

Different forms of secularism

The state must not give any political or civil power to any religion. There should be a formal and constitutional separation between the two.

Secularism does not teach as dogma or doctrine that there is no God or no religion that should be taken seriously. It is not dogmatic atheism but skeptical atheism. Or if you like it is practical atheism.

Dogmatic atheism - "We say there is definitely no God."

Sceptical atheism - "We are not happy with the evidence so we pay no heed to God or religion."

Why secularism?

It protects minority religions from having no say while bigger religions do.

The state treats the religions it unites to as political entities. Catholicism and Protestant Churches carry much political baggage from the past and act very political even in secular countries. Some Churches really are just a political party at prayer.

Religion alone leads to violence but religions that are too flavoured with politics will be worse.

Religious tampering with freedom of speech, democratic rights and reproductive rights is never ending.

Paradoxically a religion that keeps out of state affairs is protecting itself from the state. Catholic doctrine was often made up to please the Roman Empire. That was an unwarranted intrusion by the state.

The basic and essential definition

Japan's 1946 constitution has a good definition of secularism in Article 20: "Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity."

It's complicated

Secularism is complicated in the sense that it is political, social, cultural, philosophical, instructional and historical all at the same time.

First and foremost it has to be cultural, then social and then political. Forcing secularism on a nation is undemocratic. Secularism and secularisation are different things but related. Secularism then is a rather broad term.

Some say there are three secularisms. In reality these are just different ways of being secular. It is like three persons in God there are three applications of secularism in secularism.

Application 1: secularism as a socio-cultural phenomenon. This is a society ignoring religion. An example is when a play offensive to religion gets no attention. Nobody is protesting it. The religious fervour and influence wanes day by day. The demographics of people who just do not care rise and rise.

Application 2: philosophical secularism. This secularism is a tendency to argue that religion is unhealthy superstition. It wants religious promotion and practice to end.

Application 3: political secularism that does not let religion or superstition have a say in what it does.

Not all religious people are against secularism. Some champion it. But whether that is individuals not religion that is at work that is the question. There is a problem with religious secularists undoing secularism when they have a change of heart and realise they are not helping their religious system of dogma and faith community.

As somebody wrote, “In short, political secularism is about the separation of Church and State, philosophical secularism is a school of thought that sees religion as a mistaken or malevolent phenomenon that ought to be debunked and discarded, while socio-cultural secularism refers to secularization: the weakening or loss of religiosity in day to day life over time.”