



Debating the climate crisis: Question Time 2019 teachers' notes

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Follow-up questions

- How might a Christian support Imam Qari Asim's line of argument?
- How might a secular environmentalist respond to Imam Qari Asim's comment that 'we are trusted with the creation of God'?
- How would you respond to the student who spoke in the clip?

Featured panellists' biographies

Agamemnon Otero MBE is a co-founding director of Repowering. He is also a director of marine transport infrastructure company Hydra and the Repowering projects Energy Garden and Brixton Energy Solar 1, 2 & 3. He co-founded industry advocacy body Community Energy England and sat on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Office's Community Energy Contact Group. He has a Master's degree in Architecture: Advanced Environment and Energy and previously worked as the director for Renewable Energy Project Finance and Social Responsibility at a financial institution. In 2014 he was made a London Leader, in 2016 he was awarded an MBE for services to community energy and in 2017 he was named one of the 51 Most Impactful Green Leaders globally by CSR Congress.

The Rt Hon. Lord Willetts FRS is the Executive Chair of the Resolution Foundation. He served as the Member of Parliament for Havant (1992-2015), as Minister for Universities and Science (2010-2014) and previously worked at HM Treasury and the No. 10 Policy Unit. Lord Willetts is a visiting Professor at King's College London, a Board member of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a Board member of Surrey Satellites and of the Biotech Growth Trust. He is the Chair of the Sanger Institute and the Chair of Foundation for Science and Technology. He is an Honorary Fellow of Nuffield College, an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society and the Chancellor of the University of Leicester. Lord Willetts has written widely on economic and social policy. His book *The Pinch* about fairness between the generations was published in 2010. His latest book *A University Education* is published by Oxford University Press.

Qari Asim MBE is a senior Imam at Makkah Mosque in Leeds and Legal Director at global law firm, DLA Piper. Qari is passionate about fostering relations between communities and is a trustee of

Christian Muslim Forum. He is an executive board member of National Council of Imams & Rabbis, deputy chair of Government's Anti-Muslim Hatred/ Islamophobia Working Group and a faith advisor to the Near Neighbours programme. He also acts as a consultant to a number of mosques, institutions, public bodies and agencies, including Mosaic, founded by HRH Prince of Wales, to inspire young people to realise their talents and potential. He is interested in issues related to government policy, education, business, leadership, youth empowerment, gender equity, environment and social welfare. He is a blogger and columns or comments from him appear in *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Yorkshire Post* and *Huffington Post*.

Context of the event

The Westminster Abbey Learning Department's largest 16+ event is the annual Question Time, following the format of the popular TV show. Over 250 students took the opportunity to engage with public figures from a variety of backgrounds on issues of their own choosing. For the Abbey, this is an opportunity to discuss the religious perspective on current affairs as on the panel each year are voices from the major UK faiths. Questions from students this year included the role of religion in the public space, the climate crisis, gender inequality and Islamophobia and led to passionate and articulate contributions from the floor, as well as from the distinguished panel.

This year's event was chaired by **Samira Ahmed** and our panel comprised of:

- Qari Asim MBE - Senior Imam and Inter-Faith Advisor
- The Reverend Laura Jørgensen - Rector of St Botolph without Aldgate, in the City
- Agamemnon Otero MBE - Co-founding director of community energy company Repowering
- The Rt Hon. Lord Willetts FRS - Executive Chair of the Resolution Foundation

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Transcript

Student 1: What are your positions on the increasingly worsening environment conditions affecting not only the UK but the rest of the world? And do you support the students striking from school in order to raise awareness?

AO: So I really see an incredible world right now where more people have been displaced from climate than they are from war and so that and most people moving to cities and then the cities are being haggard by all these environmental crisis. So I'm really excited and support what's happening in the school strikes but I'd also like to highlight the importance and of things like have Greta Thunberg was working with Jane Goodall. This sort of intergenerational, some of your professors, your teachers, your headmasters, they have busted themselves to get there for you and that knowledge is super important. I really want to say how important it is to have that youth strike but also reach up and over to your parents or grandparents and those incredible [stone bolts] of your community because that's where the knowledge lies in passing it.

DW: Yeah I mean I think the science evidence about what's happening and why is overwhelming. Clearly we do face a fundamental global crisis unless above all we can bring down our emissions of carbon dioxide. When I then look at the practical politics of applying the science, a lot of people would say that nuclear power is one way we can produce energy without producing carbon dioxide. Nuclear power is very, I can see a guy on the second row shaking his head. As soon as you start trying to do something specific like that, you'll find there are people who say no we don't want your nuclear power and people who say it's very hard to see how you can really have electricity that doesn't produce any carbon dioxide without nuclear power being part of the mix. When we look at the crops we need to produce and the chemicals we need to produce them, there are a lot of scientists who say genetically modifying crops is a good way of producing more food whilst using less pesticide. There are other people who say GM crops are evil, they threaten the environment, we can't have GM crops. So as soon as you move from the overall objective, which is absolutely right, of tackling the climate crisis by producing less carbon dioxide and look at individual specific decisions that people have to take. Do we build a nuclear power station or not? Do we have GM crops or not? At that point, commanding consent to any specific course of action is hard work but every time you have a meeting like this I hope, we hope, we make some progress. All those kind of decisions added up are how we are going to tackle the genuine crisis that we all face.

Student 2: The school strikes are amazing, it's all the youth saying we need to do something about climate change but the government doesn't seem to be doing very much. There are people, we're going vegan, we are not using our cars, we are using public transport but we've still got all these power stations and gas companies and they still doing all this stuff. I think the problem is we have all these conversations about how we need to do something but nothing seems to be actually done

AO: 80% of the wind that hits Europe, hits the UK first and we could have been a net energy exporter until the Tory administration stopped onshore wind from happening. We could have in 12 years, so 2 years away, we would have had solar cover everything but they pulled the feeding tower from solar. So really what we have is pre- and post-tax subsidies for nuclear, for oil and gas and if there was a level playing field we would have that. There is nothing other than that, I've already argued this on LBC and everything. All the facts are there. Nuclear is not even a discussion we have because there is so much ramifications negative to the environment that we can do it without, with the battery storage, solar and wind.

QA: Environmental crisis has reached its peak in terms of how much is impacting, on not just humans but also the creation of God. And I think to a degree it's not just the politicians but also faith leaders and others have actually neglected this area. Because in our faith traditions, if I speak from my own faith tradition Islam, you know how much emphasis is placed on being someone who is trusted with the creation of God.

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