

Lesson Plan – Exploring Secularism

KS5 lesson 4 – What is secularisation?

Background	Students should read the basic information about the process of secularisation and other major concepts that are linked with it. This should be followed by reading viewpoints about negative and positive impact secularisation has had on societies or religions. In the exercise part students should reflect, discuss and evaluate questions about the viewpoints. Students of Religious Studies are encouraged to think about the religions that they study and the links to “Challenges of secularism” that many Religious Studies syllabus include. Sociology students should reflect more through the perspective of the wider society.
Subjects	Religious Studies Sociology
Links to Curriculum	OCR: A LEVEL Specification RELIGIOUS STUDIES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significant social and historical developments in theology or religious thought including the challenges of secularisation, science, responses to pluralism and diversity within traditions, migration, the changing roles of men and women, feminist and liberationist approaches. 2. Sources of wisdom and authority including, as appropriate: (at least one of the following) a) secularisation Challenges: The Challenge of Secularism 6. Two themes related to the relationship between religion and society, these may include: c) religious freedom Challenges: The Challenge of Secularisation Content of Developments in Christian thought (03) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finally, this component explores the challenges posed by secularism, and a range of responses to this. These topics enable the study of how developments in beliefs and practices have, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in philosophy, politics and studies of religion, as well as an investigation into the diversity within Christian

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practice.

Content of Developments in Islamic thought (04)

From the overview:

- In Islam and the State, learners will undertake the important exploration of changing ideas about the relationship between Islam and political systems, in particular the challenge of secularisation and modernity.
- The identification of secularism with modernisation and social progress.
- The adoption of Western legal codes in modern Muslim states.
- Opposition to secularisation in the Muslim world:
 - The identification of secularism with Western imperialism and moral decline.
 - Different reactions to secularism in the Muslim world.

Content of Developments in Jewish thought (05)

Under “The Jewish Haskalah and Jewish Emancipation” one of the topics is: “the creation of secular Jewish culture, emphasis on Jewish history and Jewish identity rather than religion”.

Content of Developments in Hindu thought (07)

- ‘Hindu-ness’ as a cultural and political identity; the caste system (jati) and non-Hindus; secularism and secularisation in India
India as a secular state, religious equality laws, the reality of religious diversity

Pearson/Edexcel: A LEVEL Specification Religious Studies

Paper 4, Option 4B: Christianity

4.2 Secularisation

a) Religion in today’s society, declining numbers, the role of the Church in formal worship and in modern life and the strengths, weaknesses and impact of the teachings of popular atheists

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AQA: A LEVEL Specification Religious Studies Christianity, migration and religious pluralism

How migration has created multicultural societies which include Christianity, with particular reference to the diversity of faiths in Britain today; freedom of religion as a human right in European law and religious pluralism as a feature of modern secular states. The influence of this context on Christian thought.

WJEC: A LEVEL Specification Religious Studies

(Unit 3: A Study of Religion) Option A: Christianity

Theme 2: Significant historical developments in religious thought

A. The relationship between religion and society: respect and recognition and the ways that religious traditions view other religions and non-religious worldviews and their truth claims.

Challenges from secularisation:

The conflicting religious and non-religious views on Christianity in the UK (the value of Christian faith schools; whether the UK can be called a 'Christian country'); beliefs conflicting with laws of country; perceived challenges to Christianity (decline of role and status of Christianity; reduced impact in public life; restricted religious liberty).

AQA A Level Sociology

4.2 Topics in Sociology

Beliefs in Society

- The significance of religion and religiosity in the contemporary world, including the nature and extent of secularisation in a global context, and globalisation and the spread of religions.

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	<p>OCR A Level Sociology</p> <p>Section B Option 3: Religion, belief and faith</p> <p>3. What are the patterns and trends of religion, belief and faith?</p> <p>4. Is secularisation occurring?</p>
Key Question	What is secularisation?
Learning Outcomes	<p>Expected: Students can explain what secularisation is</p> <p>Students can explain the main arguments for and against secularisation</p> <p>Greater Depth: Students can link the arguments to their area of study</p> <p>Students can evaluate the arguments for and against secularisation</p>
Stimulus	<p>Stimulus 1 What is secularisation?</p> <p>Secularisation refers to the historical process in which society becomes less religious and religion loses social and cultural significance. The English Church Census suggests that 50% of the adult population attended church in the 1850s, compared with just 7.5% in 2000. As a result of secularisation the role of religion in modern societies becomes restricted and the previous role of religious institutions that provided social services are replaced by non-religious state institutions that are not governed by some tradition but by enlightenment ideas of progress (modernisation) and reason (empirical sciences) in what sociologist Max Weber called rationalisation and disenchantment of the world.</p> <p>Sociologist Talcott Parsons has written about structural differentiation where other institutions have increasingly taken on many of the functions that religion used to perform. The most obvious one is the state, which has taken over historical religious functions such as education and health but also increasingly provide funerals, marriage ceremonies, etc. As this process occurs, religion becomes a smaller, more private matter, with much more</p>

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specialised functions. As a result of this, it inevitably loses its social significance.

In secularised societies faith lacks cultural authority, religious organisations have little social power, and public life proceeds without reference to the supernatural. Because of pluralism – the existence of a wide range of ideas and belief systems – and rationalisation, people are no longer united by a shared set of beliefs, as they were in previous eras. Secularisation captures a long-term societal change, but it has consequence for religion itself where some religions have themselves become significantly more secular, perhaps to fit in with the modern world or to remain relevant.

Stimulus 2 Viewpoints

1) Pluralism of secular multi faith countries cause no one truth to exist and dominate the society. This produces the conditions where one religion is questioned against another and is positively impacting religions themselves since it's causing religious institutions to modernise and their beliefs to progressively change into more appealing and liberal versions. For example, many mainstream Christian denominations today have abandoned the ideas that sins must be punished and are accepting of homosexuality or having sex before marriage.

2) Secularisation is linked with increased rationalisation of societies. Scientific explanations have replaced and clashed with religious explanations. Secularisation means development of scientific worldview based on reason and evidence and consequently the change in legislation and structural organisations of our societies that are increasingly based on rational evidence-based approach and are not burdened by some tradition that holds fixed and unchangeable truths. For example, when the Church dominated the public sphere, philosophers or scientist who discovered new knowledge that went against the official theology were risking to be deemed heretics and be executed (e.g. Giordano Bruno or Galileo Galilei).

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3) The biggest pro of secularism is more religious freedoms and tolerance. Secularisation allows both freedom of religion and freedom from religion. By separating the Church and the State and consequently not having one dominant official state religion that is promoted and privileged, it allows people from different religions to practice whatever religion they choose, or to be free from religion if they so choose. Secularisation prevents any religion special privileges over any of the other, and a specific religion is not forced onto other people. It allows people from different religious persuasions, or lack of it, to live together peacefully since the state is not marginalising religious groups of other faiths by privileging and favouring one official state religion. For example, modern secular countries are some of the most peaceful and tolerant societies. The top performing countries in the Global Peace Index all have a very strong emphasis on secularism.

4) Secularisation has brought pluralism and with pluralism it brought relativism with many comprehensive systems of belief that has distorted the moral compass of the society. For most religious people their religion is not only the source of moral guidance but also it is divinely commanded and it offers the best moral teachings. If the majority of people in one society are of one religious' denomination, we should have established state religion and promote the best way of life that will give us the best society to live in and this should apply to all.

5) Secularisation has diminished the social cohesion and national unity of the society. Having a state that is secular and neutral towards religions negatively impacted social cohesion by fragmenting society into many equal and competing religions that are now naturally in ideological conflict. It would be far better for society to have one uniformed and standardised religion shared by all. This would promote stronger cohesion in society and more social solidarity as everyone shares the same basic beliefs.

6) Different religions in pluralist multi faith societies are competing for members in market of ideas which causes unnecessary conflict. Secular society allows everyone to be equal but this has a negative consequence as each religious group is trying to win the war of ideas and expand their religion at the expense of other religions by

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	<p>winning converts. Society is religiously divided and this can cause internal conflict. It is better to have one religion for all as this will remove the need for competition and the consequent divisions.</p>
Exercise	<p>Exercise 1 Discuss and reflect</p> <p><i>1) Think of three positive ways secularisation has specifically impacted on society or the religion you are studying.</i></p> <p><i>2) Think of three negative ways secularisation has specifically impacted on society or the religion you are studying.</i></p> <p><i>3) Rank the viewpoints from the strongest to the weakest.</i></p> <p><i>4) Which one is the strongest and why?</i></p> <p><i>5) Which one is the weakest and why?</i></p> <p><i>6) Secularism brought scientific and technological worldview where “truth” is something that changes over time as better theories and knowledge replaces the old ones, whilst religious worldview does not change its fundamental truths. Which worldview would be better fit for modern pluralistic and democratic societies? Why?</i></p> <p><i>7) Secularisation forces religions to change themselves. Is this a good or bad thing? Why?</i></p> <p><i>8) There is a correlation between societies that are most secularised and the most tolerant with high Global Peace Index. Why is this the case?</i></p> <p><i>9) Have our societies lost the moral compass as they become more secularised? Why?</i></p> <p><i>10) Should we force one religion on all if there is a slight majority of people of one faith? Why?</i></p>

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	<p><i>11) Is social cohesion and solidarity negatively impacted by secularisation? Why?</i></p> <p><i>12) Is there anything else in secularised society that brings social cohesion and solidarity?</i></p> <p><i>13) What could be good about having one religion for all or at least one dominant religion? What could be negative about it?</i></p>
Take it Further	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Research how secularisation has changed the beliefs of a religion that you study.2) Research which movement inside the religion that you study are resisting the change.3) Find a list of most secularised countries in the world and compare it the list of Global Peace Index that measures tolerance in the society. Which countries are on top and which are on the bottom?
What do secularists think about secularisation?	<p>Secularists generally see religion as something that people should be able to voluntarily opt into and interpret in their own way, rather than something that should affect others who do not opt in. Secularists therefore see features of secularisation including the decline of centralised religious authorities as improving freedom of belief and undermining religious privilege and discrimination.</p> <p>Process of secularisation of societies is linked with increased rationalisation of societies, use of science and evidence-based approach to reach the truth, pluralism of ideas, equality before the law and tolerance and non-discrimination. Secularists welcome the positive changes to our societies where the state and religions are disentangled to the benefit of everyone as it produces more equal, just and free society.</p>