



• OPEN DOORS GCSE LESSON ONE:

WHAT IS PERSECUTION? WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

AIM: To introduce the concepts of religious freedom and persecution, and to explore why Christian persecution is an issue.

This lesson will meet these curriculum requirements:

AQA: How Christian churches respond to persecution. Issues of equality, freedom of religion and belief including freedom of religious expression. Religion and belief as a cause of war and violence in the contemporary world.

EDEXCEL: The role and importance of the Church in the worldwide community: how and why it works for reconciliation and the problems faced by the persecuted Church

OCR: The way in which the Church is being persecuted in the 21st century.

WJEC EDUQAS: An example of conflict between personal conviction and the laws of a country. Censorship, freedom of religious expression

LESSON EXPECTATIONS

Whether you are someone who teaches regularly or someone who is new to school's work, it is important to set expectations for your lesson from the start. This is particularly crucial when speaking about faith which can be a sensitive and divisive topic. You may want to begin the lesson by saying something along these lines:

We understand that everyone here comes from different backgrounds/beliefs and will have different experiences and thoughts on the topics we're covering; but we want to make sure that as we go through today, we're showing respect by listening to everyone in the room despite our differences. We would appreciate your full engagement and invite you to participate as much as you're able.



STARTER ACTIVITY

FREEDOM OF RELIGION / 5 MINS

Introduce the topic of "freedom of religion" – ask students, in pairs, to write down their own definition of how they would explain this concept. Ask students to feedback.

You might want to use the statement below from Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to give a comprehensive definition.

Freedom of religion: *The right to practise whatever religion one chooses.*

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest (or practise) this religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance,"

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

NOTES

ACTIVITY 1

INTRODUCTION TO PERSECUTION / 5 MINS

Encourage your students to participate in this quiz by raising their hands, clapping or cheering for the right answer

QUIZ

1. How much of the world's population experience religious persecution?

- a. 11%
- b. 22%
- c. 33%

According to a report* done for the UK Foreign Office which was published in July 2019, around a third of the world experience religious persecution in some form.

*The Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians

2. Which religion experiences the most persecution around the world?

- a. Judaism
- b. Christianity
- c. Islam

According to the same report, of all religious persecution, most NGO's estimate that 80% is directed towards Christians.

3. Which country is the most dangerous place to be a Christian?

- a. Afghanistan
- b. North Korea
- c. Syria

Answer: North Korea. Finish this section by showing the **Open Doors World Watch List Top 10 video** *

*This video has been made for a Christian audience so you might want to give a disclaimer at the start that this has been made by a Christian organisation to help Christians understand what persecution looks like.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY:

Following on from watching the Top 10 Video, split your class into 10 groups and give each group 10-15 mins to research one of the countries they've heard about. Ask them to focus on answering the following questions:

- What kind of persecution do Christians in this country experience?
- Why are Christians persecuted here?
- What is the impact on Christians or the Church in this country?

You can find information on these countries on the Open Doors Youth website: youth.opendoorsuk.org/www



ACTIVITY 2

FOCUS ON NORTH KOREA / 20 MINS

Having watched the video, ask the students to write down at least 5 different ways that Christians might experience persecution.

- Denied employment
- Have to keep faith secret – no freedom
- Arrest/interrogation
- Execution
- Homes raided or destroyed
- Violent attacks
- Churches closed or attacked
- Seen as second class citizens
- Falsely accused of blasphemy
- Abduction/Kidnap
- Forced conversion to another religion
- Death threats
- Unfairly imprisoned
- Sent to a labour camp

These are not on the video but you may want to mention:

- **Surveillance** – Christians can be spied on, monitored by the CCTV and have their banking apps frozen.
- **Denied education** – many Christian children experience bullying from their peers and can be marked down or failed by their teachers if they are open about their faith.
- **Violence or hostility from your own family** – for some Christians, the biggest risks are from those closest to them, especially in honour/shame cultures.
- **Denied basic rights like legal aid or medical treatment** – in areas where the Police or medical staff are complicit in persecution, Christians can be denied justice/treatment and sometimes experience further persecution.

In pairs ask your students to read the information sheet and work together to answer the following questions.

NORTH KOREA QUESTIONS

What religions are allowed in North Korea?

None – everyone must worship the Kim family.

Why are Christians persecuted in North Korea?

Because they choose to worship God, not the Kim family.

Who are the biggest risk to people who choose to be Christians secretly?

Neighbours – it is thought that up to a third of the population are government spies.

How are Christians persecuted in North Korea?

Spied on, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, sent to labour camps, killed.

If time allows watch Ji Ho's story about what happened when secret agents raided her home.

Wrap up this section by asking students to reflect on whether they would be willing to risk practising a religion secretly in North Korea.



ACTIVITY 3

WHY DOES PERSECUTION HAPPEN TO CHRISTIANS? / 20 MINS

North Korea is one example, but there are many different reasons why Christians might be persecuted for their faith.

MATCHING TASK: Around the room have info sheets about six countries. Ask students to go around the room to read the information and then match the reasons why Christians are persecuted with the right countries.

You might want to do this in pairs or in small groups where they feed back to each other what they have learnt.

In some countries, the leaders want to be treated like a God – Christians refuse to see them as this and so are seen to be enemies of the state.

- North Korea

Some countries insist that religion and national identity are the same thing. To be a Christian then is seen as rejecting your country and what it means to be from there. This is shameful and can make people angry.

- India
- Afghanistan

Christians can be seen as easy targets – often Christianity is seen as a Western religion, despite starting in the Middle East. In a number of countries being a Christian puts you at the bottom of the social ladder meaning you get a poorer education, less work opportunities and are seen as a lower class citizen.

- Egypt

Some governments try to hold onto power by promoting national unity and controlling all religions. This means Christians and Christian services can be monitored and anything said in contradiction to the government can be punished.

- China

If you convert it is a rejection of the accepted religion of your community/country – this can be seen as an aggressive decision and so is often received and responded to with more aggression.

- Algeria

REVIEW

5 MINS

- Ask students if they can remember the definition of “freedom of religion.”
- Finish the session by inviting students to write an answer to “why freedom of religion is an important human right.”



NORTH KOREA FACT SHEET

In 2024 North Korea continues to be the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Many Christians have to keep their faith secret even from their own families.



Open Doors estimates that there are approximately 400,000 Christians in North Korea, from a population of 25.7 million. It's very difficult to know exactly how many believers live in North Korea because they must keep their faith completely secret. From that 400,000, Open Doors estimates that 50,000-70,000 Christians are currently imprisoned in terrible labour camps for their faith. It is unlikely that they will ever be able to leave.



Why are Christians persecuted?

Anybody who believes in a higher authority other than the dictatorial Kim family is considered an enemy of the state. Kim Jong-un and his family are worshipped as gods, and posters of Kim Jong-Un must be hung in all homes and schools. Followers of any faith are at great risk of being killed or imprisoned as political criminals – and, if discovered, their families are imprisoned too.

Many North Korean Christians can't even tell their families about their faith. Sang-Hwa didn't realise that her mother and father were believers until she was nearly a teenager. "My parents couldn't share any Christian stories with my siblings and me. It's too dangerous. A child may accidentally betray his or her parents' faith." Teachers sometimes even ask young children to inform on their parents. The consequences of being identified as a Christian in North Korea would be horrendous.

"We have a saying in North Korea," says Sang-Hwa. "When three of us are meeting, one of us is a spy and will report to the government." The North Korean authorities maintain control by engaging a huge network of spies. This means that there is very little time when people and their activities are not being monitored.

If the government finds out that you're a Christian, it's likely that you'll be sent to a labour camp. Most prisoners never leave, and the conditions are appalling with forced labour, torture and starvation being normal.

It's difficult to overstate the reach of North Korean authorities and the obedience and leader-worship they demand. Police raids to identify and arrest citizens with 'deviating thoughts' have increased, and the whole country is deliberately controlled through an atmosphere of intense fear.



NORTH KOREA

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Christians are considered enemies of the state because they dare to believe in a higher authority than the Kim family. The North Korean regime demands absolute loyalty and obedience, and the Kim family are worshipped like gods. Portraits of the Kim family must be hung in all homes and schools. The first words parents must teach their children are 'Thank you, Father Kim Il-sung'.

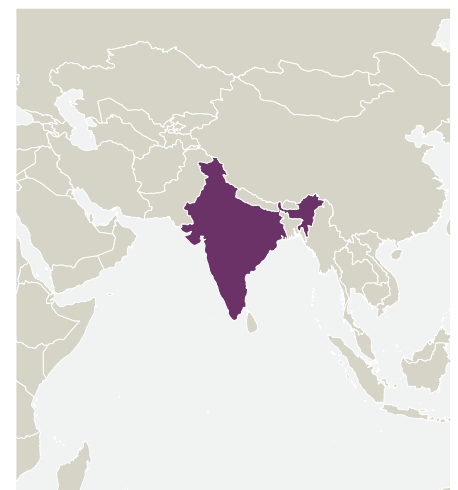




INDIA

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

The Indian government is led by the Hindu nationalist BJP, who believe that being a Hindu is part of Indian identity, and frequently turn a blind eye to attacks on those of other faiths.





AFGHANISTAN

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Afghanistan is a country controlled by the extremist Islamic group, the Taliban. Islamic principles dictate how the country is governed and what is allowed. To be Afghani is to be Muslim – there are no other options. Converts to Christianity are seen to be rejecting their national identity and so bringing shame on Islam.



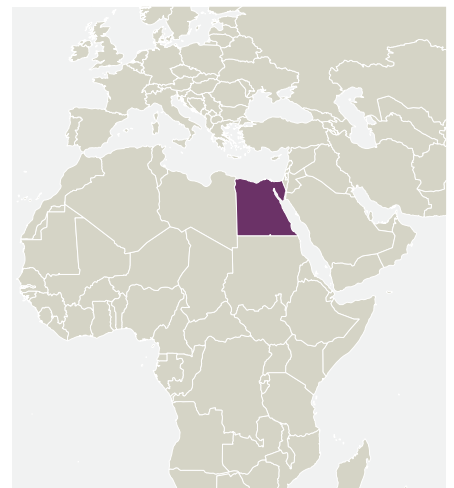


EGYPT

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Egypt is a strongly Islamic nation. Just under 90 per cent of the population of Egypt are Sunni Muslims.

President al-Sisi has called upon citizens to fight radicalism and introduce reforms in Islamic teaching. However, in rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are growing in prominence. Christians are seen as easy targets, being a minority and having less power. The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, but has not been very successful so far.





CHINA

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

The goal of the Communist Party of China is to maintain its power through national unity- including the control of all religions. Since the Communist Party took over the implementation of the regulations on religion, the treatment of religious groups has become much harsher. Christians are a particular focus because they are the largest social force in China that isn't controlled by the state.





ALGERIA

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Christians from a Muslim background face pressure from their families and communities, making it difficult to live out their faith. The state adds to this pressure by restricting freedom of religion through legal and administrative bureaucracy. Persecution often comes from family members if a Christian from a Muslim background is discovered to have converted. Church leaders report that female Christians from Muslim backgrounds are sometimes placed under house-arrest by their families when their faith is discovered.

