



## **Pilgrimage Moments: A Gay Man Talks to The Pope**

### **Introduction**

This lesson plan can be used in any Scheme of Work about religious attitudes to same-sex relationships.

In the 2019 BBC TV series *Pilgrimage: The Road to Rome*, eight well-known personalities, all with differing beliefs and faiths, put on backpacks and walking boots and set out to cover the Italian section of the ancient pilgrimage route, the Via Francigena, which finishes in Rome.

Actors Les Dennis and Lesley Joseph, professional dancer Brendan Cole, comedians Stephen K Amos and Katy Brand, Olympic champion Greg Rutherford, Irish Eurovision Song contest winner Dana and television presenter Mehreen Baig lived as modern-day pilgrims.

When they finally arrived in Rome, Pope Francis granted the Pilgrims a private audience. Stephen didn't hold back, and explained that he had come on the Pilgrimage looking for answers and faith, but that - as a gay man - he'd never felt accepted by religion, and still didn't. Then the Pope responded in a way that no one expected...

### **Contents**

Lesson Overview	2
Film List	3
Lesson Plan	4
Resources	8

# Overview

<b>Suitable for:</b>	Key Stage 4
<b>Lesson Objective(s):</b>	To consider the attitude of different religions to same-sex relationships.
<b>Key Question:</b>	Does religion accept gay people?
<b>Time:</b>	1 hour
<b>TrueTube Films:</b>	<a href="#"><u><i>Pilgrimage Moments: Discussing Homosexuality and Acceptance</i></u></a> <a href="#"><u><i>Pilgrimage Moments: A Gay Man Talks to The Pope</i></u></a>
<b>Resources:</b>	Internet-connected whiteboard or enough devices for the class.
<b>Key Words:</b>	homosexual heterosexual homophobia

## Film List



[Pilgrimage Moments:  
Discussing Homosexuality  
and Acceptance](#)



The Pilgrims are nearing the end of their journey, and over dinner, Stephen leads a discussion about religion's attitudes to him as a gay man.












[Pilgrimage Moments:  
A Gay Man Talks to The Pope](#)

The Pilgrims have reached Rome, and are granted an audience with the Pope himself - and Stephen is surprised by a papal hug.

# Lesson Plan

	<p><b>Starter</b></p> <p>Begin the lesson by asking your students - either individually or in pairs - to come up with five rules for having a polite discussion with someone who has different beliefs or opinions to you.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No shouting.</li> <li>• No insults.</li> <li>• Take it in turns to give your point of view.</li> <li>• Allow the other person to finish their sentences.</li> <li>• Try to understand the other person’s point of view.</li> </ul> <p>Give the class a few moments to write down their rules, and take some suggestions. Write the good ones (!) on the board, and if there’s time, try to unpack why the bad ones are unhelpful.</p> <p>Explain that same-sex relationships, or “homosexuality” is still a big issue for many religious people, and that the lesson aims to help us understand why, and how we might move forward as a society through discussion and by listening to each other’s points of view.</p>	<p>5 mins</p>
	<p><b>Key Words</b></p> <p>Explain the meaning of the key words:</p> <p>homosexual      A person who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex.</p> <p>heterosexual      A person who is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.</p> <p>homophobia      Prejudice and discrimination directed against homosexual people.</p>	<p>3 mins</p>

<b>Main Activities</b>		
	<p>Hand out the <i>Religious Views on Same-Sex Relationships</i> information sheets (below in the <i>Resources</i> section).</p> <p>You will probably want to concentrate only on the religions you are studying, but the sections on Christianity and Islam would be useful (but not essential) for when you show the films.</p> <p>The students should write a short summary of the main views in each religion, making sure they use all the words in <b>bold</b>.</p>	15 mins
	<p>Explain to the class that they are going to watch two clips from a BBC series called <i>Pilgrimage: The Road to Rome</i>, in which a group of celebrities (which your students might or might <i>not</i> recognise!) were challenged to follow an ancient pilgrimage route to Rome in Italy, which is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope, the most senior priest in the Church.</p>	1 min
	<p>Now watch the first film: <a href="#"><u><i>Pilgrimage Moments: Discussing Homosexuality and Acceptance</i></u></a></p>	4 mins
	<p>Once you've seen the film, discuss with the class...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the Pilgrims obey the class rules (made at the start of the lesson) about talking to people with different beliefs?</li> <li>• Did the views of Dana (the Roman Catholic woman) and Mehreen (the Muslim woman) align with the "official" view?</li> <li>• Do the class agree or disagree with Brendan's view (the Australian man, last to speak) that <i>people</i> are the problem, and not <i>religions</i>?</li> </ul>	4 mins
	<p>Now watch the second film: <a href="#"><u><i>Pilgrimage Moments: A Gay Man Talks to The Pope</i></u></a></p>	8 mins

	<p>Having seen the film, ask the class to discuss...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think Dana felt, as a devout Roman Catholic, to meet the Pope?</li> <li>• Do you think Stephen (the gay man) was brave to challenge the Pope? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What do you think the Pope meant when he said, "Giving more importance to the adjective rather than the noun, this is not good", when Stephen introduced himself as a gay man?</li> <li>• How do you think Stephen felt when the Pope gave him a hug?</li> </ul>	<p>5 mins</p>
	<p>To finish the lesson (and complete for homework if you run out of time), ask the students to write a diary entry, imagining themselves to be Stephen (so they'll be writing in the first person <i>as</i> Stephen), reflecting on his day meeting the Pope. How does he feel afterwards? Does he feel accepted? How would he describe his emotions? Does he have hope for the future?</p>	<p>10 mins</p>
	<p><b>Plenary - Has Learning Taken Place?</b></p> <p>Ask a few students to share their diary entries with the class. Make sure they all receive a round of applause.</p>	<p>5 mins</p>
	<p><b>Extension - Suggested Further Activities</b></p> <p>There are several other films on TrueTube which explore the relationship between Religion and homosexuality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Katie</a> explores how a young Roman Catholic woman has managed to reconcile the fact that she is gay with her faith.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In <a href="#"><i>Out of Love</i></a>, Kezi and Jess talk honestly about the struggles they faced coming to terms with being both Christian and gay, when it seems to them that the Church has blown the issue of sexuality out of all proportion.</li><li>• The film <a href="#"><i>Gay and Married</i></a> explores the problems of being Muslim and gay, and married to a woman.</li></ul>	
--	---	--

# Resources

*Religious Views on Same-Sex Relationships* - Information Sheet



# Religious Views on Same-Sex Relationships

## Christianity

There are five clear mentions of homosexuality in the Bible.

**Genesis** 19:1-14 tells of two angels coming to stay with a man called Lot in a notoriously evil city called Sodom. While they were there, “all the men from every part of the city of Sodom - both young and old - surrounded the house. They called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’” This is clearly not very welcoming behaviour and God soon punishes the city for its evil ways by destroying it completely. Only Lot and his children escape.

**Leviticus** is a book full of laws for the Jewish people and homosexuality is forbidden in no uncertain terms: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable” (18:22) and, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.” (20:13)

However, all three of these quotes are from the Old Testament. Christians believe that the Old Testament is true, but they do not believe they have to obey all the laws that were clearly meant for an ancient Jewish community. However, it can be difficult deciding which rules should be followed (e.g. do not murder), and which can be safely ignored (e.g. food laws).

The New Testament is different matter. It was written by the early Christians and contains teachings that they should follow. The book of **Romans** (1:26-27) describes a time when people did not follow God and lists homosexual acts among the things they got up to: “the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion”. This implies that only Godless people would do such a thing.

In a similar vein, **1 Corinthians** (6:9-10) includes homosexuals on a list of people who will not be going to Heaven: “Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Some people say that **1 Timothy** (1:9-10) also gives homosexuals a hard time: “We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.” The word translated from the original Greek as “perverts” also includes homosexuals, or so the argument goes.

As with any issue, **Evangelical Christians** would consult the Bible to see what it says about homosexuality, and then apply it to their lives. The Bible says it is wrong, therefore most Evangelicals do not accept that Christians can live as homosexuals. Some say it is a mental illness that can be cured. Others say that even if it *is* someone’s nature, homosexual relationships are still wrong. Or, to put it another way – *being* homosexual isn’t wrong, *doing* homosexual things is.

**Liberal Christians** would argue that the Bible was written at a time when homosexuality was not understood. Also, all three of the New Testament passages were written by the same person – **Paul** – and it might just be his opinion, not the opinion of the early Church. Liberal Christians would say that Jesus’s teaching of loving your neighbour applies in this case. As long as someone is in a committed and faithful relationship, then it doesn’t matter what their sexuality is.

In the **Church of England**, the different views on homosexuality threaten to cause a split between those who believe homosexual acts are wrong and those who believe homosexuality should be accepted. There are already some openly gay priests and a few churches will even bless same-sex relationships, although this has never been officially allowed by the General Synod (the Church of England’s governing body) and there is no official ceremony.

Other denominations have already made up their minds. The **Roman Catholic Church** teaches that any sexual act must potentially lead to pregnancy. Or, to put it another way: if you can’t get pregnant by doing it - don’t. For this reason, most Catholics believe that homosexual sex and contraception are wrong.

On the other hand, **Quakers** - also known as The Religious Society of Friends - have been celebrating same-sex unions since 1987, with a ceremony very similar to a Quaker wedding.

# Islam

The vast majority of Muslims agree that homosexuality is **haram** (forbidden). They would say that a person chooses to be homosexual, it is not a person's nature.

There are two mentions of homosexuality in the **Qur'an**, although both are open to interpretation. First of all in **Surah 4**:

"If two men among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, leave them alone; for Allah is Oft-returning, Most Merciful." (4:16 Yusufali)

And then the story of Lut (or Lot) in **Surah 7**, which is similar to the story as told in the Bible:

"We also (sent) Lut: He said to his people: 'Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you? For ye practise your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds.' ...And we rained down on them a shower (of brimstone): Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime!" (7:80-84 Yusufali)

Muslims believe that sex was created by God for the procreation of children and therefore homosexual sex is wrong, because it removes that possibility. Although the Qur'an recommends forgiveness for men who "repent and amend", several **Hadith** (sayings of Muhammad) record the Prophet recommending the death penalty for homosexuals. But the Hadith can be unreliable, so the various schools of **Shari'ah** Law are divided on what should be a suitable punishment. Homosexuals can be sentenced to death in some Muslim countries (eg Saudi Arabia, Iran, Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen), whilst in others (eg Bahrain, Qatar, Algeria and the Maldives), homosexuals are put in prison or given corporal punishment (e.g. a public beating).

There is a small minority of Muslims who argue that the Qur'an does not condemn homosexual love, just sexual attacks (in the story of Lut) and adultery (in the context of Surah 4). They say that if someone is born homosexual, it's their nature and God must have created them that way.

# Judaism

There are several branches of Judaism, broadly divided into three groups: **Orthodox Judaism**, which has a strict traditional interpretation of the Torah; **Reform Judaism** which believes that the Torah needs to be re-interpreted for the modern world, seeing it more as a book of guidelines than a book of rules; and **Conservative Judaism** which is somewhere in the middle, acknowledging that Jews have to keep up with the modern world, but at the same time wanting to *conserve* traditional Judaism (hence the name “Conservative” – it doesn’t mean that they vote for the Conservative Party).

Because of the story of Lot in **Genesis** and the laws in **Leviticus**, Orthodox Jews believe that homosexuality is wrong. However, the death penalty no longer applies because a sentence of death can only be passed by a court of the Jewish Temple which hasn’t existed for 2000 years. Some Orthodox Jews believe that homosexuality is a mental illness that can be cured, while others say that being homosexual is not wrong, but homosexual relationships are.

Reform Jews would say that sexuality is something we are born with, so the traditional laws need to be re-thought. Most Reform Jews would allow homosexuals to hold positions of authority in a synagogue, such as Rabbi or Cantor (the person who leads the prayers) and even celebrate same-sex marriage. However, Reform synagogues retain the right to disagree with this view if their congregations want to.

Some Conservative Jews agree with the Orthodox view, some agree with the Reform view. Most Conservatives would agree that homosexuals should be accepted and might even agree to the blessing of a same-sex relationship (when prayers are said for the couple) in a synagogue. However, they generally do not agree with same-sex marriage, because one of the purposes of marriage is to have children, nor would they allow a homosexual to become a Rabbi or Cantor.

# Sikhi

The **Guru Granth Sahib** (the Sikh holy book) does not mention homosexuality.

It is a goal of Sikhi to treat all human beings as **equals** regardless of race, caste, colour, creed, gender, or sexuality. Also, marriage is seen as the union of two souls, and the soul is believed to be sexless, so it seems that there is a strong argument for the acceptance of homosexuality in Sikhi.

However, most Sikhs believe that homosexual sex is wrong. It is the duty of all Sikhs to marry and have children. Same-sex marriage then, like celibacy, is not allowed. Sikhs who have homosexual desires are encouraged to ignore their sexual feelings in favour of a higher spirituality. In fact, all Sikhs should aim for a higher spirituality and their relationships should be based on love and respect rather than lust.

# Hinduism

There are many holy books in Hinduism. Some are considered to be **shruti** ("heard"), which are believed to have come from **Brahman** (God) and some are considered to be **smriti** ("remembered") which were written by humans. Homosexuality is not mentioned in any of the shruti texts, but it is condemned in some of the smriti books:

The **Mahabharata** says, "Foolish and evil men engage in all forms of sexual intercourse without a female womb, forcing themselves upon other men. They are born again without their organs as neuters." (13.145.52).

The **Garuda Purana** lists homosexual acts among the sins that will be punished in **Naraka** (the Hindu equivalent of Hell) before being re-born.

The **Bhagavad Purana** includes a story about Brahma's creation of all the beings on Earth which included, "the godless who, fond of sex, approached the Creator in lust for copulation. At first the worshipful Lord had to laugh about being followed by the shameless ones of darkness, but he then, terrified and annoyed, hurried to get away" (3.20.23-24). Some say that this describes the evils of homosexual lust.

Finally, one of the duties in Hindu marriage is to have children, so the evidence would suggest that Hinduism is against homosexuality and if asked, most Hindus would agree.

Before 2009 homosexuality was illegal in India but prosecutions were rare. Most of the time, as long as homosexuals live discreetly, they are generally ignored. Sexuality of any kind is not really talked about in India. People prefer to keep their sex lives private, although attitudes are slowly changing.

Some Hindus accept homosexuality, because it is not forbidden by the Shruti texts. There are Hindu priests who have performed same-sex marriages, arguing that the soul is neither male nor female and that homosexuality may be a result of having lived past lives as the opposite gender.

When homosexuality was legalised in India, Anil Bhanot (general secretary of The UK Hindu Council) said, "The point here is that the homosexual nature is part of the natural law of God; it should be accepted for what it is, no more and no less."

# Buddhism

The **Buddha** did not mention homosexuality in his teachings. He referred to “sexual misconduct” as a sin but did not explain what this means. Over the centuries, the phrase has been given different meanings by the different cultures where Buddhism has flourished.

**Theravada Buddhism** (found mainly in South East Asia: Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and parts of Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia) emphasizes the importance of the monastic life. Monks live celibate lives, learning to rise above their physical urges to a higher spiritual plane. Any kind of sexual activity would therefore be wrong. However, for non-monks, opinion is divided. Some people say that homosexual sex is against the natural order and therefore wrong, others say that as long as homosexual sex is between consenting adults who love each other, then it is acceptable.

**Mahayana Buddhism** (found mainly in East Asia: China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam) has a generally tolerant attitude to homosexuality, not regarding it as “sexual misconduct” as long as it is between consenting adults.

**Vajrayana Buddhism** (found mainly in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Mongolia) is led by the **Dalai Lama** who said that homosexual acts were, “...part of what we Buddhists call bad sexual conduct. Sexual organs were created for reproduction between the male element and the female element – and everything that deviates from that is not acceptable from a Buddhist point of view.” So any sexual act that cannot potentially lead to pregnancy would be “sexual misconduct” as far as he is concerned.

In the West, Buddhism has always been associated with liberal values, emphasizing the Buddha’s teachings on tolerance, on compassion and on the need for individuals to seek their own truth within themselves. Most Western Buddhists would therefore say that homosexuality is completely acceptable between consenting adults. Some Buddhist temples in the West are beginning to offer same-sex marriage ceremonies.