



SESSION 12: IS RELIGION THE CAUSE OF MOST WARS?



Aim

To explore whether religion is the cause of most wars and to consider human involvement in the inception of wars.



Starter

Quiz

1) In the past 3,400 years humans have been entirely at peace for how many of them?

a) 2,472; b) 1,527; c) 268

Answer: c (which equals 8% of recorded history)

2) What is the deadliest war that has ever been fought?

Answer: World War II, with over 70 million lives being lost

3) How long was the shortest war in history?

a) 45 minutes; b) 100 days; c) 11 months

Answer: a - The Anglo-Zanzibar War was a military conflict fought between the United Kingdom and the Zanzibar Sultanate on 27 August 1896. The conflict lasted between 38 and 45 minutes.

4) Name two countries which have not been to war in the last 200 years.

Answer: Sweden and Switzerland. Both these countries are militarily neutral, which they maintained throughout World War I and World War II. The Swiss and the Swedes each have a long history of neutrality: they have not been in a state of war internationally since 1815 and 1814, respectively.

A new '**geography of violence**' map reveals where in the world major battles in the past 4,000 years have taken place. If you can show this on a screen, it could be an interesting discussion starter.



Video

Watch the video **Is Religion the Cause of Most Wars?** (Running time 4:00)



Questions

Encourage pupils to write any questions on sticky notes as they occur to them.

Answer questions of understanding about the video straight away unless these will be answered later in the session. If there is not time for a question, confirm you will answer it another time. Consider using the 'car park' so pupils know you will not forget.



Exploring the Bible

Religion is commonly thought to be the cause of many wars, yet in the video, Andy Bannister referred to research which disputes this. As we consider whether Christianity promotes violence, we will look at Jesus' life and his response to being threatened with violence.

Read Mark 15:1-15

Discuss

We have seen in Mark's biography that Jesus possesses miraculous powers. What is his response when he is captured and accused of many things in verses 1-5?

Jesus does not fight against his capture despite having the ability to do so and does not respond to the accusations.

What do you think of that?

Are Jesus' accusers able to produce any evidence against him? If not, why are they accusing him? (See v.9 and v.14)

No evidence is produced. Verse 9 points us to the self-interest of Jesus' accusers – he is a threat to their power.

It is easy to look at the wrong actions of others and see the evil in them. In the video, Andy Bannister talked about evil running through every human heart.

Discuss

What do you think of that viewpoint?

The group may react strongly against this idea as we all want to believe we are ultimately good people. Allow them to express their views freely. It may be helpful to ask additional questions like, 'Have you ever done anything you are not proud of?' or, 'If you had to draw a line between what was an acceptable level of wrongdoing and what wasn't, where would you put it?'

Read Mark 15:16-39

Discuss

This section shows Jesus being subjected to emotional torment, physical violence and ultimately being put to death. **Given that Jesus has the power to stop this, why do you think he allows it?**

The Bible teaches all humans do wrong things because of the things we want. God offers humans a new heart (which wants to do good) if they will believe in his Son and follow him. Jesus' death is essential to that offer because all evil must be punished in a just society. Here we see Jesus taking the punishment on himself for the evils of all humans.



Reflection

Allow a time of reflection that is most appropriate to your group.

You may wish to reflect quietly or discuss the following:

- ◆ Does the offer of a new heart, and a new start, appeal to you?
- ◆ If Jesus does not respond to violence with violence, how much trust should we have in those who claim to speak in his name but do not exhibit the same sort of character?



Further resources

"Religion Causes Wars" An article from bethinking.org