

Applied Ethics (Christianity)
11. Religion and Equality

The principle of equality

- Fair means something which is free from bias, fraud or injustice.
- Prejudice means to judge before having all the facts.
- It is an idea or feeling which one person holds and which affects another person.
- Discrimination happens when someone acts on their prejudices and treat another unfairly.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was drawn up in response to the abuse of basic human rights during World War II e.g. the Holocaust.
- It listed 30 rights which it considered to be inalienable i.e. could not be taken away from someone.
- The first right listed is ‘all human beings are born free and equal’.
- The second is ‘Everyone has the right to life, liberty and freedom from fear and violence’.
- Human rights are the basic guarantees for every human being to be able to achieve happiness and self-respect.

Christian beliefs about equality

- Christians believe that God created everyone equal.
- St Paul wrote:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
Galatians 3:28
- Jesus taught:

“A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”
John 13:34
- To discriminate against someone goes against the second of the two great commandments:

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”
Leviticus 19:18/Matthew 22:39

The Bible’s teaching about racism

- The most famous teaching about racism in the Bible is that of the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
- In the story a man is attacked by robbers.
- He is passed-by by both a priest and a Levite.
- Eventually a Samaritan stops and helps him.
- Jesus’ listeners would have been Jews. Jesus knew that Jews hated Samaritans and considered them to be racially inferior.
- The message of the parable is that everyone is my neighbour.
- In the Book of Leviticus Jews were told:

“The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born.”
Leviticus 19:33

Own point of view and different points of views

- In order to get full marks on the last 12 mark question it is necessary to give another point of view, your own point of view as well as references to Christianity in your answer.
- A Hindu might believe that it is important to forgive and seek reconciliation otherwise you pass on bad karma.
- Even non-religious people might think reconciliation important otherwise you become bitter and twisted.
- Some people find it impossible to forgive others, particularly over big moral issues such as murder or rape.
- Forgiveness and reconciliation is a long process. In South Africa after apartheid, the government set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which gave people the opportunity to make a public apology for past crimes and violations of Human Rights. It allowed the country to move on as a more integrated society.

Christian attitudes towards racism

- Although the Bible condemns racism, Christians have not always lived up to its teachings.
- In 1948 South Africa introduced a system of segregation between blacks and whites called apartheid.
- The system of apartheid was supported by the local Dutch Reformed Church.
- In the early 1980s the World Alliance of Reformed Churches condemned the Dutch Reformed Church.
- In 1994 apartheid was abolished in South Africa
- The USA has a long history of slavery and segregation.
- Martin Luther King Jr. was a black Baptist minister who challenged the system of segregation and brought about a change in the law.
- King was assassinated in 1968.

Christian attitudes towards gender

- The Christian Church has often been accused of sexism e.g. referring to God as “He” and historically only ordaining men as priests.
- Some Christians take a literal interpretation of ‘God made Man in his own image’.
- St Paul also wrote that women should take a subservient role in the Church:

“Women should remain silent in the churches.”
1 Corinthians 11:3
- However Jesus showed great respect towards women.
- Jesus had women followers among his disciples.
- In Mark’s Gospel, it is to women that Jesus appeared first after his resurrection.
- The Church of England now allows women to be ordained priests.
- The Roman Catholic does not allow women to be ordained.

Attitudes to other religions

- The majority of the world’s population belongs to a particular religion:
 - Christianity 33%
 - Islam 21%
 - Hinduism 13%
 - Buddhism 6%
 - Other 12%
 - Non-religious 14%
- Some religions do not think it is necessary to make new converts e.g. Judaism and Hinduism.
- Christianity and Islam are proselytising religions (proselytise = to make converts).
- Christianity believes in ‘evangelisation’ (evangelise = to spread the Good News i.e. Jesus’ death and resurrection).

The Christian Mission

- Christians believe it is important to spread Jesus’ message. Jesus commissioned his disciples:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
Matthew 28: 20

Missionaries Today

- Christian missionaries still go out to developing counties today.
- Some Protestant evangelical churches still think it is important to make converts to save souls.
- For the majority of main stream denominations (e.g. Roman Catholic, Church of England ...etc.), the emphasis is not so much on making converts to Christianity but helping the countries to develop.
- CAFOD and Christian Aid are two good examples.

Evangelism

- The word ‘evangelism’ means spreading the Good News i.e. the Gospel.
- Christians believe they have a duty to spread Jesus’ message to others.
- Gideons International do this by distributing free copies of the Bible and New Testament to schools, prisons, hospitals and hotels.
- The Salvation Army believe it is their mission to help the poor and disadvantaged in a practical way by setting up shelters and soup kitchens.

Ecumenism

- Ecumenism is the coming together of different Christian denominations, worshipping and working together.
- Some see the divisions between the Christian denominations as bad a witness to non-Christians
- Many Christians today think it is important to bear in mind Jesus own words:

“Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.”
John 17:21
- In the past Roman Catholics have been suspicious of other denominations. However, after Vatican II it was seen as important to recognise and work with Christians of other denominations.
- Some think ecumenism is a waste of time – Christians should concentrate on practical problems (e.g. Third World).
- They see no need for uniformity, arguing that Christians already have a basic unity.
- Some Christians are concerned that it could dilute the truth of the Gospel and create another version of Christianity.

Forgiveness and reconciliation

- Jesus was asked how many times a man should forgive his brother. Jesus replied not seven times, but seventy times seven. Matthew 18:22.
- In the ‘Our Father’ is says we should forgive just as we have been forgiven our faults by God.
- Jesus taught to even love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
- In the Roman Catholic Church there is the sacrament of reconciliation where a person can confess their sins to a priest.
- Christians believe that its message is one of reconciliation between God and the world.

Amnesty International

- Amnesty International was founded in 1961.
- It is the world’s largest voluntary body working for human rights today.
- It is independent of any government, politics, ideology, economic interest or religion.
- It aims to:
 - Seek the release of all prisoners of conscience
 - Obtain a fair and prompt trial for all political prisoners detained without charge or trial
 - Abolish torture and the death penalty in all cases
- Although Amnesty International is not a religious organisation, many Christians approve of its actions and are members.