

Can we afford religion?

Wednesday, 7 November 2012

Duration: 23:07

GCSE	
AQA	Religious Studies B: Unit 2
Edexcel	Religious Studies Units 1-7
OCR	Religious Studies B: B601, B602
WJEC	Religious Studies A: Unit 5 Religious Studies B: Unit 1
A level	
AQA	Religious Studies: AS Unit C
Edexcel	Religious Studies: Units 1-4
OCR	Religious Studies: Unit G571
WJEC	Religious Studies: RS 1/2 CS

This is a Faith Interview featuring John Sulston, Charles Clarke, Andrew Brown and Linda Woodhead. It focuses on John Sulston's reasons for being a humanist as well as the relationship between science and religion.

Professor John Sulston is Chair of the Institute for Science, Ethics and Innovation at the University of Manchester. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 2002 jointly with Sydney Brenner and Bob Horvitz, for the work they had done in understanding the development of the nematode (worm) *Caenorhabditis elegans*. He was among 21 Nobel Laureate signatories of the 2003 document "Humanism and Its Aspirations". John Sulston was the Founder Director of the Wellcome Trust Sanger Centre from 1992 to 2000, where one third of the task to sequence the human genome was completed. He has campaigned to defend the findings of genome research against private patenting. He chaired the Royal Society Working Group which produced the report "People and the Planet" in 2012.

He is the son of an Anglican priest. However, he began to question his faith and at university 'came out' as a humanist.

This programme is suitable for use with A level and GCSE students studying personal belief, religion and science and religion and society.

In order to get the most out of the programme it would be worth brainstorming students beforehand on questions such as:

- What is the relationship between religion and science?
- Should religion and science be kept separate?
- What can religion contribute to science and vice versa?
- Why do we have religions?
- Is religion a danger to the flourishing of human society?

All of these issues are addressed in the discussion and the Question and Answer section.

Sulston argues that it is in human nature to create religions. He says that humans are social animals and also pack animals. Religion unites people. However, for him, there is nothing of importance in religious teaching except for the 'Golden Rule' which is found in almost every religion. He believes

that there is no need for belief in a 'Higher Power'. Indeed, he argues that such a power essentially removes responsibility from humans who can always blame or attribute something which happens to that power. In this way he considers that the presence of religion stunts human development and leads to people making decisions which are not necessarily the best for society or not taking the necessary steps to improve society. He says that human beings are transcendent in their own right and that they do not need dogma, myth and story to live fulfilled lives.

It is worth noting that, although it may be a slip, at one stage he seems to be implying that Christianity necessarily requires a belief in creationism.

As always, after watching the discussion, it is worth returning to the students' views and find out if and how their personal opinions have been influenced or changed by what they have heard.

For 6th formers it might well be possible to watch the discussion straight through, however, for younger students it might be advisable to watch each segment at a time (there are clear breaks between each part). After discussion, it would then be worth watching the two-minute summary to clarify and crystallize the thoughts and views expressed.