the churches have lost millions, so the growth is too small to reverse decline on its own;
- **later**: Niebuhr argued that sects that last settle into denominations; the **Latter-day Saints**, a small persecuted sect in 1830, now claim millions of members, so a verdict on today's movements may be premature.

6. **Conclusion**, for example: NRM growth confirms differentiation and privatisation but contradicts any claim that people have lost interest in the sacred; "disproves" and "shows that religion has lost its significance" each fit only one strand.

Which test to lead with depends on the verb. "Evidence that secularisation has occurred" and "lost its social significance" call for tests 1 and 2 first, with test 3 as the evaluation; "disproves" calls for test 3 first, with tests 1 and 2 as the evaluation.

4. Evaluate whether a religious revival is happening (4 questions)

Asked as: all societies are experiencing a revival in religious belief (1); many societies are experiencing a revival in religious belief (1); resacralisation is occurring in many societies (1); a religious revival is occurring in Western societies (1).

Examiners report that essays which rehearse the whole secularisation debate but never test the word **revival** score poorly, as do essays that only compare religious groups inside one society. Keep asking: is religion **coming back**?

1. **Introduction**. Define revival and resacralisation (and desacralisation); set out the four tests (more people, more intensely, more publicly, for longer); say that revival only makes sense where there was decline first.

2. The case for revival:

- **global Christian growth**: Pentecostal and evangelical expansion (Martin's *Tongues of Fire*), megachurches and televangelism;
- **post-communist return**: Russia's Orthodox revival, religious growth in China;
- **public religion**: the US Christian right; faith schools and religious campaigning in Britain; theocracies and religious states;
- **fundamentalism** in several faiths;
- **new forms**: NRMs, the holistic milieu, spiritual shopping, invisible religion, online worship; believing without belonging as hidden continuity;
- **migration and demography**: migrant congregations in Europe; Pew's projection of a shrinking unaffiliated share worldwide;
- **theory**: Berger's change of mind; religious market theory; the secularisation cycle.

3. The case against:

- **the numbers still fall** in most of Europe: attendance, rites of passage, the census;
- **desacralisation continues**: Ireland's votes, the end of blasphemy law, and church rulings on sex and family treated as advice rather than law;

- **the numbers do not add up:** the holistic milieu and NRMs gain thousands where churches lose millions, and self-spirituality is rarely passed on to children (Bruce);
 - **the cost of not taking part:** where apostasy is punished, full places of worship may measure fear as much as faith;
 - **continuity, not revival:** Italy and Poland never declined much, so there is nothing to revive; the USA itself is now declining (Gallup);
 - **measurement:** belief is hard to compare across countries and over time.
4. **Conclusion**, for example: there is real growth in some regions and forms of religion, especially Pentecostalism and Islam in the global South, but not a general return of the sacred in Western Europe; "all" is false, "many" is defensible, "Western" is weak.

Variants. For "all" or "many" societies, bring in examples from at least three regions. For "Western societies", rely on migration, evangelicals, the US, NRMs and new spirituality on the "for" side, and on European decline on the "against" side.

5. Evaluate whether religious decline is happening in all societies (2 questions)

Asked as: all societies are experiencing a decline in religiosity (1); there has been a clear decline in religious belief in all societies (1).

1. **Introduction.** Define religiosity and secularisation; underline the word **all**: one clear exception weakens the claim, so the essay must survey several kinds of society.
2. **The case for decline:**
 - **the Western evidence:** attendance, membership, rites of passage, census and survey data; Voas and Crockett;
 - **the causes may travel:** rationalisation, existential security and individualism spread with economic development and global media, so decline may follow development elsewhere (Norris and Inglehart);
 - **even strong cases weaken:** Ireland's referendums; falling US membership.
3. **The case against "all":**
 - **Martin's patterns** and Davie's "exceptional case": Europe may be the exception;
 - **the global South:** Pentecostal and evangelical growth in Africa and Latin America; Islam's growth through demography (Pew);
 - **differences between religions:** Pentecostal churches grow while older Protestant denominations shrink; Islam is growing fastest worldwide; a state church with low attendance (the Church of England) says little about faiths beyond it;
 - **minority and migrant communities** within Western societies;
 - **change of form, not decline:** privatised and online faith, NRMs, spirituality, believing without belonging;
 - **churches fighting back:** food banks, streamed services and campaigns on poverty keep some congregations growing;
 - **measurement:** Western measures (Sunday attendance) do not fit faiths practised at home or through daily prayer, and past religiosity is uncertain.

4. **Conclusion**, for example: decline is strong and well evidenced in Western and Northern Europe and growing in the USA, but the global picture is mixed and in some regions religion is growing, so the claim fails because of the word "all".

6. Evaluate the view that fundamentalism is a response to secularisation (1 question)

Asked as: religious fundamentalism is best explained as a response to secularisation (1).

The examiners warn against writing about secularisation in general: the essay must explain **fundamentalism**.

1. **Introduction**. Define fundamentalism, with examples from more than one faith; note that "best explained" means comparing explanations.
2. **Fundamentalism as a response to secularisation**: Bruce's cultural defence (change from inside in the West, from outside in the developing world); the US Christian right fighting back against liberal laws and secular schools; Islamic movements resisting Western, secular values; Giddens on certainty in a global world; Castells's resistance identities.
3. **Other explanations, each judged against Bruce**:
 - **timing**: secularisation is old in the USA, the Christian right new;
 - **poverty and exclusion**: Haynes; support from people failed by the state;
 - **a modern search for identity**: educated recruits, modern media, a demanding lifestyle;
 - **migration**: second generations adopting stricter faith;
 - **new media**: the internet spreads ideas and recruits more easily, so growth may reflect communication, not reaction;
 - **distrust of science and experts**.
4. **Conclusion**, for example: secularisation and globalisation explain why fundamentalism takes a defensive form, but poverty, identity and modern media explain who joins and why now, so it is one cause among several.

7. Evaluate the view that social class is the main influence on religious participation (1 question)

Asked as: social class is the most important factor influencing religious participation (1).

1. **Introduction**. Define religious participation; say that class, gender, ethnicity and age all matter and the question is which matters **most**.
2. **The case for class**: theodicy of disprivilege (Weber); compensators (Stark and Bainbridge); existential security; Pryce's Pentecostal study in the prerequisite note; middle-class established churches and world-affirming movements against working-class sects.
3. **The case for other factors**: gender (women more involved in Christianity and spirituality); age (generational decline, Voas and Crockett); ethnicity (cultural defence and transition); country and religion.
4. **Link to secularisation**: decline has hit some groups more than others, which suggests age and ethnicity now predict participation better than class.

5. **Conclusion**, for example: class shapes **which kind** of religion people join, but age and ethnicity better explain **whether** they take part at all; the factors interact.

Worked examples

Each is a new 35-mark essay on a part of the syllabus that has not yet had its own question. Marks are given the way the levels mark scheme works: by assessment objective and level, not by points. In the exam, write each bullet as a full paragraph.

Example 1

'Believing without belonging best describes religion in Britain today.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Explain Davie's phrase: belief survives while membership and attendance fall. Note that "best describes" invites comparison with other descriptions: decline, vicarious religion, spiritual shopping.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **The gap in the figures:** nearly half of England and Wales still identified as Christian in 2021, but only about 6% attend on a Sunday (Brierley, 2005); a wide gap between identity and practice.
- **Vicarious religion:** people expect churches to be there for funerals and national memorials, which suggests a background belief.
- **Private forms:** invisible religion (Luckmann), personal prayer, spirituality without a congregation.
- **Belonging is unfashionable, not belief:** Davie argues that people have also stopped joining trade unions, parties and clubs, so falling church membership reflects a general decline in joining, not a special loss of faith.

Against the view (AO3).

- **"Neither believing nor belonging":** Voas and Crockett found belief falling with attendance, so the gap may be temporary.
- **Unsupported belief is fragile:** belief without practice is rarely passed to children (Bruce); generational decline continues.
- **Identity, not belief:** a census answer can express culture or family background.
- **Other groups belong strongly:** minority ethnic communities, migrant churches and Pentecostal congregations show **believing and belonging** together.
- **The other way round:** some people belong without believing, attending for a school place, a wedding venue or family duty.

Conclusion. The phrase captures a real stage in Britain's change, but the evidence suggests a slide towards "neither", with strong belonging surviving in particular communities.

How it would be marked. Accurate use of Davie, Voas and Crockett, Bruce and the figures (AO1 7–9), applied throughout to **Britain** and to the **gap between belief and belonging** (AO2 10–11), with sustained evaluation that compares Davie's description with its rivals and reaches a judgement (AO3 12–15).

Example 2

'Rationalisation has led to a decline in religious belief.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define rationalisation and disenchantment (Weber); separate two claims: that belief **has declined**, and that rationalisation **caused** it.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Weber and Berger:** Protestantism began disenchantment by removing magic; the sacred canopy gave way to a world explained by natural causes.
- **Comte:** scientific thought replaces religious explanation.
- **Bruce's technological worldview:** everyday problems are handed to experts, so the occasions for prayer shrink.
- **The pattern fits:** decline is greatest in the most educated, scientifically advanced European societies.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Other causes fit the same pattern:** existential security (Norris and Inglehart), structural differentiation and pluralism also rise with modernity, so rationalisation may be a correlate, not the cause.
- **The USA:** advanced science alongside high religiosity.
- **Rational choice theory:** believing can itself be a rational response to the lack of real rewards (Stark and Bainbridge).
- **Re-enchantment and distrust of science:** Lyon's relocation of religion; postmodern loss of faith in metanarratives; risk society.
- **Meaning questions:** science does not answer why, so faith keeps a role at death, in grief and in crisis.

Conclusion. Rationalisation helps explain why religion has lost its role in explaining nature, but it is weaker as an explanation of belief itself, which seems to depend as much on security, community and how faith is passed on.

How it would be marked. Accurate knowledge of rationalisation, disenchantment and the theorists (AO1 7–9), applied consistently to the **causal** claim (AO2 10–11), and sustained evaluation that weighs rationalisation against rival causes and counter-cases before reaching a judgement (AO3 12–15).

Example 3

'Secularisation is a Western process that does not apply to the rest of the world.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define secularisation and its three strands; "Western" usually means Western Europe, North America and Australasia; note that the USA does not behave like Europe.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Where the data come from:** the thesis was built on Western Christian data; Davie calls Europe the exceptional case.
- **The global South:** Pentecostal growth (Martin), Islamic revival, theocracies and religious states; Pew projects the unaffiliated share falling from about 16% to about 13% by 2050.
- **Post-communist revival:** Russia, China.
- **Martin's patterns:** each society's history shapes what happens; there is no single path.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Differentiation is near universal:** states almost everywhere now run schools, health and law, even where belief is high.
- **Development spreads the causes:** as societies grow richer and safer, Norris and Inglehart predict lower religiosity, and some fast-developing societies (South Korea, Uruguay) now have large and growing numbers with no religion.
- **Not all of the West fits:** the USA and Poland were long exceptions **within** the West, so the West-versus-rest line is too simple.
- **Globalisation:** global media and consumerism carry secular values, while religious movements also spread globally.
- **Measurement:** Western measures may misread religions practised daily at home.

Conclusion. Decline in belief and practice is mainly Western so far, but differentiation is global and development may spread decline; the view is broadly right about the present and less safe as a prediction.

How it would be marked. Accurate knowledge of the thesis, the global evidence and the theorists (AO1 7–9), consistently applied to the **West versus the rest** contrast (AO2 10–11), and sustained evaluation that separates the three strands and different regions before reaching a judgement (AO3 12–15).

Common mistakes

- **Answering the topic, not the question.** The examiners report this every year: an essay on "revival" or "fundamentalism" that just lists arguments for and against secularisation scores in the middle at best. Use the key word of the quotation in every paragraph.
- **Theory essays instead of evidence.** Describing functionalist, Marxist and feminist views of religion does not answer whether religion is declining. Use those theories only where they say something about decline (Marx's prediction, Durkheim on new sacred forms).
- **Society and individuals mixed up.** A question on "people's lives" needs evidence about belief and practice; one on "social significance" needs evidence about law, politics, schools and moral authority. Say which you are dealing with.
- **Personal opinion.** Lower-scoring answers rely on assertion ("people today are too busy for religion"). Every point needs a concept, study, theorist or piece of evidence.
- **Statistics without comment.** Each figure needs a sentence on what it measures and what it misses.

- **Treating all religions and countries as one.** Strong answers contrast Europe with the USA and the global South, and established churches with Pentecostal, Muslim and migrant congregations, to avoid over-generalising.
- **Evaluation by juxtaposition.** "However, Davie disagrees" followed by a description is weak; say why one argument or piece of evidence is stronger.
- **Forgetting the direction of the quotation.** When the view is anti-secularisation ("just as religious", "exaggerated", "revival"), the first half of the essay must support **that** view.

How to get the marks

- **"Evaluate this view" (35 marks):** one essay, marked by levels for each assessment objective.
- **AO1 knowledge and understanding (9):** the top level (7–9) needs many detailed points, backed by concepts, theory and evidence. Name the theorists (Wilson, Bruce, Berger, Davie, Voas and Crockett, Casanova, Stark and Bainbridge, Heelas and Woodhead, Norris and Inglehart) and use the concepts (differentiation, disengagement, rationalisation, pluralism, believing without belonging, resacralisation, cultural defence).
- **AO2 interpretation and application (11):** the top level (10–11) needs material **consistently applied to the question**. If it says "Western societies", stay mostly in the West; if it says "people's lives", stay with individuals.
- **AO3 analysis and evaluation (15):** the top level (12–15) needs evaluation that is **explicit, detailed and sustained**, with contrasting views and evidence. A description of the other side that is only implicitly linked to the quotation stays in the 4–7 band; explicit evaluation that is not kept up reaches 8–11.
- **Evaluation moves that work in every type:** which strand of secularisation; how religiosity is measured and whether the past is known; which society, religion and social group; whether the evidence shows a change of **form** or a change of **amount**; and whether the theory fitted its own time better than today.
- **Reach a judgement** that answers the exact wording: how far, for whom, where, and on which definition.
- **Answer two questions from different sections;** the paper is out of $2 \times 35 = 70$.

Quick check

1. Name Casanova's three strands of secularisation and give one piece of evidence for each.
2. In England and Wales, "no religion" rose from 25.2% in 2011 to 37.2% in 2021. By how many percentage points did it rise, and by what percentage of its 2011 level, to the nearest whole number?
3. Gallup found US church membership fell from 70% in 1999 to 47% in 2020. Find the fall in percentage points and as a percentage of the 1999 level, to one decimal place. Why is this awkward for religious market theory?
4. Explain how Voas and Crockett challenge Davie's idea of believing without belonging.
5. Which of Casanova's strands do Ireland's 2015 and 2018 referendums test, and why do they not settle whether Irish people still believe?

Answers

1. **Differentiation**: the state runs schools, welfare and law (Parsons). **Decline**: Sunday attendance of about 6.3% in England in 2005 (Brierley), or the census rise in "no religion". **Privatisation**: faith treated as a personal choice; Bruce's point that private faith does not shape society. (Casanova himself doubted privatisation, citing public religion in the USA and Poland.)
2. $37.2 - 25.2 = 12.0$ percentage points. $12.0 \div 25.2 = 0.476$, so a rise of about **48%** of its 2011 level.
3. $70 - 47 = 23$ percentage points. $23 \div 70 = 0.3286$, so a fall of **32.9%** of the 1999 level. Market theory explains American religious strength by competition between many suppliers; competition has not changed, yet membership has fallen sharply, so supply alone cannot explain religiosity.
4. Davie says people still believe though they no longer attend. Voas and Crockett found that belief falls at about the same rate as attendance from one generation to the next, so the gap is a stage in decline ("neither believing nor belonging"), not a stable private faith.
5. They test **differentiation** (and privatisation): whether law follows church teaching or is made separately from it. The 62% and 66.4% votes show the Catholic Church can no longer decide Irish law. They do not measure **belief**: a voter can be a practising Catholic and still think the state should not enforce church teaching, which is itself a sign of religion becoming a private matter.

Past questions to try

- 9699/42/M/J/22 Q6: essay on whether fundamentalism is best explained as a response to secularisation.
- 9699/42/M/J/23 Q6: essay on whether resacralisation is occurring in many societies.
- 9699/42/F/M/22 Q6: essay on whether the extent of secularisation has been exaggerated.
- 9699/41/M/J/21 Q5: essay on whether social class is the main influence on religious participation.