

All religions

Justice, Good and Evil

Working for justice and trying to live good lives are important for many religious believers.

Justice is Important for Many People

- 1) Justice is the idea of each person getting what they deserve and maintaining what's right. It includes punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent. For victims of crime, justice might mean seeing the offender pay for what they did through punishment, and being made to realise the impact of their actions.
- 2) Justice is important to religious and non-religious people. Most believe justice is essential for countries to run properly and to ensure that people follow the law. Religious people believe that God/Allah is just:

CHRISTIANS believe justice is important — everyone should be treated fairly as God created people to be equal. Christians see God as just, and think that they should be too: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly..." (Micah 6:8 NIV). They believe that, after a crime is committed, justice can be restored by giving the offender a punishment for their actions.

ISLAM teaches Muslims to work for justice, and to treat others justly and equally. It is an important part of shari'ah (Islamic law). Muslims believe that they should always strive for justice to take place: "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives" (Qur'an 4:135). Many also believe that those who fight for justice will be rewarded in the afterlife, but those who don't will be sent to jahannam (hell).

JEWS must follow the mitzvot set out in the Torah, and there have been courts (Bet Din) ensuring these laws are followed since long ago. Jews believe that everyone is equal, and they are encouraged to work for justice: "You must purge the evil from among you... Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:19-21 NIV). This means that the victim needs to be compensated by the criminal for justice to truly be done.

People Should Do Good and Avoid Evil

- 1) Christianity, Islam and Judaism all teach people to live good lives. This includes following religious teachings, e.g. by helping other people. The good things that people do will please God/Allah. Religious people believe they should avoid sin and evil, as their actions will be judged when they die.
- 2) Many believe that there are two types of evil. Moral evil is when suffering occurs because of human actions, e.g. murder and rape. Natural evil is suffering caused by the world, e.g. floods and earthquakes.
- 3) Both crime and punishment are connected to suffering. Religious people are normally against most crimes because of the suffering they cause. In some sacred texts, suffering is described as a punishment for the sins people have committed or as a test from God — read the second part of p.79 for more information.

- In CHRISTIANITY, the sheep and goats parable (Matthew 25:31-46) says that everyone will be judged and separated into the good (the sheep) and the bad (the goats). Jesus said that helping another person is like helping him. If you ignore someone in need of help, it's like ignoring him: "...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45 NIV). The people who haven't helped will suffer because of this.
- Many Christians believe that evil and suffering is caused by humans misusing their free will — they believe that the original sin people are born with makes them capable of sin (see p.7). Some say Satan tempts people to sin.

- ISLAM teaches that Allah is merciful and those who have done good things will be rewarded, but he will make people who do bad things suffer for them.
- If people intend to do something good, that will help them on the Day of Judgement, but if they intend to do something bad, it won't count against them (see p.20).
- Many Muslims believe that the devil, Iblis, tries to make humans turn to evil.

"He admits whom He wills into His mercy; but the wrongdoers - He has prepared for them a painful punishment." Qur'an 76:31

- The JEWS sacred texts explain how to behave in a good way.
- Jews believe that evil and suffering is the result of humans taking advantage of the free will they were allowed by God.
- But God will forgive people if they commit sin: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19 NIV).

- 4) Non-religious people reject the idea that God causes suffering. They might feel religion isn't worth the suffering it can sometimes cause, e.g. as an excuse for terrorism, or through persecution of believers.

Why is justice important? Just is...

...that won't get you any marks. Summarise why justice is important to religious believers.

REVISION
TASK

Crime

General, Christianity,
Catholic Christianity

Crime happens on a daily basis for many reasons. Many religious organisations work to put an end to it.

Many Crimes Break Religious Laws and Teachings

- 1) There are many different types of crime, including murder, theft and hate crimes.
- 2) Christianity, Islam and Judaism are against these as they break religious moral laws.
- 3) Christians and Jews are strongly against murder and theft as they break two of the Ten Commandments. In Islam, the Qur'an also condemns murder and theft.
- 4) Murder, often seen as the worst crime, goes against the idea of sanctity of life (the belief that life is sacred) held by all three religions.
- 5) Crimes such as theft and hate crimes disregard religious teachings that people should be treated equally, as the offender shows no concern for the victim.

A hate crime is any type of crime committed against someone because of their ethnicity, religion, etc.



Crime is Caused by Lots of Different Factors

Most religious believers would agree that if someone does something illegal, they deserve to be punished. But the cause of crime isn't as simple as someone just being bad — there are many different reasons why a person might commit a crime:

- 1) **POVERTY** — People who are poor might turn to crime out of desperation. They might steal food or money, or earn money illegally, e.g. selling stolen goods.
- 2) **UPBRINGING** — Some people might become criminals if they've had a troubled childhood, or if they've grown up around crime and it's become normal to them.
- 3) **MENTAL ILLNESS** — This can lead people to commit crimes because, e.g. they may not fully understand the difference between what's legal and illegal. Others may be easily persuaded into committing a crime.
- 4) **ADDICTION** — Being dependent on something such as drugs or alcohol can lead to people doing illegal things to fund their addiction.
- 5) **GREED** — Someone might steal or earn money illegally to get something they want but can't afford.
- 6) **HATE** — A person might do something illegal because someone else has treated them badly, or because they're driven by prejudice, e.g. racism.
- 7) **OPPOSITION TO UNJUST LAW** — A law might be broken as a protest if it's seen as unfair. In the 1950s and 60s many people, such as Rosa Parks, broke laws that treated black people unfairly in the USA.

Many feel that the reason behind the crime should be taken into consideration, and many religious people would want to help the individual as well as tackle the bigger issues that cause crime. However, certain causes would be more likely to get sympathy than others, e.g. poverty would be seen as more reasonable than greed. Many think that breaking a law that is unfair or that goes against religious law is acceptable.

Christians Work to Prevent Crimes

- 1) Christians are strongly against crime — they're told to care for others: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31 NIV). Committing a crime such as theft or a hate crime doesn't treat the victim as an equal. Murder is seen as destroying something created by God.
- 2) Christians have defied laws to fight for what's right, e.g. Martin Luther King (see p.66). In this case, Christians may support breaking laws: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29 NIV).
- 3) Many Christians would help people who are e.g. struggling in poverty, in order to tackle the source of crime. They might donate to charity or help out in food banks, among other things.
- 4) Christian groups also play their part to try to prevent crime:

The Prison Fellowship is a Christian organisation in England and Wales that helps prisoners by praying for them, through group activities, and helping maintain contact with their families. They try to make prisoners see how they have affected victims of their crimes and stop them from committing crime again when they leave prison, e.g. through restorative justice (see p.59).

Street Pastors, who help people out at night (see p.13), have helped to lower crime rates and prevent violence.

Elements of both Islam and Judaism help to prevent crime.

Muslims Believe Crime Interrupts the Relationship with Allah

- 1) Muslims believe that on Yawn ad-Din (the Day of Judgement — see p.20), those who've committed crimes might not be sent to jannah.
- 2) Many Muslims also believe that a life of crime doesn't allow believers to focus on what really matters — their faith and connection with Allah.
- 3) Murder is seen as one of the worst crimes: "whoever kills a soul... it is as if he had slain mankind entirely" (Qur'an 5:32). Crimes such as theft and hate crimes defy Islamic teachings about people being equal.
- 4) Muslims hope that key elements of their religion help to reduce the likelihood of crime. For example, compulsory charitable donations (zakah — see p.22) help to tackle poverty. Alcohol, drugs and gambling are banned, reducing the chance of addiction. Parents are taught to follow teachings in the Qur'an to give their child the best possible upbringing, which should prevent them from turning to crime. Some mosques offer help for families too.
- 5) Islam teaches Muslims to speak out against unjust laws that go against Allah's teachings, so many would understand someone breaking an unjust law in protest against it.
- 6) In shari'ah courts, the circumstances surrounding the crime are looked into thoroughly, so the defendant is punished accordingly.
- 7) Some Muslims work to try to reduce crime by helping prisoners and ex-offenders:

"Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression." Qur'an 16:90

The Muslim Chaplains Association offers religious guidance in prisons in the UK. It aims to reform prisoners and stop them from committing crimes after they are released, e.g. by helping them to reintegrate into society again. It also tries to keep ex-offenders connected to chaplaincies in their local community so they continue to receive support after prison.

Mosaic is a charity that pairs young people approaching the end of their prison sentence with a mentor. As they adjust to life outside of prison, the mentor will help them with things like finding a job and somewhere to live — with the aim that this should prevent them from returning to a life of crime.

Judaism Forbids Murder and Theft in the Noahide Laws

- 1) The Noahide Laws, which Jews believe that everyone in the world should follow, state that murder and theft are forbidden. Crimes such as hate crimes go against Jewish teachings on equality.
- 2) Crime goes against God's teachings — Judaism teaches that people who disobey God will be punished by him.
- 3) Some aspects of Judaism work to reduce the chances of crime. For example, Jewish financial aid (tzedakah) is donated to charity and helps to combat poverty. Jewish parents are told to guide their children and to make sure they know what's right and wrong.
- 4) Many Jews would protest against unjust laws, and perhaps break them, as there are examples in the Torah of defying the law for what is right. In Exodus 1:16-17, two midwives were told by the king to kill Hebrew baby boys, but they didn't follow his instructions.
- 5) Some rabbis work with the Jewish Prison Chaplaincy in order to provide support for Jewish prisoners. The support offenders receive can help them to turn their backs on crime when they leave prison.

"...the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish..." Deuteronomy 11:17 NIV



There's lots to learn here, so have another read if you need...

Then have a go at writing a short summary of religious teachings about crime, and what religious people do to try to prevent crime.

