

sample resources

Sociology

The Secularization Thesis

- △ Secular: not concerned with religion, not sacred.
- △ B.Wilson (1966) described secularisation as ***'the process in which religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance'***.
- △ Giddens (20021) ***'the process where religion loses its influence over the various spheres of social life'***.

Secularization is said to be the consequence of the social changes brought about by modern, urban industrial society.

Two Camps:

- △ Supporters of the Secularization thesis (+ founding fathers)
- △ Refuters: those who suggest that religion remains a significant force but in unfamiliar forms.

Views of the founding fathers: Auguste Comte

Karl Marx

Max Weber

Emile Durkheim

Critics argue against the secularisation thesis in a number of ways:

- 1) It assumes the existence of a 'golden age', when religious organisation had widespread appeal.
- 2) It exaggerated the rational over superstition in modern society.
- 3) It cannot account for Cults, NRM and NAMs.
- 4) It underestimates the importance of Christianity as a political force: Italy and North America.
- 5) Comparative: no necessary connection between modernisation and secularization e.g. middle east
- 6) Often definitions translate secularisation into de-Christianization
- 7) The rise of the 'sacred-self' as an invisible religion

Problems in the debate stem from how we measure secularisation and how we define religion:

Objective and Subjective Measures of Secularization.

Objective Factors	Subjective Factors
Levels of membership /participation	Religion in the personal sphere
Disengagement	Religion as a commodity
Structural Differentiation Or Secularisation of Religious Institutions	NAMs
Religious Pluralism	Post-modernism
Fundamentalism	
Desacrilization	

Key Question: How do we measure secularisation and operationalize religiosity?

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