



Religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination (part 3) – How do we address them?

KEY QUESTIONS ??

- What are religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination?
- How do secularists think about decisions?

STIMULUS

An RE lesson

During an RE lesson, students have learnt about the role of worship in different religious traditions (and considered non-religious analogues such as personal reflection). They are then split into three groups and asked to consider ways in which worship is affected by religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination.

The first group discusses the religious privilege in compelling, or giving special support to, worship. Dominic points out worship being an official part of school assemblies.

The second group discusses the religious tolerance in allowing people to worship freely e.g. the quiet room where students can go to pray or reflect over their lunch break and Rima shares her experiences of going to church on a Sunday.

The final group discusses how religious discrimination can affect worship. Paige shares her experience of their synagogue being vandalised, leaving them unable to attend prayers.

When the groups feed back, there is some disagreement over whether the groups have put the different examples of practice into the right categories, and over whether it is fair or unfair for different practices to be tolerated.

Susanna feels some examples don't fit neatly into religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination. The teacher says this can be thought of as a continuum and the class discuss how other examples fit perhaps on a left-to-right scale.

The next week the class have a history lesson about conscientious objection, perhaps considering those that have refused to fight in wars or practised civil disobedience motivated by religious or irreligious beliefs. This brings the discussion round to conscientious objection and what it means in today's society.

The class generally agree that people should not be forced to do something against their conscience, but disagree on what exactly this means and how it applies to different situations. This could bring up some issues that require careful handling, particularly as it relates to equality and the rights of others.

EXERCISES

- Q1.** How does our view of what counts as religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination affect our view on the place of religion in society?
- Q2.** Why might people disagree over whether something is religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination?
- Q3.** Why do you think that religious privilege is good or bad for a fair society?
- Q4.** Why do you think that religious tolerance is good or bad for a fair society?
- Q5.** Why do you think that religious discrimination is good or bad for a fair society?
- Q6.** Write down between six and ten examples of religious or religion-related practices.
- Q7.** Does our society treat these examples of religious practice with religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination?
- Q8.** For each example in Q7, how does this affect different people's rights?

STIMULUS

Consider the following viewpoints (a-f) on religion and society:

- a) "We're a Christian country and have earned the privileges religion has. In a democracy, if most people want Christian services provided then why should non-religious services be imposed? I like having prayers in school and at the start of meetings; if you don't like them then don't turn up."
- b) "It's a problem when the government picks and chooses between religions. But as long as each religion is treated equally then why shouldn't religion as a whole be promoted? Religious freedom means being able to practise your religion, so this should be supported by the state."
- c) "Religion might inform people's personal values, but when we come together as a group to make decisions that affect all of us, decisions should be made based on reason and evidence, not just personal feelings. Otherwise what basis do we have to say your personal religious feelings should trump mine?"
- d) "Religion is the only basis for morality and so should be the basis of our laws and decisions. If people don't follow my religion it harms our society, which we all have an interest in preventing. If a law isn't consistent with religion then it can't be moral and forcing people to follow immoral laws is wrong."
- e) "The only way to ensure no religion is treated more favourably than others is to completely ban religion from public life. If you want to be religious, you should keep that in your home, along with any religious symbolism or claims. People guided by personal religious ideas have nothing to contribute."
- f) "Everyone should have the right to practise their personal religion or belief, but this should never be imposed on others. The government should stay out of people's religious beliefs and shouldn't support religious practices or beliefs. This requires the state and its services to be religiously neutral."

EXERCISES

- Q9.** How might different people's viewpoints on religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination influence their thoughts on social issues?
- Q10.** How might different people's viewpoints on religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination be influenced by their own background and experiences?

7B's Sandwiches

Class 7B have done so well on their RE test that Mrs Butcher has decided to reward them with a big plate of bacon sandwiches. However, six students have a moral conviction which means they don't want to eat them.

- Yvette is Jewish; she doesn't want to violate a widely held Jewish belief that pork products aren't Kosher and shouldn't be eaten.
- Tayyab is Muslim; he doesn't want to violate a widely held Islamic belief that pork products aren't Halal and shouldn't be eaten.
- Sasha is Christian; she's come to believe that eating meat is a sin and her god doesn't want her to. This belief isn't shared by most Christians.
- Patrick is an atheist; he believes that the only reason people accept meat eating is because of religious influence, and that the only rational diet is pescetarianism.
- Veronika is a lifelong vegan; veganism is an important part of her life and central to her ethical and dietary decision making.
- Toby decided this morning that eating meat is ethically wrong after visiting a farm on the weekend and reading about the pork industry.

After some discussion various other students suggest the following:

- a) All the students should have to eat the sandwiches.
- b) None of the students should have to eat the sandwiches.
- c) Yvette shouldn't have to eat the sandwich because it goes against Judaism. But the others should.
- d) Tayyab shouldn't have to eat the sandwich because Muslims face religious discrimination that the others don't.
- e) Yvette, Tayyab and Sasha shouldn't need to eat the sandwiches because they all have a strong religious objection, but the others just have their personal preferences.
- f) Yvette, Tayyab, and Veronika shouldn't have to eat the sandwiches because their objections are central to their worldview.
- g) Patrick, Veronika and Toby shouldn't need to eat the sandwiches because their objections are based on their own reasoning, rather than just religion.
- h) Yvette and Tayyab shouldn't have to eat the sandwiches, because objections to eating pork are mainstream in Judaism and Islam. But Sasha should, because the idea that meat eating is a sin is fringe within Christianity.
- i) Veronika shouldn't have to eat the sandwiches because of her life long objection. But Toby's objection is recent and wishy-washy.

EXERCISES

Q11. Why are each of the objections (a–i) an example of religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination?

Q12. Each of these six student's moral preferences is consistent. What would happen if they had inconsistent or opposing moral preferences?

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Create a poster called "10 rules for religious tolerance". What will these rules be? Who will create/enforce them? How will they affect people with different religious/irreligious views?
- Review the viewpoints in resources 1.03 and 1.04 (*Viewpoints on religion and secularism (part 1) and (part 2)*). Are each of these people advocating for religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination?
- What role does religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination play in the speech in resource 1.05 (*Viewpoints on religion and secularism (part 3)*)?
- Review the councillors' arguments in resource 1.08 (*How do secularists make decisions? (part 3)*). What role does religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination play in each of their viewpoints?
- Create posters to illustrate the concepts of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination.
- Think of three examples of religious or religion-related practices which are privileged, tolerated or discriminated against. Why is this the case? What would it look like if they were treated differently (e.g. if a practice that is currently privileged were tolerated, or a practice that is currently tolerated were discriminated against)?