



Can Religions Ever Justify Fighting in Wars?

KS4 RELIGIOUS STUDIES

ETHICS

PHILOSOPHY

Ages 13-16

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What Do Religions Teach About War?

This is one of the biggest questions religions try to answer: is it ever okay to fight and kill people in a war? Different religions have different views, and even people within the same religion don't always agree. Some believe war can sometimes be justified, while others think violence is never acceptable.

Christianity and Just War Theory

Many **Christian** thinkers created something called **Just War Theory**. This teaches that a war might be acceptable if: it has a good reason (called **just cause**), it's declared by a proper authority like a government, and other peaceful solutions have been tried first. However, it must also cause as little harm as possible. This theory tries to balance protecting people with accepting that sometimes defence is necessary.

Think of it like a parent who teaches their child that hitting others is wrong, but sometimes pushing someone away in self-defence is acceptable—not out of anger, but to protect yourself.

Islam's Perspective on Conflict

Islam teaches that fighting is only permitted under strict conditions, in what's called **Jihad** (often misunderstood in the West). The word actually means 'struggle' and can mean struggling with your own bad habits. In terms of physical fighting, **Islamic law** says war can only happen if Muslims are attacked first, and even then, certain people like children and priests must not be harmed. Excessive violence is forbidden.

Buddhism and Pacifism

Buddhism teaches one of the strongest anti-war positions. Buddhists follow **Five Precepts**, one of which is to avoid killing living things. Because of this, many

Buddhists are **pacifists**—people who believe violence is never justified, even in self-defence. This comes from the Buddhist belief that all life is sacred and connected.

Think of it like refusing to hit back in a fight because you believe harming anyone, even someone hurting you, creates more suffering in the world.

Judaism and Self-Defence

Judaism teaches that defending your community and family is a duty. Jewish **Talmudic law** (ancient Jewish teaching) says that if someone threatens to kill you, you may use force to stop them. However, this must be proportionate—you can't use more force than necessary. The goal is always to protect, not destroy.

Why These Differences Matter

All these religions value **peace**, but they disagree on whether fighting can ever protect that peace. Some emphasise self-defence, others focus on protecting the innocent, and some reject violence completely. Understanding these different views helps us see that religious people genuinely try to act morally, even when they reach different conclusions about the hardest questions.