

Key Concepts

Sin	Acting against the will or laws of God	Capital Punishment	The death penalty
Absolutism	The belief that there are certain actions that are always right or always wrong	Relativism	The belief that there is no moral law and that rules change from place to place and from age to age
Deterrence	To deter/ put someone off committing a crime. Effective punishment should act as a deterrent	Retribution (revenge)	The idea that a criminal should pay for their crime, or ‘an eye for an eye’
Rehabilitation (reform)	The idea that criminals should be helped to change so that they do not commit crime again.	Punishment	A penalty imposed by a person in authority on the person who has committed wrongdoing

Crime and Punishment

A critical evaluation of the aims of punishment (retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation)

Catholic teaching on capital punishment

Arguments for and against Capital punishment

Key Sources of Authority

“... we pity the person, but hate the offence or transgression. In fact, the more we dislike the vice in question, the less do we want the offender to die without correcting his vices.” St Augustine Letter 153 to Macedonius 3

“The primary purpose of the punishment which society inflicts is ‘to redress the disorder caused by the offence.’” Pope John Paul II Evangelium Vitae

“We would prefer to have them set free than to have the sufferings of our brothers avenged by shedding their blood.” St Augustine, Letter 134

Key Beliefs

Christian teaching on the aim of punishment	Christians support the idea that those who break the law should be punished so that justice is served and as a deterrent to others. However, after their punishment, criminals should have the opportunity to reform and re-join society. This follows the teachings of Jesus who forgave sinners.	
Catholic teaching on Capital Punishment	Pope John Paul II taught that CP should be avoided but is acceptable if it is to save lives and there is no doubt the murderer is guilty. In 2018 the Catechism of the Catholic Church was revised to state that the Church teaches that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person”.	
Arguments for and against Capital Punishment	‘For’	Against
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Jesus never taught that the death penalty was wrongIt can save lives (if a mass murderer is executed)The O.T says ‘he who sheds a person’s blood, shall have his blood shed’ (Gen 9:6) and ‘an eye for an eye’St. Paul taught that Christians should obey the law and Capital Punishment is legal in many countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The 6th Commandment says ‘do not kill’We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killingOnly God can take a lifeThere is always a risk that the person is innocentThe dead cannot be reformed (Augustine)Christianity tells us to love our neighbour and forgive our enemies.

Exam Practice

Describe Catholic teaching on capital punishment. (5)

Explain how a Catholic would view the different aims of punishing people. (8)

“Capital Punishment is wrong” or “Some actions are always wrong.”

Discuss this statement showing you have considered more than one point of view. You must refer to religion and belief in your answer.

Key Connections

Would Thomas Aquinas’ teaching about Natural Law (Component 1, Theme 1) support absolute or relative morality/capital punishment?

What is the connection between Christian teaching on the aims of punishment and Jesus’ teachings and actions?

What is the connection between Catholic teachings on Capital Punishment and the encyclical Evangelium Vitae?