

GCE



Revised GCE  
Teacher Guidance  
**Religious Studies**

A2 4, Themes in the Early Church and  
the Church today

For first teaching from September 2016  
For first award of AS Level in Summer 2017  
For first award of A Level in Summer 2018

# A2 4, Themes in the Early Church and the Church today

## **Belief and belonging in the modern world:**

(The following are some, but not exhaustive suggestions as to what teachers might research and teach for this topic. Of course teachers and students could find other examples of their own, especially in relation to the impact of the topics which would be useful in part (b). Students and teachers should evaluate the impact and ramifications of the various historical events and be aware of how in many cases we are still living with the legacy of our historical past).

### **“Challenges to religious authority – religious leadership and organisational models and their authority and relevance for believers today”**

Examples of religious leadership and authority offered below. Note that a balance has to be struck between historical and contemporaneous content.

1. Monarchical leadership in the form of the Pope in the Catholic Church and how this works in practice. The importance of Papal Bulls in the past and papal encyclicals today, (e.g. Pope Francis, *Laudato si, Amoris Laetitia*). How much authority and importance did an encyclical carry in the past and how much authority does it have today? Authority and leadership at a local level and how that authority was viewed in the 19th century (e.g. Ultramontanism) and contrast with today. Impact of the above in Ireland, both historically and contemporaneously, e.g. The *Ne Temere* decree (1907) and its impact on divisions in Ireland. The challenges to papal authority since the 1960s in the form of e.g. *Humanae Vitae* (1968) and other documents, like some of those that arose out of Vatican II.
2. Leadership, authority and organisational models in the Presbyterian, Anglican or Methodist churches. Democratic leadership in Calvinism; the importance of the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly in the Presbyterian Church. Citing examples, the status of elders, ministers and the Moderator. Controversial issues in more recent times, the position of women in the Church, LGBT issues, same-sex marriage, legalisation on abortion in Ireland. A consideration of religious authority and heresy in relation to the example of the Rev Ernest Davey’s heresy trial in 1927 and resulting division in the Presbyterian Church.
3. Leadership and authority in smaller Evangelical Churches and denominations; how that has evolved. Charismatic leadership. Denominations that hold the evangelical, fundamentalist and sometimes religious exclusivist torch and how such views are reflected in the lives of believers and community. Possible reference to Brethern, Elim, Baptist, Free Presbyterianism etc.

## **The nature and impact of secularisation:**

Definition of secularisation, its roots in the European Enlightenment, industrialisation, urbanisation, intellectual considerations etc. Evaluation of its impact on culture, society and religious belief, both in Ireland and abroad. How ethical and moral issues have been affected in the eyes of the public, e.g. LGBT issues etc. If present secular trends continue, what is the fate of the churches and religious belief in the longer term? Is secularisation liberating and good for the values and outlook of society?

## **Impact and evaluation of religious thinkers like C S Lewis, Alister McGrath and Karl Rahner:**

There is a considerable amount of information on the importance, contribution and evaluation of these thinkers in printed form, the internet, You-Tube and elsewhere. How these thinkers have contributed to particular debates in the Church, contrasting historical with more recent thinking. Questions arising such as; how is it possible for religious truth to change etc? The nature of theology etc.





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