



- **Secularism:** can be used in a number of ways. It may mean a belief that religion should not be involved in government of public life. It may be a principle that no one religion should have a superior position in the state. It often entails a belief in a public space and a private space, and that religion should be restrained from public power.
- **Secularisation:** a theory developed in the 1950s and 1960s, developed from Enlightenment thinking, that religious belief would progressively decline as technology and democracy advanced. Such a decline is now in doubt.
- **Secular:** not connected or associated with religious or spiritual matters. Used colloquially in widely differing ways by atheists, pluralists and those who are anti religion.
- **Wish fulfilment:** the satisfaction of a desire through a dream or other exercise of the imagination.
- **Humanism:** the way of seeing and reacting to the world using science, logic and reason and rejecting religious beliefs and ideas.
- **Sanctity of life:** The belief that all life is **given by God** and is therefore **sacred**.
- **Confessional teaching:** reinforcing the faith of students and promote a Christian world view.

The changing role of religion in society

	Christian	No Religion
2001	71.7%	14.8%
2011	59.3%	25.1%

- At the start of the 20th century 80% of marriages were solemnised in Churches, now it is below 40%.
- Participation/ attendance at church and Sunday school has reduced.

Steve Bruce: sociologist of religion

Christianity in Britain is a shadow of its former self. He believes within a few years the total membership of Christianity below 10%.

This view can be challenged with the census figures which disprove this theory.

Why is society becoming more secular?

- In Western Europe religion is becoming more private and is considered an expression of personal preference.
- French laws are a good example of this.
- This means that “public space” is then left for views that can be justified through reason. Topics which impact people as a “whole”.

Jose Casanova - Three ways of talking about secularisation and questioning how it applies to Britain.

1. The decline of religious practice in modern society

Britain. In 2014 a survey by British Social Attitudes more people claimed to be non-religious than religious. Also use census.

2. The privatisation of religion.

Britain. Many events and institutions are connected to religion in Britain. Events such as Remembrance Day. Institutions such as schools.

3. The separation of state, economy, science etc. from religious institutions.

Britain. There is a very strong link between religion and state in Britain. The Queen is Head of the Church of England and 26 Lords in HoL are Bishops in the Church of England.



Freud on religion

"The religions of mankind must be classed as among the mass delusions".

- Freud believed religion existed to protect us from nature and fate
- Religion is a product of wish fulfilment.
- The vulnerability or helplessness we feel as children is made more tolerable by the invented belief that there is a purpose to life, morality and the belief that life's injustices will be dealt with in the next.
- The concept of a deity or God takes the place of the feeling of uncertainty we have, as we are able to personify this “being” and take control of the idea of what it is.
- Additionally religion suppresses human desires, especially those which are destructive to society (sexual violence, theft, murder).
- E.g. The Ten Commandments.
- Religious ideas are so highly prized as they offer explanations to questions we cannot answer through a study of reality. Religious people look down at those who don't follow their beliefs as “very ignorant”.

- Tradition and history seem to demand that religion is followed. The beliefs are passed down by our ancestors and history shows society severely punishing those who did not also believe.
- Religion, according to Freud, simply alleviates fears about things we cannot change and represses negative behaviours.
- As for its impact on our mind, religion is negative.
- Religion is a cultural carrier for dividing people, causing conflict and leads to non-religious people being viewed as inferior.
- It provides an “answer” to our uncertainties but is really creating something unreliable and unhealthy.

Dawkins on religion

He believed that religion was infantile.

Dawkins maintains we should be able to find meaning in our lives without religion or God.

Dawkins states religion is repressive and forces us into submission, especially women. He uses the burka as an example of female suppression. He also uses the burka metaphorically as it argues it symbolises the way in which religion reduces our ability to perceive and understand things and maintains science widens it.

Dawkins also criticises religion as it is responsible for conflict.

- Northern Ireland: Protestant vs. Catholics
- Middle East: Sunni vs Shi'a
- We all need to **escape** religion.
- Dawkins biggest concern is the detrimental impact of religion on children.
- The minds of children are “high jacked by religious faith” and by identifying and labelling a child as religious, before the age of consent, adults are inflicting long term psychological abuse upon these children.
- Dawkins maintains that the power of belief to abuse is far greater than any physical abuse and can leave profound and lifelong scars on an individual's psyche.
- Dawkins also criticises the immense and abhorrent physical abuse of children in the hands of religion.



Example – Hell House in Colorado



Christian pastor set up a “hell House” in which children were terrified with images of what may happen to them when they die. Actors played out sinful actions (abortion, homosexuality etc.) and the children watched on in horror as these sinner were then tormented and punished in hell.

Such “attractions” started being used in 1970s but were revived in the 1990's. One supporter was Keenan Roberts who set up a Hell House in Colorado.

Is Christianity a major cause of personal and social problems? If yes, it seems to promote secularisation.

Christianity can be viewed as patriarchal and sexist.

“Women should remain silent in the church...for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church”

1 CORINTHIANS 12: 34-35

“The head of every man is Christ and the head of woman is man”.

1 CORINTHIANS 11: 3

“Wives submit to your husbands”



- Dawkins maintains religion also played a significant role in the criminalisation of homosexuality (illegal until 1967).
- These attitudes are still seen today in groups such as the Westboro Baptist Church. Dawkins refers to such fundamentalist groups as the “American Taliban” and criticises the way they promote such upsetting ideas through faith.
- Dawkins also states that through application of the sanctity of life religion has a negative influence of society, particularly for women and their right to abortion.

Sanctity of Life

The belief that all life is **given by God** and is therefore **sacred**.

This means all life belongs to God. As a result only God should make decisions about when life starts and ends and the path our life will take.

How has religion created social change?

1. Helped to build schools and make education available to all in the UK
2. Charity work
3. Civil rights movement – religion inspired certain human rights activists including Martin Luther King

Does secularism change religion?

It can be argued that as society changes, religion has adapted too. Christians may choose to re-interpret teachings or abandon some ideas altogether to fall in line with modern ideas.

Slavery. Outlawed in 1833

“Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.” (1 Peter 2:18)



This idea of changing religion is supported by Kwame Appiah.

“Practice changes, of course, over time, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly. And changed practice can lead to changed belief. Scriptural passages can get new interpretations. And if they can't adapt, they are often abandoned...the passage in First Peter about how slaves should submit themselves to their masters, however cruel- we can usefully look away from...In short, if scriptures were not open to interpretation they wouldn't continue to guide people over long centuries.”

Kwame Appiah.

- You could explore other ideas which have changed as society has developed. e.g. Homosexuality. Female equality.
- However, it can be noted that some religious groups have not adapted and secularism has had little influence on them (other than to reaffirm their views).

“What has in fact occurred is that, by and large, religious communities have survived, even flourished to the degree that they have not tried to adapt themselves to the alleged requirements of a secularised world”.

Berger

This is further supported by David Martin who notes since the 1980s there has been an upsurge in the number of conservative Protestant Christians, paralleling an upsurge in conservative Islam

So Christianity is at a cross roads. It could become firmer in its convictions, standing in opposition to the secular world. Or it could try to incorporate modern ideas, changing and growing with a secular world.

Should Christianity influence culture and values? Does it already have this influence?

You cannot deny the historical influence of Christianity in Britain's society and culture.

- The Monarch is Head of The C of E
- National holidays are linked to Christian festivals.
- Remembrance Sunday remembers the nation's fallen soldiers with a service at the Cenotaph involving leading religious figures.
- The flag has a cross at its centre.
- Radio 4 Broadcasts a daily act of worship.
- Dawkins, once of religions most vociferous critics, defends the study of the Bible in schools. He does so because of its influence in literature and or use of language today, rather than preaching the gospel. Yet, he is still recognising and respecting the legacy of the Christian faith. He would not support it have a superior influence but still recognises it will have some.



Cultural changes brought about by migration and increased religious pluralism means it is hard to justify the claim Britain is solely a Christian nation. It is evident in modern culture that there are influences reaching far beyond religion.

The failure of the secularization theory

The judgement that secularisation was inevitable is now considered wrong and even if a state is secular the individuals living there can still be religious. Eg. USA

David Ford and Jose Casanova both criticise the idea that secular atheism is positive. Many atheist ideologies such as fascism, communism and capitalism have tried to write religion out of our lives and in some cases have used brutality in order to do this.

“Modernisation necessarily leads to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals. And it is precisely that key idea that turned out to be wrong. To be sure, modernisation has had some secularising effects, more in some places than others. But it has also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularisation. Also secularisation on the social level is not necessarily linked to secularisation on the level of individual consciousness.” Berger

Are spiritual values just human values?

Religion promotes many values such as compassion, caring for those in need and justice (Key teaching: Sheep and Goats).

However, are these not just basic human values? The benefits of these values can be felt in society, without reference to religion. Eg. Compassion reassures other and creates a positive life.



Should Christianity play a role in public life or should the public sector be completely secular?

Some nations believe religion and the public sector should be completely separate. E.g. France

French secularity (laïcité) means church/ religion is not involved in any governmental decisions and religion must not have any influence over public matters. This also means the government should have no influence over the religions individuals choose to follow.

Impact: removal of state funded faith schools and a ban on wearing religious clothing and symbols.



What role should Christianity play in education in the UK?

In the UK 1.8 million children are educated in C of E and Catholic schools (about 1/3 of schools have an affiliation to a religion).

However many people argue that the government should not fund schools with a religious character. This view is held by the British Humanist Association (BHA)



A key concern is that faith schools can limit the perspective of the children it educates, especially within religious education.

In some faith schools the faith organisation can decide on what is taught in RE. This can lead to a confessional style of teaching.

Dawkins supports these concerns, emphasising the impact faith schools may have upon a child's scientific understanding.

"Fundamentalist religion is hell bent on ruining the scientific education of countless of thousands of innocent, well-meaning eager young minds."
The God Delusion.

To challenge Dawkins you need only look at examples of Christian scientists who are able to maintain religious faith and an appreciation for science

e.g. Francis Collins – Physician – Geneticist.



Additionally, Dawkins often discusses religion as purely fundamentalist, narrow and extreme. However, many would argue religion needs to be considered in a far broader sense as a cultural phenomenon which is also concerned with identity and practices.

However, the relationship between education and the Church is deeply rooted in history and leads to a "heritage argument" in the defence of religious schools.

For example, many schools were built for the poor using church money and removing the schools from Church control could be deemed an act of robbery.

It could also be argued that parents should be entitled to send their children to schools which reflect their beliefs and values.

Furthermore, religious schools are not necessarily less socially diverse. Eg. Catholic schools.

A further concern of faith schools is that its students will be less tolerant of living in a multi-cultural society, but this has not been proven by any sound empirical evidence.

Researchers at Warwick University Religions and Education research unit have found that young people who are committed to Christianity are actually more open to people from other faiths.

Charles Taylor states that in an ever increasingly multicultural society everyone should be recognised for their own identity and no group should be able to impose itself on another. Therefore, whilst atheists may eye religious schools with suspicion, such schools may be nurturing an individual's identity.

What role should Christianity play in state concerns?

Queen= Head of C of E, Defender of the Faith

26 C of E Bishops in HoL



Some argue that such influence in law making is not in keeping with the times and does not offer fair representation to citizens who are not Anglican. (So not just atheists but other Christians and faiths.)

But there are members of the HOL of other faiths. E.g. The Chief Rabbi representing Jews, but C of E have an undeniably high number of seats.

In countries such as France and USA the government and religion are completely separate.

Impact: In France marriage must be completed in civic institutions and any religious ceremony is separate, whereas in the UK the religious service will fulfil the state's legal function.

Changing times: Prince Charles – Defender of Faith not *the* Faith. Religion will still be at the heart of the state but recognises the diversity and pluralist nature of religion in the UK.

What is the difference between programmatic and procedural secularism?

Programmatic secularism: religion is entirely excluded from the 'public square' and manifest solely as a private matter.

Procedural secularism: public discussion must make room for explicit reference to the roots of moral judgements, including their roots in religious belief. It makes for a fuller and livelier argument in society, and it avoids the creeping assumption that all reasonable people think in exactly the same way, for the same reasons.