

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 'faith' makes him angry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m10ebWGP3LY>

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

ACTIVITY

Quote Comparison task. Provide the students with these quotes:

'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 that there have been many public debates about whether religion is a force for good or evil. Perhaps it depends on what is meant by 'religion'.

Ask students to have their own debate either by splitting the class into two groups or putting students into pairs and one representing 'Religion is

a force for good' and the other 'Religion is a force for evil'. Encourage them to say what they mean by 'religion' in their arguments.

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.