

Lesson Ten

Religion and Human Rights: 1

Aims

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- gain knowledge and understanding of
 - human rights and legal rights of citizens
 - religious attitudes towards the law and human rights
 - the impact of religion on the rights and responsibilities as a citizen
 - organisations which help if rights are abused
 - case studies of human rights issues
- evaluate issues relating to religion and human rights

Context

This is the first of two lessons on Topic 6 of your GCSE examination for Unit 1 - Religion and Human Rights

Key Words

Abuse: the harmful treatment of someone; the bad or wrong use of something.

Human Rights: the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings should be entitled.

Human Rights Act: an act of parliament passed in 1998 which says that all organisations have a duty to protect the rights of all individuals in the UK.

Legal rights: rights that are laid down as an entitlement by law.



Oxford Open Learning

Human Rights

Human rights can perhaps be defined as those things which, as a minimum, human beings are entitled to have or to enjoy during their lifetime. Many of these rights address basic needs like food and shelter. Other rights involve the freedoms which it is generally accepted every human individual ought to have – for example, freedom of conscience, freedom to choose a religion and freedom of speech (as long as it harms no one else). Rights are often referred to at times when peoples' rights are being abused. So torture, imprisonment without trial, discrimination according to race or religion or colour, slavery are recognised as unfair and an abuse of human rights.

Often, those who have the most freedom campaign for the rights of others who are not in a position to campaign for themselves, or make a difference to their situation. Gradually, charters, laws and agreements have been formed to establish particular rights and ensure that they are properly protected. In government, democracy, that is rule by the people, cannot be properly achieved unless those who govern are chosen freely and have the opportunity to speak freely. Therefore in the UK, the rights of Parliament, whose members debate and make the law, are seen to be very important.



The Houses of Parliament

Reproduced under http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_Free_Documentation_License

In the UK there has been a history of laws which have developed human rights. In 1215, King John signed the Magna Carta which gave the people of Britain some rights. It limited the power which the king had over his subjects and it included the right not to be imprisoned without a fair trial. Gradually other charters and bills were introduced adding to the rights of citizens. For example the Bill of Rights of 1689 gave people the right to elect members of parliament without any interference from the monarch and the right to free speech within Parliament. Other famous laws which promoted human rights were the Slavery Abolition Act (1833), the Factories and Workshop Acts (1802-1895) which stopped young children from being employed, limited the hours that older children could work and improved the conditions of work for adults, and the Representation of the People Acts which gave freedom to vote, first to women over 30 (1918), and then to all adults over the age of 21 (1928).

Rights and Responsibilities

Most religious believers support the principles of human rights. They believe in a God which created human life and for whom every individual is equal. They understand that, in keeping with the Golden Rule principle, the rights of every individual are safeguarded best by each person respecting the equal rights of others. So there is a balance between rights and responsibilities. For example, if people are to be protected from cruelty, they need to ensure that they themselves are not bullying or harming other people. In other words, if everyone understands their responsibility to respect the human rights of others, then they will find that their rights are also respected.

The United Nations

After the Second World War ended in 1945, the organisation known as the United Nations was established. Fifty one countries committed themselves to maintaining international peace and security, developing good relationships between nations, and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. In 2011, the number of member states had increased to 192.

In 1948, the United Nations drew up The UN Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by many countries. It was felt that the Declaration was a step towards a world in which there would be freedom, justice and peace. In 1990, the United Nations drew up the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifically focuses on the rights of children, and sets standards for their care and protection. This was ratified by the UK in 1991. Ratifying the

convention means that a country agrees to abide by the statements made in the Conventions except in any area in which the country has entered specific reservations.

The Declaration of Human Rights, 1948



Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the USA, shows the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in Spanish), January 1949. Eleanor Roosevelt was a delegate to the UN General Assembly from 1945 to 1952.

The following is a summary of the Declaration of Human Rights:

Every individual is

- born free
- equal
- entitled to all the rights and freedoms set out in the declaration

and should

- be treated in the same way
- respect everyone else

Everyone has the right to:

- life, liberty and security of person

- equal protection in law
- be innocent until proven guilty
- a public trial
- asylum
- belong to a country
- marry
- own and keep property
- free speech
- freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- freedom of movement and residence within and outside a country
- nationality
- meet with others peacefully
- vote
- work, be paid equally, join a trade union
- rest
- an education
- a right to water, food, shelter, healthcare
- contribute to the cultural life of a community

No one should be

- arrested, detained or exiled without proper process
- tortured
- made a slave
- imprisoned unjustly

The Declaration ends by indicating that no one should destroy the rights of others and that there should be laws which protect these rights. Both the Declaration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child include issues relating to religion.

Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

Article 18 of the Declaration includes the following statement:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child includes the following:

“Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should help guide their children in these matters. The Convention respects the rights and duties of parents in providing religious and moral guidance to their children. Religious groups around the world have expressed support for the Convention, which indicates that it in no way prevents parents from bringing their children up within a religious tradition. At the same time, the Convention recognizes that as children mature and are able to form their own views, some may question certain religious practices or cultural traditions. The Convention supports children's right to examine their beliefs, but it also states that their right to express their beliefs implies respect for the rights and freedoms of others.”

(From UNICEF – a summary of the rights:

http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

Activity 1

Research the UN Declaration of Human Rights at

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

Read through the articles which make up the Declaration. Look at the Preamble and list the reasons which are given for the drawing up of this statement of rights.



The Human Rights Act

The Human Rights Act 1998, passed by the UK Parliament, came into force in 2000. This reinforced the rights and freedoms contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. Most of these rights are limited, which means they are not absolute. One cannot defend one person's human rights if the human rights of another person are being taken away by the actions or words of another.

However, there are some rights that are not limited – for example, the right not to be tortured. The human rights mentioned in this act are summarised as follows on the government website <http://www.direct.gov.uk>. No one is above the law, so anyone is able to complain if they believe their human rights have been breached, even if the complaint is against someone in authority – for example, the police.

Your human rights are:

- the right to life
- freedom from torture and degrading treatment
- freedom from slavery and forced labour
- the right to liberty
- the right to a fair trial
- the right not to be punished for something that wasn't a crime when you did it
- the right to respect for private and family life
- freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom to express your beliefs
- freedom of expression
- freedom of assembly and association
- the right to marry and to start a family
- the right not to be discriminated against in respect of these rights and freedoms
- the right to peaceful enjoyment of your property
- the right to an education
- the right to participate in free elections
- the right not to be subjected to the death penalty

(Taken from <http://www.direct.gov.uk>)

Religious Attitudes towards the Law and Human Rights

In history, there have been many occasions on which people have faced difficulties because of their religious faith. Sometimes they have been imprisoned, tortured, oppressed and killed because they

stood up for the right to believe in their religion, or spoke out about things in their country which they believed were wrong according to their religious principles. Sometimes they have been driven out of their country, and so have been denied other human rights. In some parts of the world, this is still happening today.

All religions teach that their followers should oppose injustice or oppression and that the stronger people, or those in better circumstances, should stand up for the more vulnerable or disadvantaged members of their local, national or global communities. Some of the human rights which are included in the Declaration of Human Rights or in the Human Rights Act form part of some of the important statements of beliefs and practice in the world religions.

So, for example, the Jewish Ten Commandments include not stealing, not killing, not committing adultery, and not being jealous of the possessions others have. Christianity, together with the Ten Commandments, emphasises justice, equality, forgiveness and love (respecting and wanting the best) for every individual, even enemies. Buddhists and Hindus believe in the principle of **ahimsa** – not harming anything, a non-violent approach to life. Buddhists also believe in Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood, parts of the Eightfold Path dealing with treatment of others, and with compassion. Hindus and Sikhs believe in tolerance, honesty and providing support for the poor and disadvantaged. The teaching of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, centres on the equality of all and the respect which each individual is due.

You may remind yourself of some of the teaching of the religions about how believers should behave and the treatment of other people by looking back at Lesson One.

Legal Rights

As citizens with religious beliefs, most believers will respect the laws of their country. In many countries, most laws are based on general principles of equality and respect and there is usually no conflict. However, at times, as we saw in Lesson Eight in the case study of the Christian Guesthouse, there may be a problem for individuals when the laws of the country challenge their religious beliefs.

If people believe that their rights are being abused or their freedom threatened, they need to feel that they have some way of restoring justice. Sometimes, the problems are to do with legal rights and people may decide that they have to consult a lawyer and take legal action, perhaps taking a case to court. They may follow a formal complaints procedure or take their case to a tribunal, such as the employment tribunal which heard Miriam O'Reilly's case (see Lesson Seven). In addition to Employment tribunals, which are established

to hear cases where an individual feels they have been treated unfairly, there are other kinds of tribunal, for example, the Immigration and Asylum Tribunal, the Social Security and Child Support Tribunal, or the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

There are many voluntary organisations which have been established to help people who feel that they are being treated unfairly, and situations in which the human rights of individuals have been abused are often brought to their attention. These organisations also believe in the importance of equality and justice and are prepared to spend time trying to help people to gain the rights to which they are entitled, and enjoy a quality of life which will enable them to be free, independent citizens. We will study three of these in this lesson.

Activity 2

Explain how the Declaration of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act are connected with the religious beliefs and teachings of the religion(s) you have chosen to study.

**ChildLine**

<http://www.childline.org.uk>

ChildLine is a 24-hour counselling service for children and young people and has been connected to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) since 2006. The hotline is not for parents, who are invited to contact the NSPCC directly. ChildLine was begun by the television presenter, Esther Rantzen, in 1986 when the programme she was presenting, 'That's Life', decided to investigate child **abuse**. It set up a telephone line for 24 hours and encouraged adults and children to ring in with their views on or experience of abuse. The line was jammed and many accounts of bullying and abuse were heard. Many children were too frightened to give their name. The programme raised public awareness of how much children need to have someone, who is not directly involved in any way, to talk to about problems they are experiencing at home or at school.

ChildLine's aims and objectives are:

- to protect children from harm
- to share children's and young people's difficulties and help resolve or alleviate their problems
- to raise public awareness and influence policies and practice that affect children's lives and development.

ChildLine maintains the confidentiality of the child who is calling unless there is life-threatening situation. This is explained to callers. Sometimes a child or young person wants a government agency like Social Services to be involved and ChildLine, with the child's agreement, will contact them. There are special lines available for those with hearing disabilities and for those who live away from home – in foster homes, boarding schools, residential care or hospitals.

ChildLine is contacted by approximately 4000 children and young people a day and has several call centres in which trained volunteers help answer the phones. As an organisation which has experience in dealing with young people, ChildLine campaigns for the rights of the child in several ways:

- It has joined with other children's charities to press for Internet Safety for children – wanting greater protection for children using the web.
- It has highlighted the problems and dangers of bullying and launched research into children's views on bullying and how to overcome the problems.
- It has produced reports based on ChildLine conversations about eating problems, suicide, bereavement and children who run away from home.

- In 1999, it held an international conference on children and the law – having campaigned to make it easier for children to give evidence in court.
- It has taken part in a campaign making people aware of the vulnerable position of children who live with alcohol-abusing parents.

Citizens Advice



The Citizens Advice service, which used to be known as the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), was established in 1939. It is one of the UK's largest voluntary organisations and describes its work as follows:

'The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice to everyone on their right and responsibilities, and by influencing policymakers.'

It states that the organisation 'values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.'

More than 21,000 volunteers work for Citizens Advice as well as several thousand paid staff to provide a range of services. They take on a range of essential roles from giving advice to fundraising, IT, administration, publicity, campaigning and trusteeship.

Every year, approximately two million people will contact Citizens Advice. The volunteers may

- provide information on rights and responsibilities
- give advice on a wide range of issues
- talk to people face to face, by telephone or on-line
- give people the names of other agencies or organisations which may be able to help with their particular problem
- write letters for people,
- make telephone calls,
- help people to obtain justice
- help people prepare for an appearance in court as a witness
- assist in preparing a case for court

(See www.adviceguide.org.uk)

The Samaritans

The Samaritans was set up in 1953 by Chad Varah, a Church of England vicar who was working in London. He was very concerned about the number of suicides each day and wanted to give suicidal people an opportunity to talk things through and have the opportunity to think again about taking their life. Many were depressed, were experiencing severe problems in their lives and felt they had no one to turn to. Ending their life was the only way they could see to solve their problems and their feeling of hopelessness. Chad Varah believed that if there was someone who was prepared to listen and perhaps to befriend the person, talking issues through would help them to reflect and to appreciate that there might be other solutions to their problems.

He named the organisation after The Parable of the Good Samaritan in the Christian Gospel of Luke, who unlike other travellers on a road did not pass by someone who had been mugged by robbers, but stopped, helped the stranger and took him to a nearby inn where he could rest. He was the good neighbour. However, the organisation is not a specifically Christian-based organisation. Volunteers may belong to any religion, or none, as may their clients.

Today there are over 5 million contacts a year to the Samaritans which is staffed by trained volunteers. Samaritans do not offer advice. They encourage people to have the confidence to talk about their problems and perhaps to reflect on the choices available to them. They believe that if people are given time and feel they are being listened to, they will grow in confidence and will have the strength to work out problems, make decisions and see a way forward.



A branch office of the Samaritans in Moore Street, Coventry, England
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Commons:GNU_Free_Documentation_License_1.2

The Samaritans state that their purpose is:

- to enable persons who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those who may be at risk of suicide, to receive confidential emotional support at any time of the day or night from appropriately trained Samaritans in order to improve their emotional health and to reduce the incidence of suicide; and
- to promote a better understanding in society of suicide, suicidal behaviour and the value of expressing feelings which may otherwise lead to suicide or impaired emotional health.

Different services which the Samaritans provide include:

- 24-hour telephone service
- A befriending service
- A listening service for prisoners
- A range of training courses for Businesses, Schools and Prisons, featuring communication skills, and including a Worklife programme on stress in the workplace.

Activity 3

Choose one of the organisations and research more about the work they do, especially any specific facilities or projects, more detail about the work which volunteers do and how the organisation is funded.



<http://www.childline.org.uk>

<http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

<http://www.samaritans.org/>

A Case Study**Girl wins religious bangle case, July 2008**

'A Sikh teenager excluded from school for breaking a "no jewellery" rule by refusing to remove a wrist bangle which is central to her faith was a victim of unlawful discrimination, a judge ruled.

As a result of the judgment in the High Court, Sarika Watkins-Singh, 14, will be returning to Aberdare Girls' School in South Wales in September - wearing the Kara, a slim steel bracelet.

Her lawyers had told Mr Justice Silber that the Kara was as important to her as it was to England spin bowler, Monty Panesar, who has been pictured wearing the bangle.

Sarika, of mixed Welsh and Punjabi origin, of Cwmbach, near Aberdare, was at first taught in isolation and eventually excluded for refusing to take off the bangle in defiance of the school's policy, which prohibits the wearing of any jewellery other than a wrist watch and plain ear studs.

The judge declared that the school was guilty of indirect discrimination under race relations and equality laws.

After the judgment, Sarika's mother, Sinita, 38, said: "We are over the moon. It is just such a relief."

Afterwards, a spokeswoman for the family hailed it as a "common sense" judgment.

Sarika said: "I am overwhelmed by the outcome and it's marvellous to know that the long journey I've been on has finally come to an end. I'm so happy to know that no-one else will go through what me and my family have gone through." She added: "I just want to say that I am a proud Welsh and Punjabi Sikh girl."

(http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/School_uniform_and_the_5ks)

Note: The kara is one of the 5Ks (see Glossary) Once a Sikh has been initiated into the Khalsa, the brotherhood of Sikhs, he or she is expected to wear the 5Ks. It is a sign of their faith and commitment.

Activity 4

'Rules are made to be kept. No one should be able to wear something which is symbolic of their faith as part of their school uniform. Everyone must be the same.'

What do you think? Explain your opinion including religious arguments and those relating to human rights.



Self Assessment Test: Lesson Ten

1. What is meant by the term 'Human Rights'?
2. Explain how rights and responsibilities are connected.
3. Give two aims of the United Nations organisation.
4. Explain why many of the freedoms of an individual to which they are entitled need to be 'limited'.
5. Summarise in your own words what Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is saying about a child's religion.
6. Explain the difference between Human Rights and Legal Rights.
7. Explain why religious believers are committed to human rights.
8. Suggest the human rights which ChildLine helps to protect.
9. Give four ways in which Citizens Advice helps people.
10. 'The Samaritans should give advice to people. It is not enough to listen.' What do you think? Explain your opinion.

Suggested Answers to Activities

Activity One

Reasons for the drawing up of the Declaration of Human Rights:

- All human beings have dignity, equal and inalienable rights which must be recognised.
- Rights are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.
- In the past a disregard and contempt for human rights have led to appalling acts which have shocked the world.
- There is a need to work towards a world in which human beings enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want.
- Human rights should be protected by the rule of law so that people do not have to rebel against oppression.
- It is important to promote the development of friendly relations between nations.
- Peoples are determined to promote social progress and better standards of life and this comes with greater freedom.
- Everyone needs to promote respect for all and to have a common understanding of rights and freedoms and a common standard.
- The nations will teach and education in a way which promotes respect for these rights and freedoms and will work to make progress in making them a reality wherever they have control or influence.

Activity Two

Human rights are connected with religious beliefs because many are based on the same principles as religious laws. For example, some of the human rights, such as a right to life, freedom of religion, the right to own and keep property and the right to marry form part of the Ten Commandments. Most religions believe human beings were created by God and that therefore all individuals are equal before God, are equally valuable, and should be equally respected. Jews believe that freedom of religion is an important way in which respect is shown for all, and the persecution which they have experienced in the past, throughout their history, has made them very aware of the important of this and other human rights. Therefore, the principle that everyone was born free and is equal and that all should have protection under the law, the right to have a country and have freedom of movement in the country, the right not to be a slave, and to participate in free elections are all principles which go well with religious beliefs in justice, freedom, equality and compassion. Jesus said, 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself', and the 'Golden Rule' 'treat other people as you would want them to treat you' is an

important religious principle and is part of human rights principles, supported by human rights law. This means that in the same way as you expect human rights law to protect you, you must make sure that you do not abuse the human rights of others.

Activity Three

e.g. ChildLine

ChildLine hotline– 0800 1111 – a free telephone helpline for children and young people from anywhere in the UK

- It saves lives.
- Brings abusers to justice.
- Finds a safe place for children in danger on the streets.

Specific facilities

- It provides a freepost service to children and young people who may prefer to put their problems and worries in writing. Every letter is answered individually.
- It has message boards on the website where children can share their problems and feel supported.
- It has produced an innovative multimedia teaching pack 'All About Me' which includes classroom resources for teachers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- It offers each child a personal locker through the website, password protected, in which they may keep things of value to them.
- The website has a play section in which children can play games, watch videos and be creative.
- It is linked with the NSPCC – who will provide a service to help parents who are worried about their children.

Funding and help from volunteers

The Government makes a grant to NSPCC - £11.2 million over the period 2011-2015

NSPCC raises money for ChildLine:

- Fundraising activities include giving talks about NSPCC in school, fundraising at work, selling items on eBay, etc.
- Donations including gifts in memory of someone, gifts in wills
- Events organised by NSPCC – marathons, skydiving, challenging walks, etc.
- Businesses and companies may set up a partnership with NSPCC. This is good publicity for the business and provides funds for NSPCC.

Activity Four

The following is an example of an answer. You may have taken a different view, but it is the reasons for your argument that are important.

I think that schools need to be understanding about school uniform and flexible when dealing with individuals. People do have strongly held religious beliefs and education is supposed to be all about understanding people and being tolerant. I understand that if there were health and safety implications, people would have to be reasonable, but in this case, the bracelet is not doing any harm to anyone – it is a bit like a child wearing a cross on a chain. Unless it is dangerous, there should be no problem. If the child were using machinery in a Design and Technology workshop for example, then they would need to take it off – or, I suppose – the parents would need to sign something to say that the school was not responsible for any accident. One of the human rights that are mentioned in the Declaration of Human Rights is the freedom of thought, conscience and religion and I think that people should not make unnecessary difficulties for those religious believers who just want to practise their religion.

Answers to Self-Assessment Test: Lesson Ten

1. Human Rights are the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings are entitled.
2. The more rights and freedoms people have which enable them to take responsibility for their own lives, the more responsibilities they will find they have. If people expect their rights to be respected and honoured, then they have responsibility to ensure that they do not say or do anything which reduces the rights of other people. Citizens have certain rights and expect the law, and the police to protect these. At the same time, they have responsibilities to act within the law and to ensure that other people have the same protection. For example, people have a right not to be bullied but at the same time they have a responsibility to make sure they are not bullying others in any way.
3. Two aims of the UN are to:
 - maintain peace and security
 - develop good relationships between nations.
4. Freedoms of individuals are limited because to give anyone individual absolute freedom probably means denying others their freedom. For example, people have the freedom to follow a religion of their choice, but they cannot follow any teaching or rule which the religion might happen to establish if that rule denied someone else their human rights.

5. Children have a right to believe and practise their religion providing it does not stop others from enjoying their rights. Parents should help to guide their children in religious matters and they may bring up their children within a religious tradition. However, as children grow up they may have questions about religious practices or traditions which they have a right to express. Children's rights to express their beliefs must take into account the rights and freedoms of other people.
6. Human rights are basic entitlements which many nations have approved of and which give people dignity and certain freedoms. Not all countries have signed up to these rights, and even in some cases where they have ratified a document, the laws in those countries do not necessarily support human rights. Legal rights are those rights which have the protection of law in the country of the individual concerned. If those legal rights are infringed, people will have the opportunity to challenge them through the legal system, the courts, etc. Not all human rights are part of the law of every country.
7. Religious believers are committed to human rights because they believe that each human being is a unique and valuable individual and that everyone is born equal. Most religions also believe that human beings, as part of the creation, were created by God and so are very precious and have much potential. They believe that God has a purpose for human life and each person, if they are given the opportunity, has the ability to make a contribution to the world in which they live. However, because of the human ability to make decisions, and a natural instinct for the stronger to survive, and the more powerful to dominate, it is necessary to protect the weak and have guidelines which remind everyone of the life which they should be entitled to. So religious believers agree with human rights because they see them as safeguarding the freedom of individuals and their ability to participate more fully in life in the world.
8. ChildLine helps to protect children in relation to the following human rights:
 - every individual is born free and is entitled to be treated equally
 - every individual has the right to life, liberty and security of person
 - free speech
 - freedom of thought, conscience and religion
 - rest
 - a right to water, food, shelter, healthcare
9. Citizens Advice helps by
 - providing information on rights and responsibilities
 - giving advice on a wide range of issues
 - writing letters for people

- helping people to obtain justice.
10. I think the Samaritans are right not to give advice. There are plenty of organisations and government departments which will give advice to people. The Samaritans are really doing different work. They are actually listening to people who sometimes have serious problems in their lives and feel that no one else will listen to them. Probably they have found that because their problems are so great and they are very depressed, their own family and friends have stopped listening to them – perhaps because they feel the situation is hopeless and cannot be changed, or perhaps because they have their own problems and are just tired of hearing someone else's. So it is very important that there is someone there to listen who will let the person reflect on what has happened. Often a person is trying to work through in their head towards a solution and having someone who is not going to make judgments or give them advice is a great relief and gives them the space they need.