**Human Rights and Social Justice**

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| Explain Christian and Buddhist teachings, beliefs and attitudes about social justice |
| Explain issues of equality, freedom of religion and belief, including freedom of religious expression and gender and sexuality |
| Explain what is meant by human rights and the responsibilities that come with this |
| Explain Christian and Buddhist attitudes to prejudice and discrimination |
| Explain Christian and Buddhist teachings, beliefs and attitudes towards the status and treatment within religion of women and homosexuals |
| Explain Christian and Buddhist teachings on wealth and giving money to the poor |
| Explain the causes of poverty and the responsibilities of those living in poverty. |
| Explain how the poor are exploited including issues around fair pay, interest on loans and human trafficking. |
| Explain Christian and Buddhist attitudes towards charity and giving money to the poor |
| Explain contrasting beliefs in British society towards the status of women in religion, the uses of wealth and freedom of religious expression |

**Key terms**

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| Social Justice | ensuring that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy and protects peoples human rights |
| Homosexual | to be sexually attracted to members of the same sex. |
| Freedom of religion | the right to believe or practise whatever religion one chooses |
| Poverty | Being without money, food or basic other needs of life (being poor) |
| Equality | the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. |
| Disability | a physical or mental impairment which has an adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities |
| Exploitation | misuse of power or money to get others to do things for little or unfair reward |
| Emergency Aid | also known as short-term aid; help given to communities in a time of disaster or crisis, e.g. food during famine, shelter after an earthquake. |
| Human Rights | the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled to. |
| Heterosexual | to be sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. |
| Positive Discrimination | treating people more favourably because they have been discriminated against in the past or have disabilities |
| Freedom of religious expression | the right to worship, preach and practice one’s faith in whatever way one chooses |
| Human Trafficking | the illegal movement of people, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation |
| Tithe | one tenth of annual produce or earnings |
| Prejudice | unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group |
| Long-term aid | assistance given to a poor country over a long-period of time that has lasting effect |
| Discrimination | actions or behaviour based on prejudice |

Human Rights and Social Justice

**Human rights** are the rights all humans should be able to expect. These are enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. **Social Justice** ensures that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy and protects peoples’ human rights. This means equal rights, basic needs being met, equality of opportunity and fairness.

Christian groups have been at the forefront of efforts to bring about social justice. For example, prison reform began through Quaker and Methodist efforts, the work of the Salvation Army in socially deprived communities, the Trussell Trust food bank movement. They take their lead from the idea that faith without action is pointless, allied to a consideration of who Jesus helped - often the outsiders of society eg lepers, women, gentiles, prostitutes, the poor. Human rights and social justice come down to a belief in the dignity of the person – that each person is special (Christianity —made by God — sanctity of life).

Some Christians see work for human rights and social justice as opportunities to evangelise — either openly, or as role models of Christians; others see this work as an extension of Jesus' work, simply to help others (eg Parable of Sheep and Goats). Different people work in different projects to bring social justice, eg volunteering for food banks, or campaigning in parliament.

Buddhism has a commitment to personal responsibility to cultivate wisdom and compassion. However Buddhists have a long tradition of working for human rights and social justice. Belief in Metta and Karuna means that many Buddhists play an active role in supporting people recovering from drug or alcohol addiction. Buddhists are concerned about human rights abuses in Tibet by the Chinese government who took over the country 60 years ago.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.” (Romans 13:1) | Christians have a responsibility to follow the law. |
| “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) | Everyone is equal because they are all made in the image of God. This included men and women. This applied to gender equality. |

Freedom of religion

Freedom of religious belief is the freedom to believe in whatever religion (or none) that you wish and that it is legal to be a member of any religion. Freedom of religious expression is the freedom to express those beliefs, and the legal protection for that. In Britain the official state religion is the Anglican Church – the Church of England. However there is freedom to belong to any or no religion. In the past it was different - there was persecution of Protestants and Catholics depending on who was the monarch.

In some places conflict has arisen due to religious differences – for example in Northern Ireland between Protestant and Catholic. Recently there has been persecution of Christians in North Korea and in some countries in the Middle East Christians have been attacked by Islamic State.

Regardless of a person's faith, most Christians today would respect their right to that choice and expression (so long as no one is hurt, and it is done in 'appropriate' places), and would disagree with any persecution for it. A good example of Jesus’ attitude is in the story of the Good Samaritan – Jesus made the Samaritan the ‘hero’ of the story despite Jews normally treating Samaritans with contempt. Paul urged Christians to be tolerant of those who followed different food laws or who held worship on a different day.

Christianity is an evangelising religion, and many Christians see it as important to encourage others to at least follow Christian behaviours, if not become Christians. This suggests that other religions are tolerated rather than embraced.

Belief in the equality of all means that all have the right to practise their beliefs. The Dalai Lama stated: ‘I always say that every person on this earth has the freedom to practise or not to practise religion’. Right Speech encourages the speaking of truth as someone perceives it. Right Speech also means that there needs to be some restraint in how beliefs are expressed. The principle of not harming others covers more than physical harm. One’s own freedom of religious expression should not cause hurt to another or restrict the religious freedom of someone else. However in some Buddhist countries some extremist Buddhists have attacked Hindus and Muslims, especially in Myanmar – this led to the exodus of over 800,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| ‘I always say that every person on this earth has the freedom to practice or not to practice or not practice religion. It is alright to do either’ (The Dalai Lama) | According to Buddhists everyone should have freedom of religious belief and expression. |

Treatment and status of women in religion

Christians believe all people have been created in God’s image – and Paul said “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. Buddhists believe everyone is equal as all are welcome in the Sangha and that prejudice creates bad karma and has a negative effect on re-birth

However historically, the major faiths — Christianity included — did not give leadership roles to women. Roman Catholic and Orthodox, as well as some Protestant groups, still do not allow this, and often point to scriptural statements to prove this is the right thing eg Jesus had only make disciples, Paul’s pronouncements on women,etc). In these denominations the status of women can be high because of the importance of the Virgin Mary, but that does not equate to. equality of role.

All Christians agree with the sentiment in Galatians 3:2B. These beliefs mean that women and men should be valued as highly as each other. In all forms of Protestant Christianity, women can lead their religious communities, oversee religious ceremonies, and provide spiritual and pastoral care for the community. For Roman Catholics leadership within the church is not open to women - they cannot take holy orders to become a priest. In the Church Of England the first women Bishop was ordained in 2016, and there are many women priests

The Buddha taught that women were equally capable of achieving enlightenment. Women were able to become nuns in his lifetime and in Zen Buddhism women can have positions of authority within the monastic sangha. A 12th century Zen Buddhist stated: ‘In acquiring the dharma, all acquire the dharma equally… Do not make an issue of whether it is a man or a woman.’ The Buddha’s initial reluctance to admit women into the monastic sangha has led to some Buddhists believing that although they are equal, men and women have different roles. In the Theravadan orders of south east Asia, women can be novices only.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| “There is neither Jew nor gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) | All people are equal. No-one is better despite talent or wealth. Applies to racism, sexism and disabilty. |
| “Women should remain silent in churches. They are not to allowed to speak […] for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” (1 Corinthians 14:34) | In this letter to the Corinthians Paul appears to show gender prejudice and discrimination towards women. |

Homosexuality and religion

The basic stance of most Christians centres around Bible teachings about God creating man and woman as a pair, and about the duty to procreate. While many religious people may accept others as homosexual, they still disagree with homosexual acts as they see this as a choice - Homosexuals would be expected to lead a celibate life. Being homosexual is often not a barrier to having a role or high status in a religion, however, having homosexual relationships is viewed differently and is a barrier.

The Catholic Church and Orthodox Christianity as well as many Protestant groups see homosexuality as a deviancy which people should not pursue if they feel so inclined. Within the Anglican Church, there are gay vicars and bishops. However, the Church is itself split on this matter, with many Anglican communities taking a traditional stance against homosexuals. In some cases, being gay is seen as completely wrong, in others, gay relationships as wrong, in others, there is no issue with either. Some Protestant churches (Quakers, Unitarians, United Reformed) do accept homosexuality and will perform marriages for LGBT couples in church.

Zen Buddhism does not make a distinction between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Attitudes have changed - in 1997 the Dalai Lama said “from a Buddhist point of view [lesbian and gay sex] is generally considered sexual misconduct.” However by 2014 he said that gay marriage was ok.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| ‘And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number”’ (Genesis 1:28) | Adam and Eve were told to have children and be together. Some Christians interpret this to mean a heterosexual relationship is what God intended. |

Racism

Positive discrimination is action in favour of a person on the grounds of a particular characteristic eg colour – eg targeting recruitment of black or Asian Officers for the police to address inequality in the workforce.Usually this type of discrimination is in favour of those in a minority who are in many cases discriminated against negatively.

Christianity is very clear that racism is wrong. The belief that God created every person, and loves every person, and sacrificed His son to save every person shows that racism is not appropriate and would be against this belief in us all as children of God. Many religious leaders and religious communities have stood up against racism – eg Desmond Tutu against South African apartheid and Martin Luther King to attain civil rights for black people in the USA. Churches in the UK work with immigrants and refugees, who can be victimised. The example of Jesus shows he did not use a person's colour or nationality to discriminate, eg healing the Roman centurion's servant. The Story of the Good Samaritan is an example looking at what people do, not their colour/race.

Racism is against the Buddha’s teaching as it goes against core beliefs like Metta – loving kindness. People are good or bad solely in terms of their actions, and so that’s how they should be judged—not by the colour of their skin.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Teaching** |
| “There is neither Jew nor gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) | All people are equal. No-one is better despite talent or wealth. Applies to racism, sexism and disabilty. |

Wealth

There is no problem with Christians being rich if they have worked for it and earned it or received it justly. LOVE of money, not money itself is the problem. When money is the central focus of life then this is when it is a problem. Love of money leads to greed. They are encouraged to work hard (Protestant work ethic). Some jobs would be considered as immoral {gambling, drugs, prostitution, any job which exploits others, etc) — so Christians would not earn money this way.

Christians should use their money to provide for their family, to support the church (as if giving to God)! and to help those less fortunate than themselves. Giving money prevents selfishness. Many Christians tithe — give 10% of earnings to charity. Many charities have a Christian foundation or focus. Most Christians believe that they have the duty of stewardship - using what they possess responsibly, sharing their wealth with those who are less fortunate. A few Christians interpret the saying in Proverbs 10 (‘the blessing of the Lord brings wealth’) to mean that having wealth is a sign of God’s blessing.

Buddhists are not opposed to wealth – it is important to have enough for one’s needs. Monks do live simply with just a handful of possessions. Money can be used to do good. What matters is how people get their money – is it honestly and without hurting others? How they relate to it – craving or greed is one of the three poisons. What they do with it – it is ok to use money for one’s own entertainment but wealth should be used for the benefit of others. The Buddha lived a Middle Way between luxury and poverty. Craving stops people from achieving enlightenment so Buddhist teaching encourages Buddhists to give away what they do not need. Generosity is one of the six perfections in the Mahayanan tradition. Giving to charity builds up good karma.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 19:24) | Jesus was telling his followers that whilst it is not wrong to be wealthy, desiring only money can mean people neglect the religious life. |
| ‘The love of money. is the root of all evil' 1 Tim 6:10 | This shows that wealth is acceptable for Christians but it should not be the central idea that drives beliefs or actions. |
| 'No one can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and mammon (money)’ Matt 6:24 | For Christians God must be the focus which then allows money to be used to help others |
| The Middle Way | The Buddha rejected his life of wealth and of poverty in favour of the middle way. You should have enough to survive but not be greedy and take more than you need. |

Poverty — causes and responses

World poverty causes — tend to cripple a country rather than individuals - debt, unfair trade, natural disasters, corruption. UK causes — individual issues — gambling losses, born into poverty, loss of job, lack of education, etc. UK has benefits system to help.

Christians give to charities, work to relieve poverty eg Food Bank, or try to influence Government policy. Christian Charities include Christian Aid and Tearfund. They raise money, campaign and educate about poverty in the UK, then give goods, people and money for action in LEDCs. All Christians are aware of a requirement from God to help others (Parable of the Sheep and Goats, Love thy neighbour etc), so it is not just that they morally should help, it is expected that they will.

Like Christians Buddhists work through charity and by trying to influence Government policy. Buddhism teaches Karuna – that those in poverty should be treated with compassion.

**Exploitation** - Three areas of focus;

FAIR PAY = paying someone what is fair for the job they do.

EXCESSIVE INTEREST ON LOANS = charging very high amounts of interest, which often cannot be repaid so that the loanee pays back many times what they originally loaned.

PEOPLE-TRAFFICKING - includes charging people to get them into a country illegally, taking/selling people into slavery, forcing people into prostitution, etc – ie the buying and selling of people. The victims have no rights, and are often horrifically abused. Seen as modern form of slavery.

Christians agree with the minimum and living wage. People have to look after their family, and exploitation is unjust. Christians oppose excessive interest and people- trafficking. These loans can be seen as theft as there is no benefit to the loanee from all the excess money they repay. Christians like the Quakers were at the forefront of demanding the abolition of slavery in 19th Century Britain

Buddhists oppose excessive interest rates as it goes against the First Precept as it causes suffering. But people who borrow have a responsibility – was the debt caused by craving goods? An example of the poor liberating themselves was when many of India’s untouchables, at the bottom of the caste system, freed themselves by converting to Buddhism which does not recognise caste. The Buddha said the buying and selling of human beings is a wrong means of livelihood and goes against the Noble Eightfold Path.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| Dukkha  Greed – one of the 3 poisons | Owning wealth is ok for Buddhists, but it can cause dukkha (suffering) if it means greed or is gained through exploitation. Wealth is seen as an opportunity for generosity, which benefits the recipient, and also the giver since it is a good action. |
| Metta (loving kindness)  Karuna (compassion) | Buddhists should show metta to all living things eg helping the sick and needy. All human beings should show compassion to each other eg helping the poor. |

Exam Questions

4 mark Qs ‘Explain two contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about … Refer to the main religious tradition of Britain and one or more other religious traditions.’ These will be one of the following;

* The role of women in religion
* The freedom of religious expression
* The use of wealth

5 mark Qs – you need to give two examples and refer to religious teachings

* Explain two religious beliefs about the right use of wealth.
* Explain two religious beliefs about the status of women in religion.
* Explain two religious beliefs about social justice
* Explain two religious beliefs about prejudice

12 mark Qs – you need to evaluate and give arguments (both religious and non religious) for and against;

* ‘There is no point in fighting for human rights’
* ‘Prejudice can never be ended’
* ‘Religious believers should make the ending of poverty their top priority’
* ‘It is always right to give charity to the poor.’
* ‘Those who live in poverty should help themselves to overcome their difficulties.’
* ‘There is no good reason to be poor in the UK today’
* ‘People trafficking is the worst form of exploiting the poor’