

## ***Secularism: religion, politics, and freedom* | Andrew Copson**

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### **Some definitions**

The word secular is used generically of anything that is separate from religion.

Secularisation is the process by which societies become less religious both in terms of individual persons' beliefs, identities, and practices and in terms of societies' institutions.

Jean Baubérot sees secularism as made up of three parts:

- separation of religious institutions from the institutions of the state and no domination of the political sphere by religious institutions;
- freedom of thought, conscience, and religion for all, with everyone free to change their beliefs and manifest their beliefs within the limits of public order and the rights of others;
- no state discrimination against anyone on grounds of their religion or non-religious worldview, with everyone receiving equal treatment on these grounds.

### **Religious support for secularism**

'...men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The King shall not answer for it. Neither may the King be judge between God and man.' - Helwys, 1612

'I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair... The state would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern.' - Gandhi

'Give the emperor what is the emperor's and God what is God's' - Christian Bible

'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would have been fighting to prevent me being delivered to the Jews.' - Christian Bible

'There is no compulsion in religion...' 2:256 of *The Quran*

### **The case for secularism - freedom, fairness, peace, democracy**

Freedom: Mill's *Harm Principle*

Fairness: Rawls' *Veil of Ignorance*

Peace: The argument from history / 'pragmatic' argument

Democracy: Nehru's republic

## **The case against secularism**

Theocracy

Marxist-Leninist

Islamic States

Established churches

Romantic conservatives / ethnic nationalists

'Myth of Neutrality'

'Community of Communities'

## **Varieties of secularism**

France: *Laïcité* and freedom from religion

US: Freedom of religion

Turkey: *Laiklik* and control of religion

India: The secularism of diversity / 'principled distance'