

KS3 Lesson Plan 5 – Exploring Secularism

Should church and state be separate

Background	<p>Six out of ten adults in the UK now believe religion should be kept separate from government policy</p> <p>According to survey data published in Pew's report, 60% agree that religion should be "kept separate from government policies". Just 38% said "government policies should support religious values and beliefs".</p> <p>Eighty-one per cent of the religiously unaffiliated supported separation, along with 59% of Christians with 'low levels of commitment' and 55% of Christians with 'moderate levels of commitment'.</p> <p><i>The Pew Survey, 2018</i></p>
What is the secularist viewpoint?	<p>Separation of religion from state</p> <p>The separation of religion and state is the foundation of secularism. It ensures religious groups don't interfere in affairs of state, and the state doesn't interfere in religious affairs.</p> <p>In the United Kingdom there are officially two state recognised Christian denominations – the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Queen is both head of state and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. There is no established church in Northern Ireland or Wales. But the 26 unelected bishops of the Church of England who sit in the House of Lords influence laws that affect the whole of the UK.</p> <p>Christianity is one major influence among many that shape our current ways of life. We are a nation of many denominations and religions. Large sectors of the population do not hold, or practise, religious beliefs.</p> <p>If Britain were truly a secular democracy, political structures would reflect the reality of changing times by separating religion from the state.</p> <p><i>The National Secular Society</i></p>
Curriculum Links	<p>RE at KS3</p> <p>Key concepts of religious education at key stage 3</p> <p>1.1 Beliefs, teachings, and sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding and responding critically to beliefs and attitudes.

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	<p>1.2 Practices and ways of life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploring the impact of religions and beliefs on how people live their lives. <p>1.3 Identity, diversity and belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploring the variety, difference and relationships that exist within and between religions, values, and beliefs. <p>1.6 Values and commitments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding how moral values and a sense of obligation can come from beliefs and experience.• Evaluating their own and others' values in order to make informed, rational and imaginative choices.
Key Question	Should Church and State be Separate?
Learning Outcomes	<p>Expected: <i>I can explain why secularists believe that religion and state should be kept separate. I can give an example of how religion can currently influence political decision-making within the United Kingdom.</i></p> <p>Greater Depth: <i>I can explain why secularists believe that religion and state should be kept separate. I can give a range of examples of how religion can currently influence political decision-making within the United Kingdom and use evidence and data to explain my own opinion.</i></p>
Stimulus	<p>Exercise- match the countries to the description.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group the students and ask them to read the four descriptions below, without telling them the names of the countries. Display the four names of the countries and task them to discuss the descriptions to decide which description goes with which country.• You may wish to clarify/discuss or ask the students to research and define the highlighted vocabulary before they start the task.• Ask them to feed back their thoughts to the class and to explain how they came to their decisions.

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A - Iran

This country is a religious theocracy which has a state religion and includes elements of a presidential democracy, with the ultimate authority vested in an autocratic "Supreme Leader". The government could be described as authoritarian, and has attracted widespread criticism for its significant constraints and abuses against human rights and civil liberties, including several violent suppressions of mass protests, unfair elections, and limited rights for women and children.

B - United Kingdom

Although this country has a state religion, most of its citizens describe themselves as 'nonreligious'. The country is an example of the slow development of secularism over centuries. With the powers of the established religion being reduced over time, other denominations acquired equality before the law and a culture of tolerance grew eventually to include all faiths as well as nonreligious and irreligious worldviews. From the latter 20th century, the country has emphasised more secular democratic principles such as pluralism and human rights. In other ways the state has become more accommodationist, with religious organisations receiving support and privilege but specific denominations being treated more favourably.

C - India

Although this country does not have a state religion, one religion is culturally dominant. Whereas other models of secularism focus on protecting religion from the state, or individuals from religion, this country's model seeks to protect different religious groups from each other. This concern is rooted historically in the cultural value of religious pluralism. The approach is fundamentally accommodationist in that the government treats religious organisations as partners.

D - France

This country has no state religion and is largely secular in nature. The country's model of secularism has a focus on shared values and identities. Freedom of religion is considered primarily to be a matter for the private sphere, with freedom from religion dominating the public sphere.

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Exercise – ask the students:

- Ask the students how difficult they found the task
- What existing knowledge did they have that helped them to succeed?
- What did they find surprising or difficult?
- Is there anything about the task or descriptions that they are still unsure of?
- Are they surprised that the UK has a state religion?

Share the viewpoints below with the students. Ask for their feedback on each view and have a shared discussion about the themes commented on.

Viewpoints – Should we have a state church?

- “Half of people in this country say that they don’t have any religion, and it’s far more for young people. Religious believers have declined massively over the past thirty years and as a country we are getting less and less religious. So, it makes complete sense for the state religion to be atheism – that’s it – if we truly believe in democracy our state religion should be atheism!”*
- “I’m a very inclusive person and I want everyone to feel valued and part of our country. With this in mind, I believe that all religious groups within the UK should have an equal say in political decision-making – that’s the only way to move forward with unity – all religions should be involved in government ...”*
- “Listen, we are a Christian country – I’ve heard the politicians and the papers say it – our traditions and culture are Christian in nature, and we should celebrate and support them. Our state religion is Church of England – look it up on Wikipedia if you don’t believe me! Because of this, the Church should have a big say in what goes on in this country – I mean the Queen is the Head of State AND the Head of the Church of England isn’t she? That’s got to be done for a reason hasn’t it...”*
- “I think France has got it about right – religion and government are separate there aren’t they? Believe in*

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	<p><i>what you want in your own private home, but don't force it on other people by mixing it up with politics – simple really..."</i></p> <p>Exercise - ask the students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which of the viewpoints are secular – can you explain why?• What do you think of the phrase, 'a Christian country'? Is this a factual description?• Is there any current data to support this? (British Social Attitudes Survey)• Are they beginning to form an opinion about the link between the state and religion in the United Kingdom?• Should the UK have an established church? Can they come up with a list of pros and cons? <p>True or False Quiz</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Head of State (Monarch) of the UK has to be a member of the Church of England. (True)2. In the House of Lords there are 26 unelected religious leaders with the right to vote and debate. They are only there because they are members of the Church of England. (True)3. Schools in the UK have to (by law) hold acts of Collective Christian worship. (True)4. Secularists are all atheists. (False)5. Secularism is a religion. (False)
<p><i>Take it Further</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students research the British Social Attitudes Survey number 36 https://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/british-social-attitudes/ (Religion & belief section) <p>Q. Can students hypothesise about possible reasons that might explain the following finding from 36:</p> <p><i>"a dramatic decline in identification with Christian denominations, particularly the Church of England; a substantial increase in atheism and in self-description as "very" or "extremely" non-religious; and very low confidence in religious organisations, but tolerance of religious difference."</i></p> <p>-----</p>

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Synopsis from 36

Religion

Identity, behaviour and belief over two decades

The past two decades have seen international conflict involving religion and domestic religious organisations putting themselves at odds with mainstream values. Against this backdrop, we compare religious identification, behaviour and belief among the British public. We find a dramatic decline in identification with Christian denominations, particularly the Church of England; a substantial increase in atheism and in self-description as "very" or "extremely" non-religious; and very low confidence in religious organisations, but tolerance of religious difference.

Spotlight

Over time, there has been a dramatic decline in the proportion of people who identify with Christianity along with a substantial increase in those with no religious affiliation, and a steady increase in those belonging to non-Christian faiths.