Q1) The idea that I wanted to research was whether religious affiliation, specifically Catholicism, is associated with higher levels of happiness compared to non-religious individuals. This question is interesting because religion is often cited as a source of meaning, community, and well-being, but it's unclear whether religious people are actually happier or if other factors (like social connections, income, or health) explain any observed differences.

I selected 14 variables from the General Social Survey (GSS) to explore this question:

- **relig** - Respondent's religious preference (Catholic, Protestant, None, Jewish, etc.) This is my main independent variable for identifying Catholics vs. non-religious people.

- **happy** - General happiness. (very happy, pretty happy, not too happy) This is my primary outcome variable measuring overall life happiness.

- **satlife** - Satisfaction with life overall. Provides a broader measure of life satisfaction beyond just happiness.

- **satfin** - Satisfaction with financial situation. Financial security might mediate the relationship between religion and happiness.

- **satjob** - Job/work satisfaction. Career satisfaction is another dimension of overall wellbeing to explore.

- **health** - Condition of health (excellent, good, fair, poor). Health status could confound the religion-happiness relationship.

- **attend** - How often respondent attends religious services. This distinguishes practicing Catholics from nominal Catholics and measures religious engagement, which might matter more than affiliation alone.

- **memnum** - Number of memberships in organizations. Religious people might be happier due to social connections rather than belief itself.

- **age** - Age of respondent. Older people tend to be both more religious and report different happiness levels.

- **sex** - Respondent's sex. Gender differences in religiosity and happiness are well-documented.

- **educ** - Highest year of school completed. Education is associated with both religious affiliation and life outcomes.

- **income** - Total family income. Income strongly predicts happiness and might differ by religious group.

- **year** - GSS year for this respondent. Allows me to look at trends over time and control for year effects.

- **ballot** - Ballot used for interviewing. The GSS uses different survey forms; this helps identify which questions were asked.

This variable set allows me to answer my core question (Are Catholics happier than non-religious people?) while also exploring potential mechanisms and confounders. The control variables (age, sex, education, income) are crucial because differences in happiness between religious groups might be explained by demographic differences rather than religion itself. The additional wellbeing measures (satlife, satfin, satjob, health) let me examine whether religion affects specific domains of life differently. Finally, attend and memnum help me understand whether any effects are due to religious belief, religious practice, or simply social connection.

By comparing Catholics to non-religious respondents while controlling for these factors, I can provide a more nuanced answer to whether religion truly predicts happiness or if the relationship is explained by other life circumstances.