

## Secularisation – Evaluate the evidence

Source text: Bird (1999) *Investigating Religion*

Look at the following statements. Decide whether they are evidence in support of or arguments against the secularisation thesis.

<p>Winter and Short in 1993 said that many people believe without necessarily belonging to a formal church. Many people are religious without formal church attendance.</p>
<p>Grace Davie (1994) says that formal religious belief is not interesting to many sociologists so it remains under-studied in comparison with the more glamorous New Religious Movements</p>
<p>Steve Bruce suggests that it is not science which leads to dissatisfaction with religion, but the scientific way of looking at things.</p>
<p>Wilson, Bruce and Davie all suggest that the past was very religious and that there has been a serious decline in religious belief.</p>
<p>Hamilton, Stark and Bainbridge, and Martin all suggest that it is impossible to tell how religious people were in the past, whatever their actual behaviour because we simply do not know what they felt or believed.</p>
<p>A survey published in the Sunday Times (1997) of 200 vicars found that many did not know the Ten Commandments, many do not believe in the Virgin Birth and others did not believe in the miracles or the devil. Some did not believe in the Second Coming.</p>
<p>Bainbridge says religion is cyclical. There are periods of strong belief followed by other times when society is less religious in tone.</p>
<p>Parsons says that society is so complex, it is hard for religion and religious institutions such as churches to maintain their control over belief. Society is breaking into smaller groups with different interests.</p>
<p>Some Western societies are more religious than others. Religious faith is very significant in the USA and is very modern. People do not attend church but they watch religious programmes on TV.</p>
<p>Support for Islam is increasing. It seems to be formal Christianity that is in decline, not religion. Many immigrant groups take religious faith very seriously.</p>

Societies which have abandoned traditional religion often develop a civil religion based on the reverence for a great leader such as Stalin according to Robert Bellah.

Grace Davie says that members of fundamental religions are far more fervent in their belief than members of more traditional religions.

There has been a decline in the membership and attendance of the following churches: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian.

How much attendance at church or temple is needed to offer proof of religious belief?

Is there more to religion than merely attending church or chapel on a regular basis?

In Britain in 1981, 76% of people believed in God. 50% claimed they prayed regularly and needed time to do it. 58% defined themselves as religious and 50% said God was important to them in their lives.

Can some religious behaviour such as church attendance be seen as merely superstitious rather than religious in intent?

Professional people are more likely to attend church on a regular basis than manual people. The proportion is 52 to 43. Attendance at church is usually necessary for a place at a religious school.

Heelas says we can choose our beliefs and make up a 'pick and mix' religion now whereas in the past we had to take or leave the religions that were on offer because people were unaware of the alternatives.

Parsons says that religion and politics are seen as separate whereas once, politics and religion were almost exactly the same thing, particularly in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period of time.

David Martin says that NRMs are actually valid religions and should be included as such in any debate which suggests that secularisation is taking place.