

Unit 8: RELIGION AND EQUALITY

Checklist - tick these off if and when we cover them:

OVERALL

This Topic is concerned with religious responses to moral issues related to equality.

Different views and teachings about prejudice and equality in relation to race and gender

Attitudes towards other religions

Forgiveness and reconciliation

SPECIFICS

Biblical teaching about equality;

Christian attitudes towards racism;

The role of women in Christian society;

Christian attitudes towards other religions: missionary work, evangelism, ecumenism,

Christian beliefs about the status of non-Christian religions;

Christian beliefs about forgiveness and reconciliation.



JUST TICK THEM
OFF IF YOU THINK
YOU KNOW THEM

These notes are based on the hard work that Mr Antonio D'Onofrio put in over his time at Sion School. Many thanks to Mr Starkey who typed up these notes and donated his efforts to the common good of our GCSE students. These notes are not being endorsed in any way - please use them if you want to. The main help is through the booklet which costs £10 and can be found on the GCSE page. (JR 21/9/7)



UNIT EIGHT: RELIGION AND EQUALITY

BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT EQUALITY

- ★ Genesis teaches that all people are equally valuable to God because they are made "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27)
- ★ The NT makes it clear that the Good News of Christ is meant for all men, not just the Israelites for instance:
 - "Then Peter began to speak: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." (Acts 10: 34)
- ★ Christians believe God loves all humanity without any conditions or differences: women as much as men, black as much as white, rich, poor, clever, unintelligent, attractive or unattractive, crippled or athletic.
- ★ Christians also believe human beings should show this same kind of love for each other, as this is what God wants. Humans should show concern for each other's welfare, whether friend or stranger.
- ★ Paul stresses the unity which belief in Christ brings:
 - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28)

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS RACISM

- ★ The Early Church and Medieval Church were over many centuries composed of white-skinned Western races.
- ★ Christianity has spread worldwide now, however, and there are Christians of many different colours and nationalities.
- ★ Christianity teaches that all human beings are equally valued by God and should all be treated as equally important.
- ★ Racism contradicts and offends this belief by insisting that some people are better than others because of the colour of their skin or their ethnic origin. Hitler was a clear example of someone with racist beliefs and policies.
- ★ Christianity condemns racist beliefs and actions, basing this on Jesus teaching that everyone, even those who do not share our beliefs or race, is loved by God and must be loved by us as much as we love ourselves:
 - "A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must

I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?" The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind", and "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." "You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live." But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10: 25-29)

- ★ This leads Jesus to tell the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were looked on by Israelites as inferior and heretical, but Jesus shows that the Samaritan acts with true humanity/neighbourliness, when a priest and a Levite (a junior priest) leave a traveller who has been severely beaten and robbed unaided by the wayside.
- ★ Unfortunately, not all Christians or Christian Churches have always been faithful to this teaching. Some have discriminated against Jews, calling them the murderers of Christ. Some have considered black people to be inferior, for instance in South Africa and the Southern States of the USA, where blacks had no right to vote and were denied access to justice in the courts when mistreated by white supremacists.
- ★ Many Christians have, however, followed Christ's lead and protested against such discrimination.
- ★ In the USA, the black Christian civil rights campaigner, Dr Martin Luther King, became world-renowned in the 1960s for leading non-violent demonstrations against segregation in schools in the Southern States. He also denounced laws which forced black people to give up their seat in a bus if a white person was standing. Martin Luther King based all his action on faith in God's love and wish for all human beings to be equal in charity. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his work but was assassinated in 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, aged 39.
- ★ In South Africa, the white Anglican Bishop, Trevor Huddleston, and the black Anglican Bishop, Desmond Tutu, led a tireless campaign both in South Africa and worldwide against apartheid. This was a repressive legal system which forced black people to live separately in poor areas, to

work for starvation wages in mines and on farms, and to receive minimal education and health care. Black adults needed a permit to work as servants in white areas, and were often separated from their families for long periods when they did so, since their families had no such permits. Blacks could not even sit on the same park benches as whites. Gradually, the system was broken down by internal protest and international pressure, and black majority rule was established in 1994.

CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOCIETY

- ★ There are many views within Christianity about whether men and women should have different roles, duties and responsibilities, or whether these should be more or less identical.
- ★ Some Christians believe that men and women are meant to be genuinely equal partners, even though they may have different skills and abilities.
- ★ Some Christians point out that in general men are physically stronger, and women are designed by God to be child-bearing, and say that God therefore meant them to do different things with their lives. Men, they believe, are meant to do physical and other paid work, and to provide the family income while women take care of children and the home, and play a supportive role to their husbands. Some Christians say that the Bible indicates that this is the way God wants things to be.
- ★ Other Christians, however, believe that God created men and women to be as equal as possible, sharing the same job opportunities and using whatever talents they have been given, regardless of their gender. They argue it is old-fashioned and wrong-headed to expect women to subordinate their talents and prospects to the interests of the men they have married. They believe childcare and household duties should be shared equally among men and women, and both partners should have equal expectations of being able to pursue a career suited to their abilities.

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD AND WOMEN

- ★ Many, but nowadays by no means all, Christians believe that only men can become priests, and that priesthood is not a suitable or permissible role for women. The

RC Church teaches that the priest represents Christ during the Mass and it would be wrong for a woman to try to claim this role. The RC Church would say that it does not consider women in any way inferior in taking this stance, but simply that the role of women does not include priesthood.

- ★ In some other Churches, however, women have always been allowed to take leadership roles. This is also increasingly so in the Anglican Church where many female vicars have now been ordained, although this has caused a sharp difference of opinion between the RC and Anglican Churches. The question of female and homosexual Anglican Bishops being ordained is also one which is at present causing great controversy and division within the worldwide Anglican Communion itself.

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TO OTHER RELIGIONS

- ★ Christians hold a wide variety of views about non-Christian religions.
- ★ Some Christians believe that only Christianity conveys the truth about God and that all other religions are false. They believe members of other faiths should abandon their wrong ideas and convert to Christianity. They base this view on passages such as the following from the NT:
 - "Jesus answered: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6)
- ★ Some Christians take these words of Christ to mean that eternal life with God is accessible only for Christian believers, and argue that there would be no point in the death and resurrection of Jesus if there were lots of other ways to reach God through other religions. They insist on those grounds that Christianity is the only true religion.
- ★ In the past, Christian missionaries used to go to other countries with the aim of converting the indigenous populations from their local religions to Christianity. Today, there are still Christians who go to developing countries to tell the people there about Christianity, as well as to try to help them economically/medically etc. Missionary work is not, however, as popular as in previous centuries.

- ★ Some Christians stress that Christianity is an evangelical religion, that is one which must try to spread its message. Christians believe it to be the will of Christ that they should share His Good News of Salvation with non-believers and try to persuade them to become Christians too.
- ★ Other Christians, however, are not convinced of the need to convert others, or that it is right to try to do so. They believe that anyone who is trying to follow God and act morally is doing the right thing, regardless of what religion they profess. Such Christians encourage members of different types of Christian and non-Christian Churches to worship and discuss together to try to understand each other more deeply. Christians of this type do not try to convert others to Christianity, saying that religious belief is often a product of where one was born and that God will not reject a person's soul simply because her/his beliefs are non-Christian.

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS AND CHRISTIAN ECUMENISM

- ★ There have also in history, regrettably, been serious divisions between various Christian denominations, and sorry episodes of religious persecution. An example would be the persecution of Protestants by Mary Tudor, and the persecution of Catholics loyal under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.
- ★ Even today, the RC and Anglican Churches disagree fundamentally about the legitimacy of ordaining women priests, and about the authority of the Pope over the Apostolic Christian Churches.
- ★ Some Christians still take the view that only their form of Christian worship is the "right" or "true" form, and that all others are bogus, illegitimate or heretical.
- ★ More progressive Christians are, however, concerned about such entrenched and uncompromising views, especially where they contribute to mutual intolerance among Christians, as for instance in Northern Ireland between the Catholic and Orange/Loyalist Protestant traditions.
- ★ Out of such concerns, some Christians nowadays strive to act together through what is called the Ecumenical (universal) Movement. This stresses the benefits of all Christian Churches praying, worshipping and undertaking charitable work together,

and of being more mindful of their shared beliefs than their doctrinal differences.

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS ABOUT FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

- ★ A central teaching of Christ is that of forgiveness, even of enemies and those who hurt you unjustly. Christians are taught that they must not remember grudges and resentments for years, or seek revenge for injury, but should aim to imitate the forgiveness of God.
- ★ The Lord's Prayer, taught to His Disciples by Jesus, uses the words "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."
- ★ Some places of Christian worship stress the need to spread peace and forgive wrongdoing and injury. Coventry Cathedral was destroyed by German bombing in World War II, and visitors to its rebuilt precincts are now encouraged to pray and work especially for peace and reconciliation. Taize, an ecumenical centre in France open to all denominations, also encourages people, many of them young visitors, to pray together for peace.
- ★ In the RC Church, if a person wants forgiveness for something they have done wrong, they may go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (called in the past Confession) where they confess their sin to God through a priest and receive God's forgiveness through the priest's spoken prayer of absolution.
- ★ Many Christian denominations believe that Holy Communion/the Mass/Holy Eucharist/the Lord's Supper is also a powerful sign of the unity of believers gathered round "the table of the Lord," sharing his Body and Blood (in the form of bread and wine) and becoming one with Him and each other. Many Communion services use a form of words which expresses this unity, such as: "Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread."
- ★ Despite the sometimes violent hatreds and suspicions between different Christian denominations in centuries past, and the doctrinal disagreements which still exist today, many Christians now believe they should forget their differences and work together as much as possible.