

# RELIGION, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

## AQA GCSE Theme E – Christianity and Buddhism



### Causes of crime

#### Causes of crime:

- ✓ **Poverty:** people who grow up in poverty may have a higher chance of committing crimes such as theft and burglary.
- ✓ **Upbringing:** Some people learn criminal behaviour from family members.
- ✓ **Mental illness:** Although mental illness is the cause of some crimes, people with mental health problems are more likely to be the victims of crime, rather than the offender.
- ✓ **Addiction:** Drug addiction can lead to theft and drug dealing.
- ✓ **Greed:** It can be argued that greed is the cause of many crimes, such as fraud or theft.
- ✓ **Hate:** The main victims of hate crime in the UK are Muslim women. Racist and homophobic crimes are also examples of hate crimes.
- ✓ **Opposition** to an unjust law: For example, Martin Luther King deliberately broke the laws in the USA.

### Aims of punishment

- ✓ **Retribution:** To make the criminal pay for what they have done (e.g., an eye for an eye).
- ✓ **Deterrence:** to warn others off committing the same crime.
- ✓ **Reform:** to teach the criminal how to behave better so they don't re-offend (e.g., love your neighbour).
- ✓ **Protection:** to keep the public safe from the criminal.

### Types of punishment

- ✓ **Prison:** In the UK prison is used for more serious crimes such as sexual or violent crimes. One problem with prison as a form of punishment is the high reoffending rate. In the UK almost 60% of prisoners reoffend within one year of their release.
- ✓ **Community Service:** This is where the criminal does work within the community to 'pay back' or repair the damage that they have caused. Some people think that community service is too easy, but some people would argue otherwise as it has a much lower reoffending rate than prison.
- ✓ **Corporal Punishment:** This is a physical punishment, such as caning or flogging. This is illegal in the UK. Some people think it is too harsh and brutal, but others think prisoners need a harsh punishment to act as a proper deterrent.
- ✓ **Capital Punishment:** This is the death penalty. Capital punishment was banned in the UK in 1965. One of the main reasons was that there had been miscarriages of justice, where innocent people were executed. However, the death penalty does still exist in some countries around the world.

### Support for the death penalty:

#### Non-religious

- ✓ **Retribution** – one of the aims of punishment, to make the criminal pay. Capital punishment does this.
- ✓ **Deterrent** – one of the aims of punishment is to warn others from committing the same crime. However, studies have shown that the death penalty is not a deterrent to murder.
- ✓ **Protection** – one of the aims of punishment is to keep the public safe from dangerous criminals. Capital punishment does this.
- ✓ The principle of utility states that an action (such as the death penalty) is right if it produces the maximum happiness for the greatest number of people affected by it. So if the use of the death penalty is proven to produce happiness (by protecting society) then it is right.

#### Christianity:

- ✓ There are over 20 crimes that the Old Testament states deserve the death penalty.
- ✓ 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life'. This quote directly supports the death penalty.
- ✓ In Genesis: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall their blood be shed." It is right to take revenge if someone has harmed you. Retribution is one of the aims of punishment.

#### Buddhism:

- ✓ Buddhists live by the five precepts, however most Buddhists do recognise that this is often about balance. Their main aim is to reduce suffering. So if a criminal cannot be rehabilitated, and it would cause less suffering to others than is there an argument that the death penalty is the best option?

### Opposition to the death penalty

#### Non-religious

- ✓ **Racist?** – in the USA, black criminals are almost 4 times as likely as whites to receive the death penalty.
- ✓ **Barbaric** – it is a cruel and brutal form of punishment, making us almost as bad as criminal.
- ✓ **Miscarriage of justice** – sometimes an innocent person is convicted (e.g. Tim Evans, this case helped change the law in the UK).
- ✓ **Reform** – one of the aims of punishment is so the criminal can learn from their mistakes. The death penalty offers no chance of reform.

#### Christianity

- ✓ 'Image of god' – the life of all humans, even criminals, is sacred. Only God should decide when a life ends.
- ✓ '70 x 7' – Christians are taught to forgive, even in extreme cases.
- ✓ **Sanctity of life** – this is the Christian belief that all human life is sacred (belongs to God), so taking human life is always wrong.
- ✓ The sixth commandment states: "Do Not Murder". This means it is wrong to kill.
- ✓ "Love your enemies." Hatred and violence are wrong, We should forgive our enemies, not harm them.
- ✓ "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." Anytime you help people in need you are helping God. This is from the parable of the Sheep and Goats where Jesus says there are six ways to help people in need, one of them is visiting people in prison.
- ✓ "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you also do for me." We should treat criminals how we would like to be treated, this means treating them fairly.

#### Buddhism

- ✓ **Ahimsa.**
- ✓ The Buddha said that a great man is one who 'hurts not any living being'. This teaching is from the Dhamma, a collection of the Buddha's teachings.
- ✓ The first precept is not to harm or kill. The five precepts are the main moral rules in Buddhism. The first rule, ahimsa, means that violent punishments (including the death penalty are wrong).

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### Good and Evil Intentions and Actions

#### Key ideas:

- ✓ Some people think a good action is an action that does not break the law. However, there are also many good actions that exist outside the law such as helping people in need or giving to charity. Also, some laws may be unjust, so sometimes a good action may involve breaking the law (such as when Martin Luther King encouraged the deliberate breaking of the racist segregation laws)
- ✓ Evil actions are normally those that break the law, but there are also some actions which may not be illegal, but which some people think are evil (e.g. adultery). Your intention is why you do an action. Many people think your intention is just as important as your action.

#### Christian views:

- ✓ The Bible teaches that any evil actions or intentions are wrong
- ✓ Evil actions such as using violence are considered sinful and against God
- ✓ Christians believe humans were created by God to be good, but they have been given free-will, so sometimes choose to disobey God and commit sins / evil acts. Because of original sin, all humans can be tempted to do evil

#### Buddhist views:

- ✓ Buddhists don't tend to use terms like good and evil, instead they talk of 'skilful' and 'unskilful' intentions and actions.
- ✓ Skilful thoughts and actions are those that don't harm others, unskilful ones are those that cause harm. The main rule Buddhists try to follow is ahimsa – non-harm.
- ✓ The principle of karma teaches that intention is very important - if an action was deliberately intended to cause harm, then it causes negative karma. One of the rules in the 8-fold path is 'right intention'.
- ✓ Buddhists try to follow the 8-fold path and the 5-precepts to ensure their intentions and actions are skilful and don't cause harm.

### Attitudes to Suffering

#### Key ideas:

- ✓ Christians and Buddhists believe in not causing suffering to others
- ✓ They also believe it is important to help those who are suffering.

#### Christian attitudes towards suffering

- ✓ Whatever the cause of suffering, Christians believe that they have a duty to help those who are suffering
- ✓ Christians try to follow the example of Jesus – he helped many people who were suffering (e.g. he healed the blind and the sick)
- ✓ Christians try to follow the teachings of Jesus – he told his followers to 'love your neighbour as yourself' and said that God will judge them on how much they help/ignore those who are suffering; in the Parable of the Sheep & Goats – 'whatever you do for the least of my brothers you also do for me'.
- ✓ Jesus instructed his followers to feed the hungry and care for the sick.
- ✓ God cares about people's suffering.
- ✓ For Christians, suffering is not caused by God but is a result of human free-will.

#### Buddhist attitudes towards suffering:

- ✓ The main goal in Buddhism is to overcome suffering and achieve enlightenment
- ✓ Buddhism teaches in the Four Noble Truths that suffering (dukkha) is an inevitable part of life- it is also one of the '3 marks of existence'
- ✓ The Buddha realised this when he first went outside the palace and saw old age, sickness and death
- ✓ The Buddha taught that we can't escape some types of suffering (old age, sickness, death) but that there is another type of suffering that is caused by the 3 poisons (anger/greed/ignorance) that we can overcome
- ✓ Buddhists try to overcome suffering by accepting that it is part of life and by letting go of the three poisons
- ✓ Accepting impermanence (Anicca) also allows us to avoid some types of suffering (e.g. story of Kisagotami)
- ✓ Buddhists try not to cause others to suffer. They do this by following the 5 precepts and the eightfold path.
- ✓ Buddhists also believe that if you cause suffering, you create negative karma which will influence your rebirth.

### Forgiveness

#### Key ideas:

- ✓ Forgiveness means to let go of blame and anger against a person for wrongs they have done.

#### Christian attitudes towards forgiveness:

- ✓ The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant: Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive another member of the church if they sin against him. Jesus replies, seventy-seven times.
- ✓ Parable of Sheep and Goats demonstrates how Christians should take action to help those in need. Jesus explained that helping a person, whoever they are, is the same as helping Jesus himself.
- ✓ Matthew 6:14-15 "...if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."
- ✓ 'An eye for an eye' could literally be taken to mean punish others as they punish you, however it could also mean as long as there is restitution people should move on and forgive.

#### Buddhist views

- ✓ Buddhists believe in 'ahimsa' (non-harm). Forgiving is healing and non-harming so would be supported by Buddhists.
- ✓ Anger is one of the three poisons. Not forgiving someone for causing harm breeds anger and resentment which is itself harmful.
- ✓ Forgiveness breeds good karma. Atonement, as well as forgiving others as well as ourselves, is an important step on the path towards a better life and towards enlightenment. Giving up hatred and forgiving the harm done to us by others allows us to move on and to achieve peace of mind.