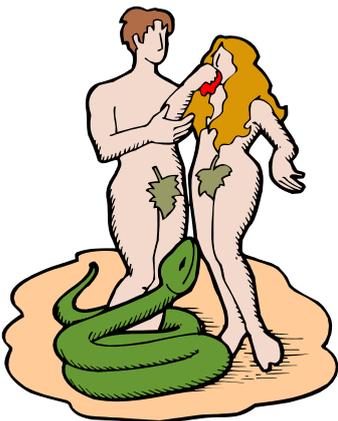


# Theme E - Religion, crime and punishment

## What could I be asked out in the exam?

- ✓ Contrasting Christian perspectives on:
  - Corporal punishment
  - Death penalty
  - Forgiveness
    - ✓ Good and evil intentions and actions, including whether it can ever be good to cause suffering.
    - ✓ Reasons for crime, including:
      - poverty and upbringing
      - mental illness and addiction
      - greed and hate
      - opposition to an unjust law.
        - ✓ Views about people who break the law for these reasons.
        - ✓ Views about different types of crime, including hate crimes, theft and murder.
        - ✓ The aims of punishment, including:
          - retribution
          - deterrence
          - reformation.
            - ✓ The treatment of criminals, including:
              - prison
              - corporal punishment
              - community service.
              - Forgiveness.
              - The death penalty.
                - ✓ Ethical arguments related to the death penalty, including those based on the principle of utility and sanctity of life.

## Where does evil come from?



The Bible teaches that:

- God made a perfect world for humans. God gave humans the gift of freewill to make their own decisions.
- Adam and Eve were permitted to do anything they wanted in the Garden of Eden, apart from eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.
- Satan appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent and tempted her to convince Adam to eat from the tree so that they could have the knowledge of God.

- Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge and God was furious with them.
- He banished them from the Garden, causing them to live in a difficult world in which death occurred, crops sometimes did not grow and childbirth was painful.
- The worst punishment for Adam and Eve was their separation from God.
- As the world was separate from God, natural evil (death, natural disasters etc.) occurred. Moral evil (murder, rape etc.) also became more prevalent as it was hard for humans to use their freewill to make good moral choices. Evil results in suffering.

How do Christians interpret this story from Genesis?

- Some Christians, such as Creationist Christians, interpret the Genesis account of the Original Sin literally. They believe that all evil and suffering is either sin or punishment for sin.
- Most Christians, including Roman Catholic Christians, feel that the story is symbolic. They believe that it is there to help us to understand that evil and suffering occur because of human free will. As God is different to us, he is separate from us and thus it is difficult for us to make good moral choices.

### Different Christian views on hate crime, murder and theft

**Hate crime** involves threatening behaviour, assault, robbery, damaging property or harassment when the victim of the crime is targeted due to their race or ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity.

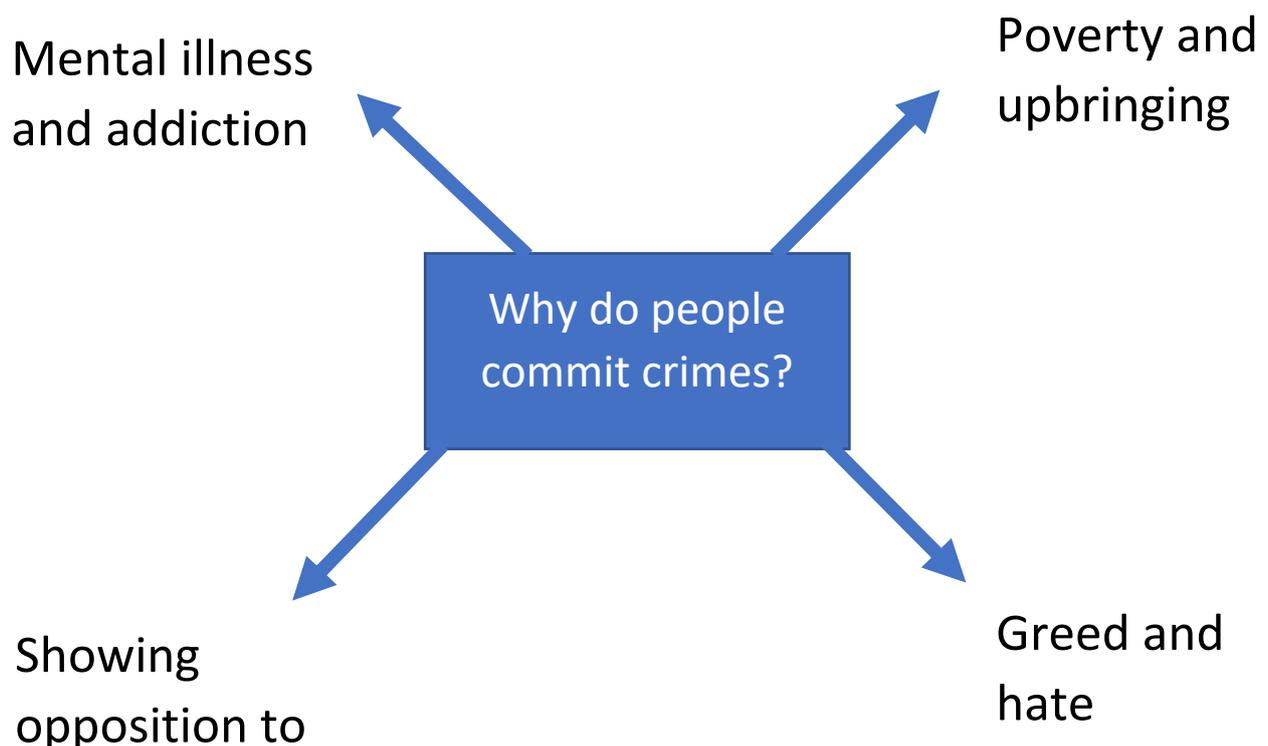
- Almost all Christians stand united against hate crimes, arguing that God made everyone 'in his own image' (Genesis 1:26) and every human person is special and should be valued by others. Christians try to follow the example of Jesus and Jesus did not discriminate against anyone, choosing to spend his time with people that other people were prejudiced against, such as lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes.
- A very small minority of Christians may themselves get involved with such crimes as they believe that the actions of some people do not please God. For example, a Christian church in America known as the Westboro Baptist Church have been involved in harassment and physical assault of gay men and women due to their belief that God hates homosexuals. They have even picketed the funerals of servicemen and women who have died in Afghanistan and Iraq to argue that the death of American soldiers is a message from God that the LGBT community should not be tolerated.

**Murder** involves taking someone's life.

- Most Christians oppose murder as it goes against the sixth of the Ten Commandments "Thou shalt not kill." They also believe in the **sanctity of life** which is the idea that all life is a sacred gift from God and only he has the right to decide when begins or ends.
- However, some Christians believe that it is sometimes okay to take someone's life. For example, some Christians support capital punishment which involves killing a person who has killed someone else. Christians who support this view use the Old Testament saying "an eye for an eye" to justify killing a person who has themselves taken the life of another.

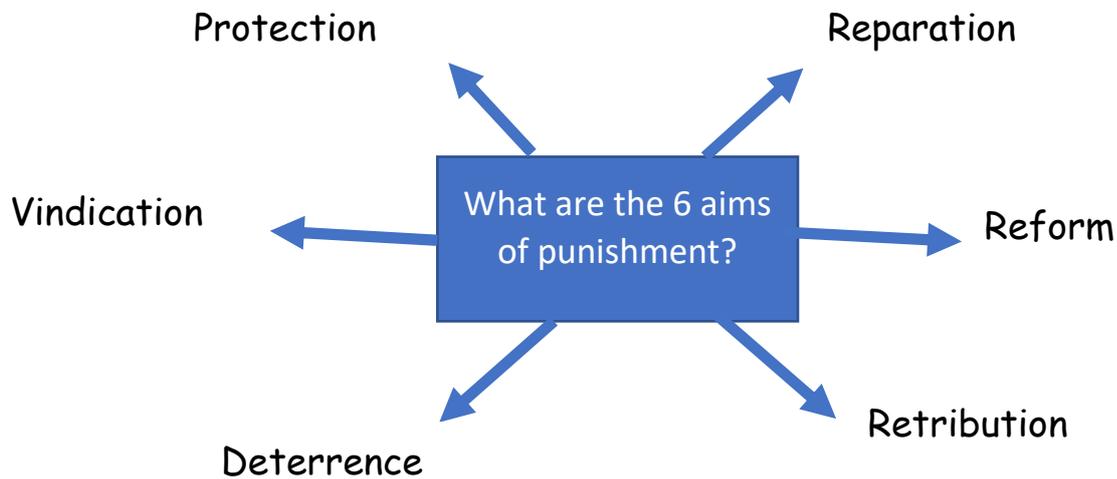
**Theft** involves taking something that is not yours (stealing).

- All Christians feel that theft is wrong as the Ten Commandments tell Christians "Thou shalt not steal" and St Paul teaches that people who steal will not be allowed in God's kingdom. Jesus taught us to "Love your neighbour" and so we should not steal from them.
- However, most Christians would argue that a person who steals to feed themselves and their family would be forgiven by God if they were sorry. Jesus was crucified next to Dismas and he told Dismas that God would forgive him and allow him into heaven because he had asked for forgiveness.



Christian views on these reasons for crime:

	Poverty and upbringing	Mental illness and addiction	Greed and hate	Showing opposition to an unjust law
Christian view 1	<p>People with difficult childhoods are more likely to commit crimes. If they are starving, they may steal to feed themselves and their families - if they ask for forgiveness, God will forgive them and so should we.</p>	<p>Jesus would want us to show compassion to those who are suffering from mental illness and/or addiction by offering them understanding and forgiveness for crimes committed. Christians campaign for better services and support for people suffering from these issues.</p>	<p>Jesus taught us to "love our neighbours"- hate crimes are therefore unacceptable. We should treat everyone with respect as we "are all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus also taught us not to be greedy as "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."</p>	<p>Jesus taught us to "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." God has his laws and Christians must follow these. There are laws of the land and Christians must follow these. Anyone who does not follow the laws must be punished.</p>
Christian view 2	<p>God provides us with the strength to deal with everything we experience in life. There are no valid excuses for breaking the law. Soup kitchens and food banks are available for the poor, it is never acceptable to steal - the Ten Commandments tell us this.</p>	<p>Mental illness and addiction are not valid excuses for breaking the law. Everyone has challenges to overcome but it is not acceptable to break the law at all. Those who break the law choose to do so and must be punished.</p>	<p>The Westboro Baptist church believes that God hates homosexuals and so Christians have a responsibility to spread a message of hate against them. Members of this church have been involved in hate crimes towards homosexuals. This is very much a minority view in Christianity.</p>	<p>Sometimes laws are unfair and discriminate against people. For example, the law used to prevent women from voting and used to allow discrimination against black people. Christians have a duty to stand up for the weak and oppressed in society and they can do this by refusing to follow unjust laws.</p>



## 1. Retribution

Christian view 1: The Old Testament tells Christians that they should seek revenge when someone hurts them, "... if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." (Exodus 21: 23-25) Christians therefore may feel that people who commit crimes need to be punished as they deserve such punishment. This may lead them to support capital punishment, for example, as they believe that someone who murders another person should have their life taken away from them also. Christians therefore may feel that people who commit crimes need to be punished as they deserve such punishment.

Christian view 2: Many Christians argue that we should not seek revenge against those who hurt us by committing crimes, but should forgive them instead. Jesus rejected the idea of taking 'an eye for an eye', arguing instead that "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." (Matthew 5: 39) Punishing criminals by sending them to jail is not helpful as it does not give them a chance to make up for what they have done or make changes to their lives to stop them from committing further crimes in the future.

## 2. Reparation

Christian view 1: Jesus taught that we should forgive those who are truly sorry for what they have done and make an effort to make up for their sins. He said, "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them." (Luke 17:3) Jesus provides us with a good example for reparation as the aim of punishment. For example, Jesus took the time to get to know Zacchaeus, a tax collector who cheated the people of Jericho. Jesus forgave Zacchaeus and as a result Zacchaeus paid back double to all the people he had cheated. Punishment should be about giving people the chance to make amends for the bad they have done and make things right, for this helps both the victim and the criminal.

Christian view 2: Some Christians might see this as a soft option. People who break the law should be punished and have things taken from them as it is not enough to simply give back what was taken or be involved with community service, for example. We need, they might argue, real deterrents to stop people from committing crimes, such as jail time and capital punishment, otherwise society will not be safe, especially for the weak and vulnerable - the members of society Jesus told all Christians to protect.

### 3. Reformation

Christian view 1: Some Christians argue that those who commit crimes are often victims of poverty and poor upbringings. The purpose of punishment should be to enable those who become involved in crime to reform and become better citizens. Education and counselling should thus form a major part of any punishment in prison, for example. Jesus taught us to forgive and "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5: 39) and so we must make allowances for those who walk down the wrong path and the purpose of punishment should be to bring them back to goodness and God.

Christian view 2: Other Christians might argue that the purpose of punishment should be to take something away from the person who has committed the crime (their liberty, their money etc.) in the same way as they have taken something away from someone with their crimes. They may point to God's rule in the Bible that we should take 'an eye for an eye' (Exodus 21:24).

### 4. Protection

Christian view 1: Some Christians may feel that it is their duty to protect the weak and vulnerable in society as this is what Jesus himself tried to do. This involves punishing those who commit crimes and hurt other people by placing them in prison so that they cannot hurt others anymore. It may also be that the criminal themselves need protection from those who are angry about his/her crimes.

Christian view 2: Other Christians might argue that punishment should not be about removing people from society by placing them in prison for the protection of others. Punishment should be about reform so that criminals can change their ways and make up for their wrongdoings. They might argue that overcrowded prisons without focus on education and counselling actually cause more harm than good as criminals come across other criminals who encourage them to pursue a life of crime.

## 5. Vindication

Christian view 1: Some Christians might argue that punishment is needed to show the authority of the law so that the law is upheld by all. Christians have a responsibility to ensure that all people follow the laws as God has commanded that they follow the laws of the land as well as his religious rules and laws. Jesus taught that we must "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17) and so Christians must obey the law and support the punishment of those who break it. It is vital that the authority of the laws be upheld to keep society safe.

Christian view 2: Other Christians might argue that the aim of punishment should not be about upholding the authority of the law. Instead, it should be about treating the criminal and those wronged with love, support and forgiveness. The aim of punishment should be to allow the criminal to make up for the wrong they have done and learn how to be a better person.

## 6. Deterrence

Christian view 1: Some Christians might argue that the main aim of punishment is to deter people from breaking the law in the first place. If drivers know that there are speed cameras ahead and they will be fined if they speed, they will slow down. If people know that their actions are being recorded on CCTV and they will be arrested if they are seen stealing or being violent, they will not commit these crimes. Without punishments, people would not follow the law and people in society would be at risk. God is very clear about the consequences of poor moral behaviour (hell) and this acts to stop people being bad. In the same way, the law is clear that those who commit crimes will be fined/sent to prison and that makes people think twice before committing a crime.

Christian view 2: Other Christians might argue that punishment does not work as a deterrent as people who are sent to prison are extremely likely to reoffend. Their time in prison does not teach them to be good so that they don't go back to prison again and so it is clearly not a deterrent. Punishment, they argue, should be about reform, education and counselling so that they can learn to be better members of society. We should follow the example of Jesus and forgive those who commit crimes if they are truly sorry for what they have done, "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them." (Luke 7: 13)

## Do Christians support the use of prison as a means of punishment?

Yes, they do	No, they don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Bible tells us "Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82: 3-4) – we should put criminals in prison to <u>protect</u> weak and vulnerable people in society.</li> <li>In the Old Testament, people are told to take "an eye for an eye." If a person has broken the law, then it is right that they are punished in prison. This is just <u>retribution</u> for their crimes.</li> <li>The Bible says, "Obey the government, for God is the one who has put it there (Romans 13: 1). Punishing criminals in prison allows for <u>vindication</u> of the law – showing that it is important and must be obeyed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jesus tells us to forgive one another as God forgives us. The main aim of punishment should be <u>reform</u> – helping people to change their lives and be better people. Most people who go to prison don't <u>reform</u>, they end up reoffending, often committing worse crimes.</li> <li>Punishment for crime should involve <u>reparation</u>, allowing the criminal to make up for their crimes and 'pay back' to the person/people affected by their crime. Prison does not allow this to take place. Community service is a better option as it allows a criminal to make up for their crimes.</li> </ul>

## Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment involves physically hurting a person who has broken the law. For example, in Muslim countries which are ruled by Shariah Law, such as Saudi Arabia, a person who steals will have their hand cut off. What are Christian views on corporal punishment?

Most Christians are against corporal punishment because:

- Jesus taught us to forgive other people rather than seeking revenge. He was against the use of violence and so would not want people to be punished in this way. Punishment should give a person the ability to reform their lives and become better. Hurting people does not encourage reformation.
- Christians believe that people should be good and follow the law because they want to be good and want to please God, not because they are scared of getting hurt. It is never acceptable to hurt another person, no matter what they have done. For example, if someone steals because they are hungry and cannot afford food, we should offer them help and support, not further pain.
- The Bible says "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." (Galatians 6: 1). This means that if a person commits a crime, we should support them and help them to be good again, not hurt them.

However, some Christians do support corporal punishment because:

- The Bible says "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them." (Proverbs 13:

24). This implies that the Bible supports the use of corporal punishment to punish children and, by extension, adults who commit crimes. Corporal punishment arguably allows the law to be vindicated and deters people from committing crimes.

- The Bible says “An eye for an eye” which suggests that those who hurt others deserve to be hurt through the use of corporal punishment. Some Christians feel that the aim of punishment is retribution and corporal punishment exacts revenge on those who have committed crimes which hurt others.
- Some Christians may feel that a person who is punished through corporal punishment is less likely to commit a crime again. They may look back to school children in the past who were better behaved because they did not want to be physically hurt by their teachers as an example of the success of corporal punishment in preventing poor behaviour.

Do Christians feel that community service is an effective form of punishment?

Yes, they do	No, they don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many Christians support community service as it allows a person who has committed a crime to pay back to society (<u>reparation</u>). For example, a young person who has vandalised an area in the community can pay back by helping to remove graffiti and tidy up a local park.</li> <li>• It is also hoped that a person who is involved with community service will feel positive about helping to make the community nicer for others and this will <u>reform</u> them, helping them to make good choices in the future rather than hurting others.</li> <li>• Community service allows criminals to show that they are sorry by giving their time and energy to making their communities better. They can then be forgiven for their crimes – this is what Jesus would want.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some Christians feel that community service is a soft option. They believe that there must be <u>retribution</u> for those who commit crimes and community service is not harsh enough to <u>deter</u> people from breaking the law.</li> <li>• Prison may be preferable to community service as locking criminals away <u>protects</u> society from their criminal acts. Those punished through community service are still able to hurt others though their actions in society.</li> <li>• Some Christians feel that the aim of punishment is <u>vindication</u> – to show that the law is important and must be obeyed. Community service and other lenient punishments may be rejected as they do not adequately stress the importance of the law.</li> </ul>

## Forgiveness

Christianity stresses the importance of forgiveness. Jesus told the Parable of the Lost Son to show that Christians should always be willing to forgive others as God is prepared to forgive them. The Lord's Prayer also states involves Christians asking “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us” - we should forgive each other as God forgives us. Also, Jesus himself showed forgiveness by spending time with 'sinners', such as tax collectors, prostitutes and lepers. Should Christians always be able to forgive others, or are there some crimes which are unforgiveable?

## **Christians should forgive no matter what?**

- Jesus taught us to forgive one another as God forgives us (we see this in the Lord's Prayer). Forgiveness is not easy and it is not meant to be. It is a challenge for Christians to forgive everyone, no matter how much pain they cause. Christians should try to help to reform criminals rather than judging them and punishing them too harshly.
- In the Parable of the Lost Son, Jesus teaches us that we should wish everyone to be good so that they can go to heaven to be with God. No matter what someone does, if they are sorry, we should be prepared to forgive them and be happy that they want to change their ways and become good people. The aim of punishment should be to support people to see that God loves them and they can be better people who can live lives that please God.
- Christians believe that it is up to God to judge us, we should not judge each other. Jesus said "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." (John 8: 7) This means that everyone has sinned and got things wrong, but God forgives us and we should forgive one another rather than judging each other and handing out harsh punishments for retribution. If someone has committed a terrible sin which cannot be forgiven, then God will punish them in the afterlife.

## **Some sins cannot be forgiven, even by Christians**

- The Old Testament says that we should take "an eye for an eye" which means that we can punish those who commit crimes rather than forgiving them. If a person has committed the crime of murder, for example, then they should have their life taken from them. This is the way to keep society safe and deter people from committing crimes.
- The Bible mentions many crimes which are 'punishable by death', such as murder, striking one's parents and selling a person into slavery. This means that Christians can argue that there are some crimes which cannot, and should not, be forgiven.
- Christians believe that Jesus has given them the job of protecting the weak and vulnerable in society. He taught us whenever we help the vulnerable, we also help him. This means that crimes against children are examples of crimes which cannot, and should not, be forgiven. Such crimes must be punished severely to keep criminals out of society and show that such behaviour is unacceptable.

# The Death Penalty



Capital punishment is when a person is killed as punishment for their crimes, through use of the electric chair, hanging, lethal injection or other means. The death penalty is usually punishment for the crime of murder and is used in some states of America and many Islamic countries. The death penalty was used in Great Britain until 1965.

## Christianity and Capital Punishment

Christians believe that God forgives everyone for the bad things they have done. Jesus also forgave people in his life; he even asked God to forgive the people who crucified him when he was dying. Christians try to follow this example by forgiving people themselves. For example, Pope John Paul II asked for mercy on the person who tried to assassinate him! However, Christians also believe in the importance of justice and that forgiveness and punishment can go together. Like many issues, there is a variety of opinion amongst Christians on the issue of capital punishment:

### For Capital Punishment

- In the Old Testament it says, "An eye for an eye" (Exodus 21: 24), so some Christians argue that if someone takes another life they should be made to pay for it with their own life.
- Capital punishment protects the weak in society by acting as a deterrent to prevent murder.
- If someone has taken a life, they need to die to protect society.

### Against Capital Punishment

- Sanctity of life. All life is a sacred gift from God and only He can decide when life ends. We were all created "in God's image" (Genesis 1: 26) and so our life is sacred
- In the 10 Commandments it says, "Thou shalt not kill." This includes capital punishment.
- Jesus taught compassion and not revenge. "...turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5: 39)
- It is up to God to punish the wicked, not human beings, "Repay no one evil for evil ... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God ... Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12: 17 -21)

- The Quaker Movement is totally against Capital punishment. The Quakers have campaigned against capital punishment since 1818. They say that all life should be respected and that no-one has the right to end life but God (Sanctity of Life.) They also argue that punishments should be used to **reform** people - clearly this is not the aim of capital punishment.

### Practice Questions:

2 marks

- Give two aims of punishment
- Give two religious beliefs about forgiveness
- Give two examples of religious moral laws that some criminals break.

4 mark

- Explain two similar religious beliefs about people who break the law. In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions.
- Explain two contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about the death penalty for murder. In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions.

5 mark

- Explain two religious beliefs about the death penalty. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer.
- Explain two religious beliefs about breaking the law in order to get a bad law changed. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer.

12 mark

- 'Reformation is the best aim of punishment.' Evaluate this statement.  
In your answer you: • should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement • should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view • should refer to religious arguments • may refer to non-religious arguments • should reach a justified conclusion.
- 'Corporal punishment can never be justified.' Evaluate this statement.
- In your answer you: • should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement • should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view • should refer to religious arguments • may refer to non-religious arguments