

Religion, Peace and Justice

DON'T FORGET – take small breaks every 20 minutes or so to keep your brain working at maximum efficiency – like the well tuned machines you all are!

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attitudes towards war• Just War Theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attitudes towards the use of violence• Attitudes towards pacifism• Reasons for these attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of Justice• Aims of punishment• Attitudes towards capital punishment• Beliefs about the treatment of criminals• Responses to the treatment of criminals
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of social justice and injustice• Beliefs about social injustice• Responses to social injustice

Christian attitudes towards war: the Just War

- In the Old Testament Wars happen as a way of God punishing those nations who oppose the Israelites – the Israelites fight on behalf of God – a Holy War, where they destroy their enemies.
- Initially in the early days of Christianity the new followers of Christ were pacifists and any soldiers who became Christians were expected to leave the army.
- When Emperor Constantine became a Christian in the 3rd Century the pacifism of Christianity was problematic for the huge empire of Rome – if they remained pacifist then anyone who chose could invade without anyone putting up a protest.
- This led to the establishment once again of the idea of a Holy War.
- In the Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas devised something called 'Just War Theory'.
- Aquinas saw the appalling suffering caused by the idea of Holy War and believed that there should be an assumption that War was wrong unless it was being fought for just reasons.
- Conditions of a Just War – this criteria should be met before a war could be started:

Before War is declared

The war proposed must be declared by the authority of the state or ruler.

There must be a Just cause.

There must be a JUST intention – the war must be to promote good and stop evil.

The war must be a last resort.

The good done must outweigh the harm done.

It must be possible to win.

During War the methods must be just:

The methods (what is done in war) must be proportionate – no more force than necessary.

Innocents should not be targeted.

After War

Peace must be restored after the war is over.

The general idea is to limit the number of Wars that happen and for people to behave morally within War.

Christian attitudes towards the use of violence and towards pacifism

- Christians look to the Bible to look for guidance about violence and war.
- Although the Old Testament has stories of God ordering the Israelites going to war the New Testament says nothing directly about War – although it does reject the use of violence for personal gain.

Biblical Teaching:

In Matthew 5 Jesus says:

“You have heard it said ‘an eye for an eye...’ but now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, let them slap you your left cheek too.”

It is thought that Jesus was teaching that acts of revenge were wrong.

More from Matthew:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Christians may argue that you cannot ‘love your enemy’ if you are being violent towards them.

And more ...

“Blessed are the peacemakers, God will call them His children.”

Again this seems to suggest that God wants people to be peaceful not violent.

When Jesus was arrested he refused to use violence to resist arrest and stopped one of his disciples when he got a sword and tried to stop the authorities from arresting him.



Put away your swords! All who take the sword will die by the sword!

- Christians may argue that killing in war is as bad as any form of murder. If you kill because you hate the enemy this is wrong and if you treat them as if they aren't really human so you can bring yourself to kill them then this is wrong because all humans are children of God.
- People who refuse to go to war are called pacifist.
- Quakers are pacifist – they believe that if it's wrong to murder people ('thou shalt not kill') then it is ALWAYS wrong – and will only breed more violence.
- Quakers believe that they can find better, more creative ways to solve problems and will often try to be mediators in times of war.
- Being a Pacifist is not just about not using violence to solve problems between individuals or nations but also about actively seeking to bring about Peace.

Other Christians argue that Pacifism may be the IDEAL way to solve problem but what should Christians do if that doesn't work? They may say that sometimes violence/war may be necessary as the 'lesser of 2 evils' – it may be worse to stand by and do nothing, for example not standing up against Hitler.

Concept of Justice

- Justice

Christian responses to social injustice

Violent and Non-Violent Action

- Some Christians argue that it is never acceptable to use violence to achieve Justice in Society.
- Martin Luther King argued that the black population should never use violence to achieve equal rights – he believed in Non Violent Direct Action – resisting the unfair laws but without using violence.
- MLK used boycotts (like the Bus Boycott), sit-ins, marches, all designed to make the point without physically harming anyone.
- MLK said this way of stopping of injustice was ‘voluntary, dignified and creative’ – he meant it was a positive choice, it doesn’t take away anyone’s human rights and that it is inventive rather than just reacting in desperation and anger.
- Other Christians have said that like with Pacifism non-violence doesn’t always protect those who are most vulnerable. What would have happened if the American Government had just shot all the Civil Rights Protestors? Sometimes violence may be necessary as a last resort.
- Some supporters of Liberation Theology – which sees that God is on the side of the poor - believe it may be necessary to take up arms (go to war with) evil rulers who oppress and exploit their people in order to protect the innocent and destroy evil.
- They may argue that in the Bible God commanded:

Amos 5: 24 _____ ***“Let justice roll flow like stream,
and righteousness like a river that never runs dry.”***

They may argue to stand by and allow people to be oppressed and murdered and do nothing is a worse evil than to use violence to protect.

Remember Oscar Romero from El Salvador



“Revolution is necessary to free the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, cloth the naked, and bring a life of well-being for the needy majority of the people.”
“God is on the side of the poor, the Church is on the side of the poor.”

You may have learnt about Cardinal Ernesto – He believed that like with Just War Theory sometimes violence was necessary to resist an evil regime.

- He grew up in Nicaragua where there was a lot of oppression by the Government of the people.
- Anyone who disagreed with the Government was murdered.
- As a catholic Priest Ernesto believed that it was wrong to let the Government go unchallenged – if he loved his neighbour he would have to stand up against them – even if this mean violence.
- Ernesto believed in something called ‘Liberation Theology’.
- This belief taught that God is on the side of the poor and that he wants to set people free from poverty and oppression – some also believed that if this meant using violence to do it then it was justified. The lesser of 2 evils.

- Ernesto led an armed attack on the Government forces – believing that he could not stand by and allow the oppression and suffering to continue.
- Eventually Nicaragua had democracy and he served in the Government as the education minister for many years.



Christian beliefs about the treatment of criminals

Remember the different ideas about the purpose of punishment:

Retribution

Protection

Rehabilitation + Reform

Revenge

- The Old Testament teaching about the treatment of Criminals is that of making amends for the wrong done – compensation to the same extent of the harm done - ‘an eye for an eye’.
- Punishment in the Old Testament seems to be about for retribution and revenge and capital punishment was acceptable for some crimes including murder and adultery, among others.
- In the New Testament there seems to be an emphasis on forgiveness and leaving God to be judge. In the story of the Woman caught in Adultery Jesus suggests that you are only entitled to condemn someone if you yourself are perfect. He tells the woman to ‘*go and sin no more*’.
- These different approaches lead to Christians having differing views about how criminals should be treated. Some believe that they should pay for their crime and emphasis punishment. People should be held responsible for what they do and this means harsh punishment for their own good and the good of society.
- Others may think it is important to understand the criminal’s background and state of mind – they may think that reform and rehabilitation are more important than just punishing people – people need to be changed.
- Either way, for Christians there is the belief that people can change and faith in Christ can change their life – both Moses and Paul were murders who reformed!
- Many Christians may think that the sort of punishment that allows a criminal to make up for their crime and to understand the suffering they have caused may be best. It is more creative than just ‘banging someone up’.

Capital Punishment

For

- Although Jesus doesn’t say anything about this issue there are crimes in the Old Testament that carry the death penalty.

- Today there are Christians who are on both sides of this debate – and feel equally passionate about it.
- Those in favour argue that it is Justice if someone takes a life then they forfeit theirs – *'an eye for an eye, a life for a life'*.
- They may say that because life is Sacred if someone takes a life then they must pay the ultimate price – with their life.
- They may argue that some criminals are so dangerous they pose a constant threat to the prison officers who care for them and to protect them and society at large some people need execution.

Against

- Other Christians believe that if murder is wrong then this includes capital punishment. When the woman was caught in adultery according to Jewish Law at the time she should have been executed whereas Jesus stepped in and saved her life – God should be the ultimate judge not us.
- Other Christians argue that to sentence someone to death and have them on death row is inhumane.
- They argue that killing someone doesn't really give them an opportunity for rehabilitation. People do change and capital punishment ignores this.