

Teachings on Politics and Violence in the Church

Christian Teachings about Violence

- Violence is part of Christianity from the very beginning, the first person to die in the Bible is Abel, who is murdered by Cain, his brother out of jealousy and anger.
- The Bible says this in Genesis: **'Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind'**.
- For many Christians in countries where it is accepted, this quote has been seen as justification for the death penalty for murder. This is expanded upon in Leviticus and the other law books where the commandments are given, such as in Exodus where it clearly states to the Jewish people 'You shall not murder'. Punishments are laid out for all offences.
- In other parts of the Old Testament, killing and violence is permitted by God, but only for God's people, the Israelites. The wars are ordered by God in order to claim or protect land that God has promised to them. These wars must follow a strict set of rules, and are often set against a backdrop of looking towards peace and harmony between all people in God's future kingdom.
- Some Christians who may initially be pacifists use the events in the Old Testament to give justification to wars of protection, but not aggression, in order to achieve peace.
- In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of peacemakers being blessed during the Sermon on the Mount. He also says that people should love their enemies and turn their cheek to violence.
- To follow with this teaching, many Christians always say that it is wrong to use violence in any context, therefore they must always look for peaceful solutions and be pacifists.
- This doesn't mean there aren't times not to be angry in a 'righteous' way against things like injustice and corruption. In the Old Testament, God constantly smites those he judges as sinful and in the New Testament, Jesus himself has an outburst at the temple at the traders who are using God's house as a marketplace, something God clearly doesn't want.

The Role of Christians in Violent Conflicts

- Some, but relatively few, Christians will enter the armed forces as a Christian, this is because the Bible directly references war as justified, but also forbids violence under any circumstance.
- One issue with this is that religious leaders often say that the Bible is the ultimate source of authority, but the Bible is written by many people over a long time which means that different views are shown throughout, conflict and violence is a blurry topic with contradictory views.

- Christians who do join the armed forces do so with the aim to bring peace, protect the innocent and also to challenge evil as a concept. One justification for war is the verse, **‘Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed’**.
 - The above quote has likely been used to justify revolutions around the world throughout history.
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The Relationship between Religion and Politics

- Very few, but some Christians, argue that involvement in politics is wrong. Therefore they wouldn't vote or attempt to displace a government because they are safe in God's will.
 - The justification for this comes from the early church where Paul writes that the Roman authorities are appointed by God and so believers in God and in Jesus should submit to them because they are a moral authority. It is also written that people should pay their taxes willingly.
 - The aim of one group, the 'Plymouth Brethren' says that they should concern themselves with spreading God's word rather than politics. However, they pray for government to be good.
 - Other Christians would argue that it is wrong and immoral to sit by when something like injustice can be clearly seen in society, they feel they need to speak up and vote against it.
 - While these people would also say that they must trust authorities, or else God wouldn't have allowed them power in the first place, they would be wary in a democracy for example, where it may not always be Christians choosing the government, but those who are evil.
 - The Canon J. John outlines three things that should affect your decision to vote:
 - What do the parties and candidates themselves believe? Do they align with your beliefs?
 - Don't vote based on self-interest, we shouldn't vote for what is good for us specifically, but what will be good for everyone, including those at the bottom of society.
 - Don't vote for parties who campaign using hatred and negativity, but vote for the parties who paint a picture of the world they want to build. Another bad party tactic is one that focuses specifically on the weakness of the opposition rather than their strengths.
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The Church of England and Political Decisions

- The Church of England is involved in the House of Lords as a spiritual input. There are 26 bishops who sit as the 'Lords Spiritual' in order to bring religion to the law.
- This means they have a potentially nation-changing say on laws in the country.
- Some people think that having this link between Church and government is wrong because the country is no longer completely Christian, but more multicultural instead of how it has been in the past. With an increasing Islamic and Atheist population, there have been calls against it.

- This is coupled with the decline of church attendance, which many people have taken as a sign that the church is becoming irrelevant to everyday society and it is unfair for them to have any say in parliament or in any political decisions.
- Significant differences in opinion can be seen between the Church and the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in terms of welfare for the poor and in war.
- The parts of social policy they clashed on included but were not limited to: attitudes towards the coal mines, replacing north English jobs, social welfare as well as the Falklands War.
- One aggressive show of this from the Church was the Archbishop remembering both the British and the Argentinian forces that were killed in the Falklands War, which infuriated Thatcher.
- Over time, the relations between Argentina and Britain have recovered, but there is still tension over the distance between the islands and the UK, and whether a political apology is necessary.
- Another recent example is that of the Church questioning the effectiveness of Universal Credit and its real-world effects on the working and lower classes of Britain. Initially, the House of Lords and the Bishops rejected the policy, but the government has now gotten it through.