Your notes

GCSE Religious Studies: revision notes

Religion, crime and punishment

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Crime and its causes

- Causes of **crime** include poverty, upbringing, mental illness, addiction, greed, hate, and opposition to a law thought to be unjust.
- Many religious believers condemn the **crime** but not the person ('hate the sin, not the sinner'). Some work with prisoners, for example as prison chaplains or through Prison Fellowship.

Aims of punishment

- **Retribution** (making the offender pay), **deterrence** (putting people off **crime**), reformation (helping the offender change), protection (keeping society safe) and reparation (making amends to the victim or community).

Types of punishment

- Prison, **community service** and fines are used in the UK. **Corporal punishment** is illegal.
- The **death penalty** for murder was suspended in Great Britain in 1965 and abolished in 1969.

Forgiveness

- Christians are taught to forgive others as God forgives them, as in the Lord's Prayer; Jesus said to forgive 'seventy times seven' times (Matthew 18:22). **Forgiveness** doesn't mean there should be no punishment.
- Gee Walker publicly forgave the young men who murdered her son Anthony in 2005.

The death penalty

- Arguments for: **retribution** ('an eye for an eye', Exodus 21:24), **deterrence**, and protecting society.
- Arguments against: the sanctity of life, the risk of executing innocent people (such as Timothy Evans, hanged in 1950 and later pardoned), and removing any chance to reform. In 2018, Pope Francis changed Catholic teaching to say the **death penalty** is 'inadmissible'.

Muslim views on crime and punishment

- **Shari'ah** is Islamic law, based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the example of Muhammad). Muslims believe Allah is just, and that people will be judged on their intentions (niyyah) as well as their actions.
- Many Muslims accept the **death penalty** for murder, because the Qur'an allows a life to be taken 'by right' (Surah 17:33). But the victim's family may forgive the killer and accept compensation (**diyah**) instead (Surah 2:178), and some Muslims oppose the **death penalty** altogether.
- **Forgiveness**: Allah is merciful and forgiving, and the Qur'an teaches that whoever forgives and makes reconciliation will be rewarded by Allah (Surah 42:40).
- **Shari'ah** sets out **corporal punishments** for some **crimes**, and some Muslim-majority countries use them. Many Muslims believe they should only be used under strict conditions, and others see them as against human rights. Muslims in the UK follow UK law, which doesn't allow corporal punishment.

Issues of Good and Evil (Eduqas)

- Eduqas Component 1, Theme 3. Learn its eight concepts: good and evil, **forgiveness**, **free will**, justice, morality, punishment, sin and **suffering**.
- What makes an act wrong? **Absolute morality** says some acts are always wrong; **relative morality** says it depends on the situation. Christians also use conscience (an inner sense of right and wrong), virtues (good qualities such as love and honesty) and the idea of sin.
- Aims of punishment: justice, **retribution** (paying back), **deterrence** (putting people off) and **reformation** (helping offenders change).
- Prison reformers: Elizabeth Fry, a Quaker, improved conditions for women prisoners in the 1800s. Prison chaplains today give pastoral care to prisoners of any faith or none.
- The **death penalty**: some conservative Christians support it for murder; liberal Christians oppose it, using Exodus 20:13 (do not murder) and Jesus' teaching to turn the other cheek and love your enemies (Matthew 5:38-39, 43-47). The UK ended it for murder in 1965.

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- **Forgiveness**: Jesus told Peter to forgive 'seventy-seven times' (Matthew 18:21-22), and taught that God forgives those who forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). In 2005 Gee Walker publicly forgave the men who murdered her son Anthony in Liverpool.
- The origin of evil: Augustine taught that evil comes from original sin, when humans misused their **free will**. Irenaeus, and later John Hick, argued that **suffering** is '**soul-making**': it helps people grow into better, more loving people.
- The problem of evil: Epicurus asked how a God who is all-powerful and all-loving could allow evil and **suffering**. Atheists use this to argue God does not exist.

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Key terms

Crime	An action that breaks the law.
Sin	An action that goes against God's will.
Retribution	Punishment that makes the offender pay for their crime.
Deterrence	Punishment intended to put people off committing crime.
Reformation	Helping an offender change their behaviour.
Forgiveness	Letting go of anger and blame towards someone who has done wrong.
Corporal punishment	Physical punishment, such as beating.
Death penalty	Execution as a punishment for a crime.
Community service	Unpaid work in the community as a punishment.
Shari'ah	Islamic law, based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah.
Diyah	Compensation paid to a victim's family, which Islam allows instead of the death penalty if the family forgives.
Absolute morality	The view that some actions are always right or always wrong. (Eduqas)
Relative morality	The view that whether an action is right or wrong depends on the situation. (Eduqas)
Soul-making	Irenaeus' and John Hick's idea that suffering helps people develop into better people. (Eduqas)
Free will	The ability to make our own choices. (Eduqas)
Suffering	Pain or distress, physical or mental. (Eduqas)

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is retribution?
2. What is deterrence?
3. What is reformation?
4. Is corporal punishment legal as a punishment in the UK?

5. When was the death penalty for murder abolished in Great Britain?
6. Which teaching do some people use to support the death penalty?
7. What did Pope Francis teach about the death penalty in 2018?
8. How many times did Jesus say we should forgive?

Answers

1. Punishment that makes the offender pay for their crime
2. Punishment that puts people off committing crime
3. Helping the offender change their behaviour
4. No, it is illegal
5. 1969
6. An eye for an eye
7. It is inadmissible
8. Seventy times seven

What to do next

Practise 19 questions on this topic

Try 9 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

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