

## **Religion: The Irish Experience.**

### **Secularism:**

Is a philosophy or way of thinking about life that limits itself to the present here and now. The word secularism comes from the latin word Saeculum which means present age. Secularism is very materialistic in its focus. Secularism suggests that elements of life such as values, knowledge and actions should be free from religious authority. Secularism denies the role of religion in society and feels that there is no 'other worldly' or transcendent meaning to life i.e. there is no such thing as God. Secularism began during the enlightenment when science began to be seen as much more important than religion. Secularism says that science and that which can be proven should be more influential than religion. Secularism says that we can find meaning in the world around us and we do not need a God.

### **Example of Secularism:**

Examples of secularism are all around us. People are turning away from traditional values systems and embracing new ways of thinking about the world. If we look at the growth of Humanism over the last half century it is clear that people a lot of people do not incorporate God or religion into their thinking of the world. People seem to feel that now all we need is belief in ourselves to succeed. There has also been a rise in agnosticism. A belief that we can never know whether God exists and so we should focus on science and nature and all that which can be proven. If we look at the growth in the number of atheists it can be seen from the European Values Study Survey (1999) it stands at 95% in Ireland and a very large 55% in the Netherlands which would suggest that secular thought is beginning to become a very real way of thinking about our world.

## **Secularization:**

A process whereby a society becomes secular. A secularized society is one that will show a decline in the interest in religion. In a secularized society religion will have no influence on any aspect of life. A secularized society will focus on nature and science in a way that can bring great benefit to humankind. A secularized society will reject anything that is 'other worldly' and will reject the role of religion within society. In secularized society religious structures will have little or no influence on ethical, economic or social thought

## **An Example of Secularization:**

In order to show an example of secularization we would need to explore societies and culture that have removed God completely. Communist countries have systematically tried to remove organised religious structures and beliefs - but such attempts seem to be failing meaning that it may be difficult to achieve a wholly secularized society.

Another example of Secularization could be seen in how a society may make decisions without any regard for the teaching of the Church. For example a society may decide that it is permissible to allow abortion or artificial methods of contraception even though it is against Church teaching.

Eoin Cassidy in his book, 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland' notes that in the 1999 European Values Study Survey 8 percent of Irish people identified themselves as 'secularist'. Cassidy also notes that Ireland is less likely to listen to Church Teaching on issues such as abortion and pre marital sex. - this would indicate that Ireland is becoming more secularized.

The church in Ireland is having less and less influence in education in Ireland. Where once the Church was hugely involved in the education of the Irish people it is now becoming far less - another indication of the secularization of Ireland perhaps.

If we look at falling Church attendance, less people aligning themselves with the Church and a general move towards material possessions in society it is clear that examples of secularization are all around us.