

Atheistic States

by Sophia



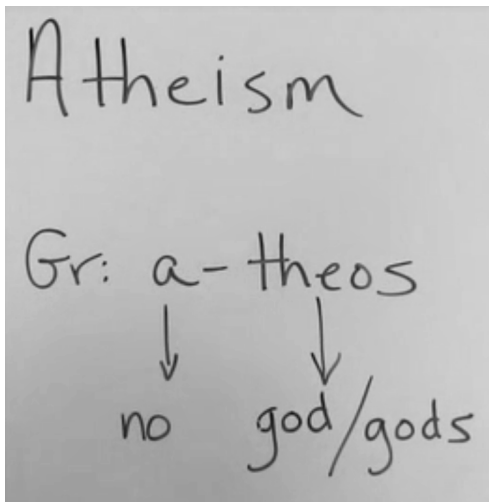
WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson talks about atheistic states. State atheism is considered the official promotion of atheism by a government. Historically in conjunction with this promotion of atheism, you can see that some countries have actively either directly or indirectly suppressed freedom of religion and religious activity. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. History
2. The French and Bolshevik Revolutions
3. Cuba

1. History

The use and application of the term atheism was present in ancient Greece to refer to someone who rejected the gods in one way or another. The word atheism comes from two Greek words “a” and “theos”. “A” refers to the negative, “no” or “not,” and “theos” means “god” or “gods.” State affairs were tied to a belief structure that included many gods, and anyone on a different track was given the uncomplimentary label atheist.



Atheism was not a commonly used term. It wasn't applied very often throughout late antiquity or through the Middle Ages. There were certainly tussles between faith and reason, but the nations and states didn't present themselves as godless entities per se. It wasn't really until the 18th century in Europe that some people saw the movements in science, modern philosophy, and, a bit later, the social sciences as structures that pointed to and supported an ideology of atheism.

At the same time, political shifts were taking place, giving rise to the establishment of newly formed national identities and nationhood. This was often at arm's length from religion and religious issues. Atheism found its home in the writings, political philosophies, and actual governmental structures that began to unfold through the modern era.

State atheism is different than a secular state. In state atheism, a government presents its country as atheistic and promotes it by discouraging religiosity. A secular state is more neutral and usually makes efforts to remain neutral concerning religion in the institution of legal structures. They endeavor to follow a course that is distinct from any religion or religious practice: that might be one element in the country's profile and makeup of the population.



TERM TO KNOW

State Atheism

The official promotion of atheism by a government.

2. The French and Bolshevik Revolutions

One of the strong roots of modern atheistic states can be traced back to the French Revolution. In its power struggle with the Roman Catholic Church, France experimented with atheism as a state ideology. It lasted less than a year. Nevertheless, the extremes of political, social, and religious identity of France made their mark on notions of nationhood in many parts of the world.

Probably the most noticeable influence of this tussle with atheistic ideology was upon communist Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent Marxist Leninist communist regime. Religion offered little to no solace in the worldly affairs of economic and political oppression. Both founders were atheistic, and the nation's complex identity associated itself with atheism, and actively suppressed religion as a distraction from the more immediate concerns of the state. Some of the policies included the seizing of churches and their properties and the extreme persecution of Orthodox bishops and priests.

3. Cuba

As the French Revolution inspired social, political, and secular movements throughout the world, the Russian Revolution also inspired many countries, including Cuba. Throughout the 1950s, Fidel Castro was struggling against the Batista regime. He fought an ideological battle very similar to what had occurred 40 years earlier in the Soviet Union. In 1959, Fidel Castro came to power and began a series of major social reforms in the areas of health care, education, communications, and steps toward recognition of equality. A major policy also included

shipping off members of the Roman Catholic Church. Members of the ruling Communist Party had to be declared atheists.

This was the case until the early 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today in Cuba, one can profess a faith and still be eligible to join the Communist Party, as they have now an official nondiscrimination policy on the matter of religion.



SUMMARY

In this lesson you learned the **history** of atheism. Two Greek words, “a” and “theos,” make up the word atheism. That was a derogatory term. Atheism wasn’t an ideology that was applied or used until the French Revolution in the 18th century. Atheism started to become more experimented with in terms of applying it to state ideology and state politics. The Soviet Union used the application of atheism as a state ideology that rejected religion because it had gotten in the way of some of the more pertinent issues of the state, political, and economic life. **The French and Bolshevik Revolutions** inspired other countries, such as **Cuba**. In the 1990s, the atheist manifesto of Cuba was softened a bit, and now there’s a nondiscrimination policy in terms of membership in the Communist Party.

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