



OPEN DOORS GCSE LESSON TWO:

HOW DOES THE CHURCH RESPOND TO PERSECUTION?

AIM: For students to understand how Christians respond to persecution and how Churches in the UK support Christians worldwide who are facing persecution.

This lesson will meet these curriculum requirements:

AQA: How Christian Churches respond to persecution.

EDEXCEL: The Church as the Body of Christ: understandings of the significance of the Church as the Body of Christ and the People of God: the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, including Romans 12:4–6 and 1 Corinthians 12.

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

WJEC EDUQAS: Persecution of Christians past and present.

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

THE WORLD WATCH LIST / 5 MINS

If you haven't watched it in another lesson, watch the Open Doors World Watch List Top 10 video.

If you have watched this, start off by seeing how many different forms of persecution your class can remember.

- 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
- Surveillance
- Denied education
- Violence or hostility from your own family
- Denied basic rights like legal aid or medical treatment

Explain that today you are going to be focusing on how Christians both experience and respond to persecution today.

Finish this section by watching the video How has Christian persecution changed in the last 30 years?

ACTIVITY 1

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH CHRISTIANS ABOUT PERSECUTION / 15 MINS

Watch Rohan's Video

In pairs answer the question: what stood out to you from that video?

At the end of the video Rohan starts quoting a Bible verse which encourages him that even though he's faced persecution he should keep going. We are going to look at some other Bible verses which speak about persecution to see how Christians are taught to react.

Give each pair one of the Bible verses to read: Ask them to read it and see if they can answer the question – **what does this teach Christians about persecution?**

Ask pairs to feedback making sure you have covered each verse. Have students capture the collaborative learning on the Bible verse work sheet.

ACTIVITY 2

PERSECUTION PAST AND PRESENT / 10 MINS

Persecution is not a new phenomenon; let's see how much you know about the history of Christian persecution

Quiz

1. When did persecution of Christians start?
 - a. When Jesus was alive
 - b. When churches started being set up
 - c. When other religions began

According to the Bible, Jesus was persecuted. The religious leaders at the time didn't like how his teaching challenged theirs. Yet, they couldn't find anything illegal with what he did or said. He was arrested on false charges and Pontius Pilot, the Roman Governor of the time, wanted to release him. The religious leaders incited a crowd to chant for Jesus to be crucified, and fearing a riot, the Governor gave them what they wanted.

2. Who were the first Christians to be thrown into prison?
 - a. James and Judas
 - b. Thomas and Barnabas
 - c. Peter and John

Peter and John were arrested because they prayed for a man who was healed of being lame. The religious leaders at the time didn't like that they were speaking about Jesus, claiming that he had risen from the dead, and told them to stop. They were released but didn't stop speaking about Jesus.

3. Why did the Emperor Diocletian start persecuting Christians?
 - a. Because they refused to worship the Emperor and Rome
 - b. Because they refused to pay taxes
 - c. Because they were wealthy

The early persecution of Christians started because Emperor Diocletian felt threatened by Christians who didn't hold to the traditional worship of the gods. He blamed them for plagues, losing wars and different uprisings. The persecution of Christians was brutal. It included being burnt alive, tortured and killed in Gladiator competitions for entertainment. Christians were taught to pay taxes and more often than not were poor, not wealthy.

4. How many Christians experience persecution today?
 - a. 325 million
 - b. 345 million
 - c. 365 million

More Christians face persecution today than ever before. Persecution of Christians is increasing and getting worse.

5. Rohan (from the video) lives in India, what number on the Open Doors World Watch list (a ranking of the most dangerous places to be a Christian) do you think India is?
 - a. 6
 - b. 11
 - c. 16

Persecution of Christians in India has dramatically increased in recent years. For many people they believe that to be a true Indian means you have to be Hindu, if you reject this then you are not a true Indian and so can be targeted.



ACTIVITY 3

WHY DO CHURCHES IN THE UK SUPPORT CHRISTIANS WHO ARE BEING PERSECUTED? / 10MINS

In pairs, ask your students if, considering the verses they have looked at in Activity 1, they can answer this question:

- What do Christians here in the UK think about persecution and it's impact around the world?

EXPLAIN

Read out 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

In the Bible the Apostle Paul uses a picture of the body to show how even though Christians might all look different and bring different skills, they are all part of one body. He was talking about connection – even though churches might look different, or people might have different experiences, for those who follow Jesus, they are all part of the same body where Jesus Christ is the head.

LIVE EXAMPLE

Ask for a volunteer: Ask them to act out what happens to them when they stub their toe. (Hopefully grabbing the toe, shouting, hopping). When you stub your toe normally your whole body reacts in tensing/shouting/hopping – you cannot help it! When one part hurts the whole body reacts.

So if we go back to the image of the worldwide church being a body, this means that for Christians around the world they are connected. If one part of your body hurts the rest of your body knows about it. Think, if you break your foot, you might cry out in pain; then there's more pressure on your arms/hands if you have to use crutches – the rest of your body feels it.

It's the same way with the Christian body – if one part of the Christian body, maybe Christians in Iraq are suffering, then the whole worldwide church feels it. There's a responsibility on Christians who have freedom to use it to support those who don't. When one part is weaker the whole body is weaker, when one part is stronger the whole body is strengthened.

If time allows show the Edward and Rana video from Syria. This video shows how, because of the support of Christians around the world, Christians in Syria are able to stay and be good news in their community.

ASK:

- Having watched this video, how was the church acting like the body of Christ?



ACTIVITY 4

HOW DO CHURCHES IN THE UK SUPPORT CHRISTIANS WHO ARE BEING PERSECUTED? / 15 MINS

With the person sitting next to you, can you think of 3 ways Christians in the UK support Christians being persecuted?

PRAY

Christians believe that God hears their prayers and chooses to act through them. The founder of Open Doors, Brother Andrew, said, "Our prayers go where we cannot...there are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray."

A few years ago in Vietnam, seven main churches in one of the regions were all raided, the leaders put into prison and the buildings locked up with chains. Those who attended the churches were scared about their possible arrest and whether they would be able to keep worshiping God or not. They gathered together 5 hours away in the middle of a jungle where it was safe to pray, at the same time they had asked for prayer from their partners around the world. 400 people in the jungle, people all over the world praying that God would release the church leaders and make it safe for them to keep practising their faith. The next day all of the leaders were released with no charges and all of the buildings were unlocked. The churches were able to resume and fully believed that it happened as an answer to the prayers of many.

RAISE MONEY

Christians all over the UK both give and fundraise to support persecuted Christians all over the world. This money goes towards emergency food and aid, smuggled Bibles and Christian books, training and legal advice as well as helping Christians for the long term with micro-loans and support to stay in their countries.

ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF THOSE BEING PERSECUTED

In the UK, our MP's are elected to represent our concerns. Many Christians write to their MP bringing their attention to the injustices Christians face all over the world. Each year, Open Doors hosts a launch of our latest research in the Houses of Parliament and MP's attend because of the amount of people who have written to them asking them to go on their behalf. You can find out about how [Open Doors is advocating through our government now by visiting this page...](#)

ENCOURAGING CHRISTIANS BY WRITING TO THEM

Writing to Christians who have experienced persecution is a tangible way to encourage persecuted Christians and remind them that they are part of the body of Christ. You can find out about [current writing campaigns by visiting these pages...](#)

VISITING THEM

Where possible, Christians in the UK might build links with a particular Church or country, visiting them if it's possible.

REVIEW

5MINS

- Finish with a recap that persecution affects Christians differently.
- Have each student write down one thing that the Bible teaches about persecution and one way the church in the UK acts as part of the body in supporting the persecuted church.

BIBLE VERSES ABOUT PERSECUTION:

EXPLAIN WHAT THESE VERSES TEACH CHRISTIANS ABOUT PERSECUTION

MATTHEW 5: 10-12

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

MATTHEW 5: 43-44

[Jesus said] “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

JOHN 15:18-20

[Jesus said] “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”

JAMES 1:2-4

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

2 CORINTHIANS 12: 9-10

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

ROMANS 8: 35-39

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

‘For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”