

## CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

- The death penalty, also known as Capital Punishment, has been a type of punishment for thousands of years for the worst criminal behaviours. The death penalty is still legal in over 80 different countries (although 50 of these countries have not used execution as a punishment in the last 10 years).
- The majority of the countries that have the death penalty are nations like China, Afghanistan and USA. In America, 'death row' (the name given to the area where prisoners waiting to be executed are held) has now become a popular feature of film, TV programmes and documentaries.
- 82% of global nations do not use the death penalty.
- Methods of execution have changed over the last century as governments look for cheaper but more humane ways to end the life of convicts.
- In America, execution can take the form of lethal injections, electric chair, gas chamber, firing squad or hanging (although in practice, lethal injection is more widely used).



- Other, less humane methods still in use include decapitation (North Korea and Saudi Arabia), shooting under anaesthetic (Taiwan) and stoning (Sudan).
- The UK parliament abolished the death penalty in 1969, although public opinion has at times been in favour of reinstating execution for the worst criminals
- Some people convicted of crimes deserving of the death penalty have later been pardoned as new evidence has come to light. This means that innocent people are wrongly convicted and their lives are taken without cause. For some, this is good enough reason to keep the death penalty abolished.
- In UK, those in favour of the death penalty has fallen from 75% in 1983 to 48% in 2015.

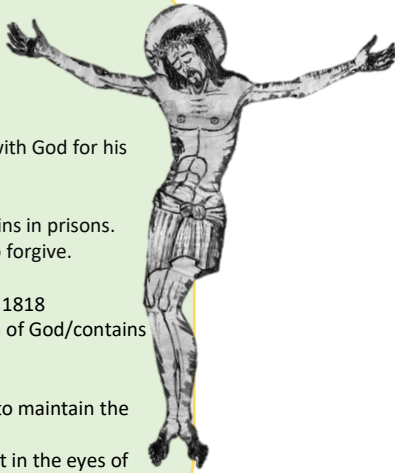


## AROUND THE WORLD

Innocent

## LIBERAL CHRISTIANS

- Only God has the right to take a life
- Execution goes against the sanctity of life
- All life is precious and only God should end it
- "Thou shalt not kill," is a clear commandment
- Jesus taught us to be compassionate and forgiving
- Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery and also pleases with God for his executioners to be forgiven when he was on the cross
- "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."
- Christians favour reform over execution. Many work as Chaplains in prisons.
- Jesus taught 'turn the other cheek', to love our enemies and to forgive. Execution makes these impossible.
- The Quakers have campaigned against the death penalty since 1818
- All human life should be respected and everyone is a reflection of God/contains a little of God
- Punishments should always be used to reform
- Some of the first prison reformers were Quakers who worked to maintain the dignity and humanity of prisoners
- "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."



## QUAKERS

Reformation 500

# THE DEATH PENALTY

- Some Christians support the death penalty, seeing it as following the Old Testament law of 'an eye for an eye'. In the Old Testament it states, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed."
- The Old Testament specifies 36 capital offences. These are crimes that are deserving of the death penalty and include idolatry, blasphemy and murder.
- Some Christians argue that the death penalty was not only approved, but created by God.
- Capital punishment upholds the commandment, 'thou shalt not kill', by showing the seriousness of the crime of murder
- RC Christians are divided. Traditionally the Catholic Church has allowed (but not encouraged) capital punishment
- In 1997 the Vatican issued a statement saying that execution was acceptable where the identity of the criminal was absolutely confirmed and where execution was the only means to protect society from the criminal
- The Vatican also states that non-lethal means of punishment were "more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and the dignity of the human person." (Pope John Paul II)



## \* ROMAN CATHOLICS

- Capital punishment is generally opposed by humanists because they think premeditated killing is wrong, even when carried out by the state
- The death penalty raises the possibility of error and an irreversible failure of justice by issuing a sentence that cannot be reversed
- Humanists believe that treating criminals fairly also helps to ensure that innocent suspects are treated fairly
- Some people see execution of any form as morally wrong and might argue that there is little evidence that the death penalty works as a deterrent. Religious people might agree with these views and also believe that life is sacred and shouldn't be ended by human beings.

### Other Arguments against the Death Penalty

- Humans make mistakes – they can get the judgement wrong. Innocent people can be killed
- Botched executions can leave a person dying in pain and agony for hours, which is inhumane
- "Capital punishment is against the better judgement of modern criminology and against the highest expression of love in the nature of God." (Martin Luther King Jr)
- "This is a democracy – the government is me. If the government is killing somebody, then I am killing somebody." (Steve Earle, musician)



HUMANISM

EXECUTE JUSTICE,  
NOT PEOPLE.

NO TO THE DEATH PENALTY.



## ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

\$60000

- There needs to be an ultimate punishment to act as a deterrent
- "While the evidence tells me that the death penalty does little to deter crime, I believe there are some crimes – mass murder, the rape and murder of a child – so heinous, so beyond the pale, that the community is justified in expressing the full measure of its outrage by meting out the ultimate punishment." (Barack Obama)
- "People who go out prepared to take the lives of other people forfeit their own right to live." (M Thatcher, Former British Prime Minister, 1984)
- The justice system in UK has sometimes failed to work, even though there are many examples of dangerous criminals who need to be permanently removed from society. For example, Myles Williams, 19, from East London, was convicted for the murder of his girlfriend Kirsty Trelor who was 20. He had previously been arrested for violently dragging her along the street, but was released on bail (on the condition that he did not contact her). In cases like this, people would agree that the justice system had failed the victim and her family.
- The average cost of keeping a person in jail for a year is almost \$60,000 – over three times higher than the average yearly salary. The average cost of the lethal injection is \$1,300. Some would therefore argue that, economically, it makes more sense to kill someone deserving of the death penalty than to keep them alive in prison for life.
- Aileen Wuornos, (right), convicted serial killer, was executed in 2002. Previously she had told the court, "You have to kill me. I am evil. If you don't I'll just kill again."



## ARGUMENTS FOR THE DEATH PENALTY

- Oppose the death penalty – for all crimes, without exception
- Evidence shows that it doesn't deter crime. It is often used with unfair justice systems
- It discriminates. Statistics show that the death penalty is used disproportionately against the poor, minorities and member of racial, ethnic and religious communities. In USA you are 7 times more likely to receive the death penalty if the victim was white than if the victim was African-American
- It can be used as a political tool as many governors have fast-tracked executions to show that they are 'hard on crime'.



## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

DEATH TO THE DEATH PENALTY

