



There is a 'softer version' of secularism which allows for expression of God in public as long as no one religion is given preferential treatment. This is sometimes referred to as 'inclusive secularism'.

Inclusive secularism could be seen as consistent with Christian faith which holds that God gives people free-will and choice and does not impose belief onto people.

But groups in New Zealand, such as the Rationalist-Humanist Society and the Secular Education Network, are active in pushing for '**exclusive secularism**', where God and religious faith would be restricted to a 'private' activity.

Unfold for more content

Most descriptions boil down to the basic idea of keeping God out of everyday life.

This means keeping your beliefs (*unless it happens to be atheism*) out of the public square – which includes public debate, public policy, public institutions (e.g. government and schools), and public spaces (e.g. the workplace).

In other words... it may be OK to believe in God as long as you keep it to yourself and you keep it private.



Although people like scientist Richard Dawkins would even argue against this.



Secularism 101

What is it, why does it matter and how to address it

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Secularism – What is it?

The UK National Secular Society describes it as a principle that involves two basic propositions:

1. A system of social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship
2. The view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil affairs or public education

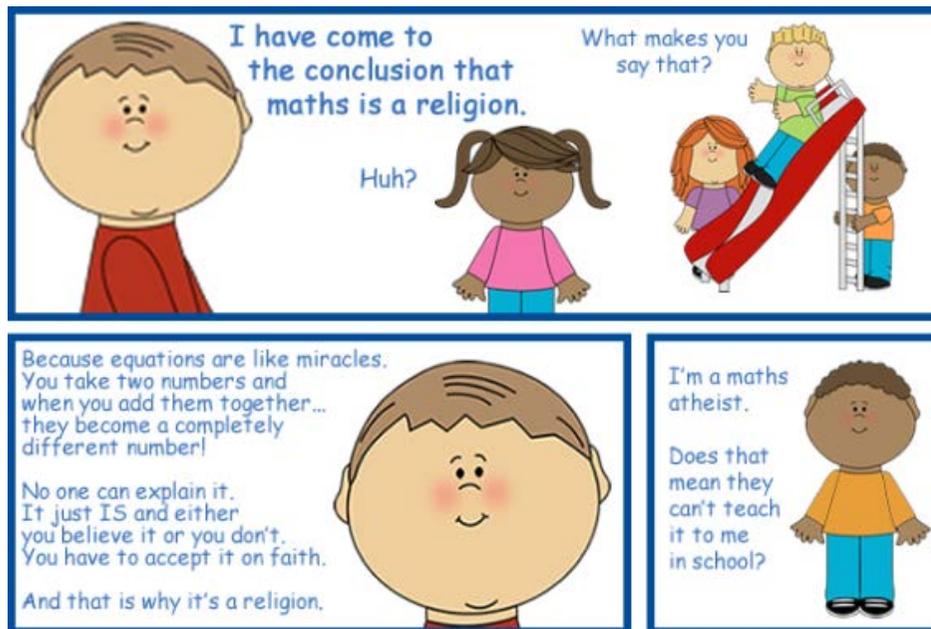
2. That people of different religions and beliefs are equal before the law

NZCN | Note S14-01

Many Christians are unfamiliar with the concept of secularism. They have not had the opportunity to consider the threat it poses for our society – for our children, and for future generations.

This resource is designed to help readers understand what secularism is, recognise the ways it subtly shapes society, realise how it is contrary to God's will, and discern how we should respond.

Why does it Matter?



There are two ways to look at this...

From **God's perspective**,

Christian understanding is that God created everything – life, family, community, government. God is sovereign over everything, and His desire is that He would be honoured and every sphere of life would function in line with His will.

For spheres (e.g. government or education) to operate as if God is irrelevant or to relegate God to the margins or the private sphere, is not giving God the honour He deserves.

From **society's perspective**,

- ✓ if God is real and,
- ✓ if God is the source of all justice and goodness and truth and meaning,
 - then it would be unwise to exclude God from the public sphere.

Therefore:.

If God is treated as irrelevant it can only have negative consequences for a society that tries to live that way.

Such a society would eventually see injustice and inequality increase; goodness, respect, and compassion decrease, and standards of truth and morality undermined. It also leads to erosion of freedom of belief and conscience.

Those with eyes to see will observe some of these signs in New Zealand today.

How do we address secularism?

- 1 Recognise** that 'exclusive secularism' is hostility to God and be prepared to engage.
- 2 Understand** that 'exclusive secularism' is a belief system like any other, as are atheism, agnosticism, and rationalist-humanism. There is no more evidence for it being 'true' than for Christianity. Whereas there is good reason to argue it has much less.
- 3 Understand** that public spheres that seek to suppress or exclude Christian or any other religious expression, are actually giving priority to atheism or beliefs that say God is not important in the public realm.

This is the myth of 'secular neutrality' or the so-called 'naked public square' – a public square where beliefs supposedly have no place.
- 4 Highlight** the unreasonableness of people who oppose any inclusion of Christian faith in public spaces when around half of the people in our country still describe themselves as Christian. Why shouldn't schools teach the basic ideas of Christianity and the profound impact it has had, and continues to have, in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- 5 Recognise** that 'inclusive secularism', which permits religious ideas and comments, is not a bad thing. It gives everyone freedom to share their real convictions, not just atheists and exclusive secularists.
- 6 Work together** – connect to New Zealand Christian Network via the web. If you are able, consider supporting the work we do promoting Christian viewpoints in the public square. www.nzchristiannetwork.org.nz

KEY POINT

Everyone has beliefs. A so-called 'naked public square' simply advantages some people's beliefs (a minority) over others.

It is ironic that atheistic belief should be elevated in this way given that it has been consistently shown to produce more authoritarian regimes than almost any other.
(e.g. most communist dictatorships in the 20th century)