Religious market theory: Stark and Bainbridge

Known as the rational choice theory, they are critical of secularisation.

Believe secularisation theory puts forward a distorted view of the past and the future.

The market theory is based on 2 assumptions:

1. People are naturally religious, and religion meets humans needs, meaning the need for religion remains constant.

2. It is human nature to seek rewards and avoid cost. When people make choices, they weigh up the pros and cons of the different choices available.

They say religion is attractive because it provides us with compensators.

When real rewards are not available religion compensates by promising us supernatural rewards.

Example - death is unobtained (nothing can be done) but religion compensates by promising us life after death.

Say secularisation is a one-way process (religion is society is declining).

They put forward a on going cycle of religion... decline, revival + renewal.

Religion never completely disappears, new forms replace old form of religion, but it never disappears.

Religions are in a market-

Churches have selling points that attract customers.
Religions have specific selling points that are unique to each individual need.

Religions are like a market- they have to keep providing something new to keep in the loop and don’t disappear.

The demand for religion increases when there are a variety of sorts to choose from, when there in a religious monopoly religious influences decline.

When there is no competition the church has no incentive to provide people with their demand, however this changes as religious market theory is introduced.

Example - In America there has never been a religious monopoly, there has been many religious suppliers, which has made religion stay important.

They conclude that the main factor influencing the level of religious participation is not the demand for religion but the varying supply.

Participation increases when there is a variety of supply as there is something for everyone.