

Chapter 1 Secularism, Schools and Religious Education Brenda Watson Abstract A secularist outlook has been privileged in schools resulting in a form of.

Other than this flaw, this book is a good introduction for undergraduate students in the Study of Religion who wish to have an overview of recent debate between theists and atheists in an efficient way. He stopped going to church after reading many books about philosophy and religion. When he had a job as a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Glasgow, he adopted the fashionable atheism of his day. As time went by, he found the arguments of atheism rather weak. In this book he wants to show that belief in God is reasonable and positive. When I saw the book, I was excited and looked forward for an update on the objections to religions and the counter arguments. Why would anyone want to reject some systems that speak about value and purpose in human life? The main issue is creation. The atheists think that the world is evolved by itself. But the theists argue that there must be an intelligent being since the appearance of the universe is so incredible and complex. If there were such a designer, there would be no general laws of nature at all, for they would constantly be broken. There would be no way in which intelligent life could evolve by creative striving and the difficult but exhilarating overcoming of obstacles to progress, for there would be no obstacles that were not instantly and magically removed. Hence, Ward thinks, God gives the freedom to act. Ward sees God as a supreme consciousness that cannot be directly confirmed by observation. It is just like the intention of a conscious human being. Intention is however undetectable. Likewise, the mind of God cannot be traced. The cosmos, Ward also argues, can be seen as having the general structure but develops many points of division. While some think that human prayers for specific things could only make things worse, Ward reckons that God would take into account the conditions that would shape the cosmic process. Sincere prayer might hence have an influence upon the mind of God and could consequently make a difference in the future. Here, Ward mentions to us a liberated and democratic version of God. Another brilliant argument is that the humanities stress on personal interpretation, for instance in philosophy or music, it is about originality of vision; whereas the natural sciences recognize only the results that can be unanimously confirmed by all competent observers. God however cannot be interpreted and affirmed in those manners. I think Prof Ward has passionately argued for his case and has enlightened me a great deal, for which I am grateful. Prof Ward is one of the brilliant teachers in the Study of Religion. He relates to us the common denominator of religions in a few words. For instance, he says: It is nevertheless regrettable that Ward adopts the Christian exclusivism. He makes an attempt to show how God could be seen as revealing truths in different ways in different religions. In Hinduism, the Buddha is viewed as an avatar. Ward in chapter eight relates all main streams of thought – the Semitic, Indian, and East Asian traditions – to a singular spiritual reality. At this point of discussion, Ward appears as an ardent follower of John Hick. However, when Ward speaks about Buddhism, he regards Gautama Buddha as a spiritually gifted person and his teaching and practice could be interpreted as a revelation by God. His attempt actually does not make sense. The three persons of Christian trinity were designed to fit together. Though they are not the same, they have complementary functions. How would the Buddha fit into this model? As the God, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Despite this displeasing approach, this is a very good book for non-Christian students. I am ashamed to admit that although I studied three degrees in London, I did not know Christianity in depth. I am thankful that this book has allowed me to feel the sentiment of Christians more accurately. I also entirely agree with Prof Ward: First you have to know about it. See Nostra Aetate

Chapter 2 : The Effective Teaching of Religious Education : Brenda Watson :

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The chosen topic is a very pertinent one in the new South Africa too, and Religious Educators there have been hard at work over the past three years to find sound and practical educational answers to the challenging questions that have arisen. I hope that in this paper, a sharing of the paths along which we have searched will help to clarify your own position here in Namibia. I expect that, given the shared history of our two countries over the past century, there will be many similarities. I intend developing this paper according to the following headings: In the first instance there is the theocracy, where the state is itself a religious structure. The old South Africa under the ideology of Christian nationalism tended in this direction. Secondly one can have the situation where church and state have separate spheres recognised by the constitution, but there is a considerable degree of cooperation and interaction between the two. Such a situation would acknowledge the integrity of human beings - the citizen and believer are one and the same person. Modern Germany is very close to this model. The separation between Church and State can, on the other hand, be a strict one with no overlaps. In this model, all state institutions are completely secularised, and all religious bodies are completely outside of the state sphere. The United States of America fits this picture to a large extent. But their motivation is a desire for equity and justice in relation to the religious dimension of human life. A fourth possibility is that brand of secular state where religion is suppressed. Such a state attempts to deny or eliminate religious bodies, and may even actively propagate an atheist ideology. No country actually conforms precisely to any one of these four scenarios. It is more helpful to see them on a continuum of Church-State relations, ranging from absolute identity to absolute separation, and tending, as we move across the continuum towards the denial of the relevance of religion in state affairs. The Constitution of South Africa locates that country quite firmly near model ii , as it acknowledges the right, under certain conditions, to conduct religious observances at state or state-aided institutions. An influential lobby within the ruling party would be happy to see the subject removed from the curriculum. I will leave you to make your own judgement about the Namibian situation. Freedom from religion, rather than freedom of religion. For many people, giving a particular state such a description immediately locates it unequivocally at the far right of the above continuum. It is instructive to note that in the Catholic tradition we differentiate between secular and religious priests. The difference reflects the tension between the Kingdom of God already among us and the Kingdom yet to come. The secularisation of the modern world, a process whereby sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols⁴, can be seen as a healthy challenge to religion, rather than as a threat. Her "best kept secret"⁵ is now out in the open! In practice this means that it is not identifiable with any particular religion. Rather, it has the capacity to acknowledge the validity of all religions within the nation in an equitable way. May God protect our people. God bless South Africa. The way in which the state approaches religion will necessarily have an impact on Religious Education in the public classroom. To build a meaningful relationship with the State, the Catholic School needs to be informed about it and how it operates; it also needs to work with the State on a clear formulation of policy for RE. The State itself needs to recognise freedom of religion as a right, not conferred by itself, but by the relationship the believers have with their Lord and with each other. *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 93 7 Cf. And because of this, the classroom in the Catholic School takes on a real public dimension. It is no longer, nor does it aspire to be, an entirely private affair. How does she relate and respond to them? An answer to these questions will help guide our search for a meaningful approach to Religious Education that will have the breadth and the depth of wisdom to take into account two sets of requirements that hold one another in tension. How do we fulfil the evangelising mission of the Church, while upholding the constitution of the State in the matter of religious freedom? I think this is the crucial question. In acknowledging their validity, the council states: The Catholic Church rejects nothing

which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. We need to understand and to embrace the mission of evangelisation with open arms: Indeed, twenty-five years after Vatican II, a joint document titled Dialogue and Proclamation, from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, elaborated on this theme. Through dialogue, carried out in the spirit of the gospel, the Church offers experiential knowledge of Christ, and receives in return many riches from the treasuries of the other religions. The document offers much that can be translated into guidelines for Religious Education, and I would like to quote a few passages: We certainly have good reason to reject any treatment of world religions that leads to eclecticism or relativism or syncretism or indifferentism. What then makes a Catholic school Catholic? How does it live up to its description of being universal? How does it bear a message of salvation that can be heard by all who belong to it? Dominic Milroy offers the following identifying features of the Catholic School. The everyday encounters with other human beings, with the disciplines and challenges of the search for truth, become sacramental encounters with the presence of God and therefore invitations to holiness. Such freedom is an inner quality of life, a maturity flowing from the practice of obedience to the will of God. It is a gospel service modelled on that of the one who let children come to him and who always gave preference to the weakest and most vulnerable. They are simply an array of human constructs. What Makes a Catholic School Catholic? In the global context, the Catholic school becomes an instrument of the Kingdom, as a co-worker in creating the vision of community in diversity expressed in Isaiah They will do no hurt, no harm on all my holy mountain, says Yahweh. In sharing in this work of building a pluralist society, it lives out the Christian message of hope for the unity of mankind. It is not self-seeking. In its identification with Christ it does not seek to denigrate a different religious commitment, practice or point of view. Nor does it act in ways contrary to freedom in order to win new members to the body whose mission it shares. It is rather, a practical instance of the vision the Southern African Church has of itself as a Community Serving Humanity. And the humanity which the Catholic School serves today is a multicultural, multireligious microcosm of the world we live in. We may see it in the following way: How close in spirit to this vision is the call of the modern democratic state for access, for equity, for quality, and for freedom of conscience in educational programmes? Is there a harmony? Or are there seeds for a conflict difficult to reconcile? Watson, op cit, p 63 Teaching Religious and Moral Education in a Secular State 7 Catholic School ethos A very common fear is that the Catholic School will lose its distinctive character if it relinquishes its autonomy, or has that autonomy restricted by national policy. But need it be? If we hold this vision, how much of a conflict do we see between the interests of Church and State in Religious Education? We need to be able to articulate clearly and with confidence what our special character is. We also need to be able to demonstrate that it makes a difference, and that this difference goes in the same direction as the deepest aspirations of the State and its people. In fact, in South Africa today, the national and provincial Catholic Education Negotiating Teams are treating this as a priority in order to develop an honest and sure relationship with the Education Ministries. Recent legislation has opened the door for negotiating partnerships between Catholic Education and the State whereby the special character of the Catholic School, it is hoped, will be enshrined in provincial legislation. In order to prepare for this we need to work at identifying the authentic, enduring core of Catholic tradition. At the same time we will discern those historical and cultural accretions to the tradition that are less crucial - since they are time-bound - and thus negotiable. We will also be in a position to eliminate those aberrations that have accrued unconsciously to our practice. We will then have found both a firm foundation and a measure of free space for reaching out to embrace the multireligious reality of our schools in the spirit of dialogue that the modern and future Church espouses. Home-school-parish partnership Having moved in this way, things will be healthier for RE, I believe, though not the same. Building the home-school-parish partnership will be another major dimension of the challenge. In the first place, parents need to be reaffirmed in their right, and firmly challenged in their responsibility as the prime

educators of their children. They in fact enjoy the right to determine in accordance with their own religious beliefs, the kind of Religious Education that their children are to receive. But in all fairness this can only be asked and expected if adult Religious Education for parents is encouraged and made accessible. Many parents abdicate this responsibility because of their sense of inadequacy. It is left largely in the hands of willing and some not-so-willing volunteers who have little or no experience or training. Two things need to be done, as I see it. Ways need to be found to move away from catechesis being the extension of the schoolroom, to an echoing and building up of the faith that takes place within the community. With the home and parish dimensions of Religious Education strengthened, it will be easier for the school to develop with them a clearer understanding of partnership, and the distinctive roles of each within it. Nurturing faith will certainly happen in all three instances, but it will be the particular emphasis of the parish or faith community. More opportunities for interaction between parents, teachers and pastors need to be created so that a common vision can be generated. Staff development A word about staff is necessary here. There are few teachers who love Religious Education, and engage in it with zest. Given the lack of training opportunity, and the present uncertainty about RE, this is not surprising. However, teachers need to understand that the Religious Education curriculum is the concern of all, since the first message students will hear is the one of action. In addition, those teachers specifically engaged in RE need good incentives and opportunities for professional formation. Classroom practice Much about the classroom practice of RE is implicit in what has already been said. I will just highlight a few challenges in this respect.

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Democracy, Religion and Secularism - Download as PDF File .pdf), Text File .txt) or read online. Brenda Watson. Brenda Watson attempts to re-deï•ne and re.

The article argues for re-consideration of the secularization so often in the West regarded as an essential condition for a democratic state. Its inbuilt incoherence and problematic consequences suggest that the term secular should be abandoned. Deep-seated reasons for objecting to such a proposal follow, discussing an affront to personal integrity, confronting intellectual apartheid and analysing abuse of religion. Introduction The term secularism was first used ca. Holyoake to denote a system that seeks to interpret and organize life on principles taken wholly from the world, without recourse to any religious belief [1]. Since then, there has been intense debate concerning the precise meaning of the word secular when applied to liberal democratic states in the West. Jose Casanova, for example, has distinguished between three different connotations: My concern is with the second of these, as I want to relate to how the word is commonly used in everyday parlance indicating the characteristic division between secular public space and religious private space presumed necessary for a democracy. Regarding the term religion, again I am referring to the most commonly-accepted meaning in everyday usageâ€”and seen most clearly by those who do not agree with itâ€”namely belief in some kind of cosmic order greater than what science alone can unravel. Awareness of some Transcendent Reality, in most religions termed God, is what justifies using the same word religion to denote the very different and separate forms of organization and practice which religions in the plural reveal. The validity of this secularist approach to democracy tends to be taken for granted in the West today. The assumption is that the public domain must be neutral and that, if it is secularist, it is neutral. This means that religious beliefs must be kept for the private domain. This approach is, however, open to a number of objections. Difficulties Facing the Privatization of Religion 2. Incoherences in Insistence on a Secularist Organization of Society i Its claim to neutrality may be bogus. It tends to be assumed that not mentioning something makes for neutrality when it can easily lead to reductionism. Not mentioning God in the public domain may constitute practical atheism whether stated or not. It can convey the implication that religion is peripheral to the conduct of human affairs and therefore irrelevant. This is not any less contentious than the various religious views a secularist approach wishes to confine to the private sphere. Thus, built into the use of the term is a commitment to a controversial view of the world. That is not a neutral position. To Talal Asad, for example, the concept of secularism as a neutral and flat space is curious. Religious people must be bilingual, speaking a secular language in public. Sensible as this may seem, such banishment of God-language constitutes a form of exclusivism. It effectively discriminates against religious people who have to learn this second language whilst the non-religious do not, for the default position is effectively atheist. Bhikhu Parekh strongly expresses concern about reasons given in the public realm having to be of a secular nature. In an interview with Julian Baggini, he said: If you tell these people: You undermine not only the very basis of their beliefs but the very language in terms of which they think and talk. You are doing them an injustice. You are treating them unequally, because you have certain discursive privileges which you deny them. The claims of pluralism argue for including religion, not excluding it. After all, as Jean Behke Elshtain comments: The importance given to tolerance likewise implies that religion be not ignored. Free speech should be available to all, religious and non-religious alike. Openness to enquiry should welcome the contribution of religion to debate and education. In trying to find a sustainable identity for a nation, its history and tradition should naturally be understood and respected, instead of masked out of consideration as is frequently the case regarding the role of Christianity in the formation of civilization in the West see e. A Vacuum to Be Filled The problem is compounded by the fact that it cannot be the case that, if God exists, any religious aspirations are unimportant and should be publicly sidelined. On any showing, religious belief is not just a hobby; it affects all that a person isâ€”how people speak, act and react. Belief cannot be clinically separated from the character

of a person. Moreover, any society has to be focused around a worldview in the sense that principles are adduced for making decisions affecting everyone. Such basic common values and convictions may be implicit or less explicit and shared by different explicit world-views and religions. However, they give an effective community something to rally around. If religion—which in almost every civilization known has provided such a communal ideal—is ruled out, then of necessity something else must take its place. What that view is may be disputed, but nature abhors a vacuum. If the existence of God or any form of Transcendent Reality is denied, materialism will be the result, whatever particular angle it be viewed from such as scientism, positivism or humanism. Without some belief in Transcendent Reality, matter is all that there ultimately is, and everything becomes explainable in principle in material terms. Such materialism may be consciously chosen or not. Often it is taken for granted and not articulated. It can therefore appear to be benign and open, unlike religion, which never tires of professing what it believes, to the irritation of those who do not believe it! Materialism tends, however, to be vague about values, about whether life has any purpose, and what the point of community is. Materialism can easily descend to questioning whether good and evil have any real meaning beyond what people choose. Secularists generally claim to inhabit high moral ground, standing for human rights and a genuine altruism not dependent on any utilitarian desire for heaven or fear of hell. Lofty sentiments can indeed be expressed, as Steven Weinberg recently said in an interview: However, it may be asked whether, for the running of a democracy in which everyone has a vote, such sentiments are enough. Are they not appropriate only for a fortunate, educated elite? The Side-Lining of Religion Signs that such materialism, chosen or not, has led to the ignoring of religion are plentiful. A recent holiday in India, which happened to include the Easter season, brought home to me just how side-lined religion has become. The sensitive tour-organisers assumed that no one would wish to mark in any way the most important Christian festival of the year. A few of us discovered a village church close by to where we were staying, where on Easter Eve they were holding a 4-h service. We were amazed to find ca. Our Indian guide commented afterwards: Most newspapers carry very little on religion except when it is the cause of public controversy or violence. Apparently this is an area of human life and activity on which it is not worth commenting. Religion is conspicuous by its absence in a powerful institution like the Royal Society of Arts, of which I am a Fellow, whilst materialism of one kind or another is conspicuous by its omni-presence. This is also true of philosophy, where appreciative reference to religion is rare. It is not often that philosophy journals invite competent religious people to contribute to debate on important issues to which reference to religion would be relevant. Major playwrights such as Tom Stoppard take it for granted that there is no God and that life must find meaning, if it can, without any spiritual dimension. In his most-acclaimed play, *Arcadia*, there is plenty of argument and disagreement expressed, e. There is no spokesman for the validity of holding any religious view; for the Smart Set that is not an option. Does this secularist victory ensure greater freedom of thought? Is it a recipe for a more sustainable and benevolent society? It is understandable that many see it as such. Reacting against a time when specific religious belief was held to be essential for the holding of public office, secularism meant freedom from such constraints. In this sense, secularism may be regarded as beneficial by everyone, whether religious or not. Inappropriate religious intervention regarding the nature of the state needs forthright opposition. A theocracy where it is presumed that all must believe in God according to how the ruling clique understand it, with penalties for not toeing the religious line and even total exclusion, does provide appropriate reason for secularist protest. Similarly, if education is in the hands of clerics who prevent free enquiry in the search for knowledge, then secularist protest is justified. Historically, that is how the secularist movement in the West arose at the time of the Enlightenment, as protest against oppressive ecclesiastical control. The significance of the term secularism is still appropriate in many parts of the world. I consider, however, that it is so no longer in the West. Here the battle has been won; the Christian churches today realistically pose no such conceivable threat to domination or tyranny. The protection of the rights of any minority, religious or secular, and equal universal access should be central normative principles of any liberal democratic system. In principle one should not need any additional particular secularist principle or

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legislation. Moreover, the ignoring of religion to which it leads entails lack of understanding of religion and inability to make valid judgements concerning it. This is serious because on the world-stage religion is a force that has to be reckoned with; ignorance can become dangerous indeed in the light of terrorist threats. The atrocities in Paris both on the staff of the Charlie Hebdo cartoon paper and in November illustrate only too well how urgently the West ought to re-think its attitude to religion. Why is there this insistence on the necessity for secularism, when it carries contentious consequences as outlined above? Is it not time to look again at why democracies should be secular? Has it not become an anachronistic term and outlived its significance, and potentially deadly in its implication that all religion is unhelpful or even bad? Ideally, its use should be discontinued now the protest for which it was once so important ceases to be relevant. However, such a conclusion is likely to be passionately resisted. Is it that the West is still living in the 18th century and re-living a fight that has been won, caught in a time-warp like a perpetual teenager rebelling against parental control? I suspect there are at least three deeper reasons at work. Public life is full of controversial debate. Almost everything any politician says is controversial in that some citizens do not agree with it! All academic work similarly involves controversy. The difficulty, however, is that when fundamental beliefs and values holding a society together are voiced – as they should be, and nurtured – problems can arise if something is assumed to be agreed by all when it is not.

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Brenda Watson is the author of several books on education and religion. A former lecturer at Didsbury College of Education, she became Director of the Farmington Institute in Oxford for several years before doing consultancy work.

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The article argues for re-consideration of the secularization so often in the West regarded as an essential condition for a democratic state. Its inbuilt incoherence and problematic consequences suggest that the term secular should be abandoned. Deep-seated reasons for objecting to such a proposal.