

Section B



IS RELIGION THE PROBLEM OR THE SOLUTION?

- ◆ Watch Section B of the DVD
- ◆ Read the quotes on this page, then discuss the questions below and on the following pages

Discussion

Opponents of religious belief, such as A N Wilson, give examples from history where religion has divided people and been used to justify violence and hatred.

- Can you think of examples from history where religion has been used in this way by some people?
- What are your experiences of religion? Are they positive or negative?
- What makes religious belief such a powerful force?

Think about what was said in the DVD and look at the readings on the next page

- Do you think the London bombers were motivated more by their religious beliefs, political beliefs or something else?
- How far do you think religion itself is to blame in conflicts? How much of it is down to people's interpretation of it or their own personal feelings / agendas?

It is said in the Bible that the love of money is the root of all evil. It might be truer to say that the love of God is the root of all evil. Religion is the tragedy of mankind. It appeals to all that is the noblest, purest, loftiest in the human spirit, and yet there scarcely exists a religion which has not been responsible for wars, tyrannies and the suppression of truth.

AN Wilson, Against Religion

The 20th century's two great secular substitutes for faith, Nazism and Communism began in dreams of Utopia and ended in nightmares of hell.

*Sir Jonathan Sacks,
Chief Rabbi*

...it appears that these young men were motivated by the misguided teaching of people who distorted their own scriptures through over-literal interpretation, playing on the fears and insecurities of young people and pushing them from behind.

Dr Prem Sharma, South Asian Development Partnership

Although many ignorant citizens may view Jihad as fighting for faith through acts of terrorism, Jihad in fact is defined as striving for one's faith...

Islam ... has been tainted by some to cause acts such as the occurrence on 7/7.

Maria Mahmood, 15

It is completely wrong to say suicide bombing is jihad. It is not jihad.

Lord Mohamed Sheikh

The meaning of *jihad*: it can refer to both spiritual and military activity. After 9/11 and 7/7, some Muslim scholars, Muslim leaders in Britain, emphasised the spiritual aspect, what's called the *jihad an nafs*, the *jihad* against the self, the *jihad* against the evil desires of the self. That does exist in Islam, but it's not the overwhelming emphasis that we find in the Qu'ran and the Hadith, the traditions of Mohammed.

Overwhelmingly, the emphasis is placed upon martial activity, on military activity, military *jihad*... And certainly, when Mohammed Sidique Khan and his colleagues committed their atrocities on the 7th July 2005, they weren't thinking about *jihad an nafs*.

Dr Anthony McRoy, Scholar on Islam

Well, I think that to suggest that terrorism is not linked to the government's foreign policy in terms of the willingness to attack targets in Britain is to bury one's head in the sand.

Dominic Grieve MP

There is no distinction between religion and politics in Islam. So the way Muslims will see it, when people in Palestine or Iraq are oppressed, they don't see it as Iraqis or Palestinians being oppressed; they see it that Muslims, people who are part of the worldwide Muslim *ummah*, part of the worldwide Muslim community, are being oppressed. And therefore their reaction is going to be simultaneously religious and political.

Dr Anthony McRoy

Religion is a private matter, but unfortunately it's been politicised... there are people who use religion to justify their own political agendas.

Khurshid Ahmed, British Muslim Forum

Discussion

Religious faith may have been used as an excuse to justify atrocities, but it has also been the most powerful source of compassion and care for the marginalised and the poor. Some people even argue that the absence of religious faith is far more dangerous than the existence of it.

Read the quotes on this page

- **Do you agree with these quotes?**
- **Can you think of examples where religion has been a positive force in society? Can it be used to resolve conflicts? If so, how?**

If religion kills, so does the absence of religion. People have killed in the name of God. But their crimes do not rival the crimes of those who have killed believing they were gods.

All religions proclaim, as their goal, the unification of humanity. Truly religious people work to ensure that their faith contributes to resolving conflicts and tensions, not increasing them.

Judge Mota Singh

Suppose Dawkins* dream were to come true, and religion were to disappear: would that end the divisions within humanity? Certainly not. Such divisions are ultimately social constructs, which reflect the fundamental sociological need for communities to self-define, and identify those who are 'in' and those who are 'out'; those who are 'friends' and those who are 'foes'.

Alister McGrath, 'The Dawkins Delusion', p51

** Richard Dawkins is an atheist who wrote the book 'The God Delusion'.*

Religion causes division, but also brings people together. Although diverse religions may preach a versatile ethos, all religions are united on the basis of simple moral obligation. We are all responsible for each other in a community.

Maria Mahmood

Religion's always been a problem. It's nothing new today.

Young woman, London

Well, religion and politics have a lot to do with what's going on in the world today. They can destroy or they can build. But we have to make up our own minds.

Older man, London

Good works, John Wesley insisted, are no guarantee of a place in heaven. But they are most likely to be performed by people who believe that heaven exists. The correlation is so clear that it is impossible to doubt that faith and charity go hand in hand...

The only possible conclusion is that faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that, while they do not condition the attitude of all believers, influence enough of them to make them morally superior to atheists like me.

Roy Hattersley, The Guardian, Monday 12 September, 2005

Discussion

How people interpret their religious scriptures has practical implications.

Look at the readings below

- **If violence is part of Islam (or of any other religion), as suggested by Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, do you think people should be 'prepared to change beliefs and practices' as suggested by Dr Girdhari Lal Bhan?**

There have been examples throughout history where people have taken a stand on certain issues because of their religious beliefs (for example going to prison because they did not want to go to war (WWI), abstaining from alcohol, wearing certain clothing, protesting against issues they do not agree with).

- **Think of examples where you think this has been a good thing, or a bad thing.**

There is no doubt that the Qur'an includes a strand of passages extolling violence and Jihad which have always served as justification for Muslims involved in such actions down through the ages. Some voices in contemporary Islam are calling for a more peaceable reinterpretation of such passages, arguing for example that they were only applicable in a particular historical or geographical context.

However, traditional and classical Islam has always taken these passages at face value, and the generally accepted doctrine of abrogation (repeal) has always asserted that the later aggressive Medinan passages have abrogated (repealed) the more peaceful earlier Meccan verses.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, IISIC

Sir Iqbal Sacranie, secretary-general for the Muslim Council of Britain, is an example (i.e. of a prominent moderate Muslim who is ignored by the young radicals). He listed what he saw as the potential incentives to bomb innocent people, including 'alienation' and 'segregation'. But Islam? God forbid that the possibility even be entertained. That is the dangerous denial from which mainstream Muslims need to emerge. For too long, we Muslims have been sticking our fingers in our ears and chanting 'Islam means peace' to drown out the negative noise from our holy book. Far better to own up to it, not erase or revise it, just recognise it...

Irshad Manji, Time magazine, Sunday 17 July 2005

We should be prepared to discuss issues on which we differ and be prepared to change beliefs and practices that are illogical or irrelevant to the changing times or incompatible with interfaith amity.

Dr Girdhari Lal Bhan, World Council of Hindus

Religious Leaders

Look at the advice to religious leaders below

- **How important are religious leaders in shaping people's understanding of their religion?**
- **Do you agree with the advice given? Can you add to it?**

Advice to religious leaders

[Young people] are complaining that the mosque leaders, the *imams*, are completely irrelevant... when young men and young women see pictures on TV of their brothers and sisters in Palestine and Iraq being oppressed... they want to know what the Muslim leadership is going to do to change the situation. And that's what the Muslim leadership are failing to do. They are failing to provide any kind of strategic plan or lobbying which would change government policy in the Middle East, and until that happens, we shouldn't be surprised to see more and more young people committing terrorist actions here and abroad.

Dr Anthony McRoy

Stop brainwashing. Be less of a teacher more of a friend. Teach a lesson not a lecture. Learn as well as teach. Listen. Don't criticise other religions, teach us about ours.

Students, Birmingham

Conclusion

So, is religion the problem or the solution?

Some Further Questions

- Should religion be seen as a private matter? Is this the solution to religious conflict?
- Should people apologise for acts (both recent and in the past) committed in the name of their religion?
- Is there a place for faith-based schools in Britain?
- What do you think about people changing their religious beliefs or converting to another faith? Or when people give up their faith completely?