

Are all religions equal?

INTRODUCTION

This session explores the assumption that all religions are just different paths or ways of believing the same thing or worshipping the same god. It also asks students to think about the ways in which religions view each other and what may be the advantages and disadvantages of some of these outlooks. Are all religions equally true and can all coexist peacefully if this is the case?

Stimulus: Show the students a street interview in Australia of people being asked whether all religions are equal:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvqpYtaNgrw>

ACTIVITY

After watching the film, ask the students the following questions:

- Are all religions are equal?
- What is meant by 'equal'? Are there different sorts of 'equality'?
- Are some more truthful than others?

Explain to the students that accepting all religions as equal or some as more truthful than others may cause conflict. The six main world religions that are well represented in the UK (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism), as well as other religions and philosophies of life, have co-existed for a long time but there has sometimes been conflict between them.

Stimulus: Show students this video of how religions have coexisted through the years:

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Snc1MNbHDc>

Pause at key points to get feedback from students on, e.g. the importance of Abraham [as an acknowledged prophet in three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam], the approximate date of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, and the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland [Still in the news today].

Ask the students to reflect on this statement and question:

- Imagine a world in which all religions were proclaimed to be equal. Would this allow the main religions to coexist in peace?

Get some feedback from the students on this, then introduce another question:

- How do different religions view each other?

Explain the following theories to students (whilst acknowledging the complexity of meaning that may underpin these basic definitions):

Exclusivism: the belief that one religion in particular holds the truth. Some Christians, for example, believe that only Christianity holds truth and only Christians will gain salvation and a place in Heaven.

Inclusivism: the belief that, while one's own beliefs are absolutely true, other sets of beliefs may be at least partly true, if not another way of saying the same thing.

Pluralism: the belief that at least some truth and value lies in religions and beliefs other than one's own, along with the acknowledgement that one's own beliefs are not the only or full source of truth.

ACTIVITY

If you have a VERY ABLE group, split them into three teams and allocate each team as exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist. Then ask them to complete the following task:

- Imagine that your allocated view is going to become enforced by the state. On a piece of paper list the possible positive and negative consequences of the approach you have been allocated.
- What might be good about the UK having a *Christian* Exclusivist view or having a *Christian* Inclusivist outlook? What *conditions* might be placed on the Pluralist view that might make it good for the UK?

Encourage the students to present their ideas to the rest of the group.

An ALTERNATIVE activity would be to replay the street interview in Australia of people being asked whether all religions are equal: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvgpYtaNgrw> and ask pupils to say what they think of the different answers given. Can they identify the answers as being exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist?

CONCLUSION

Prompt students to reflect on the overall answer to the question, are all religions equal? In what sense *might* they be equal? Ask students which outlook from the previous task they think is the best – exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist?