

Is Religion Just a Cultural Thing? Proxe Station Instructions

Is Religion Just a Cultural Thing? Content Slides Layout

The content slides layout consists of 12 slides arranged in a 2x6 grid. The top row contains the title 'IS RELIGION JUST A CULTURAL THING?' in large, bold letters. The bottom row contains various charts, surveys, and diagrams related to religion, including a world map, a survey of religious identity, a Venn diagram of religious identity, a survey of why people are religious, a survey of how to tell if a religion is 'real', a survey of why people create religions, and a survey of what a religion is.

InterVarsity New England – August 2008

Purpose

This display was meant to engage people with how they think about religions in general. Rather than compare religions and science, we primarily look at religions through the social sciences. We tap into historical, social, and psychological questions surrounding religions. This display shows how Christian faith stands up very well under that kind of scrutiny.

Intro/Invitation

Give an honest introduction as we invite people to interact with this.

- Smile. Ask, 'Would you like to do a survey?'
- 'Hi, my name is _____. I'm doing this with the Asian Christian Fellowship. We're asking whether people think religion is just a cultural (or man-made) thing. Would you like to do our survey?'
- Take these sticker dots and go from left to right. I'll ask you some questions at the end.'

Follow-up Questions (Be sharing, supportive, and/or challenging)

- So what did you think?
- Did any of those questions stand out to you or interest you?
 - Possible sharing statement: Yeah, I liked the one that says...
 - Possible challenging question: Some people think Christianity was only a human invention. What do you think?
- Possible supportive question: Have you ever seen an evaluation of Jesus like this?
- Possible supportive question: Do you have some kind of spiritual background? How have you reflected on that while you've been here at BC?

Helping Someone Explore Jesus

- Why Would People Create a Religion Like This?
 - IF THEY ASK: *Was Christianity really this radical? Why?* Because Jesus was sending his first Jewish disciples out into the whole world to bring God's mercy, justice, and healing. Have you looked at what that could be like? Do you want to be a part of that?

- IF THEY ASK: *But what has Christianity done for us lately? Are you saying you have to be a Christian in order to do good?* Look, the teaching of Jesus has brought about non-violent resistance, civil rights, abolition, women's rights, poverty relief, and widespread literacy. It's responsible for people fighting sex slavery, establishing hospitals, and reaching urban youth. I think it's been the greatest force for good in the world. We're not talking about just individual acts of kindness. We're talking about mobilizing massive communities to address real problems and solving them. Do you want to be a part of that?
- YOU ASK THEM: Do you understand why Jesus being resurrected gives us hope? It means that Jesus had become God's true human being, and that God had made him the king of the world. (That's why Jesus' followers didn't bow before Caesar.) Do you want to know more about him? Can I tell you what that means to me?
- A Human Invention?:
 - IF THEY ASK: *Why did Jesus proclaim a spiritual victory, not a military one?* He claimed to conquer the evil in humanity.
 - IF THEY ASK: *Could this idea about a 'spiritual victory' have become more popular over time, even if it was false?* It's unlikely. It would have been like standing up in France when it was occupied by the Nazis during World War II and saying that you had won the decisive victory against evil. I don't think anyone would believe you unless you rose from the dead, declared yourself a new type of human being, and proved your ability to transform people. Yet in Roman-occupied Israel, lots of Jewish people decided to follow Jesus. And Jewish nationalism was at an all time high, and lasted for another 100 years. The list of Jewish revolts we put there isn't even complete; Josephus the Jewish historian lists a lot more.
 - YOU ASK THEM: What did you put here? Why?
- Which Is Merely a Social Construct?
 - IF THEY ASK: *So you think Hinduism and Atheism are social constructs?* Well, what did you put on the question How Could You Tell if a Religion is Merely a Cultural Thing? Do you mind if we test them?
 - Hinduism legitimates people in power through the caste system; it legitimates wealth since the poor have to work off their bad karma on their own – why help them? And it legitimates men's desire for sex; look at how lower-caste women are treated in India!
 - Atheism legitimates survival of the fittest, therefore materialism. And marriage doesn't really mean anything; it's just sex. Richard Dawkins said, 'Sex is merely the gene's means of producing more genes.' That legitimates men's desire for sex, doesn't it?
 - Yet don't you long for more than what these stories offer?
 - YOU ASK THEM: The question is what story do you want to live in? Your story affects your ethics. The Greek and Indian religions looked forward to the soul escaping the body, so the body wasn't really important. They are either free with the body or don't value the body. Don't care for the poor, don't care about who you have sex with. Atheism looks at us as bodies with no soul. So our desire for love, truth, connection, justice – all that is just biochemical inventions in our head only and will probably never happen for the world because they aren't *real*. Don't you want more?
- The Resurrection – A Jewish Invention?
 - YOU ASK THEM: Do you think that Jesus and his movement caring for the Roman oppressor was a popular idea? That letting go of their land was a popular idea that didn't require lots of proof and argument?
 - YOU ASK THEM: Do you want to explore the idea of a living Jesus who is still active in the world?
- Explain the 'big story.' Then ask them, 'Do you want to let Jesus be the leader of your life?' Or ask, 'Do you want to meet again sometime to talk more?'

Helping Someone Deepen a Relationship with Jesus

- Why Would People Create a Religion Like This?
 - YOU ASK THEM: What do you understand about Jesus being resurrected, and why it gives us hope? That Jesus had become God's true human being, and that God had made him the king of the world. (That's why Jesus' followers didn't bow before Caesar.) Do you want to know more about him? Can I tell you what that means to me?

- A Human Invention?:
 - YOU ASK THEM: Maybe if you've grown up in the church or something, it may seem like just a human thing. But maybe there's a kernel of truth in there somewhere. What questions do you have? Would you like to find out more about Jesus' spiritual victory over evil and why it's relevant to us and to the world?
- Which Is Merely a Social Construct?
 - YOU ASK THEM: How can you live more fully in God's story?
- The Resurrection – a Jewish Invention?
 - YOU ASK THEM: Do you want to explore what it means to relate to a living Jesus who is still active in the world?
- Explain the 'big story.' Then ask them, 'Do you want to read a book or talk with someone? Whatever is helpful to developing a relationship with Jesus?' Or ask, 'Do you want to meet again sometime to talk more?'