

# Religion, peace and conflict



# 1. Introduction to religion, peace and conflict

Throughout history people have gone to war (fighting between nations to resolve issues between them). Often the intention of those fighting a war is to create peace- a absence of conflict, which leads to happiness and justice. For Christians and Muslims the concepts of peace, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation are important both in the aftermath of conflict and as tools to prevent war from happening

## Peace

- Peace may be hard to achieve through war because its aftermath is often instability and resentment
- Christians and Muslims seek inner peace and tranquillity through prayer and mediation
- The prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when God will bring peace, and the Qur'an also emphasises peace ***'He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many people...Nation will take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.'*** Isaiah 2:4

## Justice

- Isaiah says God, the ultimate judge, will establish justice. Justice is equality of opportunity
- If more privileged parts of the world are seen to be the cause of injustice, conflict may result
- In Islam 'the Just' is one of the 99 names for God who gives humans laws to follow
- In Christianity God is a Just God, Christians should follow this

## Forgiveness

- Christians are taught in the Lord's prayer to forgive if they wish to be forgiven
- Forgiveness does not mean no action should be taken to right a wrong, but when conflict is over forgiveness should follow. Actions to establish peace and justice need to be taken to avoid further conflict
- Both Muslims and Christians believe God offers forgiveness to all who ask in faith

## Reconciliation

- Reconciliation means a conscious effort to rebuild a relationship which has been damaged by conflict
- It is also important in the prevention of conflict

## 2. Violence, violent protest and terrorism

- The right to protest (express disapproval, often in a public group) is a basic right in a democracy. The UK allows peaceful public protest marches if police are told six days before so that violence can be avoided.
- Christians believe protest to achieve what is right is acceptable as long as violence is not used- Jesus taught ***'Blessed are the peacemakers'***. Martin Luther King Jr, a Christian pastor organised peaceful protests against unjust racist laws which succeeded in bringing civil rights to African-American citizens .
- However, humans have freewill and where non-violent protest is ignored violent protest may be used for the common good.
- In Islam, fighting is only allowed in self-defence of the faith and only against those who actively fight against you.
- ***'Do not repay anyone evil for evil ...If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'*** Romans 2:17-19
- ***'Do not kill each other for God is merciful to you. If any of you does these things out of hostility and injustice, We shall make him suffer Fire'*** Qur'an 4:29-30

### Terrorism

- Some individuals or groups use terrorism to further their cause by killing innocent people
- Suicide bombers, car bombs and using cars to injure others are examples of terrorism tactics
- The aim of terrorism is to make society aware of their cause, make people frightened and push the authorities in to giving way to their demands
- Terrorists may link their cause with a religion but no religion promotes terrorism
- Most Christians and Muslims believe terrorism is wrong as it targets innocent people.

## 3. Reasons for war

### 1. Greed

- This is war to gain more land, more power and more resources.
- The Bible warns against greed ***'For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil'*** Timothy 6:10
- The Qur'an warns against greed also ***'God does not like arrogant, boastful people who are miserly...hiding the bounty God has given them'*** Qur'an 4:36-37

### 2. Self-defence

- If a country or religion is under attack then conflicts can happen. It would be seen as entirely right to defend your country against attack or fight evil such as genocide
- The Bible says fighting in self-defence is okay ***'Do not repay anyone evil for evil...if it is possible as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone'*** Romans 12:17-19
- The Qur'an also says it is okay ***'Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged- God has the power to help them'***

### 3. Retaliation

- At times a country will be attacked in a way that provokes retaliation e.g. WW1
- Retaliation however can often lead to the escalation of a situation with war
- Jesus taught that retaliation is wrong ***'But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also'*** Matthew 5:39
- Islam teaches God allows fair retribution but retaliation must be measured and not cruel

# 4. Nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction

- **Nuclear weapons** are weapons that work by nuclear reaction; they devastate huge areas and kill large numbers of people.
- US forces used atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during WW2, causing 140,000 people to die in Hiroshima alone. Japan surrendered ending the war so some people may say that their use of nuclear weapons was justified
- Since then countries have developed more powerful nuclear weapons which are used as deterrents

- Other types of **weapons of mass destruction** (WMD- kill large numbers of people/cause great damage) include:
  - 1) **Chemical weapons** (use chemicals to poison, burn or paralyse humans and destroy the natural environment)
  - 2) **Biological weapons** (that have living organisms or infective material that can lead to disease or death)
- The Chemical Weapon Convention (1993) made the production, stockpiling and use of these weapons illegal worldwide. Chemical weapons are thought to have been used in Syria and Iraq.
- Biological weapons are illegal but many countries have them

## Christian Beliefs

**All are wrong because:**

- Sanctity of life- only God has the right to end life
- Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons kill huge numbers of innocent people ***'Do not murder'*** Exodus 20:13
- The quote ***'Eye for an eye'*** can be used to justify war BUT NOT nuclear weapons

**HOWEVER, some Christians might see nuclear weapons as a deterrent to maintain peace**

## Muslim beliefs

**All are wrong because:**

- God created all life on earth. Muslims have a duty to preserve it
- The Qur'an seems to rule out weapons of mass destruction ***'Do not contribute to your destruction with your own hands, but do good, for God loves those who do good.'*** Qur'an 2:195

**HOWEVER, some Muslims might see nuclear weapons as a deterrent to maintain peace**

# 5. Just War

The Just War theory gives the conditions/rules that must apply if a war is to be considered just. **Christian** writers Augustine (fourth century) and Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) developed the concept of a 'just war'.

## Rules to decide whether the war is just (jus ad bellum)

- Be fought for a just cause (e.g. self-defence)
- Have a just intention ( fought to restore a greater good)
- Be the last resort
- Have a reasonable chance of success
- Be proportional (excessive force should not be used)

## Rules about how the war should be fought (jus in bello)

- The war should be fought by just means (innocent civilians should not be targeted)
- Only appropriate force should be used
- Internationally agreed conventions must be obeyed (Geneva Convention rules)

## Muslim attitudes to conduct in a war

The first Caliph, Abu Bakr, came up with rules for Muslims:

- Muslim armies must not harm innocent civilians, animals, fruit-bearing trees or people who are devout in their faith such as monks
- Dead bodies must not be mutilated and prisoners must be treated in a civilised way

Muslims believe:

- Wars should be proportional and fought without anger, but it is better to avoid war if possible
- Soldiers must be of sound mind and prisoners should be treated in a civilised way

# 6. Holy War and religion as a cause of violence

- A Holy War is a war fought in the name of God; believing God has sanctioned the war.
- A Holy War seems to a contradiction-how can killing large numbers of people be holy?
- In **Christianity** the Old Testament refers to God helping the Jews in battles to win the Promised Land.
- In the **Crusades** (11-14<sup>th</sup> century battles between Christians and Muslims) both sides believed God was on their side.
- **For both Muslims and Christians** a holy war must:
  - be authorised by a religious leader with great authority
  - only fought to defend the faith from attack (e.g. the right to worship being denied)
- Those who take part gain spiritual rewards) e.g. if they die in battle they will go straight to heaven/paradise
- In Islam, holy war must meet the criteria for a just war .

## Religion as a cause of violence

- In the UK most Christians and Muslims do not respond violently to an attack on their faith.
- During the troubles in Northern Ireland (1968-98) conflict between Catholics and Protestants led to violence against each community.
- Some groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS (IS) use the Muslim idea of holy war to start civil war and commit acts of terrorism.

## Christian beliefs about the use of violence

- Some Christians cite Jesus' advice to his disciples to buy a sword (Luke 22:36) as justification for violence, but most believe Jesus was warning his disciples of dangerous times ahead, not endorsing violence.
- Jesus' example at his arrest shows his non-violent stance:  
***'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said, 'for all who die by the sword die by the sword'*** Matthew 26:52

## Muslim beliefs about violence

- Holy war must follow just war criteria and can only be declared by a proper religious leader. It cannot be used to convert and it must be fought for God and not to allow a leader to show power ***'Fight in God's cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who oversteps the limits'*** Qur'an 2:190

# 7. Pacifism and peace-making

Pacifists believe that war and violence can rarely be justified- conflicts can be settled in a peaceful way. They think it is better to prevent war by promoting justice and peace.

## Christian views on pacifism

**FOR:** 1. Jesus said *'Blessed are the peacemakers'* Matthew 5:9

2. Christians should follow the teachings of the

**Sermon on the Mount to 'Turn the other cheek'**

4. It doesn't fit in with *'Love your neighbour'*

5. Quakers are a Christian denomination that strongly support pacifism

6. During WW1 and WW2 some people called conscientious objectors refused to fight and faced punishment. Many conscientious objectors took on non-fighting roles as cooks, doctors or nurses

**AGAINST:** 1. Fighting may be needed to overcome a greater evil

2. Jesus healed the Roman centurion (soldier) he did not condemn him

3. War can be used to achieve peace

## **ANGLICAN PACIFIST FELLOWSHIP**

Works to overcome the inequality and injustice that leads to war within and between nations. Sponsors the Week of Prayer for World Peace and contributes to peace related events and religious services that raise awareness of pacifism

## Muslim views on pacifism

**AGAINST:** Islam is a religion of peace but not a pacifist religion because of the duty of jihad and the instruction in the **Qur'an** *'Fighting has been ordained for you, though it is hard for you'*

**FOR:** 1. Muslim must not refuse peace if it is offered as the **Qur'an** teaches *'But if they [non-believers] incline towards peace, you must also incline towards it, and put your trust in God...'*

2. Muslims seek inner peace through submission to God's will and being part of the ummah (Brotherhood of Muslims)

## **MUSLIM PEACE FELLOWSHIP**

Works against injustice and for peace in the local community and globally. Affirms commitment to peace on behalf of all Muslims. Tries to deepen people's understanding of Muslim teachings about peace through publications and conferences



# 8. Religious responses to victims

Victims of war may need:

- Psychological support
- A safe place to live
- Medical help
- Access to food and clean water
- A means of earning a living

## Christian reasons for helping

- Jesus taught *'Love your neighbour as yourself'* Mark 12:31
- Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) taught that everyone is everybody else's neighbour, regardless of race etc.

## Muslim reasons for helping

- The Qur'an teaches *'Whoever saved a life, it would be as if they saved all of mankind'*. Qur'an 5:32
- Muslims are taught to be compassionate and empathise with others

## Christian organisations that help

**1. Caritas** a Catholic charity that serves the poor and promotes charity and justice world wide, provided food, shelter, translators and legal services to Syrian refugees who escaped to Greece in 2015

**2. Christian Aid** works to end poverty and promotes peace, justice and human rights so that war is prevented. It raises money to support local organisations that help refugees from places such as Gaza, Afghanistan and Syria

## Muslim organisations that help

**Muslim Aid** provides short and long term aid to victims of war and other disasters. In 2014 they helped set up the Beity orphanage in Turkey to give health care, education and spiritual support to children whose parents were killed in Syria.

**Islamic Relief** provides short term aid to victims of war during disasters and emergencies. They also work alongside communities to help prepare and strengthen them in the long term

