

Applied Ethics (Christianity)

10. Religion, peace and justice

War in the Bible

- Old Testament portrays God as being wrathful and vengeful.
- The ancient Israelites often went to war carrying the Ark of the Covenant into battle to help them.
- The Ten Commandments strictly forbid people from killing. However, this is generally understood to mean 'do not to commit murder'.

Jesus' teaching about violence

- In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells his disciples that they must offer no resistance or retaliation towards their enemies.
- "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)
- "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too." (Matthew 5:39)
- When Jesus was arrested one of the disciples cut off the ear of one of the guards, he said that those who live by the sword shall themselves die by the sword (Matthew 26:52).

St Augustine's Just War Theory

- The Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire. Christians began to question their responsibility towards the state.
- St Augustine thought that it was right to go to war if it was going to defend the innocent.

St Thomas Aquinas' Just War Theory

In the 13th century St Thomas Aquinas developed Just War Theory: War has to meet the following criteria:

- War should be declared by the proper authority
- There should be a good reason for going to war.
- The reason for going to war must be to do good.
- War must be the last resort.
- Has to be proven that the war will produce more good than evil.
- It must be possible to win.
- The amount of force must not be too excessive.

The Crusades

- The Crusades were military expeditions undertaken by Christians between 1095 and 1270
- to recover the Holy Lands from Muslim control.
- The name crusade comes from Latin meaning "cross". Crusaders used the cross as an emblem of their cause.
- The crusaders thought they were doing the will of God (Deus Vult).

Modern Just War Theory

A modern form of Just War Theory:

- Going to war must be in defence after an unjust attack.
- There must be a realistic chance of success.
- The cost of rebuilding the country after the war should be taken into account.
- Only military targets should be attacked not civilians.
- The force used should be for a good reason.

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.
- Important to remember that you don't need to be religious or believe in God to be concerned about peace and justice. Many atheists are actively in organisations like CND and Amnesty International. Many politicians believe it is important to fight against social injustice.
- 'Islam' means peace. Muslim attitudes to war and peace are based on the Qur'an. Some people instantly think of 'Jihad' when they think of Islam's attitude to war. However, it must be remembered that 'Jihad' simply means 'to struggle'. For a Muslim this struggle might be living out their faith. Islam is a religion of peace in which fighting and war are seen only as a last resort.

Pacifism

- Some Christians have always held that armed conflict is wrong and can never be justified.
- They take Jesus' words literally when he said, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too."

Quakers (The Society of Friends)

- The Society of Friends, or Quakers believe that war can never be justified.
- They believe that evil can never be overcome by weapons which harm and kill.

Notable Pacifists

Donald Soper

Soper was a Methodist minister who spoke out against the use of armed aggression. He was banned from speaking on the radio during WWII. He devoted much of his life to preaching from a soap box on Hyde Park corner.

Bruce Kent

A former Roman Catholic Priest, Monsignor Bruce Kent became the General Secretary of CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He spoke out against the British government's nuclear weapon programme during the 1980s.

Non-Violent Protest

- Some Christians believe that non-violence is the best response to aggression.
- Martin Luther King was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.
- He believed it was wrong to use violence against racism.
- He used speeches, boycotts and sit-ins and other forms of peaceful protest.

Non-Passive Resistance

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran minister who was involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler.
- He believed it was his Christian duty to use force against an evil regime.
- He was caught by the Nazis and hung for treason at Flossenburg in 1945.

Aims of Punishment

- Deterrent
- Reform the criminal
- Protect society
- Retribution

Old Testament and punishment

- In the Old Testament, revenge or retribution is seen as a legitimate aim of punishment.
- "If anyone injures his neighbour, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured, so he is to be injured". Leviticus 24:19
- The commandment's original intention was to limit revenge.

Jesus' teaching about punishment

- Love your neighbour – and pray for those who persecute you
- No retaliation - turn the other cheek
- Do not judge – lest you might be judged
- Forgiveness - seventy times seven if necessary
- Prisons - "...I was in prison and you visited me!" (Parable of the Sheep and Goats)
- The woman caught in adultery - "...Who so ever is without sin, let them be the first to cast the first stone!" John 8 : 3 – 11
- Hypocrisy - "Why do you look at the speck of dust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own!"

Elizabeth Fry

Elizabeth Fry was a Quaker who during the 19th century worked to improve prison conditions.

The Death Penalty

The last woman to be hung in Britain was Ruth Ellis in 1955. Gwynne Evans and Peter Allen were the last people to be hung in 1964. The Death Penalty was abolished in 1964 in Britain.

Arguments for:

Deterrent - If a potential murderer knew that if they were caught they would be executed, they wouldn't do it. It stops other people from committing the same offence.

Revenge - People need revenge for the death of a murdered victim. The Bible says 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. It is only right that you take a murderer's life away.

Arguments against:

Cruel - No form of execution is painless.

Discriminates against the poor - In the USA more blacks are executed than whites. Those who can afford good lawyers are more likely to get off the Death Penalty than those who are poor.

No evidence of a deterrent - Murder rates continue to rise even in those states that have the death penalty.

Social Justice

- Social justice refers to when a society treats people fairly and equally without discrimination.
- Christians believe that humanity has been created in the image and likeness of God.
- Christians might respond to social injustice by:
 - Peaceful demonstration
 - Civil disobedience
 - Campaigning through the media and internet
- Martin Luther King Jr is a good example of a Christian who campaigned against the injustice of segregation in the 1960s.
- Some Christians might join organisations like:
 - Anti-slavery International
 - Amnesty International
 - Mencap

Liberation Theology

- Liberation theology has its origins among the poor in South America.
- It interprets Jesus' teachings in terms of a liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions.
- It claims that God speaks primarily to the poor.
- Father Camillo Torres took part in armed uprisings. He said, "Any Catholic who isn't a revolutionary is living a mortal sin by not fighting for justice for the poor."
- Oscar Romero became an outspoken critic of the El Salvador government and the army, often speaking on the radio. He was shot / assassinated / murdered / executed on 24th March 1980 while saying mass.