

OPEN DOORS GCSE LESSON:

# 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.

**AQA:** This lesson will meet these curriculum requirements:

**EDExcel:** How Christian Churches respond to persecution.

**OCR:** The problems face by the persecuted Church. The Church as the Body of Christ.

**WJEC EDUQAS:** The way in which the Church is being persecuted in the 21st century. The role of the UK Church in 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 some might find emotive.

You might want to start with a blurb like the one below to explicitly set out the kind of involvement you are expecting from your students.

Hello my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Today as part of your GCSE requirements we are going to be speaking about religious persecution.

Now I am aware that speaking about faith can be a sensitive topic as often we will all have different experiences and opinions. As part of today's session we are going to be asking for your thoughts and getting you to do some partner and group work.

Right at the start I want to be very clear about the expectations of this session. I am expecting every member of this class to:

- Listen to each other
- Respect each other – even if you have different opinions
- Be actively involved in the session – to take part in every element



## 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.](#)

**Introduce the concept of persecution – ask your class in pairs to come up with as many different ways as possible that people might be persecuted for practising a religion.**

Ask for feedback and see what your students already know. If not mentioned you might want to refer to this list:

- Risk of kidnapping/abduction
- Arrest/Imprisonment
- Hostility/harassment from family/neighbours
- Death
- Sent to a labour camp
- Not allowed to take your children to church
- Violence – physical violence or bomb attacks
- Not allowed to convert from your religion
- Lack of access to education, employment, legal help, opportunities
- Internet hacking

Explain that today you are going to be focusing on the experience of Christians and how they experience persecution around the world.

## 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

NOTES

### 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

Jesus was persecuted. The religious leaders at the time didn't like how much his teaching challenged theirs. Yet they couldn't find anything wrong with what he did or said. He was arrested on false charges and Pilate, the governor of the time, wanted to release him. It's only because the crowd started shouting for him to be killed that he was crucified.

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. 320 million
  - b. 330 million
  - c. 340 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. 20
  - b. 10
  - c. 1

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

What do Churches here in the UK think about persecution around the world and what do they do about it?

#### EXPLAIN

You might want to 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.



## ACTIVITY 4

## NOTES

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

**Show Abishek's video** – as a first responder he helps to connect the church in India to the church around the world. Stop the video at 2:20

- Having watched this video – how was the church acting like a body?

**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 prayer can change things. Praying for Christians who are imprisoned or at risk of being attacked or arrested can change the reality for them.

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 worshipping 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

At the moment through Open Doors, Christians are raising money to help Christians in India who are dealing with a similar lockdown to us because of COVID-19. The difference is, there is absolutely no support for people who are unable to work. Many Christians belong to the dalit caste which is the lowest and poorest social class. They often are doing jobs where they earn a daily wage and so if they don't work, they don't eat. Often they are discriminated against when aid is available and so this is a very vulnerable time for Christians.

#### ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF THOSE BEING PERSECUTED

This might look like writing to MP's in this country to speak up on behalf of people who are imprisoned unfairly. There was an example of this when a lady called Asia Bibi was thrown into prison in Pakistan. Asia was the first woman to be sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan.

She was going to the village well to get water in 2009, when some Muslim women tried to chase her away from the well, claiming that she would make the water 'unclean' if she used it. Asia responded by saying that Jesus had rescued her and then asked, "What has your prophet done for you?" For this question, she was sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010, and was in prison until Nov 2018. Christians in the UK were asked to write to their MP's to put pressure on the Pakistani government to ensure her freedom. Asia's case isn't the only one. Pakistan's blasphemy laws are well known for being frequently abused to target minorities, including Christians.

#### ENCOURAGING CHRISTIANS BY WRITING TO THEM

One of the ways Christians can stay connected with other around the world is by writing letters of encouragement to those in prison or who are facing particular hardships.

#### VISITING THEM

Often Churches in the UK will have a link to a Church in another country. They might offer opportunities to go visit this church depending on how dangerous it is.

## 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."