

# Can postmodern religion survive?

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Britain has apparently become less religious over the last hundred years. Church attendance is down, and fewer people admit to religious beliefs or affiliation. Religion's role in our national and public life has also declined.

But do these changes really mean religion is dying out in this country, or could religion be changing to new and radically different forms?



## Arguments for decline

Some sociologists argue that decline of religion is an inevitable result of modernity. As people reject supernatural explanations in favour of rational explanations, morality becomes grounded in individual conscience and religions become increasingly marginalised and irrelevant.



## Arguments for change

Others argue that instead religion is shifting away from its traditional hierarchical forms, towards new ("postmodern") forms that enable subjective experience and individual autonomy. People might stay outside of traditional religions, instead constructing their own belief systems. Or they may identify with traditional religions, but prioritise their own conscience and interpretations over institutional norms.



## Can the new forms survive?

One argument against the shift to postmodern religion accepts that these new forms exist (for example in Neopaganism, in New Age and in the Emerging Church) but argues that they will not last because they cannot exert adequate control over their members or effectively transmit their values to new generations.



## This research project

This project will investigate how postmodern religions are organised and transmit their values through time. The research centres on the contrast between hierarchical models of organisation and learning, and non-hierarchical, learner-centred and networked models. The approach used is a combination of theoretical analysis, anthropological field work, and virtual ethnography.