

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Route B

EDUQAS GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES
COMPONENT 1 FOUNDATIONAL CATHOLIC THEOLOGY
THEME 1: ORIGINS AND MEANING

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BIG QUESTIONS:

Could life on earth exist due to blind chance?

Is there any purpose to human life?

Can you be a Catholic Christian *and* an Evolutionary Scientist?

If God created all life, do humans ever have the right to take it away?

Is human life 'sacred'?

When does life begin?

Why should we care about planet earth?

Is the Bible really the 'Word of God'?

Is there any point in inter-faith dialogue?

Who is 'my neighbour'?

AREA OF STUDY - ORIGINS AND MEANING

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will

- Know what St Augustine wrote about creation from 'nothing.'
- Be able to compare Catholic, other Christian and non-religious views on the origin of the universe and of human beings, including Hawking's theory of the Big Bang
- Understand scientific theories of evolution from Darwin and Dawkins
- Be able to explain the Catholic view that creation and evolution are compatible
- Be able to explain how the concept of *Imago Dei* relates to the sanctity of human life
- Be able to explain views on abortion and the value of life from Catholic, fundamentalist Christian, Jewish and non-religious viewpoints

Key concepts and definitions

Creation ex nihilo	–	Creation out of nothing. Before God created the universe, nothing existed. Only God can create out of nothing.
Evolution	–	the process of mutation and natural selection which leads to changes in species over time to suit particular environments.
Imago Dei	–	in the image of God. The belief that human beings are uniquely a reflection of God's personhood. Unlike the other animals. Human beings are rational, free and moral.
Omnipotence	–	the belief that God is all powerful.
Transcendence	–	existing outside of space and time; God exists in a way that makes him nothing like anything that exists, above and beyond creation.

Humans have always asked themselves questions about their origins: How did the first humans get here? Was it an accident or by design? Is there a reason why we exist? Is there a supreme being, or even beings, that brought everything in to existence?

Many of the religions of the world have addressed these important questions and have explanations that set out their beliefs about the beginnings of the world, humans and everything that exists. Judaism, Christianity and Islam as the three monotheistic (belief in one God) traditions, are united in their belief that there is one God who is responsible for all life.

Creation out of nothing - '*ex nihilo*'.

When we think about creating something we generally are talking about making something new from things that already exist. Catholics believe the way that God created the Universe was different to this because He created it out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). In other words, there were no 'ingredients' already in existence for him to use, as He created **everything**. Not only was there no water, air, land, light or dark, there wasn't even any time or space. God is solely responsible for everything that exists. Only God can create out of nothing because he is omnipotent (all powerful).

St Augustine of Hippo, an early Christian thinker, explored this idea in his writings Confessions XII,7.

"... you, O Lord... made something in the Beginning which is of yourself, in your Wisdom, which is born of your own substance, and you created this thing out of nothing... From nothing, then, you created heaven and earth".

So, God created the universe just as it says in Genesis 1 and 2?

The Bible is a written text in the same way that we have other fiction and non-fiction books. To properly understand one of Shakespeare's plays, we might need to know when it was written, what life was like at that time, how language differed then, why he wrote it, what messages he wanted to convey and who he wrote it for. For Catholics, the same is true of the Bible.

Not all Christians interpret the Bible in the same way and therefore they understand the Creation accounts differently. Christians are, however, united in that they believe;

-in God

-that the people who wrote the biblical accounts were inspired by God

-that God makes himself known to human beings through the Bible

-the Bible is the Word of God and helps us to live our lives today

How Catholics view the Genesis accounts

When you read the accounts of creation in Genesis you realise that they are two different stories. Genesis 1 was written down about 450 BCE as a poem and it tells of the six days of creation, with God resting on the seventh, making the day holy. Genesis 2 was written earlier in about 950 BCE and focuses on the story of the creation of Adam and Eve in some detail. Catholics today accept that the two creation stories were written as myths. When Catholics talk about a myth in religious terms, they do not mean it is a made up story or an untruth, rather, it is a story with an underlying truth. A myth is often a symbolic story that conveys a hidden truth and shouldn't be taken as literally true. The messages that the stories convey is what is of greatest importance. Although the two accounts of creation in Genesis have different details, they share the same truths:

1. God made everything that exists – *“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”* Gen 1:1-2 and in Genesis 2 *“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground.”* Gen 2:4-5

2. Everything that God made was good – *“God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was Good.”* Gen 1:10 and *“The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him”.* Gen 2:18

3. Humans were the final act of God's creation, but the most important – *“Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”* Gen 1:26. In the second account it says *“Then the LORD God formed a man from dust of the ground and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”* Gen 2:7

The big idea underpinning the creation accounts is that God created everything *ex nihilo*, out of love and that humans were created to experience the love of God, creation and other humans.

Catholics therefore believe that the creation accounts should not be interpreted literally as they come from different times and reflect the thoughts and attitudes of the societies in which they originated. However, they do tell us undeniable truths about God.

What do other Christians believe about the Creation accounts?

Another way of interpreting the Bible is to believe that it is a factual record that describes events exactly as they happened. This is the view of those that we would describe as 'fundamentalist' or 'literalist' Christians. The Genesis accounts, from this point of view, are therefore historical accounts of what actually happened at the beginning of everything. So, a fundamentalist reading of the Bible leads to the belief that the Universe was created in six days; Christians who believe this are called Creationists. Likewise, Eve was created from Adam's rib exactly as it says in the Bible.

Does it matter that Christians have these conflicting views?

Whilst it is important to realise that Christians are united in their beliefs that God created the Universe, that everything He made was good and that humans are the high point of His Creation, the fact that Christians interpret the Creation accounts differently, is going to matter when it comes to exploring what scientists say about the origins of the universe.

Jewish views



In Jewish belief, God is the source of all life and referred to throughout the Torah as the sole creator. Prayers are said in Orthodox synagogues expressing this belief 'Blessed be He who spoke and the world existed.' The **modeh ani** prayer said by many Jews each morning and thanks God for allowing life for another day.

Genesis (the first book of the Torah) tells two creation stories:

Heaven and earth, animals and humans are created in six days with the seventh day being a day of rest. Each week observant Jews celebrate Shabbat and keep it as a day of rest.

The second creation story in Genesis describes how Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden. In both, humans are created on the sixth day. Adam, the first human being, was made in the image of God, from dust from the earth. Adam and Eve had power over all things.

Traditionally Rosh Hashanah is the celebration of the day when God created the world and marks the beginning of the New Year.

Some Orthodox Jews believe these stories are true accounts. Other, perhaps more Reform Jews, believe that the creation accounts are stories which shouldn't be considered as historical facts. Some may believe that God started the universe through the Big Bang and has guided the creation of life through evolution.

Non-religious views about the origins of the universe

Today, many think of Science and Religion as being in opposition to each other, but this view is far too simplistic. Up until the 16th century, the philosophers and theologians were the scientists, it was from their work that science was born. In Medieval times belief about the structure of the Universe was based on what scholars observed and mathematics. Any scientific reasoning was in line with the Christian faith and the accounts of Creation in Genesis. Scholars at this time were more interested in how you should live your life so that you could enter heaven rather than knowing how the Universe worked. The accepted view at this time was that the earth had been created by God, as described in Genesis.

Since these times, science has developed and as a result some theories that have been put forward, appear to contradict the Biblical accounts. The study of the origin of the universe is called cosmology. One of the first challenging ideas for many religious believers was the discovery that the earth went around the Sun along with the other planets, rather than being the centre of the universe, as had previously been believed. Furthermore, Scientists have concluded that the world is a lot older than we first thought and today it is believed that the universe is more than 15 billion years old. Our solar system probably formed about 4.6 billion years ago and the sun exploded in to light a further 100 million years after that.

The Big Bang Theory

The best known theory explaining how the world began is the Big Bang theory which became widely accepted in the 1960s. The theory was first put forward by a Catholic priest, Father Georges Lemaitre and then much later by Professor Stephen Hawking. The theory arose as a result of various observations made about the universe, particularly:

-galaxies far away from our galaxy (which is called the Milky Way) are getting further away and as they do that the whole universe is cooling down

-as you observe these galaxies and their stage of development, it seems to suggest that the universe is about 15 billion years old, which has led scientists to believe that there was a one-off moment when it all began, before this nothing existed. Hawking calls this a 'moment of singularity'.

The explanation is that the matter that makes up the universe was once compacted together, but because it was so dense and hot it could no longer keep itself together. As a result, the matter exploded which is the moment we call the 'Big Bang'. At this point space and time were created and the temperature gradually decreased until it was what it is today. During this time elements such as helium and hydrogen were formed, islands of more solid matter took shape and these gradually combined to form billions of galaxies, containing billions of stars. These form the universe we know today.

The Big Bang theory has led Hawking and many other scientists, to conclude that there is no evidence to suggest that there is a Creator responsible for the origin of the Universe, instead things may just have happened by themselves.

The Catholic view of Big Bang Theory

The Catholic Church has no reason to question the evidence that scientists present about the origins of the universe. As we saw earlier, there is a long history of the Catholic Church being interested in and leading on areas of scientific discovery. In fact, it doesn't have to be a choice between religion and science because both are perfectly possible.

The theory raises almost as many questions as answers. For example where did the matter come from that caused the Big Bang? Hawking suggests that since gravity exists, the universe can and will create itself from nothing, but the question is, where did the law of gravity come from? Neither gravity nor matter are 'nothing', so if either of these existed before the Universe then the Universe has not come from nothing.

Science and Theology seem, in fact, to be answering different questions. The author of Genesis is explaining *why* the universe began. The story was told in a non-scientific age to explain that God was the creator of everything and that he had a special role for humanity to play in the world. These stories express meaning rather than presenting a factual account of historical events. Scientists are answering the question of *how* the Universe was created. The conclusion therefore for Catholics is that if the Big Bang theory is correct then perhaps this is the way that God chose to create the world.

Scientific theories of evolution

Charles Darwin

The Big Bang Theory has provided a scientific explanation for the origin of the universe without a need to believe that God is responsible. Similarly, various theories have been proposed to explain how new species develop.

Charles Darwin rocked the Christian world in 1859 when he published his book called '*On the Origin of the Species by means of Natural Selection.*' He worked as a naturalist on HMS Beagle and spent a long time studying the animals and birds on the Galapagos Islands which are a thousand miles off the coast of South America. He noticed major differences in some of the animals across the different Islands, particularly in relation to the finches. Some of the finches had thin, sharp beaks whereas those on other islands had short, fat beaks. The size of their beaks related to what best suited the food source that was available to them on that particular island.

He concluded that although these variations happened by chance naturally when a species produced offspring, often the variation was very useful and made it more likely that these animals would survive and breed, producing the next generation. So, over time those species with these particularly strong variations assisted the survival of that species. This process is referred to as '**survival of the fittest**' or **natural selection**.

Darwin's proposals were highly controversial at the time; that this process had repeated itself many times over a long period of time, leading to completely new species of animals emerging. This process is known as **Evolution**. According to this theory one species is descended from another

species from which it is different. If we are to work backwards; human beings have descended from an ape like species who themselves came from a species of mammal, these mammals descended from a reptile who had come from a fish until eventually all life can be traced back to a simple bacterium.

The theory of evolution is supported by fossil records which reveal that a large number of species have not survived and also that earlier forms of animals have survived but in a mutated form (for example elephants are closely related to the extinct woolly mammoth). DNA research also seems to suggest that there are very close similarities between many species, which further reinforces evolutionary theory.

Richard Dawkins

Professor Richard Dawkins is a British Scientist who is often referred to as ‘the most famous atheist in the world’. He has been outspoken about his support for Darwinism, atheism, humanism and is in opposition to religion. Dawkins believes that the theory of evolution and natural selection explain the origins of the universe much better than the idea of a creator God. He famously said that you could not be sane and well educated and disbelieve the theory of evolution.

Dawkins is well known for the work that he has done to build on Darwin’s theory of natural selection. In his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976), he argues that it is the individual genes within organisms that adapt and evolve, not organisms themselves. Dawkins argues that each living organism’s body is just a survival machine for its genes and does not serve any other purpose. He described life as just “bytes and bytes and bytes of digital information”, therefore humans are no more than carriers of DNA whereby over time, good genes survive and bad genes die out. Dawkins therefore rejects;

- any notion of a creator God who has a plan for the universe
- the concept of an immortal soul given by God.

Is evolution compatible with Catholic beliefs?

For many, Darwin’s and Dawkins' views are challenging because they appear to present a negative view of humanity;

- the creation of humans was just a lucky genetic mutation
- humans are merely another slightly more advanced form of animals
- humans have no greater importance on this earth than other animals

However this view is seen as overly negative by the Catholic Church which has embraced the theory of evolution. Saint John Paul II restated the view of Pope Pius XII, that the Church saw no conflict between evolution and the teachings of the Christian faith. He went on to encourage theologians and scholars of Scripture to be informed by scientific research in their ongoing work.

Sources of Wisdom and Authority

Pope John Paul II in his *Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: On Evolution* (22 October 1996)

“ . . . In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII has already affirmed that there is no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of the faith regarding man and his vocation.”

The Catholic Church does **not require** a literal interpretation of Scripture which tells of the creation of human beings on the sixth seemingly in the same form that they exist in today. What is important to the Catholic Church is not whether God chose to create through a Big Bang and a process of evolution over many millions of years but that in Genesis, God created with purpose and so everything that exists is part of His loving plan. This is what is important for Christians to understand; not *how* it happened but *why* it happened.

“If methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God.” Gaudium et Spes 36

What do other Christians believe about the Big Bang theory and Evolution?

Whereas the Catholic Church and other Liberal Christians support these theories, some Christian denominations, most notably some Fundamentalist and Evangelical Christians, see them as an attack on their beliefs,. These Christians interpret Scripture literally and believe that the Bible has come directly from God and that every word is historically true and accurate. Any scientific account of creation that conflicts with the Genesis account is therefore considered wrong. Their views would include;

- The actions of the creator God brought about all life
- A great variety of life forms suddenly appeared on earth at the time of creation
- Plant and animal species were created with their characteristics complete at the time of creation
- Human life was created last, with characteristics that were complete at the time of creation

The last two points therefore rule out the idea of evolution.

Catholic beliefs and teachings about the origin and sanctity of human life

Is human life special?

The fact that humans appear to be the only creatures capable of using reason to make moral decisions, has led many people, whether they are religious or not, to believe that human life has more value than other kinds of life and is precious. For those with no religious faith, life is special because it is the only life we have.

For Christians, human life has special value because they believe that each person is unique because God made them and there is no-one else quite like them. Sadly we know this when those we love die, because they leave a space that can't be filled by anyone else. We might have another sister, son or friend but they can't ever replace the person that we have lost. All Christian denominations believe that human life is special and a gift from God.

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred (holy) and that everyone has a right to life which should be protected and valued at every stage.

Imago Dei – the Image of God

Both of the accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 describe how God planned and made the world. Everything that exists does so because God created it, including plants and animals and his final creation, humans, who were his most important. *'Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end...'* Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258

The creation of humans in both Genesis accounts is different to the way that we are told that other living things are created for three main reasons;

1. **Humans are special.** In Genesis 1 it states that humans were not just created by God but created in His image.

*“Then God said, Let us make mankind in our **image**, in our **likeness**, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*

*So God created mankind in his own image, **in the image of God he created them**; Male and female he created them.”* Gen 1. 26-27

In Genesis 2 God creates Adam from the earth and breathed life into him so that he could live. These accounts demonstrate that the creation of humans was unlike the rest of creation because they were made in a unique way and most importantly in the Image of God. The Latin term for in the Image of God is **Imago Dei**.

Catholics believe that since only humans have been made in God’s image, they therefore have a special **dignity** which should be recognised in everyone that they meet whatever their gender, colour, status or belief.

2. Furthermore, humans have an immortal **soul** which has come from God and will go back to God, so their **destiny** is to share eternal joy with God in heaven.

3. **Humans have freedom to make moral choices.** In Genesis 2 it says *“And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are **free** to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat from it you will certainly die.”* Gen 2:16-1

Saint Catherine of Siena on the Image of God

St Catherine (1347-80) was a woman who had a deep spiritual faith and was passionate about making people aware of God. She spent most of her time with sinners and outcasts because she knew that God loved them all as they were all created in His image.

Sources of Wisdom and Authority

The Dialogue of St Catherine of Siena, of Discretion

'Her dignity is that of her creation, seeing that she is in the image of God, and this has been given her by grace, and not as her due. In that same mirror of the goodness of God, the soul knows her own indignity, which is the consequence of her own fault'.

'What made you establish man in so great a dignity? Certainly the incalculable love by which you have looked on your creature in yourself! You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her, by love you have given her a being capable of tasting your eternal Good'.

Her most famous work is called *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* which is a conversation between God and a soul trying to make *her* way to God. The choice of the word *her* in reference to the soul is a Latin tradition.

There are three important messages that come from St Catherine's writing;

1 Humans originate from God – in the same way that children originate from their parents or your reflection in the mirror originates from you, *"Her dignity is that of her creation, seeing that she is in the image of God."*

2 Conscience – when we look in a mirror we see our face, the good and bad; freckles, spots, wrinkles! Since humans have God's truth in their lives, they have an inner conscience that tells them when their actions are right or wrong, just like looking in a mirror, *'In that same mirror of the goodness of God the soul knows her own indignity, which is the consequence of her own fault'.*

3 Love – St Catherine reflects that the reason that humans have been made with such dignity in the image of God is because He loves them immeasurably. He created out of love. *"You are taken with love for her, for by love indeed you created her."*

Fundamentalist Christian views and non-religious views about the value of human life

Most human beings are in agreement that human life is special and worthy of protection.

'The child, by reason of its physical and mental immaturity, need special safeguard and care, including appropriate legal protection before as well as after birth' (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights)

For religious believers, human life is considered to be sacred or holy because it has come from God. This idea is known as the **Sanctity of Life**. Since all life originates from God and is precious, it should be valued and protected, not destroyed.

What is Abortion?

Abortion is the deliberate ending of a pregnancy. Before 1967, abortion was illegal in Britain, however this doesn't mean they didn't take place. Instead thousands of illegal or 'back street' abortions were carried out each year and led to serious injury and sometimes the death of the woman.

In 1967 Abortion was legalised up to 28 weeks, along as certain criteria were met. Two doctors must agree to the procedure for it to go ahead and decide that there is a risk to the physical or mental health of the mother or her existing family, if the pregnancy were to continue. Other grounds on which an abortion can be granted is if the woman's life is in danger or there is a substantial risk that the baby might be born with a physical or mental disability. In 1990 The Abortion Act lowered the number of weeks to 24, however in rare cases if the woman's life is at risk or there is the likelihood of severe abnormality in the foetus, then there is no time limit on abortion.

Attitudes towards Abortion

Abortion is a highly controversial issue and has been widely debated since its legalisation. Arguments on both side of the debate centre around three main issues;

- 1. Preserving Life** - There are those who believe it is always wrong to take a human life and that includes the life of the unborn. However, there are widely held views on when life actually does begin. Is it the moment of conception? When implantation occurs? When the first movements can be felt in the womb? As the heart starts to beat? When it is born?
- 2. Quality of Life** –There are those that argue that the issue isn't whether the foetus is a life or not, but whether having the child will adversely affect the *quality of life* of the mother or the child. If the mother is going to suffer mentally or physically by having the child, so for example, if the mother has been raped or if the child will be born with severe disabilities, some argue that it is kinder to have an abortion in these circumstances.
- 3. Rights and Responsibilities** –Some people believe that every human has a right to life, even an embryo and potential parents should take responsibility for bringing new life in to the world. This view is usually referred to as '**Pro- life**'. On the other side of the debate there are those who believe that the important issue is that the woman has rights, she has the right to do what she wants with her body and that includes having an abortion. Some who take this view accept that a foetus has rights but would argue that the woman's right to do what she wants with her body takes priority. This standpoint is referred to as '**Pro –choice.**' Currently, in law the father has no legal rights.

The Catholic Church and Abortion

Preserving life

The Catholic Church is against Abortion in all circumstances because human life is sacred. The Catholic Church teaches that life begins at conception. It is God who gives life at this moment and it is the start of a human being's relationship with God. This life is often described as 'a life with potential' rather than a potential life.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1.5

Abortion is therefore seen as murder, a great moral evil, which is against one of the Ten Commandments: 'Do not murder'.

The Church values the life of both mother and child. If a mother's life is in danger during the pregnancy then it supports action to save the life of the mother even if it threatens or destroys the life of the unborn child. Situations where this might happen include cases of ectopic pregnancy or when the mother might need treatment for cancer such as chemotherapy. This is the known as the **Principle of Double Effect.**

The reason this is seen as morally justifiable by the Church is because the intention is to save the mother's life. The **secondary unintended effect** is that the unborn child may lose its life.

Quality of Life

The Church values all life even if a person is disabled. All life is equally valuable because it has been given by God and every life is special and unique.

The Church understands that continuing with a pregnancy in some situations might affect the quality of life of the mother, father or child. The Church teaches that the whole community has a responsibility in these cases. Parents, family and friends have an important role to play in providing love and compassion as well as emotional and practical support to women and couples who are considering an abortion.

Rights and Responsibilities

‘From the time the ovum is fertilised, a new life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother . . .It would never become human if it were not human already.’ (The Roman Catholic Declaration on Procured Abortion 1973)

The Church teaches that an unborn child is not merely a part of its mother’s body. From the moment of conception it is a separate individual and therefore a person with its own rights, even though it is reliant on its mother’s body for life.

Instead of having an abortion, the Church encourages those in this situation to accept their responsibility to give the child life and would encourage them to have the child adopted if they are unable to be a parent.

The Anglican Church and Abortion

The Anglican Church is also strongly opposed to Abortion and agrees with the Catholic Church that is a great moral evil. They also encourage adoption as a consideration in these cases.

Anglicans uphold the sanctity of human life. However, where they differ from the Catholic Church is that many Anglicans believe there are strictly limited conditions when having an abortion would be preferable to having the child. This is sometimes referred to as ‘the lesser of two evils’. The conditions where this might be the case include;

-if the mother’s life is in danger, abortion is permitted but not encouraged. It should be carried out as early as possible.

-abortion is permitted if a woman has been raped because of the effect on her ongoing quality of life

- if the child is likely to be severely disabled. However, if this is the case there should be some certainty that the child would only have survived for a very short period of time.

The Anglican Church also calls for better sex education as a solution to unwanted pregnancies.

Humanist views on the value of life and Abortion

Humanism is based on this life, the here and now, as Humanists do not believe in God or any other supernatural being. For a humanist, this life is precious because it is the only one there is. Moral decisions should be based on what will allow all involved to live a full and happy life. They uphold these beliefs based on reason because it makes sense, and because they believe in personal choice and respecting others.

There is no one humanist view on abortion but they tend to take a more liberal 'Pro-choice approach' and accept abortion as a morally acceptable choice. Humanists;

- do not consider life sacred (though they do believe it is special) but instead they think that 'quality of life' is an important consideration and that this outweighs preservation of life

- do not think a foetus is a person until well after conception

- encourage careful consideration of both long term and short term affects before a decision is made

- promote adoption as a possible alternative that might bring about greater happiness

- support the legalisation of abortion so that unsafe, illegal abortions don't take place

- consider better sex education and easier access to contraception would reduce the number of abortions

Peter Singer –a humanist's view

A well-known Australian humanist and moral philosopher, Peter Singer, has some interesting ideas in relation to Abortion and the value of life that many find controversial.

Non- person humans

Singer agrees with the Catholic position that life begins at conception. However he describes this life as 'biological' and denies that embryos are 'persons'.

Singer defines a human person as a being that can reason, feel, hope and make moral choices. Therefore, embryos, new born babies, those in a coma and the elderly with dementia are all examples of biological, but 'non-human persons'. It is morally acceptable to take the lives of these 'non-human persons' if it will bring about less suffering and greater happiness for all involved.

Speciesism

Singer is critical of the Catholic view that human life is more special than any other type of life. He believes that treating animals as less important than humans is discriminatory and 'speciesist', in the same way that discriminating against people because of their colour is racist.

Singer argues that animals have similar responses to humans, in that they feel pleasure and pain and therefore their interests must be taken in to account. A conscious animal such as a cat, has more mental capacity and is more of a 'person' than an infant baby or an elderly person with dementia. Singer argues that speciesism is therefore, morally wrong.

A Catholic response to Singer's views

Catholics would argue that since God gives humans a soul, they are and remain 'persons' whether they are conscious or not, even when they are asleep, in a coma or haven't yet been born.

With regard to Singer's views on speciesism, Catholics would agree that human beings should respect and care for animals, since they are God's creatures and part of his creation. However, they make a distinction between animals and humans because humans have been made in the image of God. Humans therefore have a special dignity that animals don't. Human beings should care for animals and must not inflict unnecessary cruelty, but they can use them for food and clothing.

Jewish views



For many Jews, God is believed to be the sole creator, giver and taker of life. Genesis (the first book of the Torah) teaches that humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1 26-27) and life is precious. In the Tenakh there are references to a relationship with God even before birth (Psalm 139) and Jeremiah (1).

The Ten Commandments, believed to have been given to Moses, forbids the taking of a life. The Talmud discusses a number of cases in which mitzvot in the Torah can be disregarded in order to save a human life. This includes working on Shabbat and breaking the fast on Yom Kippur.

There are many different Jewish views concerning abortion. These are often formed by interpretation of religious texts and teachings.

- Some Jews believe as God is creator only He can take life. An important belief in Judaism is pikuach nefesh –the saving of a life. It is taught that 'Anyone who destroys a human life is considered as if he had destroyed an entire world.' In the Ten Commandments it is forbidden to kill and some Jews believe this can refer to the unborn.
- However, most Jews believe that the unborn foetus is not a person until it is born.
- Many Reform Jews believe that abortion can be permitted but only for serious reasons such as the mother's life is at risk.

SUMMARY

- God transcends human understanding and he created everything that exists out of nothing because he is omnipotent.
- God created humans out of love, in his image which makes all human life special (sacred).
- The Catholic Church accept the creation accounts in Genesis as symbolic stories that convey hidden truths and they shouldn't be read literally.
- The Catholic Church teaches that Science and Religion can be compatible.
- Scientists such as Stephen Hawking do not see it is necessary for the universe to have been created
- The Catholic Church accepts Big Bang Theory and Charles Darwin's ideas about evolution as compatible with belief in God
- The Catholic Church would reject Richard Dawkins' ideas that humans are nothing more than 'vehicles' for their genes
- In her writings, Catherine of Siena expressed the idea of *imago dei*
- Views on abortion differ greatly; Catholics and many other Christians believe it is a great moral evil, some Anglicans believe it can be justified in certain circumstances, many Humanists think that 'quality of life' and women's rights issues should be considered
- Jewish views also vary; many Orthodox Jews see abortion as wrong whilst many Reform Jews might see it as acceptable in certain situations

AREA OF STUDY - CREATION

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study, you will

- Understand that the two creation stories in Genesis convey different ideas about God
- Understand the relationship that should exist between human beings and the rest of creation
- Compare Catholic, Humanist and Jewish beliefs about care and respect of the planet and the environment

What do the two Creation accounts in Genesis tell us about God?

Genesis 1

In Genesis 1 the emphasis is on the greatness of God as creator of the Universe;

-**Transcendence** – God exists above and beyond creation which makes Him unlike anything else that exists *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'* (Gen 1.1)

-**Eternal** – the fact that God creates heaven and earth *"In the beginning"*, shows that he already existed, God has no beginning.

-**Omnipotent** – God is all powerful, creation happens just by him commanding it *'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.'* (Gen 1.3). Furthermore, he creates from nothing, **Creation ex nihilo**, before he creates nothing exists and only God can do this.

Key concepts and definitions

Stewardship- the duty to care for creation responsibly, as stewards rather than consumers, and to protect it for future generations.

Genesis 2

The second account shares many of the themes evident in Genesis 1 but in addition, in this version God is portrayed as;

Omnibenevolent – God is all loving because he is the Supreme Being who needs nothing yet he created a universe with humans in, he created out of his love. Before he created humans, he created everything they needed to live on, *'Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.'* Gen 2.8-9.

In addition, God does not want man to be lonely so he creates other species to keep him company, and he allows Adam to name them, but he knew that these were not suitable companions for Adam so he created Eve and they became one flesh.

Immanent – This account emphasises God being involved in his creation, particularly humans and their lives. In this account God talks to Adam, he forms him from the dust of the earth and breaths life in to him and he creates woman from Adam’s rib. For this reason Christians today believe God is omnipresent –present everywhere.

What do the two Creation accounts in Genesis tell us about human beings?

In both accounts the messages given about human beings are the same and reinforce the belief that human life is precious and sacred. Humans have been created to have a close relationship with God but they also have a duty to care for everything that God has created.

Sanctity of life – Humans are created last in Genesis 1 and are the high point of God’s creation. In Genesis 2 God personally creates Adam and Eve, Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam’s rib. Furthermore, he breathes life in to Adam which demonstrates how precious and sacred human lives are compared to everything else in creation. As part of his creation, God reflects again that all that he has made is **good** which includes human beings.

Image of God – Humans were created imago Dei-in the image of God, ‘So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.’ (Gen 1.27) which makes them sacred and holy.

Male and female – God deliberately creates humans male and female, he wants Adam to have a companion in the second story; in Genesis 1 humans are encouraged to “Be fruitful and increase in number.”

Freewill – God gives Adam and Eve freedom to do God’s will or to choose not to, ‘*And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*’ (Gen 2.16-17). Although God instructs Adam not to eat from the tree, he gives him the choice to disobey him.

Stewards of God’s Creation – God commands that humans have authority over nature but also have a responsibility to care for it. In Genesis 1 God creates humans to rule over his creatures. In the second Genesis account Adam is put in the garden to ‘work it and take care of it’ but his authority is seen when God asks him to name all the animals.

Catholic beliefs about humans and their relationship with creation

Ten thousand years ago there were probably only a few million people on the planet, by the 1920s this had risen to 2 billion and in 2017 the figure topped 7.3 billion. All of our water, food and fuel come from the earth’s natural resources, as the population has grown, so too has our consumption of these resources. Many of the essentials for life are ‘non –renewable’ which means once they have been used they cannot be replaced.

Sources of Wisdom and Authority

The creation of Eve

‘The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

‘That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh.’

Gen 2. 23-24

As well as a growth in population there has been a huge demand for goods such as food, phones, computers, cars, houses and many more material possessions. Many scientists believe that the effects of increased transport, factories and the pollution they cause, among other harmful practices such as deforestation, has damaged the ozone layer. The fine balance of gases surrounding the earth has been disturbed, leading to climate change.

Changes to the world's climate is thought to be having a devastating effect on hundreds of millions of people worldwide as well as threatening the existence of many different species.

Furthermore, the effects of climate change with more unpredictable and extreme weather has a greater impact on the world's poor because they are already vulnerable. 90% of people who die in natural disasters live in the poorest countries. Climate change is not just an environmental issue but a justice issue too.

The relationship of human beings with the environment

Christianity is certainly not the only religion that believes that;

- God created all living things, including people
- God created the earth with the right conditions to sustain life and that plants, fish, birds and animals were made for humans to use and make the earth beautiful
- the earth belongs to God and not to human beings; we are just the 'care-takers' of God's world

Catholics believe that all of creation is holy because it comes from God and is a sign of his love because he created the earth in a way that was sustainable for human life. One important way of showing love for God is by valuing what God has created.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical **Laudato Si**, encourages Catholics to think about the gift they have been given and to consider what type of world they will be passing on to **future generations**. This will mean that humanity needs to look beyond their own personal gain and instead consider the effects of their actions on the environment.

'Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realise that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit.'

Laudato Si 159

Stewardship of the world: not a 'resource' but 'THE source'.

In the Genesis creation stories humans are given the authority to rule over all living things. The very first law that seems to be given to humanity was that they should be 'stewards' of the earth. A steward has a care-taking role and will often look after people on someone else's behalf. A steward at a football match will direct people get to the right seats, deal with First Aid when needed and ensure that everyone is safe during the game and after. The steward is working on behalf of the football team owners, acting as a servant to others, watching out for the most vulnerable and

making sure that everything is as it should be and not allowing any destructive or dangerous behaviour.

When humans are made stewards of the earth by God, they are given the same type of caretaking role in relation to looking after the planet, *'The LORD God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.'* (Gen 2. 15).

An important aspect of looking after it involves protecting it for future generations so that they can live and enjoy God's creation. In return for good stewardship, the earth provides everything humans need to survive, but they do not have the right to abuse the natural world, instead they must live in a sustainable way.

What does good stewardship look like?

Catholics can take care of the planet in many different ways, at an individual, local and global level. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis has highlighted sound, practical ways that people can do this

'Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.'

Other reasons the Catholic Church give for caring for the environment include the following;

Love your neighbour as yourself

Christians are frequently reminded of the greatest commandment, to love God and to love others. For Catholics this extends to everyone we know now and even those that we don't. This means that Catholics need to be concerned about those in other countries who bear the brunt of the most devastating effects of climate change through floods, storms and drought.

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." 1 John 4:20

Those that we don't know but still must show love for include those not even born yet; 'we do not inherit the earth from our parents, we borrow it from our children'.

The Common Good

The Catholic Church teaches that every individual has a duty to contribute to the good of society; the common good. As individuals, Catholics should act justly and seek justice for others, especially the poor. This approach is most likely to lead to good things for everyone because if all individuals are cared for, everyone would benefit from living in an orderly, prosperous and healthy environment.

Universal destination of Goods

Do we every really own possessions or is it more likely that we own them for a time before they become somebody else's when we recycle them or give them away?

The Catholic Church sees the earth in this way – the current generation does not own it, they are looking after it to pass on to future generations. One of the commandments is *'You shall not steal'* (Exodus 20:15) and a refusal to look after the planet is stealing from future generations.

“The seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbour and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of people's labour. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the **universal destination of goods.**” (CCC 2401)

Humanist Views

Humanists have much in common with Catholics with respect to their concerns about the environment and the future of the planet. There are three main ways that their view would differ from that of a Catholic;

'Good without God'. Most humanists agree with the idea of stewardship and see the world as beautiful and valuable. They believe;

- More should be done to preserve habitats and species because if they are lost then we may be damaging ourselves without realising it.

-We should care about the future of our planet because we should care about other human beings, even those not born yet.

What makes Humanists different to Catholics or other religious believers is that they seek to live good lives because they believe it is the only life we have. They uphold these beliefs based on reason because it makes sense, and because they believe in respecting others. Their views are not based on belief in a supernatural being or beings (God).

Population control - Humanists see population growth and overcrowding of the planet as a major threat to life on earth. They recognise that a growing population increases the demand for food, water, shelter and fuel as well as more material possessions and wealth. They believe;

-the demand for the earth's resources can increase tension and even lead to war which then threatens the happiness and safety of humans

-in **Birth control programmes** to limit population growth. This is contrary to Catholic views as they believe that God wants humans to flourish and multiply as seen in Genesis.

Speciesism –This is the view that humans are prejudiced in favour of their own species and that we discriminate against animals because we believe that being a human sets us above other animals. Increasingly humanists see this view as wrong in the same way that racism or sexism is wrong. A famous moral philosopher and humanist who takes this view is Peter Singer.

A Humanist might ask us to consider a Bee. Bees are threatened globally and in many areas are declining alarmingly in numbers. It is estimated that a third of all the food we eat such as fruit and vegetables, have been pollinated by bees. If this is the case are humans really superior to bees as we are reliant on them for our food source? One reason a humanist would give for treating animals equally is that as humans it makes sense to for our future survival. Other humanists might go further and say that animals have equal rights to humans.

This is contrary to Catholic views as they believe humans are special and holy because of the way they were created by God, in his image, as described in Genesis.

Jewish views



God is the source of all life and referred to throughout the Torah as the sole creator. Prayers are said in Orthodox synagogues expressing this belief, 'Blessed be He who spoke and the world existed.' For many Jews the universe is too wonderful and complex to have happened by chance.

In the first book of the Torah, God gave humans a duty to take control over nature (Genesis 1. 26-28). Many Jews believe it is their responsibility to continue the work of creation by making the world a better place to live in. This is referred to as Tikkun Olam (healing the world). This includes not wasting or destroying the environment (bal tashchit), not causing stress to living creatures and not causing pollution or harm to trees. This can be seen in the Torah when soldiers are told not to destroy trees in war.

Many Jewish festivals celebrate God's creation, such as Sukkot which is a harvest festival. The keeping of Sukkot is a mitzvah (duty or obligation). Living in the Sukkah (a temporary shelter often made of leaves and plants) during the festival is a reminder of human connection with nature and the environment.

Jewish people also have a festival where they plant trees (Tu BiShvat - New Year of the Trees/Ecological Awareness Day). Trees are vital to the well-being of our environment and the damage caused by having too few trees can be seen in the rainforests of South America which have suffered significant deforestation.

Summary

- Christians believe the earth belongs to God, not humans.
- The two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 show different aspects of God
- Humans should act as good stewards of the earth to preserve God's gift for future generations
- Humanists also believe that humans should respect and protect the planet, though they do not accept the concept of being a steward for God
- Jews also believe in the importance of respecting and protecting the planet for God and for the benefit of future generations

AREA OF STUDY - THE BIBLE

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will

- Understand how the Bible is considered the '**word of God**'.
- Understand that the Bible is compiled of a collection books written in different **literary forms**.
- Be able to compare Catholic and Fundamentalist Christian **interpretations** of the Bible.
- Understand Jewish views about the importance of sacred scriptures

The Bible is the source of Christianity's main beliefs and is considered to have been inspired in some

way by God. Although it is usually referred to as one book, it is in fact a collection of different books written by many authors over a period of more than a thousand years.

In early times there was no need for a written holy book as religious accounts were passed on by the **Oral Tradition** because most people could not read or write. The stories of Abraham, Moses and the prophets were shared by word of mouth. Scribes began to write down parts of the oral tradition from around 1,000 BC. Similarly, the accounts of the life of Jesus were not recorded straight away as there was a strong belief that the second coming of Christ was imminent. The realisation that this was not the case and that eye witnesses were dying out, prompted the writing of the first New Testament writings.

What became the accepted version of the Bible was agreed, after much discussion, by Pope Damascus in the 4th century. The accepted list of the books that make up the Bible in the Catholic tradition is called the **Canon of Scripture**.

Literary Forms

Living in the current age provides us with a greater variety of forms of communication than our ancestors could ever have dreamed of; email, text messages, online newspapers as well as traditional books full of examples of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and plays.

It is very easy to misunderstand writing, think about text messages; we sometimes get offended needlessly because we can't hear the tone of the person writing, we only see the words themselves. To understand any piece of writing fully it is helpful to know who wrote it, when, why, what life was like at the time and the reason they wrote in the first place. This is also true of the books contained in the Bible as there is a whole library full of variety included within it

KEY CONCEPTS

Inspiration –“God breathed” The belief that the Spirit of God guides an individual to act or write what is good and true.

Revelation –the word used to describe all of the ways in which God makes *himself* known to human beings. Christians believe that God does this finally and fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

How the Bible is structured

The Bible is divided into two large sections called the Old and New Testament. The word 'testament' means 'covenant' which is an agreement between two different groups.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament has 46 books according to the Catholic Canon; it begins with the origins of the universe and human beings. It traces the relationship between God and the Jewish people before the arrival of Jesus.

Law- the first five books form the Pentateuch. These books give instructions on how to live life according to God and contain the Ten Commandments, for example.

History- Joshua, Samuel and Chronicles are some of the books that trace the history of God's people from when they entered the Promised Land, detailing how they were guided by God and encouraged to keep the Covenant God had made with Abraham and later, with Moses.

Prophets – a prophet is a messenger sent by God to inspire and challenge those who are failing to stay faithful to God; Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel are some of the most famous prophets.

Wisdom – these books encourage people to stay close to God in their lives and come in the form of songs, poetry, prayers and sayings.

The New Testament

The New Testament has 27 books according to the Catholic Canon; it contains the accounts of the life of Jesus and the growth of the Church after he had returned to heaven. This section of the Bible contains;

Gospels – the books of 'Good News' that detail the life of Jesus. The four Gospel writers were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Acts of the Apostles –which document the growth of the early Church

Letters- which were written by early Christian leaders like Peter and Paul to encourage, guide and sometimes rebuke people in the Church.

Book of Revelation- written by John, this is an apocalyptic book, full of symbolism that some Christians believe refer to the end of the world.

Revelation and Inspiration

'All scripture is inspired by God' (2 Timothy 3:16)

Christians describe the Bible as the '**word of God**', they believe that through the Bible God is making himself known to them; he is speaking to his people, providing them with a way to live and be holy. Christians believe that God **reveals** himself to humans in other forms too, for example through creation, through other people and most importantly, in the person of Jesus.

In Genesis, it is described how God breathed into Adam so that he could live, God's Spirit was shared with human beings. Christians believe that God continues to send his spirit to guide people towards goodness and truth today, this is known as **inspiration**. God's Holy Spirit helped his chosen people understand and this guided the writers of the Bible. So, the Bible is 'the word of God'; meaning that the Holy Spirit inspired believers to accept God's message in their lives and in turn to share it with others.

Interpreting the Bible

The Catholic view

As we saw earlier when we compared Catholic and other Christian views on the origin of the universe, not all Christians read or understand the Bible in the same way. The Catholic Church teaches that the authors of the Bible were inspired and gained truthful insights about God but that not everything they wrote was historically or literally accurate, for example their understanding of science was very limited. The Church therefore asks that in order to fully understand what God wanted to reveal to humanity, readers should consider the context in which it was written and the implication of the literary form used; a poem is very different from a piece of historical writing. For Catholics, the accounts given in Genesis 1-3 can be considered myth; stories that, whilst not being 'true', contain great 'truths'.

'In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take in to account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in used at the time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating the current'. (CCC110)

Other Christian views

Other Christians such as Fundamentalists believe that God inspired the biblical writers, so it does not contain any errors. It has authority therefore, over all of time to present day. Some Fundamentalists are literalists, taking everything in the Bible as being literally true.



Jewish views

The Torah

The Torah is the first five books of the Tenakh (Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim) and is believed to be the holiest and most authoritative scripture for Jews. Moses is believed to have received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai.

The many different views amongst Jews derive from their consideration of the Torah as an authoritative text.

-For some they believe it was given by God to Moses and as such must be taken literally and not changed. Many Orthodox Jews will seek to obey the mitzvot as duties in life. Society may change but Jewish teachings don't. One of Maimonides' (a Jewish teacher) principles was that the Torah was given in its entirety to Moses and can never be changed.

-For many Reform and Liberal Jews, it is not necessary to take the scriptures literally and they believe that sometimes they have to be adapted for modern life.

The Oral Torah

For many Orthodox Jews, the Oral Torah is also considered as source of authority. Believed to be God's words revealed to Moses and passed down to successors to form the Mishnah and Talmuds.

Many Reform Jews may refer to the Oral Torah but not see it as a source of divine authority.

SUMMARY

- The Bible was inspired by God and is an important source of authority for Christians
- God has made himself known through the Bible; he has revealed his love for all of humanity and has given them guidance on how to live a life according to his laws
- The Bible contains many different kinds of literature, written by many different people over a very long period of time.
- Christians have different views about how to interpret the writings in the Bible; Catholics accept the idea of biblical myth, whilst most Fundamental Christians do not
- The Catholic Church teaches that the Bible should be read in context not solely as a piece of historical writing
- There is also diversity within Judaism regarding the nature of divinely inspired scripture

AREA OF STUDY - PAINTING

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will

- Understand the meaning of **Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam'**
- Be able to explain how the painting expresses **Catholic beliefs about creation, God and human beings**

Expressing beliefs through Art

There are very many different ways in which people express their religious beliefs and faith. They may;

- pray, meditate or take part in an act of worship
- choose to help others by supporting a charity or doing other good works
- respond to a 'call' from God to follow a vocation as a nun or priest, teacher or social worker
- express their beliefs about the meaning of life and the nature of God creatively through art, literature or music. Originally, paintings and stained glass were important ways to share Bible stories and key Catholic beliefs with the many ordinary people that could not read or write.

Michelangelo's Creation of Adam

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, is home to the very famous painting by Michelangelo. The Chapel is part of the Vatican and is also the place that new popes are chosen by the Cardinals of the Catholic Church. There are nine scenes painted on the ceiling depicting stories taken from Genesis, with the creation of Adam being the one that is most well-known. It was painted somewhere between 1508 and 1512 and was commissioned by Pope Julius II.

How does the painting express Catholic beliefs about creation, God and human beings?

To analyse the meaning of the painting we can divide it into four distinct parts.

1. Adam – Adam is seen on the left of the painting, lying back on the earth from which he has been formed as told in Genesis, *“Then the LORD God formed a man from dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”* (Gen 2. 7)

Adam is portrayed as a perfect human being; young, handsome and strong. This reflects the Catholic belief that **everything that God created was good**, as mentioned repeatedly in Genesis 1.

Furthermore, Adam resembles God (on the right of the picture); he has the same physical build, is striking a similar pose and details such as the arms, shoulders and feet are almost identical. All this is a reminder that humans are made in the image of God: **imago Dei**.

In the painting, Adam appears quite a laid back figure, his arm resting on his knee, suggesting that he is not fully alive yet. He is barely reaching out to God which reflects the view that humans need God's grace to do what God asks.

2. God –unlike Adam, God is presented as a dynamic, active figure as if He is hard at work at His greatest creation. God reaches out to the more passive figure of Adam because He loves him. The Christian belief is that God loves the world.

Michelangelo's' God is portrayed as a much older being; bearded yet strong and powerful in His body. The viewer is reminded of the belief that God is both **eternal** and **all powerful**; he is responsible for all of creation which He made from **nothing**, because nothing existed before God. The youthfulness of Adam is a reminder than in comparison to God, humanity and the earth itself are new. The difference in age between Adam and God also signifies the parent- child relationship that exists between God and humanity, indeed God is the Father of all Creation

3. The hands – Adam and God are seen reaching out to touch each other with their fingertips. The viewer is reminded here, of the second account in Genesis where God breathes life in to Adam. In the painting Adam's fingers are bent, signalling that they have not yet received life from God in order to straighten them. The touch of fingertips represents the spark of life given to all humans by God –**human life is sacred** and a **gift from God**. Not to be overlooked in the painting, is what that there appears to be a close, loving relationship between God and man.

4. The cloud –the shape behind God that shows him being carried towards earth by a group of angels has caused much debate. On a simple level this detail shows the **transcendence** of God and conveys his greatness and majesty in sharp contrast to the earth bound figure of Adam. However two elements of the cloud-like shape have provoked much discussion; what does the shape of the cloud represent and who is the female looking figure under the left arm of God?

Some believe the cloud resembles the brain and that the message being expressed is that God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom- He is **omniscient**. Others believe that the cloud represents a womb because of the red background. Furthermore, the green cloth hanging down could be the umbilical cord. This interpretation of the cloud reinforces the idea that **God gives all life**, in the same way that the womb gives life to a new child. Furthermore God is the Father of all humanity who are His beloved children.

The female figure under the arm of God seems to be an important feature of the painting because He has his arm around her and she in turn has her arm around a child. Some believe the figure represents **Eve** who has not yet been created for Adam, but is already in the mind of God, *'The LORD God said "it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'* (Gen 2.18). If this is true then it is reinforcing the great love that God has for humanity because he does not want them to be lonely but to experience the gift of love.

Others believe the figure to be that of **Mary, Mother of God** and that the child on her left is her son Jesus. Those who take this view describe Mary as the '**new Eve**' and that Jesus is the '**new Adam**'. Michelangelo may be expressing the idea that Adam will soon sin and that Jesus will come in the future to bring humans back to God. In the Bible, St Paul compares Jesus to Adam *"So it was written: 'The first man Adam became a living being', the last Adam, a life giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the*

second man is of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:45-47)

SUMMARY

- Michelangelo has expressed Catholic beliefs about creation, God and human beings in his 'Creation of Adam', by including allusions to the idea that God is the eternal, all powerful, Creator ex nihilo, that creation is good, and that humans are God's greatest creation.

AREA OF STUDY - SYMBOLISM

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will

- Understand the Tree of Life mosaic and be able to explain **the meaning of the symbols and images**
- Be able to explain why the symbol of the cross in the mosaic is referred to as the **'Tree of Life.'**

Symbolism and Imagery in Christian Art

To understand the meaning behind any piece of art you need to understand the symbolism. This involves working out the meaning that the artist is trying to convey through the images that have been used in the piece.

The Tree of Life Mosaic

The Tree of Life Mosaic in the Church of San Clemente in Rome is an example of Christian symbolism. It was created by Masolino da Panicale in the 12th century. The central image is one of Christ on the Cross but an interesting feature of this piece of art is that there are many other symbolic images surrounding the main frame.

The Twelve Apostles

There is reference made to the twelve Apostles who were specially chosen by Jesus to continue to spread the Good News once he had left them.

The Lamb - at the bottom of the cross there are twelve lambs who are pointing towards a thirteenth lamb at the centre of the picture directly under the Cross. This central lamb has a halo and is representing Christ whom Christians refer to as the 'Lamb of God'. In the story of the Passover in the Old Testament book of Exodus, a lamb was sacrificed and its blood put on the doorposts of the homes of the Israelites. The Angel of Death 'passed over' these houses and instead killed the first born sons of the Egyptians. The event is celebrated by Jews every year in the feast known as the Passover. The Israelites had been saved from their slavery.

Jesus is described the 'Lamb of God' because his sacrificial death saved humanity from their sin and death. It is therefore fitting that this sacrificial lamb is placed under the cross in the mosaic.

The Apostles also lived a sacrificial life, they gave up their homes and families to follow Jesus and spread the word after his death. For some, it also literally cost them their lives, for example St Peter was executed in Rome.

The Dove –On the cross itself the artist has placed twelve doves which again represent the Apostles but this time we are reminded of the Holy Spirit because of the use of a Dove. The Holy Spirit came to the Apostles at Pentecost, were filled with courage and began to spread the word. This is often described as the 'Birthday of the Church' because without this event Christianity may not have spread.

Additional important figures in Church History appear throughout the scene including the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), who were so instrumental in spreading the Good News. They appear at the top next to the image of a living, risen Jesus.

Representations of Jesus

Apart from the predominant symbol of the Cross, there are other representations of Jesus in the Mosaic. The two symbols Chi-Rho and the Alpha and Omega are combined into one at the top of the cross.

The Alpha and Omega - In the book of Revelation the Greek letters Alpha and Omega are used several times to symbolise Christ. They are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet which express the idea of something being complete. In the book of Revelation, God speaks of himself as the Alpha and Omega and from early Christian times it was also used to refer to Jesus. We are therefore being reminded that Jesus shares the eternity of God.

Chi-Rho –this symbol is frequently used in Catholic Churches today on baptismal candles and the priest's vestments. The symbol looks like the letters X and P which are the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek. With the use of both of these symbols the artist is emphasising the importance of Christ.

The symbol of cross as the tree of life

The cross is a complete crucifixion scene with Mary and St. John present either side of the cross. but this symbolic creation goes far beyond just depicting the sacrifice and death of Jesus in its many themes.

The hand of God the father can be seen at the top of the Cross reaching down to earth from heaven handing a crown to Christ. This symbolises how the **transcendent** God becomes an **immanent** God who is now involved in creation in Jesus.

The Cross

Christian art often focuses on the suffering and death of Jesus but this image is different. Jesus is placed on a black cross but this emphasises the brightness of his figure set against it. Jesus' sacrifice is about life not death, hope not despair.

The Tree of Life

The Cross emerges from a tree at the base of it, this is considered to be the tree of life. This phrase is a reference to the Book of Revelation 22.2, 'On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations'. All people are saved through the crucifixion.

There are also lots of references to Genesis in the image; the tree at the base of the Cross is perhaps a reminder of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. Eating the fruit from this tree was the first sin of humanity; the presence of the serpent wrapped around a fawn who is drinking from the rivers of life seems to confirm the link. The message is that sin ruins life on earth as well as the relationship between God and humans.

The Vine

One of the most predominant features apart from the cross itself is the green vine that circulates the entire scene and emerges from the tree of life. This is another reminder of the Garden of Eden and the green paradise that was created for all of humanity. The Vine can also represent Christ himself who in John's Gospel said 'I am the Vine'. (15.5)

The Vine is labelled as the Church by an inscription along the band just above the sheep, 'We have likened the Church of Christ to this vine; the Law made it wither but the Cross made it bloom'.

SUMMARY

- God the Father created the whole universe
- God the Son, Jesus, dies on the cross to redeem the sins of humanity
- The sacrifice of Jesus is a source of hope and life
- All people are saved through the crucifixion, despite original sin

AREA OF STUDY - LOVING AND SERVING IN CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN BRITAIN AND ELSEWHERE

CORE LEARNING

By the end of this area of study you will

- Understand how the concept of **Imago Dei** has **influenced Catholic Social Teaching**
- Be able to explain the **importance of justice, peace and reconciliation** in the Catholic Church
- Be able to explain how the Catholic **Church promotes understanding, respect, tolerance and harmony between different religions** and those with **no religious faith**
- Be able to explain how the Catholic charities of CAFOD and the SVP demonstrate **love and service of their neighbours**, in the work they undertake

What rights, if any, do all humans possess?

Many people would turn to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) for an answer to this question. The declaration contains 30 articles that represent the rights that all humans should have. They include the right to;

-to life, freedom and personal safety

- a standard of living that ensures good health and well-being, including access to food, clothing, housing and medical care and social services

-an education, employment and leisure time

-freedom of movement and residence in their own country, the right to seek and experience asylum from persecution in other countries.

All thirty articles are based on the first;

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

What is Social Justice?

All countries are legally required to uphold the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and many have formally agreed to do so. When any of these articles have been denied, other countries and international organisations will intervene and try and restore these basic human rights. The reason they do this is because they aspire to social justice for everyone in society.

Social justice is the desire to achieve a just and fair society where everyone regardless of their sex, age, race, religion or country of origin have access to the same basic provisions to live and can look forward to equal opportunities and human rights.

For many Christians, the **UN Declaration of Human Rights** reflects the main principles of Christianity and what ‘Loving your neighbour’ looks like in practice.

Catholic Social Teaching – The Church speaks out

Over the centuries many popes have spoken out about the social issues of their day after having reflected on God’s word in the Scriptures. They have often chosen to do this through various encyclicals, and these have become known as Catholic Social Teaching. The first modern instance of this can be traced back to 1891 when Pope Leo XIII spoke out in favour of oppressed factory workers who were demanding justice from their reluctant employers.

Gaudium et Spes

During the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s the Church published an influential document called ***Gaudium et Spes*** which reflected on the Church in the modern world. The document drew on the creation accounts in Genesis which outline how humans have been created in the image and likeness of God. This belief is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching.

Since humans are made in the image of God they are all; God’s children, sacred and holy, and possess special dignity. The Church therefore calls on people to not rest until there is equality for all.

We already know that many people in our world today have their human rights abused and they are not treated with dignity and worth. Consequently the Catholic Church calls on believers to challenge these situations in the world and to not rest until all of God’s children experience peace and justice and every type of discrimination is eliminated

“There will be no peace or justice in the world until we return to a sense of our dignity as creatures and children of God.” Pope John XXIII

The message for Pope John XXIII is echoed in *Gaudium et Spes* where a link is made between peace and justice. There can’t be true peace in the world unless there is justice first.

Sources of Wisdom and Authority

Imago Dei: Gaudium et Spes 29

Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.

True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honoured Human institutions, both private and public, must labor to minister to the dignity and purpose of man. At the same time let them put up a stubborn fight against any kind of slavery, whether social or political, and safeguard the basic rights of man under every political system.

Sources of Wisdom and Authority

Imago Dei: Gaudium et Spes 78

Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice.
.peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide

How can Catholics help to bring about peace and justice?

Catholic Social Teaching asks everyone to treat other people with dignity and to take action when needed by;

- upholding the rights of individuals
- standing in solidarity alongside those who are oppressed and treated unjustly
- caring for respect and care for the planet and the environment
- praying for justice and peace for all

The role of the Catholic Church in inter-faith dialogue

Called to serve – faith in action

On the 13th March 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis; the 266th leader of the Catholic Church, the first non- European pope since the 8th Century, the first from the Americas and in fact the first from the Southern hemisphere. Quickly, he gained a reputation for shunning protocol and convention, preferring to live in a guesthouse in the Vatican rather than the papal apartments and choosing to travel on public transport. Eighteen days later he made headlines again as he entered a young offenders' institute in Rome on Maundy Thursday to wash the feet of ten young men and two women at the Mass of the Lord's Supper. He knelt before them and washed, dried and kissed their feet in a symbolic act of service. What surprised the world's press and many onlookers was not just that he chose a prison to celebrate Mass in, but that he washed the feet of inmates of different nationalities and faiths, including at least two Muslims.

Why did the Pope's actions cause such surprise? Certainly the notion that the pope would enter a prison to perform this service would challenge some, they might question whether this was a suitable place for the pope to be. However, his actions were a powerful reminder of the first Mass where Jesus performed this same action on the twelve Apostles who were equally surprised by his actions and did not feel worthy enough to receive this sign of love.

Pope Francis reminded those gathered that the person who is most high among them must be at the service of others and that they were all called to help one another. He explained that he performed this act of service out of love for them.

On another level, the Pope's actions surprised many because included among those whose feet he washed were young people from other faiths, including members of the Muslim community.

The Catholic Church has, in fact, a long history of mutual respect and dialogue with those of other faith traditions and indeed, those of no faith at all. The actions of Pope Francis in his first days as pope sends a very clear message out to the world that all people are called to serve, inspired by the great command Jesus gave to 'love one another'. This call extends to people from every walk of life regardless of gender, faith or standing in society.

Britain: A multi-faith society

The UK has a strong Christian heritage that originated in Roman times and became more visible during the 4th and subsequent centuries. Today, the UK is more of a multi-faith society than any other country in Europe and includes Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists among its numbers.

How did the UK change from being a country of one faith to many?

Britain has in fact always been a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society;

- Over the centuries, Saxons, Danes, and Vikings, to name but a few, have all settled in Britain, each bringing their own culture and belief system.
- The UK has always provided refuge for those suffering persecution, this has included French Protestants in the 17th century and European Jews in the last century.
- During the 19th century, the British Empire included many countries across the world. Citizens from the Empire were allowed to settle in Britain. Small communities grew in British cities as a result and included those who had been slaves in their country of origin until they came to Britain and were given their freedom.
- As countries gained independence from Britain, the Empire became known as the Commonwealth. After the Second World War in the 1950s many immigrants came to Britain from Commonwealth countries such as India, Pakistan, the Caribbean and West Africa because there was a shortage of workers in Britain. Many of these immigrants had fought for Britain in the war. The British Armed forces relied heavily on those from the Commonwealth who fought with them and they actually outnumbered the British.
- Immigration has continued due to the free movement of many from the European Union to Britain.

In Britain today **religious pluralism and freedom** are encouraged, meaning that all faiths have an equal right to exist together and to practice or change their religion.

Of course, not every person in Britain today is a person of faith. In the 2011 census, about a quarter of the population, 14.1 million people, declared they have no religion.

What is Inter-faith dialogue?

In this context 'dialogue' means co-operative, constructive and positive engagement between people of different faiths and of no faith such as humanists and atheists, to;

- promote mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and harmony
- identify common ground
- engage in shared action for the common good of society

'**Inter-faith Dialogue**' relates to engagement between those of all faiths. More recently, the term '**interpath dialogue**' has become more common, which is favoured by some humanists, atheists and agnostics because this term does not exclude them.

Why do we need inter-faith dialogue?

Living in a multi faith society brings many benefits. Different religious cultures and traditions bring with them a variety of food, clothes, music, and literature in to our lives. With this comes new ways of living and enjoying life. By living and working alongside those from other religious backgrounds we can gain greater tolerance, respect and understanding towards those who have a different viewpoint to us. This leads to harmony and a safe, happy society.

However, there are also many challenges faced when living in a more diverse society in Britain today;

-religious tensions can exist between different faith groups which sometimes can lead to persecution, hatred and violence.

-those who are from other ethnic backgrounds, as well as practising a different faith, can sometimes experience racism and discrimination.

-at a time when the economy is weak and there is a high level of poverty and lack of opportunity, those from other faiths and ethnicities can become scapegoats and are seen by some as part of the problem, leading to intolerance and hatred.

-with the current rise in all forms of extremism, including religious extremism, innocent members of certain faith groups, for example Muslims, can experience prejudice and be treated with mistrust and a lack of respect.

Since the Referendum of 2016 when Britain voted to leave the European Union, racial and religiously motivated hate crime has risen significantly in Britain.

Promoting Community Cohesion

Over the last few decades there have been many initiatives involving religious groups promoting community cohesion. This includes the Inter Faith network, the Forum of Faiths, the Council of Christians and Jews and the Muslim Council of Britain. The aim of community cohesion is to establish a better society where all groups feel that they belong and can live peacefully together. To achieve community cohesion requires all those involved to; listen to each other, respect differences, recognise common features between faiths and promote shared values of tolerance and respect.

The Catholic Church and Inter-faith dialogue

Although Pope Francis' actions on his first Maundy Thursday as Head of the Catholic Church may have surprised some, it should not have done so. Recent Popes have had much to say about the need for understanding, tolerance and respect between the different faith groups and Catholics play an active role on many inter-faith committees.

Pope Francis' predecessor Pope Benedict XVI, stressed on many occasions, the importance of inter-faith dialogue in the modern world.

*'Together with all people of good will, we aspire to peace. That is why I insist once again: **interreligious and intercultural research and dialogue are not an option but a vital need for our time.**' [February 2007]*

In the 1960s, Pope Paul VI spoke to the Church through the document **Nostra Aetate**, which was a declaration on the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian Religions. One very important statement that this document made was that Jews should not be blamed for the death of Christ. Over the centuries and even today, many Jews experience prejudice and persecution, which is partly fuelled by the belief of some that they should be held accountable for the death of Jesus on the cross.

In this document Pope Paul referred to Church teaching on **Imago Dei** to implore people to respect the faith of others.

*'The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men. . .**We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God.**'*

The work of Catholic Charities

There is a huge gap between rich and poor in the world, not just globally but also in the UK today. To understand the scale of it, here are a few estimated facts;

- In a world population of around 7.3 billion, 1.3 billion live in extreme poverty, living on less than a pound a day, 1.1 billion people in developing countries don't have access to clean water and 1.6 billion live without electricity.

- Around 22,000 children die every day due to the effects of poverty; hunger, lack of sanitation and access to clean water

- Infectious diseases that can easily be cured, such as Diarrhoea, cause the death of 1.8 million children every year

- In the UK, in a classroom of 30, 9 children are living in poverty

Pope Francis warns of becoming immune to statistics and failing to see the human lives and their genuine suffering behind them. *'Poverty has a face! It has the face of a child; it has the face of a family; it has the face of people, young and old. It has the face of widespread unemployment and lack of opportunity. It has the face of forced migrations, and of empty or destroyed homes.'* (June 2016)

The Catholic Church and the preferential option for the poor

'Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them you are killing them.' (Gaudium et Spes 69)

The Catholic Church teaches that Catholics have a duty to work against the forces in society that create poverty. This duty comes before many other acts of Christian love and service that a Catholic might perform because the Church asks its followers to choose to put the poorest and most vulnerable people *first*. This is what the term 'preferential option for the poor' means.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches that we must 'feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger' and that 'Whatever you do for *the least* of my brothers and sisters, you do for me'.

The Work of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development- CAFOD

Global Neighbours

CAFOD is the official aid agency for the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It is a member of Caritas International, a group of over 160 Catholic agencies from around the world who are known as 'the helping hand of the Church'. CAFOD works with local churches and other partners in places like Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, to tackle injustice and poverty.

CAFOD's mission is to;

-Overcome poverty by working with the poorest and most vulnerable communities to bring about sustainable development. They do this by working alongside local partners to plan programmes together. They fund projects for long term change in communities such as; providing seeds, tools and machinery for food production, materials to build wells for clean water, education, hospitals and health care programmes, training in skills and advocacy.

-Respond in times of an emergency such as an earthquake, flood, drought or war to save and protect the vulnerable lives of the poor. CAFOD, along with other aid agencies and local partners including the Church, will provide food, water, shelter and medicine to people who have lost everything so that lives can be saved.

-Educate people on the causes of poverty and injustice so that lasting change can be achieved. CAFOD provides resources for schools and parishes to use to raise awareness of issues and as an inspiration for prayer and worship.

-Campaign and challenge those in positions of power such as governments and businesses to ensure their policies and practices are just and fair and contribute to alleviating poverty.

CAFOD has led many campaigns for change over the years including 'Make Poverty History' which united 31 million people globally to unite and call for action against poverty, As a result, world leaders pledged to increase aid spending and the G8 agreed to cancel some of the remaining debt owed to the World Bank by some of the poorest countries in the world.

-Fundraise in schools and churches to enable them to carry out their projects, helping the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. CAFOD organises two Family Fast days a year which they rely on for much of their income.

Faith in action

For Christians, **the parable of the Good Samaritan** provides a strong message about their responsibilities in relation to their fellow human beings. It is the last words of Jesus in the story that Christians are called to respond to, when they are faced with those in need;

'Go and do likewise.'

One of CAFOD's fundamental principles is the belief in the intrinsic dignity of every person. Some ways that this belief is demonstrated in their work include;

-even though CAFOD is a Catholic organisation, they do not limit their work to helping Catholics; CAFOD works with people regardless of their gender, race, religion or political views.

-All support is welcomed including from people of other faiths and those with none.

-Working alongside those who need help retaining their dignity. People do not want to rely on others to survive, CAFOD equips people with skills so that they can support their own families and give something back to their communities.

Care for our Common Home

We have seen previously that poverty and environmental concerns are closely linked.

Sustainable development which protects the environment, as well as promoting human development, is at the heart of CAFOD's work. Their campaign, "*One Climate, One World*", was organised in response to the needs of the poorest communities and Pope Francis' call to care for 'our common home'. CAFOD's campaign contributed to a climate deal in Paris (Dec 2015) which agreed a path towards;

-a low carbon future

-global temperature increases no greater than 2 degrees centigrade

-financial support for poorer countries to cope with the impact of climate change which disproportionately affects them

The Work of the St Vincent De Paul Society

The St Vincent de Paul Society, commonly known as the SVP, was founded by Blessed Frederic Ozanam in Paris in 1833, inspired by St Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian approach to justice. Active involvement with the poor is the Vincentian way and their aim is to tackle poverty and disadvantage by providing **practical assistance** to those who are suffering in whatever form. Many parishes and schools have an SVP group which are called 'conferences'.

'The knowledge of social well-being and of reform can be learned not from books, nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor person's garret, sitting by their bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces them, sharing the secrets of their lonely hearts and troubled minds.'
(Blessed Frederic Ozanam)

Inspired by Christ's call to 'Love your neighbour'

The SVP takes its inspiration from Christ's message to 'love our neighbour as ourselves.' They do this by;

-visiting and befriending individuals and families at home, in hospital or hospices, residential homes and young offender institutes. The aim of the visits is to show they care and ensure that people who are vulnerable don't feel lonely and isolated. Visitors may also help with practical tasks such as shopping, gardening or filling out official forms.

-running support centres providing a range of services such as counselling, training in basic literacy and numeracy and debt advice.

-organising soup runs in disadvantaged areas, providing warm drinks, food and companionship.

-contributing to protecting the environment by encouraging people to donate pieces of furniture, instead of throwing them away, so they can be repaired and recycled and redistributed to those who need them.

-showing compassion to those they work with by not judging them.

-being generous with their time, possessions and selves in the service of others.

-Being alert to the changing needs of the communities they serve.

Human Dignity

A founding principle of the society is that they respect the dignity of each person they work with because they believe that they are all equal. Although the SVP is a Catholic organisation, it is non-discriminatory and helps those in need regardless of their colour, race, faith, status or sexual orientation. The kind of people they help includes; the homeless, single parent families, the socially isolated and asylum seekers.

SUMMARY

- Over the centuries the Church has spoken out about issues of social justice
- Since all humans are made in God's image, the Catholic Church calls on people not to rest until there is equality and justice for all
- The Catholic Church calls people of all faiths to listen to each other, respect differences and recognise their shared values
- Catholics are active members of inter-faith committees and organisations
- CAFOD and the SVP are showing God's love to the world in their work with the poor and vulnerable. Their work is based on the idea that all humans deserve respect and dignity because they are made *imago dei*, that Jesus taught the importance of love of neighbour and that the world is a gift from God that we care for on a temporary basis.

