

Christianity and Social Justice

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- **Forgiveness** – Making a deliberate choice to let go of wrongs done to you.
 - **Reconciliation** – The restoration of relationships after forgiveness is given.
 - In 1994, there was a ‘five stage peace plan’ put together to solve the **Rwandan Genocide** in order to encourage reconciliation between the main two ethnic groups in Rwanda.
 - Desmond Tutu is the archbishop of Capetown, he was part of the ‘Truth and Reconciliation’ commission in post-apartheid South Africa appointed by the new government.
 - In the Gospels, Jesus is reported as having gone to the temple, only to find an adulterous woman was to be stoned. However, Jesus said **‘He without sin cast the first stone’**. This was significant because Jesus was saying only those who have never done anything wrong have any right to judge the others. Jesus said that the woman must have been forgiven for her crimes.
 - Jesus also teaches about not being hypocritical, he says **that ‘don’t try and take the speck out of your brother’s eye until you take the plank out of your own eye first’**. He was saying that you can’t say that others need to pay for their crimes, when your sin is just as great.
 - The Lords Prayer as written says **‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us’**.
 - This relates to the parable of the king and his servant, where the king forgives his servant, but the wicked servant then doesn’t forgive his fellow servant, the first servant is then taken to prison and tortured until he pays back all his debt because he refused to forgive his debtor.
 - This parable also talks about wanting to be treated in a specific way, and that we should conduct ourselves in that particular manner if we want to be treated in that way.
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Verses for Forgiveness

- It says in Luke that **‘If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him’**. The word repent comes from the Greek ‘Metanoeo’ which means ‘to think differently’.
 - Psalm 97 says that **‘righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne’**, which basically means that if Christians want to build God up, then they must forgive and allow God to serve justice rather than dish it out themselves.
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Examples of Social Justice

- In Proverbs it commands **‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves...speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor’**. This is a direct demand to uphold social justice.

- **Social Justice** – Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunity and privilege.
- Some denominations will work in communities in order to achieve social justice through youth groups, charity organisations or missions on the street to directly help the homeless.
- Christians believe in the value and dignity of all human beings, regardless of race, gender, social status or any other pre-modifier. All are equal before the eyes of God.
- Some Christians who worked for social justice include:
 - **Martin Luther King** – Worked to promote civil rights in the 1960s in the USA, he made the famous ‘I have a dream’ speech which emphasised the unification of all people regardless of race or religion. He talked about Jews and Gentiles as equals.
 - **Mother Teresa** – Worked in Calcutta, India in the slums with children housing them and feeding them in special homes. She wanted to fix the issue of poverty.
 - **Jackie Pullinger** – Works in Hong Kong with drug addicts in order to prevent relapses and prevent people from staying addicted. They use a medically dangerous method of immediate de-addiction by using a 10-day abstinence method from all drugs.
- The biggest organisation involved in solving social justice issues is ‘Amnesty International’, they are responsible for promoting and protecting human rights all over the world. They have connections with churches, governments and other establishments to solve the issues.
- Amnesty have worked in countries like Russia, against corruption in the west, China and other anti-Christianity (or other religions) establishments all over the world.
- Christians largely support Amnesty by either donating, being members, or praying for them.
- Amnesty International isn’t an inherently Christian organisation.

Liberation Theology

- **Liberation Theology** – A radical movement that started in South America that argued the church should act to bring about social change by allying itself with the working classes who are deemed the most vulnerable in society, it is based off Jesus’s teachings about defending the oppressed.
- In these people’s ideology, they interpret the Gospel of Jesus through the eyes of those being oppressed, Jesus didn’t come to help the righteous, but wanted to help the non-righteous.
- They also say that structural church is not required, rather, cultural contributions through music, spontaneous sermons, folk tales, stories and tradition are all valid ways of talking about God.
- The Trinity is slightly different in Liberation Theology:
 - **God** – All powerful, but works on behalf of the oppressed.
 - **Jesus** – Showed God’s concern for the poor outwardly, he is the liberator.
 - **Holy Spirit** – Works through people to help the poor get back up.

- In Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about God separating the sheep (the ones he guided) from the goats (those who were independent from him) and says that he will give the sheep his kingdom because they 'clothed him', 'invited him in' and 'looked after him'.
- However, nobody has physically helped God, and yet God says they have in reality looked after him just by helping their brothers or sisters. Therefore, Jesus is essentially saying that by caring for your brothers and sisters, you will be able to get into Heaven as God is in all.
- **Sin** – That which means people breached the relationship with God which affects them directly.
- **Church** – Must denounce injustice, help the poor to rise up and develop their own moral compasses in line with God and ensure the clergy seek to help the poor directly.
- **Salvation** – One must demonstrate their own salvation by ministering to the poor directly.
- President Obama, the first black president of the USA, learned about liberation theology by his pastor who actively supported the concept – possibly influencing his theology.
- Some people have argued that throughout history and especially in the Bible, God has been seen intervening in the world to aid the oppressed and the poor, such as the Hebrews in Egypt.
- Black theology is a sub-theory about the black minority who were oppressed in the USA. It talks not only about black oppression, but draws comparison from other biblical accounts.
- Much of the theory focuses on issues such as slavery, class divisions, segregation and other methods the white majority used to oppress the black minority throughout the world.
- Some of the theory actually focuses on colonial invasions of Africa where European powers attacked the black majority living there. Many socialist parties in Africa have created African Socialism which talks about taking land back for black farmers from the white farmers.
- These ideologies are largely present in the south part of Africa where the UK, Portugal, Belgium and France had created apartheid systems which encouraged the race divisions and almost started a race war in some of the nations.