



General Certificate of Education
Advanced Subsidiary Examination
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General Studies (Specification A)

GENA1

Unit 1 AS Culture and Society

Insert

Source Booklet

A Sources for use with **Questions 1.1 to 1.30** and **Questions 2 to 5**

Section A**Source A for Questions 1.1 to 1.30**

Is religion really under threat?

- (1) A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of secularism, the notion that the state, not religion, should reign supreme. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance, including the Pope and politicians of both right and left, to exorcise this spectre.
- (2) I have always seen the secularist ideal as the most benign legacy of the Enlightenment but have no doubt that secularism is increasingly seen as a threat to liberty rather than its stoutest defender. Conservative party chairperson Lady Warsi is the latest to raise the alarm, speaking of her “fear” that “a militant secularisation is taking hold of our societies”. She pulls no punches in claiming that “at its core and in its instincts, it is deeply intolerant” and that it “demonstrates similar traits to totalitarian regimes”. Pretty much the same message came from Labour’s David Lammy on Radio 4’s ‘Any Questions?’ when he attacked “an aggressive secularism that is drowning out the ability of people of faith to live with their faith”.
- (3) Warsi is taking this message to the Pope, which is a bit like taking pizza to Napoli. In the Pontiff’s 2010 visit to the UK, he also railed against “aggressive forms of secularism”, likening it to the evils of Nazism and claiming that “the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society”. Other clerics have followed suit, but just what is it that people are so terrified of? Is secularism really a threat, or has it simply been distorted, by its critics, its defenders, or both?
- (4) To answer this we could do worse than start with the latest supposed examples of the terrible persecution of the nation’s Christians: the High Court ruling that prayers were not a lawful part of formal Council business in Bideford, Devon. This followed the Court of Appeal upholding the judgement against two Christian guesthouse owners that they were guilty of discrimination for not permitting gay couples to stay in double rooms. The anti-secular alarmist sees both decisions as indicative of the times when, as Warsi put it, “signs of religion cannot be displayed or worn in government buildings; when states won’t fund faith schools; and where religion is side-lined, marginalised and down-graded in the public sphere”.
- (5) It’s hard to take seriously the idea that any of this represents a mortal threat to religion in public life. I can’t help feeling that Christianity has always thrived on persecution, and it is trying just a bit too hard to portray itself as under the cosh yet again, when really it is mostly just ignored. Nevertheless, the very extremity of the language – the comparisons with Nazism and the way in which such claims are increasingly being seen as self-evident truths – tells us that something has gone wrong with secularism in Britain. And the problem, I think, is that it has lost its secular soul. Secularism, in the political sense, is not a comprehensive project to sweep religion out of public life altogether. Nor is it a celebration of Godless science. Rather it is – or should be – a beautifully simple way of bringing people of all faiths and none together, not a means of pitting them against each other.
- (6) It all goes back to how we understand the core secularist principle of neutrality in the public sphere. Neutrality means just that: neither standing for or against religion or any other comprehensive world-view. That is why, in theory, if not in practice, the United States is both culturally the most religious country in the developed West and constitutionally the most secular. There, it is clearly understood that the value of secularism is that it allows all faiths to practise freely, without any enjoying a special place at the heart of power.

- (7) Why then in Britain has secularism become seen to be hostile to religion? Because neutrality is too often assumed to require the bleaching out of all traces of faith, excluding religious belief and discussion from public life. But it doesn't, and we can see why by reference to the notion of public reason articulated clearly by John Rawls, the American political philosopher. He was quite clear that the religious had no obligation at all to keep their faith entirely to themselves and that it was perfectly legitimate to introduce religion into public political debate as long as religious beliefs could, in due course, be backed by valid political argument.
- (8) The message is clear enough. When we enter the public arena we are obliged to talk to each other in terms we can share and understand, not in ways that are tied just to our specific "comprehensive doctrines". If we are debating the ethics of abortion, for example, we'd get nowhere if some insisted their views rested on the Catholic faith whereas others took theirs to flow inevitably from their atheism. What we all need to do is provide reasons that have some regard of other people in their capacity as fellow citizens, whatever their views of the world. That doesn't mean denying or even covering up the fact that we have religious or other motivations for believing what we do. It is simply to acknowledge that we can't expect these to carry any weight with others.
- (9) Why then the evident touchiness about talk of religion in public life? The short answer is that we're just not used to it. Public discourse reflected the fact that faith of the many is, as David Cameron described his, "a bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes". Or as a BBC survey concluded, the largest group in this country are those of "vague faith". So religion was occasionally seen and only rarely heard, and that's the way people liked it.
- (10) Things changed for various reasons. Several of the so-called new atheists say that 9/11 motivated them to lift the polite silence that surrounded religion and launch their attacks. Islam moved up the agenda and with it religion more generally. But now that faith is out in the open we don't seem to know what to do with it. The waking of a religious seriousness that looked like it was in a permanent vegetative state disturbed secularists who were then perhaps too concerned to sedate it again. But as the Romans learned, the more a group feels persecuted, the stronger, not the weaker, it gets. They are also encouraged by the sympathies of those of vague faith, who often see the likes of Richard Dawkins as angry, petty, aggressive pests.
- (11) One cause of this has been, I think, a classic rationalist mistake. It is true that there is nothing fair or democratic about having un-elected Anglican bishops in the House of Lords. There is no reason for religion to have a protected 'Thought for the Day' (BBC Radio 4) slot in the middle of the national broadcaster's flagship news programme. A Council meeting is no place for prayers. But all these anomalies exist because Britain has a history steeped in Christianity. Where tradition flies in the face of reason and justice, it should be dismantled. But when it merely teases it, it is often better to allow the passage of time to erode those anachronistic remnants than try to demolish them. Most people either quite like these weird inheritances or are indifferent to them. So when they are turned into symbolic battles, the general public looks on baffled.
- (12) What I am advocating is in part pragmatic but its core is entirely principled. Allowing the free expression and discussion of religion is as much a non-negotiable principle of secularism as maintaining the neutrality of the core institutions of civil society. It may be unfair to criticise secularists for being "militant" or "aggressive" but we are often ham-fisted and heavy-handed. If secularism has come to be seen as the enemy of the religious when it should be its best friend, then we secularists must share at least some of the blame.

Source: adapted from Julian Baggini, 'Is religion really under threat?', The Guardian, 14 February 2012
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Section B**Sources for Questions 2 to 5**

Source B**Parents blamed for 'downward spiral' of behaviour in schools**

Schools have to provide pupils with a stable upbringing because parental skills are declining. Philip Parkin, general secretary of Voice, the union for education professionals, told its conference that there had been a 'downward spiral' in the quality of parenting that was likely to continue.

"The traditional sense of community, with parents taking responsibility for their children, has gone and it is now showing in the poor behaviour of children in schools. There is cheek in the classroom, which shows a lack of respect (a much-misused word these days), and a lack of a sense of the importance of education which many children now come to school with. That sense of 'you can't tell me what to do.' It is very difficult," he said.

He attacked communities for failing to share in the responsibility for bringing up young people. "Respect for each other and care for each other; the sense of community we had; the community which cares for its children: all this has been significantly eroded," he stated.

Source: adapted from Mark Reynolds, Daily Express, 31 July 2008
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Source C**Christian leaders call for ban on smacking children**

Church leaders have called for smacking children to be completely outlawed in the UK, saying there are no circumstances where the "painful and humiliating practice" is justified.

The Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, is one of the leaders who have signed a joint statement with other prominent Christians, calling for the removal of the "reasonable chastisement" defence for parents who smack their children when they misbehave.

"How can we ever think that smacking or using physical force on children can ever be right? None of us would ever dream of smacking an adult, why should we think smacking a child is any more acceptable? They too are made in God's image, valued as the individuals they are. That does not mean that anything goes as far as bringing up children is concerned – but it does rule out physical punishment."

A joint statement issued with other senior Welsh Christians also condemned the practice: "Physical punishment of children has for too long been a common part of our culture. As a form of discipline it is incompatible with the core religious values of respect for children's human dignity, justice and non-violence. There are no circumstances under which this painful and humiliating practice can be justified."

Views have long been divided on the benefits of physically punishing children. The law was tightened under the Labour government in 2004, with parents banned from using force that causes "reddening of the skin". However, attempts to bring about an all-out ban have repeatedly failed.

Source: adapted from John-Paul Ford Rojas, The Telegraph, 20 November 2012
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Source D**Children, parents and the modern media**

You can't blame Jamie Oliver for being worried. As the father of three children aged between 11 and 3, he really needs some long-term tech ground rules in his house. So he announced last week that he has banned his eldest daughters from using a mobile phone or any kind of social media. "I found out my two eldest girls had set up Instagram accounts in secret, which I wasn't happy about," he said. "My eldest is the only girl in her class without a mobile. It may sound harsh, but I do worry about the bullying that can go on with these sites."

Sara Bran is from north London and writes on creativity and parenting. She has two daughters, aged 7 and 17. "I don't think 'the internet' is taught well in school," she said. "It is only mentioned to children in the context of danger and safety. It needs to be broken down into health issues, social issues, understanding the information, amongst others."

A recent report for Public Health England concluded that "children who spend more time on computers, watching TV and playing video games tend to experience higher levels of emotional distress, anxiety and depression". In the longer term, they may also become 'desensitised' to the violence often portrayed in them.

Then there's the sedentary effect: more than 70% of young people do not undertake the recommended one hour of physical activity a day. Earlier this year the Public Health Sciences Unit in Glasgow found a correlation between viewing television for longer than three hours a day (from age five) and 'conduct disorder'.

Last year Facebook reported that it was developing technology to link children's accounts to those of their parents. At the moment, no under-13s are allowed on the site. The most recent report on Facebook use however found that "of 20 million minors who use Facebook, 7.5 million were younger than 13 and more than 5 million were younger than 10".

Source: adapted from 'Children and the internet' by Viv Groskop, The Observer, 3 November 2013
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