

Is Religion a force for evil or good?

INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on why people believe religion may be a force for evil or a force for good. It asks students to assess the views of Richard Dawkins, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Christopher Hitchens and Tony Blair. It also encourages students to have their own debate and cast a vote on this session's question.

ACTIVITY

Explain to students that Richard Dawkins is an important scientist and atheist who believes that the world would be better off without religion. Show them the clip of Dawkins explaining why religion makes him angry: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWJM-mOGQ5E

Afterwards, ask students to say whether they agree or disagree with Dawkins' points.

ACTIVITY

Quote Comparison task:

'With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil — that takes religion.' Steve Weinberg – Physicist.

'Without God everything is permitted'. Fyodor Dostoevsky – Russian writer.

Ask students to respond to these questions:

- *Which quote suggests religion is a force for evil and which quote suggests a religion is a force for good? Expand what you think Weinberg and Dostoevsky were arguing.*
- *Do you think Weinberg and Dostoevsky could agree about some things?*

ACTIVITY

Explain to students that Christopher Hitchens is an atheist who believes religion is a force for evil. Hitchens had a live television debate (2010) with Tony Blair, once Prime Minister of the UK who left the Anglican Church to become a Catholic in 2007. Blair argued in this debate that religion is a force for good in today's world. [The full debate (1 hour 46 minutes) can be seen at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddsz9XBhrYA]

Ask students to have their own debate either by splitting the class into two groups or putting students into pairs and one representing Hitchens and the other Blair. Give students time to think of various arguments to suggest religion is a force for good and bad.

CONCLUSION

Ask students to cast a vote. Do they think that religion is a force for evil or for good? It may be that some students are in the middle or undecided. Give students time to reflect on why this may be.