

# Secularisation



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Rationalization shows that religions are based on a 'leap of faith' rather than proof or evidence, while Weber argued that following a growth in disenchantment in an increasingly rational society, discrimination, the process by which sacred and supernatural forces are no longer seen as controlling the world and religious ideas, beliefs and institutions, would occur. It is also suggested by sociologists, like Heals et al. In their Kendal study, that the holistic milieu and increased participation in Norms and New-Age spirituality is evidence of a reconciliation of society.

However, critics argue that actual numbers are a small proportion of the population and that such groups still only have a marginal position in society. Bryan Wilson argues that Norms are almost irrelevant to society, with Peter Berger describing them as 'islands in a secular sea'. The Kendal study would seem to support this with only 2% of the population engaged in New-Age activities and only half of these individuals viewing their activities as spiritual. This supports Bruce's view that the rise of New Age is not a threat to secularists.

Where religious pluralism, is concerned there is no longer a single religious voice or message. Instead there is a fragmentation, which Steve Bruce describes as a decline in 'strong religion' with religiosity becoming now a matter for personal choice from 'weak religions'. Critics argue that this is not necessarily the case. An example would be Northern Ireland, where there is a marked division between Protestants and Roman Catholics, yet religious belief remains strong.

Disengagement could be the way established religions have lost influence and withdrawn from wider society. This is reflected in the way that established religions have lost political and social influence. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carrey, described the Church of England in 1991 as like 'an elderly lady, muttering away to herself ignored by most people'. Here the head of the Church seems to accept that disengagement has taken place compared with the historical past when the Church was at the heart of politics, the civil service, education, the arts etc.

Although there has been a spectacular 50% fall in attendance in traditional Christian religions between 1979 and 2005, declining participation statistics, while apparently supporting secularists, do not necessarily prove it because they take no account of people's beliefs. It would seem that religion has shifted from the public to the private realm, summed up in Grace Davies phrase 'believing not belonging'. Other factors to bear in mind are the growth in ethnic religions, Norms and engagement with New-Age spirituality. Another thing to consider with statistics is that those from the past cannot always be considered reliable.

In addition, membership criteria can change over time, just as the motives and meanings behind participation can change. Finally, religious participation does not in itself guarantee religiousness. In the past in the UK, ND currently in small-town USA, attendance may be more to do with respectability. Many parents attend church in the UK today simply in order to send their children to faith schools. Postmodernists have an ambivalent view of religion. On the one hand, they see the major established religions as in decline along with their meta-narratives.

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On the other hand, they see a role for individuals seeking individual spirituality to give meaning in an increasingly shallow society that lacks any depth. Augment Banyan argues that the days of universal truths disappeared with the progression from a modern society to a postmodern society. He sees society as increasingly individualistic and fragmented in which people are searching for some form of spirituality. However, in this climate of 'pick and mix', people can and do change their mind and beliefs, creating religious pluralism.

Therefore the growth of the 'holistic milieu' and New-Age spirituality reflects the individualism associated with postmodernism. People operating as 'spiritual shoppers' search for individual meaning and seek new and different forms of spirituality, rather than engage in established religions. The global picture of religion is one of contrast between the decline of established religion in most of the developed world and the continued strength of religion generally across the rest of the world. Even in the Western world, there is not a consistent picture of religious decline.