

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Route B

EDUQAS GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES - ROUTE B
COMPONENT 1 FOUNDATIONAL CATHOLIC THEOLOGY
THEME 2: GOOD AND EVIL



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BIG QUESTIONS

What is God like?

If God is good, why is there suffering in the world?

Is evil and suffering the price we must pay for having human free will?

Can suffering ever be good for us?

How should we respond to the existence of evil and suffering in the world?

How can three be one and one be three?

Did God become human in Jesus?

Why is Jesus important to Christians in answering questions about suffering?

What should guide our moral behaviour?

Can people really be cured of their suffering at Lourdes?

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will:

- Know different Christian, non-Christian and philosophical attempts to answer questions about where different kinds of evil come from and how 'the problem of evil' has been explored
- Understand what St Augustine meant when he called evil a 'privation'
- Understand what Catholics mean by 'Original Sin' and 'free will'
- Understand Catholic beliefs about Christ's suffering
- Understand Jewish views about suffering and evil
- Know that Catholics believe the world is fundamentally good.
- Understand what Catholics mean when they call God "good"
- Understand Catholic ambivalence about suffering using the example of the suffering of Jesus to show that it can be beneficial.

KEY CONCEPTS

Evil – the absence of good and the impulse to seek our own desires at the expense of the good of others, which often results in suffering

Free-will – the decision making part of a person's mind is called the will. A will is free if the person is able to choose right from wrong without being controlled by other forces

Privation – the loss or absence of a quality or something that is normally present. Evil is a privation of good

Suffering – pain or loss which harms human beings. Some suffering is caused by other human beings (often called 'moral evil'); some is not (often called 'natural evil')

Goodness – the quality of being like God; seeking the well-being of others selflessly

Catholic perspectives on the origin of evil

Catholics believe that God is omnipotent (all-powerful). They also believe that God is all-loving. This is sometimes called God's 'omnibenevolence'. Therefore, they believe that the world God made has to be a good world – a good, all-powerful God wouldn't make any other kind. But if this is true, why does the world contain so much evil and suffering?

Moral and natural evil

One way that Catholics answer this question is by saying that the evil and suffering exist because of human free-will. Free-will is the human ability to make choices and Catholics believe that it is a gift from God. Human beings can use this gift to make good choices or to make bad choices. When they make good choices the goodness of the world increases but when they make bad choices then evil and suffering are the result.

However, many people point out that not all examples of evil and suffering in the world are caused by human choices. Some are: things like bullying, theft, murder, war and poverty. This kind of evil is often called 'moral evil' because it is caused by the moral choices human beings make. But there are other kinds of suffering which seem to have nothing to do with human choices. For example, the suffering that comes as a consequence of natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, famines and disease. This kind of suffering is often called 'natural evil' because it happens naturally and is not caused by human beings.

How can Catholics explain the existence of 'natural evil'? One way they do it is with the concept of 'original sin'.

Original Sin

In Genesis chapter 3, we read the famous story of Adam and Eve's disobedience. In this story, Adam and Eve, the first two human beings, are given a garden full of good things to eat by God and are told that they can eat from any of the trees in the garden but that they must not eat from the tree in the middle of the garden – the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. The serpent then tempts Eve to disobey God and to eat from the forbidden tree and Eve offers the fruit to Adam. Adam also eats the fruit from the forbidden tree. Immediately they are changed by their act of disobedience. The first thing that happens is they both realise for the first time that they are naked and they make clothes for themselves out of leaves. Before they ate from the tree, their nakedness had not been something which embarrassed them – but now it becomes a source of shame. Even worse things are to follow.

Because of their disobedience, God gives each of them different punishments (sometimes called 'curses').

This story is sometimes called 'the Fall' because it describes the moment when human beings 'fell' from the perfect state in which God had created them. The disobedience of Adam and Eve is often called 'Original Sin'. Sin is any wrong action that is against God's plans for human beings. It is called 'original' because it is the very first sin.

Is it 'true'?

Many Christians take this story literally (as though it is an historical fact) and believe that Adam and Eve were real people and their sinfulness introduced all kinds of bad things into the world, including pain, inequality, work and death. It also affected all the human beings who are descended from them who no longer have a natural ability to avoid doing evil actions. This creates more moral evil. For many Christians, this is the best explanation for the existence of evil and suffering in the world. God made a perfect world, but human beings sinned and damaged themselves and the world in which they live, and because of this damage, evil and suffering now exist.

But why then didn't God just make Adam and Eve so that they wouldn't make bad choices? Many Christians, including many Catholics, think that the story of the Fall does not have to be read as a literal history of the beginning of human beings or the origins of evil. It can also be read in a more symbolic way, as a meditation on who human beings really are and how they relate to the world and to God.

Catholics also believe that a belief in creation is compatible with the Theory of Evolution. If evolution is true then human beings evolved from other kinds of human-like animals. The story of the creation and Fall are then reflections on the moment in the history of evolution when human beings first understood the difference between good and evil. Original Sin is then a symbol or metaphor for the fact that all human beings have a tendency to be tempted and to sin and that we all share some responsibility for the evil and suffering in the world.

St Augustine and 'privation'

St Augustine, one of the earliest and most important Catholic thinkers and writers, wrote a book called the Enchiridion (a Latin word which means "handbook"). In this book, Augustine asks himself the question of why there is evil and suffering in the world if God is good and all-powerful. He gives three separate but related answers to the question.

1. His first answer is that the existence of evil helps people to appreciate the good in the world which otherwise they might not notice. Sometimes we don't appreciate the good things we have until they are not there anymore. Many of us don't appreciate how wonderful being healthy is, until we have had the experience of being unwell.

"And in the universe, even that which is called evil, when it is regulated and put in its own place, only enhances our admiration of the good; for we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil."

(St Augustine, Enchiridion 3,11)

2. In his second answer, St Augustine says that God does not cause or permit evil because evil isn't even a thing. Evil is just the absence of good things. God makes a world full of good things but through our poor choices we sometimes cause those good things to become absent from the

"For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? Disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist."

(St Augustine, Enchiridion 3,11)

world. Another word for an absence is a 'privation'. When we experience evil and suffering we are not experiencing anything at all, we are just being deprived of the good things we usually have. God does not want us to be deprived of these good things but either our choices have led to these privations or God allows them for the sake of some greater good.

3. In his third answer, St Augustine says God allows suffering precisely because he is omnipotent and good. He allows evil

“For the Almighty God, who has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil, if he were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil.”

(St Augustine, Enchiridion 3,11)

because in his goodness and power he is always able to bring a greater good out of suffering. In this answer, St Augustine is saying that sometimes we arrive at a place of much greater happiness through overcoming evil and suffering than we could ever have done without it. In other words, sometimes suffering is good for us!

Other Christian views

There are other Christian answers to the problem of evil. The most famous is probably the one suggested by the philosopher John Hick. He argued that God deliberately made a world which was not perfect because only in an imperfect world could human beings learn and grow. On this view, God values human freedom so much that he wants us to learn for ourselves how to be good and loving; God doesn't give these things to us 'ready-made'. Hick argues that it is only through suffering that human beings can come to perfection and 'grow in God's likeness'. This is a bit like thinking of human beings as athletes in training. Physical exercise is painful and difficult but it ultimately leads to a much stronger, healthier body. In the same way, Hick says, suffering is painful and difficult but it ultimately leads to a much stronger, healthier soul.

Jewish views

Unlike the Christian idea of 'Original sin', Jews do not believe that people are born evil. Rather, they are born free but with two inclinations: to do good or to do evil. 'Yetzer ha tov' is the inclination to do good actions and 'yetzer ha ra' is the inclination to do evil actions. The Torah teaches that God has given human beings choices and that it is important to struggle against the inclination to do evil actions by giving obedience to God. Jews believe it is not possible to hide evil actions from God and the Ten Days of Return between the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur give times for people to atone (make up for or make good) for the times when they have followed their inclination to do evil rather than given obedience to God. Therefore, Jews see evil and suffering as a consequence of human beings' wrong choices.



The 'goodness' of God

When Catholics use this term for God, they mean that God is the cause of goodness in others. This is probably the best way to think about God's goodness, especially if God is beyond the human ability to describe what he is really like. In this way, God is good in the same way a chef is described as "good". We call a chef good when the food she cooks tastes delicious – a chef is good if her food is good. In the same way, Catholics would say, we call God good because the things he made are good: light, sea, earth, sky, animals, plants and human beings. God finishes by looking on all that has been

created and he 'saw that it was good'. This is what Catholics mean when they say that the world reflects God's goodness – they mean, they can tell that God is good, because the world God created is good. Just like you can tell if a chef is good, if the food she created is good.

Jewish views

There are many similarities between the Jewish and Catholic views about God's goodness and the goodness of the created world. First of all, Jews, like Catholics are not dualists and Jews believe that God is the only God and is all powerful. There is no belief in an opposite God. Jews do not even believe in the Devil, as such.

For Jews, God is the source of all life and referred to throughout the Torah as the sole creator. He is the judge and he is merciful. He will protect and care for all that he has created. The goodness of God is shown by the creation of the world and the giving of the Torah. Stories such as the fleeing of the Israelites from Egypt retold at Pesach show God's goodness and care.



The challenge of evil

One of the earliest and most famous presentations of the problem of evil was made by an atheist, Scottish philosopher called David Hume (1711-1776). Hume is the first philosopher to present what has now become known as 'the inconsistent triad'. A 'triad' is a group of three things. Hume and others claim the following group is 'inconsistent' because it seems that not all of them can be true at the same time:

1. God is all-powerful (omnipotent)
2. God is all-loving (omnibenevolent)
3. Evils exists.

Hume said that if the first two claims are true, then evil would not exist. However, since from our experience, evil definitely does exist, then at least one of the other two must be false. Hume says if God wants to stop suffering but cannot, then he must not be all-powerful. If God can stop suffering but does not want to, then he must not be all-loving. If God **wants** to stop suffering and **can** stop suffering, then evil would not exist. But evil does exist. Therefore, Hume says, either: God is not good; or God is not all powerful; or God does not exist. Hume believed that God did not exist.

Mackie, free-will and evil.

A twentieth century, atheist philosopher called John Mackie (1917-1981) took Hume's ideas further. He rejected some of the usual answers to the problem of evil that Christians often give.

Evil is necessary as an opposite of good

Mackie rejected this idea. He rejects it first because he thinks lots of examples of goodness are easily noticed and appreciated without needing a contrast. We can all see and appreciate a kind and generous person, even if we have never met a mean and selfish one. His second reason for rejecting this argument is because, even if it is true that we need some evil and suffering to

"...we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil."

(St Augustine)

help us to appreciate the good, we only need a little bit. He argues that there is far more suffering than is needed to make a good contrast to the good in the world and some of the suffering is truly horrible, far more and far worse than is really needed.

Evil helps us to become better people

Another traditional Christian argument that Mackie rejects is the idea that suffering helps us to become better people. First, Mackie doesn't understand why God needs to make us better through experiencing suffering. Why can God not just make us perfect to begin with? But even if we accept that the sort of goodness that comes about because of overcoming suffering is better than the goodness we could achieve without suffering, there is still a problem, in Mackie's view. The problem is that just as often, suffering makes people worse, rather than making them better. Some people might learn patience and courage through having to undergo cancer treatment. But other people might just as likely become bitter and resentful. If evil is allowed in order to bring about greater goods, then why does it sometimes lead to greater evils instead?

Evil is a consequence of free-will

Both St Augustine and John Hick rely on the existence of free-will to explain why God allows evil to exist. Mackie rejects this as a reason because he does not see why God could not make free human beings who always choose good instead of evil. Some would reply that a human being who can only ever choose good, is not truly free but Mackie does not think the ability to choose evil is a required part of human freedom. He also feels that evil and suffering is far too high a price to pay for having free will.

Is suffering always evil?

Catholics and other Christians might respond to the arguments given above by suggesting that, whilst suffering is always hard, it is not always evil. As a result, Catholics have an ambivalent attitude to suffering. 'Ambivalent' means you have mixed feelings about something.

The meaning of suffering

For Catholics, suffering is a mystery and it might be the case that God uses suffering to bring about great goods that would not have been possible without it. In the biblical Book of Job, God tells the long suffering Job that he is just not capable of understanding the reasons why God chooses to do, or not do, certain things.

Suffering as a sign of love

Many wise thinkers have pointed out that love is impossible without suffering. Loving another person means that you would do anything for them, even if it means sacrificing your own pleasures and comforts. Jesus says, 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (John 15:13)

There is also another way that suffering and love are connected and that is because nothing lasts forever. If you love anyone, or even a pet, there will come a time when one of these people or animal leaves you, or dies. Few human beings go through life without ever experiencing the pain of grief and parting, but the suffering we experience when we lose someone we love reflects the depth of the love we felt for them. The more we love a person, the more painful it is when we lose them. Suffering and love, therefore, cannot be separated.

Suffering as a proof of commitment - 'No pain, no gain'

Jesus makes clear that being a disciple always requires sacrifice and cost: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34). To show we are really committed to something, we must experience suffering

Suffering as a blessing

One of the most difficult ideas to understand is that suffering can somehow be a blessing. In the Matthew 5, Jesus lists those people that are “blessed” and includes some strange categories of people: those who are poor, those who mourn, those who suffer. We would not usually consider these things to be blessings, but Jesus is pointing out that God’s way of seeing the world is not our way, and that those who are lowest in the world’s eyes are often closest to God.

The suffering and death of Jesus

At the heart of all the Gospel accounts is something called “the Passion narrative”. “Passion” is Latin for suffering, and these parts of the Gospel describe the last week in Jesus’ life when he was arrested, tried, tortured and crucified. This story is so sacred to Christians because they believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus saved all of humanity from their sins. Therefore, the suffering of Jesus is hard to think of as evil because it brings about such great good.

Isaiah 53 – “the suffering servant”

One metaphor which can help us to understand the importance of Jesus’ suffering can be found in the Old Testament description of the Suffering Servant, in Isaiah 53. From the earliest centuries, Christians saw this passage from Isaiah as a prophecy of Jesus and the way in which his suffering would bring about blessings for others. In this passage, a figure called “the suffering servant” who is described as an unattractive person, is rejected by his own people and cruelly punished by them. But the author of Isaiah says that he was experiencing the sufferings that others deserved, so that they would not have to experience them.

The acceptance of suffering by the 'suffering servant' somehow brought about their salvation. This is what Catholics believe about Jesus too and is one very important reason why they are ambivalent about suffering.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him...He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53



Jewish views

Jews do not read Isaiah 53 as a reference to Jesus, rather they see it as a metaphorical description of the suffering of Israel - the Jewish nation - throughout the ages, which will ultimately bring about the salvation of all other nations in the Messianic age to come. However, despite this difference of interpretation of the identity of the suffering servant, Jews would also have the same ambivalence towards suffering.

For Jews, suffering comes from two different sources – human made and natural. Often suffering has arisen because God has given free will to people to do good or to do evil. They believe that some suffering can come from God as a test or a punishment but often the existence of suffering is not to be understood. In such cases, human beings should not question why God has sent suffering. In the Ethics of the Fathers it states: 'It is not in our power to explain either the wellbeing of the wicked or the sufferings of the righteous'.

SUMMARY

- Moral evil is suffering caused by human actions and choices
- Natural evil is suffering caused by natural occurrences, e.g. earthquakes and disease
- Some Christians believe that all evil is a result of Original Sin – the inherited guilt and sinful tendency that all human beings possess
- St Augustine said evil is a 'privation' – not a thing in itself, just the absence of good.
- Some philosophers have said that suffering helps us to grow in a spiritual sense and that is why God allows evil
- Jews believe that we are free to choose between the natural human inclination to do evil and the natural human inclination to do good. Often people choose evil. Sometimes suffering is a test or punishment from God but often cannot the purpose of suffering cannot be understood
- The Catholic and Jewish belief is that God's goodness is reflected in his creation which is good
- Philosophers, such as David Hume and John Mackie, have often challenged (and sometimes rejected) believing in a loving God in an evil world
- Catholics are ambivalent about evil. They sometimes see it as beneficial and would use Jesus' suffering, shown through the image of the 'Suffering Servant', to show how good can come out of suffering

AREA OF STUDY - THE TRINITY

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will:

- Know that Catholics believe that God is a Trinity of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Understand why this belief is important to Catholics
- Understand where this belief can be found in the scriptures and how it has developed
- Understand the importance of St Augustine's metaphor of the love, lover and beloved as an image of the Trinity
- To understand why Jews have no beliefs or teachings about the Trinity

The mystery of the Trinity

Christians believe the following things about God:

- There is only one God
- God exists as three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Each of these three persons is distinct from the other two
- Each of these three persons is fully God
- But there are not three Gods (see first bullet)

When we list these beliefs separately it looks impossible for all of them to be true at once, yet every Sunday, Catholics recite something called the 'Nicene Creed'. A 'creed' is a statement of belief. Nicea was the name of a place in ancient Turkey, where a council of bishops met to settle the question of how Christians should speak about God. In this creed it is clear that Christians believe in 'one God', but also in the 'Son of God' who is equal with the Father ("consubstantial with" means, roughly, "the same as") and in the Holy Spirit who is 'adored and glorified' with the Father and the Son.

Why do Christians believe that God is a trinity of persons?

Ideas about Trinity in the Bible

A belief in the Trinity emerged gradually in the history of Christianity. The very earliest Christians, were not really Christians at all; they were Jews who followed Jesus. The term Christian doesn't even exist as a name for a group until several years after Jesus' death (Acts 11:26). Even then it seems to be a name others used as an insult, rather than a name that these Jesus-following Jews called themselves. So, it is no surprise that Christians believe in only one God because Christianity grew out of Judaism. A belief in only one God (what we now call "monotheism") is the belief that most clearly

***I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.***

***I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
consubstantial with the Father;***

***I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father
and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.***

The Nicene Creed

separated the Jews from the many other ancient religions that surrounded them, who believed in many gods. So Christians, like their Jewish ancestors and Jews today, believe there is only one God.

At the same time, these early followers of Jesus had other experiences which completely changed how they understood God and the world. The early followers of Jesus had experienced Jesus' death and resurrection and they believed that they had met the risen Jesus. Because of this they came to believe, very early in the history of Christianity, that Jesus was also God. In the letters of St Paul (the earliest Christian writings we have access to), it is clear that he, and the Churches to whom he was writing his letters, believed that Jesus was God. For example, in his letter to the Colossians he writes:

“The Son is the image of the invisible God...For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...” (Col 1:15-17)

In this passage, it is clear that the Son has an equality with the Father and was present with the Father at the creation of the world. However, they also knew that Jesus was not the Father, since they had heard Jesus pray to the Father (see for example John 11:41)

So Christians, very early in the history of Christianity, as well as believing in only one God, also came to believe that Jesus was also God, but was not the Father.

The early Christians had also experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and sometimes felt the Spirit at work when they prayed.

So Christians, also very early in the history of Christianity, as well as believing in one God, and that Jesus was God, had also come to believe that the Holy Spirit was also God, and was not the Father, and was not Jesus.

Before they could explain what any of this meant, they believed in one God, that Jesus was God and that the Holy Spirit was God. By the time the Gospels were written (later than St Paul's letters), there were many indications of a belief in the three persons of the Trinity. For example, in the accounts of Jesus' baptism we see the three persons of the Trinity present:

“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the **Holy Spirit** descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a **voice** came from heaven: ‘**You are my Son**, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’” (Luke 3:21-22)

The Gospel of Matthew ends with the clearest expression of the Trinity:

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matt 28:19)

Christians to this day still baptise people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Historical Development

From these starting points in the early Church, the doctrine of the Trinity developed until it was finally settled and written down at two early councils of the Church – Nicea in 325 AD and Constantinople in 381 AD.

The first council of Nicea was called to settle a disagreement that had arisen in the 4th century between a priest called Arius and a deacon called Athanasius. Arius did not believe that Jesus was God. Arius argued that Jesus was the highest creature but that he was less than God. Athanasius disagreed. He argued that the Father and the Son were equal and that both were God.

The council sided with Athanasius and said that the Father and the Son were equal to each other.

Following this council, another argument arose. This time there were some who argued that the Son and the Father were so equal that they weren't really two separate persons, but just different 'aspects' or 'modes' of the one God. So another council was called in AD 381 in Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) which produced the Creed that Catholics now say at Mass every week. This creed makes it clear that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all equal to each other, are all equally God, but are still three distinct persons.

Today, the Trinity is important for two main reasons:

1. Without a doctrine of the Trinity, it would not be possible for Christians to believe that Jesus is God. The belief that Jesus is God is probably the most important Christian belief.
2. The doctrine of the Trinity means that the God that Christians believe in is a community of persons. This means that it makes sense to say "God is love", because even before any creatures existed for God to love there was a relationship of love within God which has existed for all eternity.

This idea of God as a trinity of love is one which is explored further by St Augustine when he tries to make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity.

St Augustine – love, lover, beloved

St Augustine (354-430) wrote a whole book on the Trinity.

One of the ideas that he used to make sense of the doctrine was the concept of love. St Augustine believed, as do all Christians, that "God is Love" (see 1 John 4:8). He also realised that love needs three things: the person who is doing the loving, the person who is being loved and the love itself. If God is love, these three aspects must have been present in God from all eternity – even before God had made any

creatures to love. So St Augustine says that the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is like this Trinity of love, lover and beloved. This idea of God as love is a helpful one for Christians because it makes it clear that love needs to be an important part of every Christian's life.

There are three things in love, as it were a trace of the Trinity...love is of someone that loves, and with love something is loved. Behold, then, there are three things: he that loves, and that which is loved, and love.

St Augustine, De Trinitate 8, 10



Jewish views

Jews may think that Jesus existed as a historical person but they do not attach any significance to his life and death. Nor do they believe that Jesus was God. Equally, they do not believe in the Trinity. They would see both a belief that Jesus is God and the Trinity as a challenge to the oneness of God. For Jews, God is the only God and is all powerful. The belief in only one God is stated in the most important prayer for Jews; the Shema. It is also stated in the Ten Commandments. There are different attributes of God such as 'judge' and 'merciful' but these are only characteristics of the one God. Shekinah signifies God's presence on the earth. These attributes of God though are not separate persons, but are just the different ways in which human beings experience God.

SUMMARY

- Christians believe in a God who exists as a Trinity of persons: Father, Son and Spirit
- This arose because the early Christians believed that Jesus was God incarnate
- St Augustine said the Trinity of persons was like the a lover, the beloved and love itself
- Jews have no beliefs or teachings about the idea of Trinity. They would reject it as a challenge to their fundamental belief that God is one

AREA OF STUDY - THE INCARNATION

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will:

- Know the meaning of the word 'incarnation'.
- Understand the biblical origins of the belief that Jesus is God incarnate
- Understand how this doctrine influences Catholic understandings of the meaning of suffering
- Understand what Pope John Paul II said about suffering in *Salvifici Doloris*

KEY CONCEPT

Incarnation – 'Made flesh'. The Christian belief that God became man in the person of Jesus, fully human and fully divine.

For Christians, the word refers to the most central Christian belief; that Jesus is God and that in Jesus, God the Son became a human being. It is called 'the incarnation' because God became visible 'in the flesh' in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The most usual way Christians express this belief is by calling Jesus the 'Son of God'. This connects to the doctrine of the Trinity, where the term 'Son' is used to name the second person of the Trinity. When Christians call Jesus the 'Son of God' they mean that he is God who has become a human being; that he is the 'incarnate Son'. Christians also believe that Jesus is 'fully God and fully man'. So when they say that Jesus is the incarnate Son, they don't mean that Jesus is a really good human being who is very close to God; he is really and fully God. At the same time, they don't mean that Jesus is just God in disguise, or God pretending to be a human being; he is really and fully human. Christians believe that Jesus is one person, with two natures: one human nature, and one divine (which means 'godly') nature.

John 1:1-18: Jesus is the Word of God

Another way that a belief in the incarnation is expressed is by using the metaphor of "God's Word". In the opening chapter of John's Gospel, John refers to Jesus as 'the Word'. The author of John's Gospel has written the prologue in such a way that he expects his readers to be able to hear echoes of the opening lines of the book of Genesis. Both Genesis and John's Gospel begin with the phrase: 'In the beginning...'

In the first chapter of Genesis, God speaks and things happen. For example, God says, "Let there be light" and then light happens. So in Genesis, God's word is the power that makes Creation happen. In John's Gospel, the author says that the relationship between the Father and Jesus, is like the relationship between a speaker and his words. So the author of John's Gospel refers to the second person of the Trinity as 'the Word'. In John's Gospel, it is clear that the second person of the Trinity is distinct from the Father

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-3,14

('the Word was with God') but that he is also equal to God ('the Word was God'). The incarnation is made very clear with the words, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'.

Philippians 2:5-11: The kenosis hymn

The equality between Jesus and the Father, and the moment of the incarnation, is described in another place in scripture: in a hymn which St Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians. In this hymn it says that Christians should be like Jesus who, even though he was God, willingly put aside his equality with God to become a human being. And then as a human being, he doesn't even insist on his equality with other human beings, but makes himself even lower by accepting the death of a slave. This hymn is called the 'kenosis hymn'. Kenosis is a Greek word which means 'emptying'. It is called the 'kenosis' hymn because it was a hymn of praise that early Christians used to sing about Jesus and it contains the idea that Jesus 'emptied himself' of his rightful equality with God, in becoming a human being in the incarnation. St Paul says, **'he made himself nothing'**

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

***Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something
to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!***

Philippians 2:5-8

The Incarnation and the Problem of Evil

A belief that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God is very important to Christians in helping them to respond to the Problem of Evil. Jesus incarnation and suffering give Christians a way of being able to continue to believe in the goodness of God, even in the face of human suffering.

The answer to the Problem of Evil is one that human minds might not be able to ever understand but many Christians still trust in the goodness of God. She uses the example of a two year old child who has to undergo heart surgery which will be very painful but which will ultimately save the child's life. She points out that the mother will never be able to explain to the two-year old why she has to suffer, because the two-year old won't understand what heart surgery is, or why it is needed. But the two-year old can be helped to cope with the pain because she trusts in her mother's love and that her mother has her best interests at heart. The child can cope with the suffering because her mother is by her side while she suffers. She doesn't know why she has to suffer but she does know how to endure it.

The Christian answer to the Problem of Evil is something like that. It is not an answer to why we suffer, but it can give Christians an answer to 'how' we can bear suffering without losing faith. In the parable, all human beings are like the two-year old child in that we will never understand why we have to suffer, but Jesus is like God's loving hand, the tender love of a mother for her child. Jesus is a comfort to those who suffer because Christians believe that Jesus is God's presence with his people. Christians believe Jesus is with us in our suffering because Jesus himself experienced suffering and did not run from it but bore it out of love. A similar answer to the problem is given by St Pope John Paul II.

John Paul II – Salvifici Doloris

In his letter, *Salvifici Doloris* (which means “the saving power of suffering.”) St Pope John Paul II says that the only way human beings can grasp the “why” of suffering is to try and understand the depth of God’s love for human beings, which Jesus showed through his willingness to die on the cross. He also says that if Christians willingly ‘offer up’ their own suffering in prayer for the sake of others, that they can somehow share in the saving suffering of Jesus. This is very difficult to understand but St Pope John Paul II believes that if we try and bear our suffering patiently and offer it to God in prayer, that God will somehow be able to use it to bring about good for others. If a Christian can do this, it is an act of love which is like Jesus’ own act of sacrifice.

But in order to understand the ‘why’ of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love...This answer has been given by God to human beings in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Those who share in Christ’s suffering have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ takes on human weakness...But if in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, then the weaknesses of human suffering can be filled with the same power of God made visible in Christ’s Cross.

Salvifici Doloris 13 & 23

SUMMARY

- The incarnation is the belief that Jesus is God 'made flesh'; that Jesus is fully God and fully human
- The opening chapter of John's Gospel conveys these ideas clearly
- St. Paul describes the incarnation in his writings
- Jesus gives an answer to the “how” of suffering, if not the “why” of suffering
- Pope John Paul II believed that our own suffering could become saving for others if it is joined to the suffering of Jesus

AREA OF STUDY - THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will

- Understand how the teaching and example of Jesus provide authority for Christian moral behaviour
- Know the details of the moral teaching of Jesus in the 'Sermon on the Mount'
- Understand beliefs about Natural Law and conscience
- Understand how suffering can make people more virtuous

KEY CONCEPT

Conscience – human reason making moral decisions. The knowledge we have of what is right and wrong and the God-given compulsion within all human beings to do what is right and to avoid what is evil

The example of Jesus

When Christians talk about Jesus as an example, they mean that the way he lived his life is one that all Christians should try and imitate.

Jesus and sinners

All the way through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, one of the things that is surprising to those around him is the amount of time Jesus is willing to spend with those that others thought of as sinners. So Jesus spends his time with tax collectors (for example, with Levi and Zacchaeus) and with adulterers and prostitutes (for example the woman caught in adultery and the woman who anoints his feet with oil in the house of Simon the Pharisee) and he is crucified with thieves and bandits. Jesus is an example to Christians here by showing that God always forgives those who sin and no-one is outside of God's mercy. Therefore, Christians too should show forgiveness to everyone, no matter what they have done.

Jesus and the sick

The other group that Jesus spends a lot of time with are those who are sick and are outcast from society. Jesus willingly touches lepers and heals them. He heals the woman with a haemorrhage, who was an outcast from her society because of her illness. He also heals those who were considered possessed with evil spirits. Many modern commentators think that what was called 'possession' in Jesus' time might be the sort of thing we now describe as mental illness. There is no sickness, or social condition, that Jesus refuses to touch and to heal. Jesus is an example to Christians here by showing that they should never treat anyone as an outcast but be with them in their suffering and try to help them if they can.

The teaching of Jesus: the Beatitudes

Jesus also gives clear teachings on how people should live their lives. The clearest collection of these teachings are in chapters five to seven of Mathew's Gospel in a section that is often called the Sermon on the Mount.

The sermon begins with a list of blessings, which are often called The Beatitudes (which is Latin for "blessings"). The list of blessings is a strange list in that some of the things on it are not usually thought of as blessings. For example, Jesus speaks of the poor, the grieving and those who suffer as people who are blessed. But there are other categories of people in this list who clearly stand for the sort of behaviour and attitudes Jesus sees as the model for all human living. So, he praises the peacemakers, the merciful, the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

One of the key messages of the beatitudes seems to be that those who are closest to God are often those that the world does not recognise or value and sometimes even persecute.

The teaching of Jesus: the old Law and the new

In another part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses a phrase over and over again which begins "You have heard that it was said..." and ends with the phrase "But I say to you...". Here Jesus shows the ways in which being a follower of his is more demanding than the religious Law (Torah) which his listeners have been living by. He begins this whole section by saying 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law...I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.'

So Jesus says that in the past the Law ruled out murder, but Jesus says even being angry with someone is unacceptable. The Law did not allow adultery but Jesus says that even looking at someone lustfully is unacceptable. The Law allowed people to take revenge on those who had harmed them, only paying back in proportion to what had been suffered ('an eye for an eye') but Jesus says that you should not take revenge at all. The Law required people to love their neighbour but allowed them to hate their enemy, but Jesus says you must love your enemies as well.

The teaching of Jesus: right actions, wrong reasons

At the end of the sermon, he warns people against doing good things but for the wrong reasons. He speaks about praying, fasting and giving to charity (called almsgiving) and says that these must always be done in private. Jesus knew too well that often people do these good things publicly so that others will think well of them. Jesus says that people should do these things because they are right, not to get praise from other people.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you,
persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil
against you because of me. Rejoice and be
glad, because great is your reward in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the
prophets who were before you.*

Matthew 5:3-11

The whole of the Sermon on the Mount seems very demanding and almost impossible. This is perhaps because the thing Jesus dislikes the most is pride; he doesn't want anyone to think that they have achieved all that goodness demands of them. This is probably why he preferred spending time with sinners who knew they needed the mercy of God, than he did with the Jewish religious leaders (Pharisees), who thought they didn't.

Other sources of moral authority: Natural Law

After the Second World War, many former Nazis were put on trial in Nuremberg for 'crimes against humanity'. Many of these people used as their defence the argument that they were only obeying their superior officers who, at the time, they were legally obliged to obey. The courts at Nuremberg did not accept these arguments. Even though the crimes committed by Nazis were not crimes in Nazi Germany, they were still crimes that were against a universal, natural law that the judges at Nuremberg believed every human being could understand, even if they were living in a state that had rejected these natural laws.

This is the basic idea behind the concept of Natural Law. It is the belief that above all human systems of law, which are enforced by nation states or other human institutions, there is a moral law that every human being understands and should live by. The same idea is expressed in the existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is another way of saying there are some natural rights which every human being should have, even if the laws of the land in which they happen to live ignores these rights.

A belief in Natural Law is a key part of Catholic Moral teaching. The idea is that because human beings all ultimately share the same human nature, the same things will ultimately bring them fulfilment. Natural Law (put forward by St Thomas Aquinas) says that all human beings have some purposes in common: preserving life, reproduction, educating children, living in an ordered society and worshipping God. Because of these common purposes, there are some universal laws that all human beings have to obey. For example, like the laws against murder, child abuse, theft, and lying.

Catholics would see this human ability to discover the Natural Law as a proof of the fact that the universe is created and ruled by a God who is good. In fact, they would argue, our ability to recognise suffering as an evil is itself a sign that we have this God-given ability to tell the difference between good and evil.

Conscience

If there is a Natural Law that applies to all human beings, then the ability to discover this law is what Catholics call 'conscience'.

In Catholic understanding, conscience has two parts— the part that is to do with knowledge and the part that is to do with action. The part that is to do with knowledge is our mind's ability to know the difference between right and wrong and make decisions about what the right thing to do is in different situations. St Thomas Aquinas defined conscience as 'the mind of human beings making moral decisions'. The part that is to do with action, is the internal impulse that Catholic believe all human beings have to do what is right and to avoid doing what is wrong. This part gives human beings the sense of moral duty and leads to guilt when they fail to do what they know to be right. The two parts of conscience work together: in any given situation, the conscience will help a human

being to know what the right thing to do is; it will also compel the human being to do that thing not just give them knowledge of what it is.

Catholics believe the existence of conscience is unique to human beings and that the existence of conscience is another proof of the goodness of God who created human beings in his own image and likeness. Also, in relation to the Problem of Evil, if human beings accurately informed and obeyed their conscience more often there would be far less moral evil in the world, and far less suffering as a result.

Virtues and suffering

Catholics also believe that living a good life and obeying one's conscience is something that requires practice. Doing the right thing is not always easy and if our moral character is weak then it is even more difficult to do what is right. Catholics believe that there are moral habits which human beings need to practice in order to become good people. These moral habits are called 'virtues' which comes from the Latin word for 'perfection'. They include things like courage, generosity, selflessness and self-control. Each of these virtues challenges our instinctive selfishness; our desire to keep ourselves safe has to be overcome in order to become more courageous, for example.

The Catholic view is that these virtues take practice, we are not good at them straight away but can get better at them through our life experiences. One of the ways in which people can grow in virtue is through the experience of suffering. This is because suffering sometimes helps us to improve in the virtues. For example, if I have to endure a serious illness this can make someone more courageous. If I suffer poverty, this can make me more generous when I do have food and other things to share. The Catholic view of virtues is a good way of helping us to understand how suffering can help us to become better people.

SUMMARY

- The examples and teaching of Jesus provide the most important moral guidance
- The Sermon on the Mount provides much of this moral teaching and also shows how Jesus has come to fulfil the religious Law (Torah) of his day
- Other sources of moral authority include Natural Law which is the belief that there are absolute moral rules that exist for all people, in all places and at all times.
- Another source of moral authority is the human conscience which has the ability to understand what is right and wrong and the desire to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. Catholics believe they have a duty to inform their conscience in order to make the right moral decisions.
- Virtues are good moral habits
- The existence of Natural Law and conscience are a proof for Catholics of the existence of a good God
- Catholics believe that suffering can help in the development of the virtues.

Area of Study - Sculpture and Statuary

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will:

- Understand why Catholics have statues in churches and how they aid worship
- Be able to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using statues in worship
- Understand why there are no statues or images of people in Jewish synagogues and why Jews would never depict God.
- Understand what Michelangelo's 'Pieta' means as a reflection on God's goodness and human suffering

Sculpture and statues

Catholic churches have many features that make them different to other churches. One thing that many people notice is the presence of statues. These statues can be of many different religious figures. In all Catholic churches, there will be at least one crucifix that has on it the figure of Jesus. This will usually be displayed in a prominent position in the church. In most Catholic churches, there will also usually be a statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus. There will also often be a statue of Jesus, called the "Sacred Heart" that shows the heart of Jesus burning with love. In addition to these three most common statues, there might well be other statues of saints, especially of the saint after whom the Church is named.

In many Catholic churches, these statues will have places to kneel in front of them and places to light candles to leave as physical symbols of prayer intentions. Catholics often kneel in front of statues to pray.

The presence of statues in Catholic churches as a focus for prayer and devotion is common and unremarkable to most Catholics but for many other Christians it is an unusual practice and one with which many would disagree.

Statues: for and against...

For many Christians, especially those who belong to some Protestant traditions, the making of religious statues goes against the second commandment that forbids the making of any image as an object of worship (Exodus 20:4-5). They see the use of statues as the worship of 'false gods'.

Catholics would respond by pointing out that they do not pray to the statues. Instead the statues are reminders of God and Jesus and these help them to focus their prayer on what really matters. Statues are like photographs of loved ones – the photographs are only important to us because they are mementos of the people we love. We don't love photographs, we love the people the photographs represent.

Other Christians might reply that this would be a good argument if the statues were only statues of Jesus, but they are often of other holy men and women, such as Mary and the saints. They would say that prayers offered to anyone or anything other than God is breaking the first commandment to worship God alone (Exodus 30:3).

Catholics would respond by saying that they do not pray to Mary and the saints but rather they ask Mary and the saints to intercede on their behalf and pray to God for them. Catholics often ask other living people to pray for them and will offer to pray for those in need themselves – as do many Christians. Catholics believe that they are part of something called 'the communion of saints'; all believers, both living and dead, are part of this communion and Catholics believe that the saints in heaven offer prayers to God for those on earth. For this reason, they would ask the saints to pray for them. They are not worshipping false gods.

In reply, other Christians often point out that the actions of Catholics, in lighting candles and kneeling before statues of saints certainly looks to them like Catholics are praying to saints and are not giving God the worship which is due to God alone.

In order for Catholics to answer this, we will have to look at the significance of statues – and other physical signs in general – for Catholics.

The Significance of Statues for Catholics

Catholics would say that the presence of statues in churches is just one way in which they express a deeper commitment to what they call an 'incarnational view' of the world. Remember, the incarnation is the belief that God took on a physical form and lived in the real world when he became a human being in Jesus. For Catholics, this means that physical things are good and that God can make himself known to human beings through the ordinary physical things around us. This is why so much of Catholic worship is centred on ordinary, physical signs of God's extraordinary presence – oil, water, bread, wine, colours, incense, music etc. Statues are just another sign for Catholics of the reality of the incarnation.

The one statue that will be present in every Catholic church is the crucifix. This is a directly incarnational image since it is an image of Jesus himself whom Catholics believe became incarnate in order to save people from their sins. The crucifix is the most common focus for Catholic prayer and it reminds Catholics of the incarnation, but also of the suffering of Jesus which, for Catholics, is a reminder of God's love for them.

The Jewish view

Jews reject the use of statues as a focus for prayer. In observance of one of the Ten Commandments; 'You shall have no other gods before me', Jews do not make images or representations of God. In the synagogue, there will be no statues. Indeed, although synagogues may be very decorative and have pictures, carvings and stained glass, they will have no human representations at all. It is God alone who should be worshipped. For Jews, anything else would be a sign of the worship of false idols. Even God is not depicted in art or statuary because God is beyond human understanding.



Statues and suffering: Michelangelo's Pietà

Statues also help Catholics to reflect on the meaning of suffering. One of the most famous statues that does this is Michelangelo's Pietà. It is a statue of Mary holding the body of her son after his crucifixion. The figure of Mary holding her dead son was a popular sculptural subject in medieval Europe. 'Pietà' is a word which comes from the Latin word for holiness. Of all the many different forms of the Pietà by various painters and sculptors throughout history, the one by Michelangelo stands out as perhaps the greatest.

Michelangelo carved it from a single slab of marble in less than two years. It is famous for the way the artist has managed to make stone appear to flow like real cloth and how well he has captured the anatomy of the human form and subtle human emotions. His interpretation of the Pietà was different to ones previously created by other artists. Michelangelo decided to create a youthful and serene Virgin Mary instead of a broken-hearted and older woman, as is often portrayed in earlier versions of the image.

Some viewers are surprised by the stillness on Mary's face, considering she holds the body of her dead son. Her left hand is positioned with an open palm; this is a sign Mary is at peace after witnessing her son's crucifixion. Others have pointed out that the deep shadow created by the fold of the garment next to Jesus, is a symbol of an open womb representing the pain Mary bore as she gave birth to Jesus, mirrored by the pain now of his death. This echoes one of the prophecies of Simeon at the beginning of Luke's Gospel who says to Mary as she presents the baby Jesus in the Temple: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:35).

Mary is shown supporting the body of a fully-grown man on her lap. In reality, that is difficult for the average woman to do. In the Pietà, Mary's figure is larger than that of Jesus. Her bottom half forms a sturdy base for the body of Jesus. Even though the piece is life-like, it is not realistic. Mary's size makes Jesus look small in comparison. This is another echo of Mary as the mother of the infant Jesus; as if she is holding a baby in her arms, reflecting on the pains of the future as foretold by Simeon. This represents the love of a mother, which bears the pains of child bearing, both at the beginning of life and then throughout it, until the end. Many mothers who have lost their own children, report that the statue is a strange sort of comfort for them.

In her sadness, Mary seems resigned to what has happened. Christ, too, is presented almost as if he is in a peaceful sleep, and not one who has been bloodied and bruised after hours of torture and suffering. His wounds are hardly visible. In supporting Christ, Mary's right hand does not come into direct contact with his flesh, but instead it is covered with a cloth which then touches Christ's side. This shows the sacredness of Christ's body. Overall, these two figures are beautiful and idealised, despite their suffering. This reflects the belief of Catholic ambivalence to suffering; that suffering is somehow a mirror of love and can be a source of blessing.

SUMMARY

- Catholics use statues in their worship as a reminder of God and as a focus for prayers; statues are not worshipped
- Some other Christians believe that using statues in worship is against the Ten Commandments
- Jews reject the use of statues or any images of humans in synagogues and would never represent God because God is beyond human understanding
- The Pietà is a statue of the death of Jesus that many Catholics find helpful in helping them to respond to human suffering

AREA OF STUDY - PILGRIMAGE

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will:

- Know the meaning of the word 'pilgrimage'
- Understand why pilgrimage is important to Catholics
- Understand how pilgrimages can be a response to the existence of suffering
- Know what a rosary is and how it is prayed
- Know the what the Sorrowful Mysteries are
- Understand Jewish attitudes to pilgrimage
- Understand how the Rosary is used as a Catholic response to suffering

'Pilgrimage' – what is it?

A pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place. Before modern roads and transport, this could take a very long time. For example, many Catholics in England would walk for many weeks to Canterbury, the ancient shrine of Thomas Beckett. In Europe they would walk for weeks or months to Santiago Di Compostella, the supposed resting place of the apostle St James. Many Catholics still go on pilgrimage, although they don't usually take weeks or months to do it. However, many of the ancient practices of pilgrimage are still common: travelling with groups of pilgrims, praying and fasting on the way to the site, carrying with them the sick and those who are in need of prayers. In this last respect, pilgrimage remains an important way for Catholics to respond to the mystery of suffering. The Catholic Church recognises sites of pilgrimage as important places for prayer and spiritual renewal.

Why is pilgrimage important to Catholics?

There are many reasons why pilgrimages are important to Catholics. These may include:

- to help strengthen their faith
- to share the experience and their faith with other believers
- to pray for something special
- as a way of thanking God
- to seek physical, spiritual or emotional healing
- to do a penitential act as a reflection of sorrow for sin
- to come closer to God by giving him time and attention.

A group pilgrimage may help an individual to feel part of the church community. Pilgrims pray together and feel supported by each other.

Going on a pilgrimage can help believers to reflect on their life's journey. It is an opportunity to take time out from every-day life and focus on their journey to God. It is often a journey of self-discovery, most noticeably for those who are sick. Very few sick people come back cured. However, they may come back feeling at peace and able to accept and cope with the problems they face.



The Jewish view

Pilgrimage is not considered an obligation in Judaism. However, in practice, something like pilgrimage is an important feature of the devotional life of many Jews. The Torah refers to the traditional importance of all Jews going to Jerusalem for the three pilgrim festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. For some Jews, it is important to visit Israel, particularly to visit or hold special celebrations at the Western Wall. In addition, for some Jews it is important to visit the graves of significant teachers and rabbis, such as Maimonides.

Pilgrimage and suffering: Lourdes - a case study

Pilgrimages help many people learn how to value the role of God in their lives in a new way and find a way to bear the sufferings of life without being defeated by them. One place where this is very evident is in a Catholic pilgrimage shrine in Southern France, called Lourdes.

Lourdes became a pilgrimage site after a young girl called Bernadette Soubirous had a series of visions of a beautiful lady she later realised was Mary. These visions happened in a grotto beside the River Gave in the foothills of the Pyrenees in the middle of the nineteenth century. In these visions, amongst other things, the lady told her to dig in the ground and that from a spring of healing water would flow. This spring of water is still a central part of the pilgrimage to Lourdes and many visitors, especially the sick and disabled, bathe in the waters to seek physical and spiritual healing. Pilgrims will visit the grotto, which is the site of the apparitions, to pray and to offer petitions. They take part in torchlight and Blessed Sacrament processions, will usually celebrate Mass daily and take the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Most Catholic dioceses in England and Wales have an annual pilgrimage to Lourdes and will take large numbers of young people who volunteer as helpers for the sick and disabled pilgrims. These pilgrimages are often life-changing for the young people involved and are a real and practical way that ordinary people can respond to the mystery of suffering. Many young people report that it is their work with the sick and disabled that is especially meaningful to them on their pilgrimage, because often these people have borne suffering and sickness their whole life with patience and grace.

The Rosary

The Rosary is a traditional form of Catholic prayer, part of what is called 'popular piety'. Popular piety are those forms of praying and devotion which are not part of the formal rites of the Catholic Church but which are used by many Catholics as a way of bringing themselves closer to God. They are called 'popular' because usually they arise out of the practices of ordinary Catholics and acquire large popular followings, often before the official Church recognises their value. Popular piety often has many culturally specific features which is part of what makes it popular.

The Rosary – what is it and where did it come from?

The Rosary is one of the oldest and most universally used examples of popular piety. The Rosary is the name given both to a prayer and to the beads that are used in the praying of the prayer. It consists of three prayers: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be; each of these prayers is said a set number of times during the reciting of a Rosary.

The practice of praying the Rosary is believed to have begun with St Dominic in the 13th century. It has been pointed out that anyone who says a full Rosary will have prayed 150 Hail Mary's, which is

the same as the number of psalms in the Bible. Enclosed Benedictine Monks will pray all 150 psalms through the Church's year and it has been suggested that the Rosary was a way for ordinary people to echo this monastic prayer of the Church in their ordinary lives.

How and when do Catholics pray the Rosary?

Each of the parts of the Rosary have a prayer to accompany it and the Rosary is divided into sets of mysteries which are prayed on different days. There are three traditional sets of mysteries: the Joyful, the Sorrowful and the Glorious. St Pope John Paul II added an additional set of mysteries: the Luminous Mysteries.

The crucifix – Holding the crucifix at the start of the Rosary, the person reciting the Rosary will say the Apostles' Creed.

The five beads – The beads on the string that begins with the crucifix are divided into a 1,3,1 arrangement. On the first bead an Our Father will be prayed, on the next three Hail Mary's will be prayed and on the last one a Glory Be. Often these prayers are offered for the Pope's special intentions.

The medal – at the end of the string, which is the beginning of the large circle of beads, there is usually a religious medal. The medal is the beginning and end of one set of mysteries. The first time the medal is held, an Our Father is prayed as the beginning of the first Mystery prayed.

Decades – Then there are a set of ten beads, followed by a single bead. On each of the ten beads a Hail Mary will be prayed and on the single bead a Glory Be will be prayed to mark the end of one mystery. On the same bead, an Our Father is then prayed to mark the beginning of the next mystery. Between these two prayers, the 'Oh my Jesus' Fatima prayer is usually now said also.

The medal – on returning to the medal, a full set of mysteries will have been prayed. This time, whilst holding the medal, the person will say the final Glory Be, final 'Oh my Jesus' prayer and usually the seasonal antiphon to Our Lady, such as the Hail, Holy Queen.

The Rosary is often prayed before and after Mass on weekdays in many parishes. It is also the most usual prayer said when families gather to receive the body of a deceased loved one into their home or into the Church on the evening before their funeral. For this reason, the Rosary has become a powerful way for Catholics to reflect on the meaning of suffering.

The Rosary, the Incarnation and suffering: The Sorrowful Mysteries.

The mysteries of the Rosary are the focus of the whole prayer. The idea is that whilst each of the prayer repetitions are made that the person is supposed to meditate on the meaning of the mysteries. Each mystery is an event from the Incarnate life of Jesus. The Sorrowful mysteries are the five that invite Catholics to meditate on the meaning and importance of Jesus' suffering and death.

The agony in the Garden – this is when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before he died. He prayed to be spared the suffering he knew was to come but in the end accepted God's will out of obedience and love.

The scourging at the pillar – this is when Pilate had Jesus whipped in an attempt to satisfy those who wanted Jesus to be crucified. It didn't do any good and Pilate condemned Jesus to death.

The crowning with thorns – this is when the soldiers mocked Jesus, twisting thorns into a crown because he had been charged with claiming to be the King of the Jews

Jesus is made to carry his cross – this is when Jesus carried his own cross to Golgotha, the place of his crucifixion.

Jesus is crucified and dies on the cross – this is when Jesus is nailed to the cross and, after six hours, dies on the cross.

Reflecting on the suffering of Jesus was one of the most important ways in which Catholics were able to find answers to the Problem of Evil. The Rosary in turn is one of the ways that helps Catholics reflect on the nature and meaning of this suffering.

SUMMARY

- A pilgrimage is a journey to a site of special religious importance
- Pilgrimages help Catholics feel closer to God and help them to respond to life's difficulties
- Lourdes is an important pilgrimage site, especially for the sick and disabled.
- The Rosary is the name of a prayer and the beads that are used to say the prayer
- It consists of repeated sayings of the Our Father, Hail Mary and the Glory Be
- The Rosary helps Catholic to reflect on the main events in Jesus' life, including his suffering and death