Keywords – Religious attitudes to the Elderly and Death.

**Active euthanasia.** The ending of a life by a deliberate action, such as by giving a patient a fatal injection.

**Ageism.** Prejudice and discrimination against the elderly.

**Bereaved.** People who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

**Blasphemy.** Talk or behaviour that insults God or the gods.

**Care home.** A home for the elderly who are ill and need specialist medical treatment.

**Community.** A group within which a person lives and acts, e.g. a religious community.

**Corporate responsibility.** A community or society takes responsibility for the care of the people within it.

**Day of Resurrection.** Day when the dead will return to life.

**Death.** The end of life which can be determined in several ways but normally when the brain stops functioning.

**Dependency.** Reliance on somebody or something else.

**Eternal life.** Everlasting life after death.

**Euthanasia.** Inducing a painless death, by agreement and with compassion, to ease suffering. From the Greek meaning “good death”.

**Extended family.** All members of a family, including grandparents, cousins, etc.

**Generation gap.** A difference between the views of young people and their parents.

**Free will.** Having the ability to choose or determine one’s own actions.

**Heaven.** A state of being with God after death.

**Hell.** A state of being without God (or with the Devil) after death.

**Hospices.** Special places to which people go to die with dignity.

**Individual responsibility.** A person who takes responsibility for themselves.

**Involuntary euthanasia.** When a patient’s life is ended because it is felt that, to keep them alive is to make them suffer, but the patient has not given their consent to the decision.

**Life support machine.** A machine that keeps people alive when they would otherwise die.

**Mercy killing.** Term sometimes used for euthanasia.

**Mourning.** State of sadness over the death of a loved one.

**Nuclear family.** Traditionally a family comprising of the mother, the father and their own children.

**Passive euthanasia.** Allowing a terminally or incurably ill person to die by withdrawing or withholding medical treatment that would only prolong the suffering and have no real benefit.

**Pre-existence.** Belief that some part of ourselves existed before we were conceived for this life.

**Purgatory.** A time of spiritual cleansing and preparation for Heaven.

**Quality of life.** A measure of fulfilment.

**Rebirth.** Continuing life in another form.

**Reincarnation.** Being reborn again in another form.

**Residential home.** A large building with individual rooms for the elderly. Meals and a communal room for socialising are provided.

**Sanctity of life.** Life is sacred because it is God-given.

**Self determination.** Refers to the right to make decisions for oneself in life. It is an argument use by those who agree with voluntary euthanasia.

**Voluntary euthanasia.** A terminally ill person asks a doctor or a friend to help them die peacefully and with dignity. It can be called 'mercy killing' or 'assisted suicide'.
Religious attitudes to the Elderly and Death.

Senior citizen – A term commonly used to describe an elderly person over 65 years old or of retirement age.

Ageism – prejudice and discrimination against the elderly, deciding that they cannot think or act rationally and are all physically weak, frail and not able to understand what is going on.

The Generation Gap is the differences between the views of old and young people. This can be in terms of fashion, styles and interests as well attitudes towards morals and behaviour. This gap often leads to misunderstandings.

Older people tend to think that young people are:
1. Immoral
2. A potential threat to their safety, yobs and hoodies.
3. Impolite and have no respect for their elders.
4. “it was not like that in my day” They take everything for granted.
5. However, they may also be helpful, thoughtful and well mannered.

Young people tend to think older people are:
A. Old fashioned
B. Grumpy
C. Always moaning
D. Always ill
E. Don’t understand the younger Generation.
F. However, they may also be wise, caring, experienced and practical.

“Listen to your father; without him you would not exist. When your mother is old, show her your appreciation.” Bible, Proverbs 23:22

“rub the nose of those who do not respect their parents in the dirt.” Islam, Hadith.
Caring for the elderly

Buddhists teach care for the elderly should focus on “metta” – loving kindness. Caring for the elderly will give you good karma, which will lead to a good rebirth.

Who should care for the elderly?

Living arrangements:
At Home.
Advantages.
1. Live in the home and neighbourhood they love.
2. Keep independence.
3. Use support services and family assistance e.g. social services, NHS district nurse visits, ‘meals on wheels’ Home can be adapted stair lifts and ramps.
4. Family can visit regularly.
Disadvantages.
A. If family moved away rely on the phone, or neighbours.
B. May feel lonely and isolated.

Living with family The ideal is when the elderly person is treated as an important member of the family, not as someone who lives there because there is no option. Religions encourage this is out of gratitude, respect and recognition of the wisdom the elderly possess.

Community options

Hospices
a. Provide care for a patient with a terminal illness who is close to death.
b. Palliative care (Healthcare that aims to relieve and prevent the suffering of patients. Medications do not cure the disease).
c. Hospice can provide respite care (an interval of rest, relief) for terminally ill people and their families.
d. Main differences between hospices and hospitals are that hospitals treat to heal. Hospices offer palliative and respite care, preparing terminally ill people and their families for death.

We should respect our elders.
Christianity.
A Jewish and Christian teaching is found in the 10 Commandments. “Honour your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12).
Jesus’ Golden Rule is to treat others as you would want to be treated.

Islam.
It is the responsibility and duty of the family to care for the elderly because of the effort and sacrifices they have made. Sending the elderly to a home is regarded as unkind and disrespectful. Elderly people are a source of wisdom not a burden. Extended families live together and elderly parents have the right to expect their children to care for them. Looking after the elderly provides spiritual growth. “rub the nose of those who do not respect their parents in the dirt.” Islam, Hadith.

Hinduism.
Hindus believe in fulfilling their duty (dharma) to God. One of the five daily duties is to serve and care for parents and the elderly. Parents are part of the extended family and as they are very important they are cared for, respected and obeyed throughout their lives.

‘let your mother be a god to you. Let your father be a god to you.’ Caring for the elderly will give you good karma, which will lead to a good rebirth. Caring for elderly parents is the responsibility of the eldest son.

We have a duty to care for all human beings, particularly the vulnerable
Christianity. Parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ Jesus taught that we should extend kindness and help to anyone in need, regardless of their background. So the elderly should be cared for in line with the Christian attitude of care and compassion for the vulnerable.

Christians are taught to "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18 & Luke 10:27) and recall that God made all people in His image (Genesis). Therefore, we should appreciate that we are all of equal worth to God and should value His gift of life.

Hinduism. Hindus believe that there is a piece of God in all of us. Atman (soul.) So God is in all people, we are all connected, should have mutual respect with others to come closer to God.
Euthanasia
The word euthanasia means “a gentle death” and is often referred to as “mercy killing”.

Active euthanasia The ending of a life by a deliberate action, such as by giving a patient a fatal injection.
Passive euthanasia Allowing a terminally or incurably ill person to die by withdrawing or withholding medical treatment that would only prolong the suffering and have no real benefit.
Voluntary euthanasia A terminally ill person asks a doctor or a friend to help them die peacefully and with dignity. It can be called ‘mercy killing’ or ‘assisted suicide’.
Involuntary euthanasia When a patient’s life is ended because it is felt that, to keep them alive is to make them suffer, but the patient has not given their consent to the decision.

Christian Beliefs about Euthanasia
God makes life and He is the One to end life. Humans are made in the ‘Image of God’ we should not ruin that image. Euthanasia is murder and breaks the 6th rule of the 10 Commandments.
People are created with worth to kill someone as if they were an animal is wrong. Animals do not have souls, humans do.
People should be offered care (not death) in their suffering. (hospice) Jesus performed miracles, a miracle could occur.
Passive euthanasia shows compassion in the way Jesus showed to people.
Some Christians may argue euthanasia is the most loving thing to do. Jesus said to love your neighbour as yourself and perhaps you would want to die in certain situations.
The Golden Rule is where Jesus said ‘do to others as you would do to yourself’. Perhaps, if you were in pain, you might want to die and end suffering too.
Christian ‘situation ethics’ suggests you should look at each situation individually before deciding what is the right action. Rev. Joseph Fletcher. It can be used to defend euthanasia.

Ways of keeping people alive. a. Life support machines. b. Medicines. C. Restarting the heart/ defibrillator.

Christian beliefs about life after death.

God’s Judgement

If the person is a Christian but is imperfect due to unconfessed sin not yet forgiven
Purgatory: A place where sins of Christians can eventually be forgiven before heaven

If the person is a Christian who has confessed their sins and so been forgiven for them
Heaven: To be in the presence of God for eternity

If the person is not a Christian
Benevolent God saves all people
Just God saves all good people
Pluralist God saves all religious people