

ORIGINS AND MEANING



Simplified key term definitions (these definitions would still receive the full 2 marks for an (a) task in the exam):

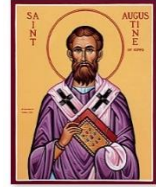
creation ex nihilo	creation out of nothing
evolution	the process of mutation and natural selection which leads to changes in species over time
imago Dei	in the image of God
inspiration	the belief that God guides an individual to act or write what is good and true.
omnipotence	The belief that God is all-powerful
revelation	the ways in which God makes himself known to human beings
stewardship	to care for creation, as stewards rather than consumers
transcendence	existing outside of space and time (like God)

Sources of authority:

<i>Confessions</i>	A work by St Augustine in which he explains why God must have made the universe out of nothing
<i>Message to the Pontifical Academy: on evolution</i>	An address by Pope John Paul II making clear Catholic acceptance of evolution, calling it 'more than a hypothesis'
<i>The Dialogue of Divine Providence</i>	A work by St Catherine of Siena in which she says being made <i>imago Dei</i> gives us dignity and the ability to recognise our faults
<i>Genesis 1</i>	A Biblical account of God making the universe by the power of his word in six days before resting on the seventh
<i>Genesis 2</i>	A Biblical account of God making Adam and Eve and giving them responsibilities in relation to nature
<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>	A Vatican II document that affirms 'the basic equality of all' and links recognition of equality to peace, which is described as not just the absence of war but an 'enterprise of justice'

1.1 THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIVERSE:

Creation *ex nihilo*



- In the Bible, the book of Genesis starts by saying, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'
- It continues in chapter 1 to describe God creating the universe by the power of his word in six days before resting on the seventh
- Genesis ch1 therefore shows God is eternal (as he exists even before creation), transcendent (he is outside of the space and time he creates) and omnipotent
- Genesis ch2 describes God making a man (Adam) out of dust and breathing life into him through his nostrils before seeing his loneliness and creating Eve
- Genesis ch2 therefore reinforces God's omnipotence and shows he is benevolent (as he cares for his creation)
- While Catholics don't read the Genesis creation stories literally, they do accept the ideas it presents about God (i.e. God is the omnipotent creator who made the universe out of nothing – creation *ex nihilo*)
- Catholic teachings about this were developed by St Augustine in *Confessions*
- He said only God is eternal (without beginning or end), and so there couldn't have been anything for God to make the universe out of...
- ...nor could he have made it out of himself, otherwise the universe would be equal to God...
- ...therefore God must be omnipotent and made the universe out of nothing
- Fundamentalist Christians also believe God created the universe out of nothing because (unlike Catholics) they take the Genesis creation stories literally
- Fundamentalists do this because they think that as the Bible is the word of God, it cannot contain any kind of errors, so all the details in Genesis must be accurate
- They therefore believe God created the universe (which Catholics agree with) in just six days (which Catholics disagree with) and so are known as creationists

Past/possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe St Augustine's teaching about the origins of the universe. [5] **2019 Q!**
- (c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, teachings about the origin of the universe. [8] **2018 Q!** [Note that Catholic and Fundamentalist ideas from lesson 1.2 would also be relevant for this question.]

(b) Describe St Augustine's teaching about the origins of the universe. [5]

St Augustine taught that the universe was created by God out of nothing. This concept is called creation *ex nihilo*. St Augustine stated that since only God is eternal, God could not have created the world out of something, since there wasn't anything other than God in existence. Also, he couldn't have made it out of himself, or else the universe would be equal to God. Therefore, he must have made it out of nothing, and was able to do so because God is omnipotent. St Augustine wrote these ideas in a work called *Confessions*.

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, teachings about the origin of the universe. [8]

The Catholic Church teaches that the universe was created by God out of nothing. In *Confessions*, St Augustine stated that since only God is eternal, God could not have created the world out of something, since there wasn't anything other than God in existence. Also, he couldn't have made it out of himself, or else the universe would be equal to God. Therefore, he must have made it out of nothing (creation *ex nihilo*), and was able to do so because God is omnipotent. The Catholic Church accepts the Big Bang theory, but teaches that God caused the Big Bang.

Fundamentalist Christians also believe the universe was created by God out of nothing. They believe God created the universe by the power of his word in six days before resting on the seventh because this is what it says in Genesis. Fundamentalists read the Genesis creation accounts literally because they see the Bible as the perfect word of God and think it must therefore be without any kind of error. This means they reject the Big Bang theory because the timeframe it suggests does not match the six days described in the Bible.

1.2a THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIVERSE: The Big Bang Theory



- The Catholic Church accepts the Big Bang Theory (BBT)
- Indeed, the BBT was proposed by Fr Georges Lemaitre, a Catholic priest
- The BBT fits in with Catholic ideas about the universe coming into existence from nothing (*ex nihilo*) in a single moment
- This allows for the explanation that God must have caused the Big Bang
- Catholics don't mind that the BBT doesn't match the Genesis creation account because they don't take that literally - it's theology, not science
- Fundamentalist Christians reject the BBT because it describes the universe taking billions of years, contradicting the six-day timeframe given in Genesis
- The BBT also suggests the earth is much older than a literal reading of the Bible would suggest (though Catholics see reading the Creation stories literally as a 'category mistake')
- Atheists such as Fred Hoyle have criticised the BBT for being too close to Genesis, worrying that some might associate it with 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3)
- Hoyle (along with philosopher Bertrand Russell) believed in the 'steady-state' theory (SST) - the idea that the universe has always existed
- Stephen Hawking rejects the SST, saying there is plenty of evidence that the universe is a particular age (about 14 billion years old)
- Hawking says the universe did have a 'moment of singularity' - a moment of dense energy before which nothing existed
- Unlike the Catholic Church, Hawking does not think that this therefore suggests God caused the Big Bang

Argument strengths/weaknesses:

- + A strength of the BBT is that there is plenty of evidence to support it (such as the Red Shift Effect). Also, it has been accepted by two of the most celebrated scientists in history (Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking)
- This weakens the argument of those who reject the BBT: scientific evidence is against them!
- + Fundamentalists might say that a strength of their position is that it is rooted in the Bible, which must be right because they see it as the word of God
- Catholics would say that the Fundamentalist argument against the BBT theory is weak because it requires a literal reading of the Genesis creation stories, which is a category mistake

(d) 'God created the universe in six days.' Discuss this statement from more than one view, including religious and non-religious ideas. [15 marks]

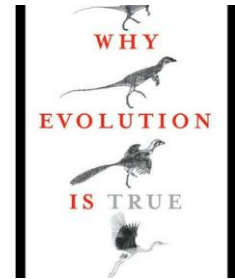
Some Christians, such as Fundamentalists, would agree with this statement. This is because they believe the Bible is the literal word of God and free from scientific or historical error. As such, when the first chapter of Genesis records God creating the universe in just six days, they take this as fact. Fundamentalists are sometimes called Creationists because of their belief in the literal truth of the Genesis creation accounts.

Other Christians, such as Catholics, would agree with the first part of the statement, but not the 'in six days' part. Catholics agree that God created the universe out of nothing (ex nihilo). In *Confessions*, St Augustine suggested that God couldn't have made the universe out of himself (or else it would be equal to him) or out of anything already existing (since only God is eternal), so must have made it out of nothing. However, Catholics do not think this happened in six days. Catholics do not take the Genesis creation accounts literally, and accept the Big Bang theory that was proposed by a Catholic priest (Fr Georges Lemaitre). As such, they accept the universe was formed over billions of years following a huge explosion at the beginning of time, with God being the cause of the explosion ('Big Bang').

Humanists and other atheists would completely disagree with the statement. One reason is because many believe there is evidence to support the Big Bang theory. For example, Stephen Hawking wrote about the universe emerging from a 'moment of singularity' (a moment of dense energy before which nothing existed). Atheists do not believe this moment of singularity requires a God to cause it. Furthermore, some atheists believe in the steady-state theory. Supported by Bertrand Russell and Fred Hoyle, this theory suggests the universe has always existed in some form. As such, they would reject the idea of it being created over six days by God.

In conclusion, I believe the statement to be false. I think the Fundamentalist viewpoint is weak – they are making a category mistake by reading the Genesis creation account as history. I think the authors were trying to tell us who created the universe and why, and that the details given as to how should be seen as poetic rather than as scientific fact. I find the arguments for a longer timeframe strong. If the universe was created in six days, there would not be overwhelming scientific evidence (such as the Red Shift Effect) to suggest otherwise. This also leads me to disagree with the argument for the steady-state theory.

1.2b The Theory of Evolution



- Evolution is the theory first proposed by Charles Darwin that complex organisms developed from earlier, simpler forms of life
- Fundamentalist Christians reject evolution because it contradicts the description of how God made man in Gen. 2:7
- It also contradicts the description of the time creation took in Gen. 1
- Catholics don't read Genesis 1+2 literally so don't see the above as a problem
- Pope Pius XII said there was no conflict between evolution and Catholic understanding of God's role in creation in the encyclical *Humani Generis*
- Pope John Paul II quoted Pius XII in reaffirming Catholic acceptance of evolution, describing it as 'more than a hypothesis' in his *Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: On Evolution*
- The scientist/atheist Richard Dawkins thinks evolution provides evidence that there is no God
- He says the random natural selection of evolution suggests a lack of design/purpose in life, so there is no reason to believe life has a designer (i.e. God)
- Dawkins sees humans as packets of genes trying to survive, and says there is no evidence for humans having a soul
- Catholics don't accept Dawkins' conclusions because they think for humans to have evolved from simpler life forms, someone must have created that life (God)
- Also, souls are not physical, so you couldn't expect to find scientific evidence for them as science is the study of the physical (not spiritual) world

Argument strengths/weaknesses:

Some strengths and weaknesses identified in 1.2a are also relevant here. A weakness to the atheistic conclusion Dawkins draws from evolution theory is that while evolution helps explain how life developed, it doesn't answer the question of how life started. This allows some Christians (such as Catholics) to accept evolution while still believing that God created life.

Past/possible exam questions:

- (b) Describe the teaching of Pope John Paul II on evolution. [5 marks]
- (d) 'The Theory of Evolution is the best explanation for the origin of humans.' **2019 Q!**
- (d) 'Evolution proves that God does not exist.' **2022 Q!**

(b) Describe the teaching of Pope John Paul II on evolution. [5 marks]

Pope John Paul II supported the theory of evolution. In his *Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: On Evolution*, he quoted Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* to make clear that there was no conflict between Catholic teaching and the theory of evolution. This is because the Church (unlike Creationists) does not see Genesis as a scientific text that needs to be interpreted literally, but rather as myth containing a different truth; i.e. that God created us through his omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Due to the amount of evidence for evolution, John Paul II described it as 'more than a hypothesis'.

(d) 'Evolution proves that God does not exist.' [15 marks]

Catholics would disagree with this statement. One reason is because belief that God created the universe is at the heart of Catholicism. This idea is conveyed in the Biblical creation stories (Genesis) and was explained in detail by St Augustine in *Confessions*. Since Catholics believe in a creator God, they would reject the idea that Evolution proves he doesn't exist. Furthermore, Catholics see evolution as part of God's design. While Pope John Paul II described Evolution as 'more than a hypothesis', he was just reaffirming Pope Pius XII's ideas from *Humani Generis* that there was no conflict between evolution and a Catholic understanding of God's role in creation. As such, evolution is not seen to disprove God's existence.

Humanists and other atheists would agree with the statement. One reason is because Darwin's theory of evolution can explain how complex organisms developed from earlier, simpler forms of life. Atheists would see this as offering an explanation for life without the need for a God. Moreover, evolution is seen by some to challenge the idea that the universe has been designed. Richard Dawkins thinks evolution involves random natural selection, with humans just being 'packets of genes' trying to survive. For Dawkins, this suggests a lack of design to life, and therefore no designer/God.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the agreeing view weak because while evolution can explain how life developed, it doesn't explain how life began, and therefore doesn't demonstrate that there was no God who created life in the first place. I find the disagreeing view strong because it recognises that scientific and religious ideas do not have to conflict – the science can tell us the 'how' of the universe, while religion can point to the 'who' and the 'why'.

1.3a The sanctity and value of human life



- Christians believe humans are made *imago Dei* (in the image of God), which means having some of his characteristics (loving, creative etc.)
- Genesis 1:26-27 describes God making humans uniquely in his own image
- Fundamentalists take these words literally, while Catholics would say it's a poetic way of expressing a truth about humans
- Both would say that being made *imago Dei* gives humans dignity and value
- Catholics believe in the sanctity of life - the idea that life is sacred because it comes from God and should therefore be protected
- 'Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God' (CCC) – this is the basis of Catholic opposition to things like abortion and euthanasia
- For Jewish ideas about the sanctity of life, see revision section 5.6 (Pikuach Nefesh)
- St Catherine of Siena wrote ideas about what being made in God's image means in *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* (a set text for this topic)
- She said the soul's dignity 'is that of her creation' (i.e. humans are precious because God made them)
- She said that being made by God gives us some understanding of his goodness and an ability to develop a conscience that recognises our faults
- She suggests we were created through and for love and to return to God, so life is sacred in both origin and destiny
- G.K. Chesterton says that since everyone bears the image of God, all (however sinful) are equally precious, just as all pennies (however damaged) have equal worth

Past/possible exam questions:

(b) Describe St Catherine of Siena's teaching about being made in the image of God. [5]

2018 Q!

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, belief in humanity as created *imago Dei*. [8]

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, beliefs about the sanctity of life. [8] **2020 Q!**

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, beliefs about the value of human life. [8] **2021 Q!**

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, views about the value of human life. [8] **2023 Q!**

Note that these last three (c) tasks are basically identical and would be answered in the same way.

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two different Christian traditions, belief in humanity as created *imago Dei*. [8 marks]

Catholic Christians believe that being made *imago Dei* (in the image of God) allows us to develop certain qualities (e.g. being loving, creative etc.) that God has. For example, St Catherine of Siena suggested in *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* that God made us out of love and for love. She also said that, like God, we can recognise right from wrong because we can look in the 'mirror of the goodness of God'. Catholics also believe that being made *imago Dei* gives us all dignity and value, with G.K. Chesterton comparing us to pennies - all are equally valuable, even if some are more damaged than others.

Fundamentalists also believe humans are made in God's image. They take a literal approach to reading the Bible, and it describes God making humans in his own image and likeness in the Genesis creation accounts. As such, Fundamentalists would agree with Catholics about the value and dignity of human life.

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two different Christian traditions, beliefs/views about the value/sanctity of (human) life. [8]

Catholics believe in the sanctity of life (the idea that life is sacred and should be protected because it comes from God). The Catechism states that human life is sacred because it involves the 'creative action of God'. Human life is seen as especially valuable because Genesis teaches it is made in God's image (*imago Dei*). In *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, St Catherine of Siena suggests that this gives humans dignity. Belief in the sanctity of life is the basis of Catholic opposition to things like abortion and euthanasia.

Judaism teaches that life is sacred because it comes from God (as described in the Genesis creation stories from the Torah). As life is so sacred, there is a concept called *pikuach nefesh* which allows most mitzvot to be set aside in order to save a life (partly because the Talmud says that people should live by the law rather than die by it). For example, a doctor would be allowed to break the Commandment from Exodus to rest on Shabbat if they were responding to an emergency call to save a person's life. Only three mitzvot can never be broken to save a life: adultery, idolatry and incest.

(b) Describe St Catherine of Siena's teaching about being made in the image of God. [5]

St Catherine of Siena taught that the soul's dignity 'is that of her creation'. This means that being made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) makes us precious and gives us dignity. She also taught that being made in God's image means we can recognise goodness (as God is good). This allows us to develop a conscience that tells us right from wrong and allows us to recognise our faults. She further taught that God made us in his image through love and for love. These teachings are found in *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*.

1.3b Catholic and Anglican attitudes to abortion



- Catholicism is 'pro-life' (opposed to abortion) because, as stated in the Catechism, life is sacred and begins at conception
- 'Before I [God] formed you in the womb, I knew you' (Jer. 1:5)
- Because life starts at conception, abortion is seen to break one of the Ten Commandments ('Do not murder')
- The Catholic Church encourages mothers who can't face parenthood to choose adoption over abortion
- Only double-effect abortions (where an operation is performed with the intention to save the mother's life and unintentionally kills the unborn) are permitted by Catholics
- Anglican Christians agree with Catholics that life is sacred and that abortions are undesirable, with adoption generally being preferable
- However, Anglicans don't think life begins at conception, but rather at a later point in pregnancy, so not all abortions are seen as murder
- Because Jesus taught 'love your neighbour', Anglicans think abortion is acceptable if it is the loving thing to do
- Examples of loving abortions could include when the mother's life is at risk or the foetus has a disability which would result in a life of pain

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) of arguments

- + The Catholic view that human life starts at conception is scientifically reasonable, since what is conceived isn't any species other than human, and it is also living
- Given that Catholics don't take all of the Bible literally, some would say it is odd to read too much into Jer. 1:5, which reads quite poetically. Also, Ex. 21:22 suggests that a mother's life is more important than that of a foetus
- + Using 'love thy neighbour' to justify something not usually accepted was something Jesus taught in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and practised by healing on the Sabbath
- Many would question the idea that it is loving to abort a foetus with a disability, as this could suggest an unloving message (i.e. the lives of people with some disabilities aren't worth living)

Past/possible exam questions:

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, attitudes about abortion. [8] **2022 Q!**

(b) Describe Catholic teaching regarding abortion. [5]

For relevant (d) tasks, see 1.4

(b) Describe Catholic teaching regarding abortion. [5]

Catholicism does not approve of abortion. Firstly, this is because the Church states in the Catechism that life begins from the moment of conception. This idea is hinted at in Biblical passages such as Jeremiah 1:5 ('Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you'). Secondly, since humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), the Church upholds what is called the 'sanctity of life', the idea that life is sacred and belongs to God. This means that taking life, including that of the unborn, is prohibited, as it is in the Ten Commandments from Exodus.

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, attitudes about abortion. [8]

Catholicism is pro-life and does not approve of abortion. Firstly, this is because the Church states in the Catechism that life begins from the moment of conception. This idea is hinted at in Biblical passages such as Jeremiah 1:5 ('Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you'). Secondly, since humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), the Church upholds what is called the 'sanctity of life', the idea that life is sacred and belongs to God. This means that taking life, including that of the unborn, is prohibited, as it is in the Ten Commandments from Exodus.

Anglicans hold a slightly different position. While agreeing with the Catholic Church on the sanctity of life and viewing abortion as something to preferably be avoided, they recognise that there may be times when abortion is the best option because it is the most loving thing to do, and Jesus instructed Christians to behave lovingly. The clearest example of this would be when pregnancy poses a threat to the life of the mother. Like Catholics, Anglicans would generally consider adoption a better solution to an unwanted pregnancy than abortion, but would not necessarily regard abortion as murder. This is because Anglicanism does not say that life begins at the moment of conception, but rather at a later point in the pregnancy.

1.4 Humanist views on abortion and the value of human life



- Humanists base moral decisions on what is best for humans/society
- They reject religious concepts such as the 'sanctity of life', focusing instead on the 'quality of life'
- They tend to be pro-choice because: (i) abortion prevents unsafe 'back-street' abortions and poor quality of life for women and unwanted children...
- ...(ii) a foetus doesn't become a person until well after conception...
- ...(iii) preference should be given to a more mature human being who already exists in the world
- The humanist Peter Singer accepts the Catholic position that a foetus is a human being from conception...
- ...but thinks it doesn't become a person until much later (when it is a 'rational and self-conscious being')
- Singer supports abortion because it only kills 'non-person humans' and can help reduce suffering in society
- Singer thinks it's wrong ('speciesist') to say human life has unique value, arguing that animals can experience pain+pleasure and so should have more rights than an unconscious foetus

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) of arguments

- + Some statistics support the argument that abortion improves life quality...
- + ...e.g. deaths from back-street abortions have all but disappeared, while some credit lower crime rates in the USA partly down to legal abortion
- Pro-life people would counter this by saying the ends do not justify the means as it's unfair to kill unborn babies so others can have a nicer life
- Catholics would reject Singer's 'speciesist' criticism, arguing that although humans should care for animals, humans are more valuable as they are made *imago Dei* and have a soul
- Singer's definition of 'person' would seem to exclude young children, those in comas etc.

Past exam questions:

- (d) 'There is no such thing as sanctity of life.' Discuss. [15] **2025 Q!**
- (d) 'No-one should have the right to an abortion.' Discuss. [15] **2020 Q!**

Note that (d) tasks are the only tasks where you can include non-religious ideas. In this topic (Origins+Meaning), you must include a non-religious view in your (d) tasks.

(d) 'Abortion can never be the right choice.' Discuss. [15]

Catholics are pro-choice and would agree with this statement. One reason is because of Catholic belief in the sanctity of life. Genesis describes God making humans *imago Dei*, while the Catechism says life is sacred from its beginning because it involves the 'creative action' of God. Since God created humans in his own image, Catholics believe it has great value and should always be protected. Furthermore, the Catechism explicitly states that human life begins at conception. This idea is hinted at in Biblical passages such as Jer. 1:5 ('Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you'). Since human life is seen to begin at conception, Catholics would say abortion can never be the right choice because it goes against one of the Ten Commandments from Exodus ('Do not kill').

Humanists and other atheists are often pro-choice and so would tend to disagree with this statement. One reason is because they reject the idea of the sanctity of life (because they don't believe in God) and argue that quality of life is what is most important. They would argue that abortion can improve quality of life as, for example, it can prevent women having to sacrifice their careers/education for the sake of an unwanted baby, or facing physical/mental health problems resulting from childbirth. In such circumstances, abortion can be seen as the right choice. Moreover, some humanists would argue that there does not even have to be a particular circumstance to justify having an abortion. Peter Singer suggests that since a foetus is incapable of thinking and hoping, it is not really a person (despite being human). If the foetus isn't a person, it could be argued that there is nothing wrong with having an abortion under any circumstances.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement. I find the argument that life begins at conception strong because it seems to be a biological fact – what is conceived isn't any species other than human, and it is also living. The argument that abortion is justified if it improves the quality of life for others is very weak. I might have nicer things if my parents didn't have to also buy things for my little brother, but that doesn't make it acceptable for me to kill him. If life begins at conception, abortion is taking away a human life, and all humans, including foetuses and my little brother, have the right to life.

'There is no such thing as sanctity of life.' Discuss. [15]

Catholics would disagree. One reason is because they believe life comes from God. This is shown in the Genesis creation stories, while the Catechism states that human life is sacred because it involves the 'creative action of God'. The value of life is reinforced by the Commandment from Exodus to not kill. Furthermore, human life is seen as especially valuable because Genesis teaches it is made in God's image (*imago Dei*). In *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, St Catherine of Siena suggests that this gives humans dignity. Belief in the sanctity of life is the basis of Catholic opposition to things like abortion and euthanasia.

Humanists and other atheists would agree with the statement. One reason is because they don't believe in God. If there is no God, then life cannot come from him and it is not 'sacred'. This leads to Humanists focusing on the quality of life rather than the sanctity of life, and is the basis for their support for euthanasia. Moreover, the Humanist Peter Singer has rejected the idea that human life has unique value. In relation to abortion, he has suggested that it is speciesist to assign more value to the life of a foetus than to certain animals that have a greater capacity to experience things like pain. In rejecting the unique value of human life, the idea of the sanctity of life is also rejected.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the disagreeing view strong because it links to the desire to preserve life (one of the five primary precepts of natural law identified by Thomas Aquinas). I find the agreeing view weak because focusing on quality of life focuses on something very subjective – who has the right to decide what 'quality of life' is worth preserving? What might be unbearable for some might not be unbearable for others.

1.5 Creation in Genesis 1+2

- The six-day creation story (Gen. 1) reveals a God who is eternal ('In the beginning, God...')...
- ...and omnipotent (creating out of nothing by just his word)
- He is also transcendent (separate from the universe He creates)...
- ...and omnibenevolent (all-loving - he didn't need to make us, so must love us)
- The Adam and Eve creation story (Gen. 2:4b-24) shows God as creator (forming man from dust and woman from man's rib)
- It also shows God as omnibenevolent (creating a companion for Adam to stop him getting lonely)...
- ...and immanent (involved with - not distant from - his creation)
- While God is omnipotent in the Adam and Eve account, God gives humans a role to play in looking after creation in this story
- Each creation account shows humans made *imago Dei*
- In Gen. 2, God breathes life into Adam, while Gen. 1:27 says, 'God created mankind in his own image'
- Both creation accounts emphasise distinction between male and female, but also that they complement each other...
- ...relationships help to complete human beings, who are incomplete if they do not relate to others with love
- The goodness of creation is made explicit at the end of each of the six days in Gen. 1, and implied by the paradise of Eden in Gen. 2



- Both stories encourage humans to flourish: 'Go forth and multiply' (Gen. 1:28), while co-operation allows Adam and Eve to initially flourish together
- In Gen. 1, humans are implied to be stewards by virtue of being given mastery/dominion over the other animals
- In Gen. 2, the stewardship role of humans is more explicit, with man placed in Eden 'to work it and care for it' (v15) and name the animals (v19)
- Both accounts emphasise the sanctity of life - it comes from God and belongs to him

Past/possible exam questions:

(b) Describe two characteristics of God that are shown in the Genesis creation stories. [5]

(b) Describe two characteristics of humans that are shown in the Genesis creation stories.[5]

NOTE: Some details from this section could be included in answers to questions about beliefs regarding the creation of humans and the interpretation of the creation accounts

(b) Describe two characteristics of God that are shown in the Genesis creation stories. [5]

One characteristic of God that is shown in the Genesis creation accounts is his omnipotence. This is shown in Genesis 1, when God creates the universe out of nothing (ex nihilo) by the power of his word.

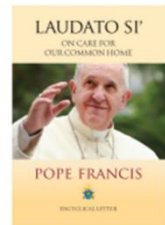
The creation accounts also show God as a creator. In Genesis 1, God creates the whole universe over a period of six days before resting on the seventh. In Genesis 2, it describes God making a man (Adam) from dust and breathing life into him before making a woman (Eve) out of Adam's rib.

(b) Describe two characteristics of humans that are shown in the Genesis creation stories. [5]

One characteristic of humans that is shown in the Genesis creation accounts is that they are made imago Dei (in the image of God). This is shown in Genesis 2 by God breathing life into Adam, while in Genesis 1 it says, 'God created mankind in his own image'.

The creation accounts also show humans having a responsibility to be stewards. In Genesis 1, humans are implied to be stewards by virtue of being given mastery/dominion over the other animals. In Genesis 2, the stewardship role of humans is more explicit, with man placed in Eden 'to work it and care for it'.

1.6 Views on caring for the environment



- Catholicism teaches that humans must care for the environment (i.e. be good stewards) because Genesis teaches that creation is a gift from God
- Pope Francis called upon Catholics to behave in environmentally friendly ways (e.g. using public transport and avoiding using plastic) in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*
- Many Catholics feel they should help prevent climate change as it damages the lives of many, especially those living in poorer countries
- By doing this, Catholics follow Jesus' teaching to love thy neighbour and abide by the Church's instructions to contribute to society's common good
- For other reasons, Humanists agree we should protect the environment
- They think we should look after the earth because it's our home and doing so improves the quality of people's lives (present and future)
- They say human intelligence makes us responsible for looking after the earth, and that doing so is a way of ensuring respect for other creatures
- Many humanists encourage contraception to limit population growth as a means of addressing climate change, though many Catholics and other Christians reject this approach as they see contraception as a denial of one of the purposes of sex
- Some Christians are less concerned about stewardship because they interpret words in Genesis ("you shall have dominion over all the animals") as meaning the world is ours to do with as we please
- They also think that if the environmental situation got very bad, God would intervene, or that if the world is destroyed, then that must be part of God's plan

Strengths (+) and weaknesses (-) of arguments

+ Many would say those encouraging greater care for the planet are right to do so, with most scientists agreed that human behaviour is contributing to rising global temperatures/climate change

- Others question this conclusion, saying global temperatures have fluctuated dramatically over the earth's history and that the current rise is just part of that cycle

- Arguing that the Genesis line 'have dominion over the earth' allows us to do with the earth as we please seems to ignore the implications elsewhere in the Bible that we should care for the planet (e.g. Proverbs says, 'The righteous man is merciful to the life of his beast'), while arguing that God will intervene if things get really bad seems to go against the evidence

Past exam questions:

(b) Describe Catholic attitudes about caring for the planet. [5] **2022 Q!**

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, teachings about preserving the environment. [8] **2023 Q!**

(d) 'Only Humanists have a duty to care for the environment.' [15] **2018 Q!**

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, teachings about preserving the environment. [8] NOTE THAT THE CATHOLIC PARAGRAPH WOULD ALSO SCORE FULL MARKS FOR A STEWARDSHIP (b) TASK

Catholicism teaches that humans have a duty to show stewardship (care for the environment) because the world is seen as a gift from God. This duty is particularly shown in the Genesis creation stories (e.g. Adam is placed in Eden and told to 'work it and care for it'). Pope Francis has also emphasised the need for Catholics to care for the environment. For example, in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he encourages Catholics to use public transport and avoid using plastic. Since climate change is particularly devastating for those living in poorer countries, many Catholics feel they must work to prevent it as a way of following Jesus' teaching to love our neighbours.

A minority of Christians are less concerned about stewardship. Some interpret a verse from Genesis about having 'dominion' over all the animals as meaning the world is ours to do with as we please. Furthermore, some believe that if the environmental situation got very bad, God would intervene to protect us. Others believe that if the world is destroyed as a result of climate change, then this must be part of God's plan. Such Christians (along with the Catholic Church) would reject using contraception to limit population growth as a means of addressing climate change because they see contraception as a denial of one of the purposes of sex.

(d) 'Only Humanists have a duty to care for the environment.'

Catholics would disagree with this statement. One reason is because they regard creation as a gift from God. Genesis describes God creating the world, and placing Adam in the Garden of Eden, telling him to 'work it and care for it'. Catholics interpret this as meaning that all humans have a duty to show stewardship (care for the world). Furthermore, Pope Francis has emphasised the need for Catholics to care for the environment. For example, in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he encourages Catholics to use public transport and avoid using plastic. Since climate change is particularly devastating for those living in poorer countries, many Catholics feel they must work to prevent it as a way of following Jesus' teaching to love our neighbours.

A minority of Christians might feel indifferent about the statement as they are not hugely concerned about caring for the environment. Some interpret a verse from Genesis

about having 'dominion' over all the animals as meaning the world is ours to do with as we please. Moreover, some believe that if the environmental situation got very bad, God would intervene to protect us. Others believe that if the world is destroyed as a result of climate change, then this must be part of God's plan.

Humanists would disagree with this statement. They believe that it is important to care for the environment not for religious reasons (they don't believe in God), but because earth is our home and doing so improves the quality of people's lives. However, since Humanists only make up a small proportion of the earth's population, they would say it requires more than just them to care for the environment. They see stewardship as a collective responsibility because human intelligence makes us responsible for looking after the world and is a means of showing respect to the other creatures we share the world with. One method supported by Humanists is the use of contraception to limit population growth.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the view that is indifferent about caring for the environment weak because the line from Genesis about having dominion over the earth doesn't justify mistreating it – as Proverbs says, 'The righteous man is merciful to the life of his beast'. I find the viewpoints regarding environmental care as a duty for all strong because most scientists agree that human behaviour is contributing to rising global temperatures/climate change, and since this can be so devastating, it is urgent that everyone plays a part in addressing it, and not just Humanists.

1.7 Revelation and inspiration in the Bible



- The Bible is a collection of books formed over ~2000 years
- Many Biblical stories were passed down by word before ever being written
- Once the books were written, another process involved selecting which ones would be included in the Bible
- The list of books ('canon') in Catholic Bibles was finalised by Pope Damasus in 382 AD
- The Bible contains different kinds of literature: law, aetiologies, history, prophecy, wisdom, Gospels, letters and apocalyptic
- The Catholic Church thinks that awareness of a given Biblical book's literary form, as well as the context it was written in, is important for helping to understand its meaning
- QUOTE: 'In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at the time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*)
- Catholicism accepts what it says in the New Testament: 'All scripture is inspired by God and can be profitably used for teaching' (2 Timothy 3:16)
- For Catholics, this means that the Holy Spirit influenced the events recorded in the Bible and helped the Biblical writers to perceive and understand things about God and humanity
- It does not mean that God told the writers what to put (though some Fundamentalists would interpret 'inspiration' in this way)
- Catholicism also teaches that those who decided upon the canon of the Bible were guided by the Holy Spirit

- Because the Bible is inspired by God, it is seen to contain God's revelation ('showing'; 'uncovering') about Himself as humanity's loving Father
- Fundamentalists think that coming from God makes the meaning of Biblical texts self-evident and not in need of interpretation
- Catholics disagree with this - although inspired by God, Biblical writings are still the work of humans, so their own historical and cultural contexts affect interpretation
- As human works, Catholics also think Biblical writings can contain human error when they address things other than God's nature and human relationships with Him
- Fundamentalists completely reject this idea: as a divine work, the Bible must be perfect

Past exam questions (ideas from 1.1+1.2 should be incorporated):

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism OR two Christian traditions:

- how the Bible is interpreted. [8] **2018 Q!**
- beliefs about the interpretation of the Creation accounts in Genesis. [8] **2022 Q!**

(b) Describe the origins of the Bible. [5]

The Bible is the outcome of a process that took around 2000 years. Many of the Bible's stories were preserved and passed down verbally ('the oral tradition') before eventually being written down, though some parts of the Bible (such as St Paul's letters) were writings from the beginning. Even after all the different parts of what we now call the Bible had been written, the Bible itself still did not yet exist - there was still a process for deciding which religious writings would and would not be included in it, and in what order the chosen books (called 'the canon') would be put. After much discussion, this canon was finalised by Pope Damasus in 382 A.D.

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, beliefs about the interpretation of the Creation accounts in Genesis. [8] NOTE: The first paragraph below would also score full marks for a (b) task asking you to describe how Catholics interpret the creation accounts in Genesis (a 2023 exam question).

Catholicism teaches that while the creation accounts in Genesis do contain truth, they should be read as mythology rather than history. The Catechism says that, when reading parts of the Bible, it is important to consider literary genres and the context of the writing. As such, Catholics are discouraged from reading the creation accounts in Genesis literally (a 'category mistake'), since the Church accepts scientific ideas (e.g. the Big Bang and evolution) that would appear to conflict with a literal reading of the Genesis accounts. The creation accounts are read as theology, not science, with the central revelation in them being that the universe was created out of nothing (ex nihilo) by an omnipotent God.

Fundamentalist Christians disagree with the Catholic Church's interpretive approach.

They believe that the inspiration God provided the Biblical writers with made it impossible for their writing to contain any kind of error, including historical or scientific error. As such, the Bible is the perfect word of God and the Genesis creation accounts are seen to provide an accurate, literal description of how the universe and life on earth came to be. This leads them to reject scientific theories like evolution since Genesis says humans existed on day six of the universe (not billions of years later) and were formed from dust (not evolved from apes).

1.8 Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*



- *The Creation of Adam* is part of a painting by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel
- Based on Genesis ch2, it shows God (in an unusual-looking carriage) reaching out his hand to Adam, perhaps to show that it's God who gives us life
- Adam's hand is only half raised, perhaps to show that humans are spiritually sluggish
- God's grey hair and beard suggest he is old and wise, conveying his eternal and omniscient (all-knowing) nature
- God's muscularity conveys his omnipotence, while the physical similarities between God and Adam (i.e. both human-like) show that man is made *imago Dei*
- The carriage God is in has been compared to a brain, perhaps showing that God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom
- It also looks like a womb, perhaps to show that life comes from God...
- ...an idea supported by the flailing ribbon, which looks like an umbilical cord cut loose (perhaps symbolising that God gives us free will)
- Next to God is a woman, who might be Eve (already in God's thoughts in anticipation of Adam's loneliness)...
- ...or it could be Mary, the 'New Eve', with the Christ-child (the 'New Adam') next to her (already in God's thoughts in anticipation of The Fall)

Past/possible exam questions:

(b) Describe how Catholic teachings are shown in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. [5] **2022 exam Q!**

(b) Describe two Catholic beliefs about God that are shown in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. [5] **2020 exam Q!**

(b) Describe two Catholic beliefs about humans that are shown in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. [5]

(d) 'Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* accurately represents the origin and nature of humans.' Discuss. [15] (Ideas from 1.2b would also be needed for this task.)

NOTE: it is highly unlikely that a (c) task would be set about Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.

(d) 'Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* is an accurate representation of our human nature and origins.' Discuss.

Catholics would have a mixed view about this statement. On the one hand, they would agree that Michelangelo's painting conveys certain truths about our origins. For example, God's outstretched hand conveys that life comes from God, which Catholics agree with, while Adam's limp hand also suggests something Catholics would accept (i.e. that humans are spiritually sluggish and in need of God's help to do good). Furthermore, the similarity in form between God and Adam would be seen to accurately show that humans are made in God's image (*imago Dei*). However, since Catholics don't read Genesis 2 literally, they don't really believe that the creation of Adam is an historical event, accepting the theory of evolution instead (as made clear by, for example, Pope John Paul II). As such, Catholics would say that the painting is historically and scientifically inaccurate regarding our origins.

Fundamentalist Christians would be happier with the historical and scientific accuracy of the painting, as they do read Genesis 2 literally. They would also agree with the symbolic meanings that Catholics accept about the painting. However, Fundamentalists would see inaccuracy in the way God brings Adam to life with his hand, as Gen. 2 describes God doing this by breathing into Adam's nostrils. Also, the woman placed next to God in the picture is thought by many to represent Eve. If this is true, Fundamentalists would see this as an inaccurate depiction of female origins as Genesis describes Eve being formed by God from Adam's rib.

Humanists and other atheists would completely disagree with the statement. One reason is because they accept the theory of evolution. This is Darwin's idea that humans emerged following a process of mutation and natural selection that led to changes in species over time. This is not what is conveyed in Michelangelo's painting. Moreover, Richard Dawkins has suggested evolution points to a lack of design. He says all organisms are just 'packets of genes' trying to survive. If life lacks design, it must also lack the designer of life suggested in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.

In conclusion, I would disagree with the statement. I find the Catholic view strong and the Fundamentalist view weak for the same reason - while the painting may have theological accuracy in identifying God as our creator and us as creatures made in His image, its images are metaphorical and unscientific. Fossil records provide plenty of evidence that evolution plays a significant part in explaining our origins, so the absence of evolution from the painting means it has some inaccuracy in terms of representing our

origins. However, I think there is a weakness in the view that evolution must mean there is no God. Evolution explains how life developed, but it does not explain how it started.

(b) Describe how Catholic teachings are shown in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. [5]

One way Catholic teachings are shown in this painting is through the muscular form of God. This conveys the Catholic teaching that God is omnipotent, as understood by his ability to create *ex nihilo* (as shown in the Genesis creation stories).

Another way is through the physical similarities between God and Adam (i.e. they're both human-like). This conveys the Catholic teaching that humans are made *imago Dei*. The positioning of the hands of Adam and God also conveys the Catholic teaching that it is God who gives humans life and that humans are dependent on God.

1.9 *The Tree of Life* mosaic



- *The Tree of Life* is a symbolic artwork in Rome's San Clemente church
- It shows Christ on a cross on top of a tree (Eden's tree of life from Genesis)
- This symbolises how the cross brings life and forgiveness rather than death because through it, Christ (the new Adam) offers heavenly salvation (eternal life)
- 12 doves on the cross represent the apostles, as do 12 lambs underneath
- The lambs surround a 13th lamb (which has a halo), representing Jesus, who was described as the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' by John the Baptist (John 1:29)
- Vines swirl around the artwork, representing 'Jesus the vine' (John 15:5), whose saving drops of blood are in the vines
- They also symbolise the Church - stretching out to all shows the Church is universal and that salvation is available for everyone
- The greenery reminds us of Eden, as do the four rivers beneath the cross
- A hand reaches down from the top of the image to crown Jesus
- This shows how the transcendent God who is beyond time and space becomes immanent (directly involved) in the world through Jesus
- The four Evangelists (Gospel writers) are also represented on the image through

the winged man (Matthew), lion (Mark), ox (Luke) and eagle (John)

- Jesus is also represented in the mosaic by the Greek letters Alpha+Omega - these are the first and last Greek letters, showing Christ is the beginning and the end (as described in the Book of Revelation)

Past exam questions:

(b) Describe what two of the symbols in the 'Tree of Life' apse mosaic in St Clemente in Rome represent. [5] **2018 exam Q!**

(b) Describe two symbols in the 'Tree of Life' apse mosaic in St Clemente in Rome. [5] **2024 exam Q!**

NOTE: it is highly unlikely you would be given a (c) or (d) task about this artwork, though it is possible some (b) tasks could be more specific than the two shown here.

(b) Describe two symbols in the 'Tree of Life' apse mosaic in St Clemente in Rome. [5]

One symbol is the 12 lambs surrounding a lamb with a halo. The lambs without a halo represent the 12 apostles, while the lamb with a halo represents Jesus. In the Bible, Jesus is described by John the Baptist as the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'.

Another symbol represents the four evangelists (Gospel writers). They are represented on the image through the winged man (Matthew), lion (Mark), ox (Luke) and eagle (John).

(b) Describe two ways that Jesus is represented in the 'Tree of Life' apse mosaic in St Clemente in Rome. [5]

One way Jesus is represented in the mosaic is through the Greek letters Alpha and Omega. These are the first and last Greek letters, showing Christ is the beginning and the end (as described in the Book of Revelation).

Another way is through Jesus on a cross on top of a tree (Eden's tree of life from Genesis). This symbolises how the cross brings life and forgiveness rather than death because through it, Christ (the new Adam) offers heavenly salvation (eternal life).

(b) Describe two ways that the apostles are represented in the 'Tree of Life' apse mosaic in St Clemente in Rome. [5]

One way the apostles are represented in the mosaic is through 12 lambs. They surround a 13th lamb that is shown with a halo. The lamb with a halo represents Jesus, the 'Lamb of God' (John 1:29), with the other lambs being his followers.

Another way is through the 12 doves on the cross. The dove is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so this might be a reference to the Bible's Pentecost story, when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and filled them with courage.

1.10 Catholic Social Teaching



- Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the name given to the Church's guidelines on how the world should respect all human dignity
- Such teaching is based on applying Biblical teachings (particularly the instruction of Jesus to love our neighbour) to modern times, often by Popes and Bishops
- One aspect of CST is the 'preferential option for the poor', which means putting the needs of the world's poorest first
- CST stems from the belief that all humans are made *imago Dei* and are therefore of equal value, leading to the promotion of dignity, stewardship, social justice and the common good
- A lot of CST was generated during the Second Vatican Council (see 3.7)
- One relevant document from the Second Vatican Council was *Gaudium et Spes*, which identifies the ending of inequality and discrimination as essential to achieving world peace
- It states that 'the basic equality of all' should be recognised because 'all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness'
- It also states that human dignity and world peace are damaged by 'excessive economic and social differences' between people
- It suggests that peace is 'not merely the absence of war', but rather an 'enterprise of justice' and 'the fruit of love' when it results from respecting other people and their dignity
- For these reasons, and because Christ taught 'Blessed are the peacemakers' in the Sermon on the Mount, Catholic groups like Pax Christi work to resolve conflict
- CST suggests genuine peace can only be achieved when those who have been in conflict go through a process of reconciliation, as promoted by Jesus' teachings on forgiveness

- In the Lord's Prayer, for example, Jesus taught we should 'forgive those who trespass against us' – see 4.2 (Sin +Forgiveness topic) for more such teachings
- This process requires both sides to address lasting issues so that they can live harmoniously together

Past/possible exam question:

- (b) Describe Catholic teachings about reconciliation. [5] **2024 exam Q!**
- (b) Describe what *Gaudium et Spes* teaches about peace. [5] **2020 exam Q!**
- (b) Describe Catholic teachings about justice. [5]
- (d) 'Working for peace is the most important thing a person can do.' Discuss this from both religious and non-religious perspectives. [15]

(b) Describe Catholic teachings about reconciliation.

Catholic Social Teaching teaches that reconciliation is an essential process for achieving genuine peace. In the Bible, Jesus taught that we should 'forgive those who trespass against us'. Reconciliation requires groups on both sides of a conflict to come together and be prepared to forgive each other. This helps to remove any lasting issues and for both sides to live in harmony. The peace that results from reconciliation then meets the description of it in *Gaudium et Spes* (not merely the 'absence of war' but 'a fruit of love').

(d) 'Working for peace is the most important thing a person can do.'

Some Catholics might agree with this statement. One reason is because peace is such a focus of Catholic Social Teaching. For example, *Gaudium et Spes* calls for the end of inequality to help bring about peace, which is described as not merely the absence of war but an enterprise of justice. This is why Catholic groups such as Pax Christi work so hard to help resolve conflict. Furthermore, working for peace is a way of following the teachings of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers", while he also taught that we should love our neighbour. Since war brings so much suffering, working to bring about peace could be seen as the most important way of showing love to our neighbour and therefore the most important thing a person can do.

Some Humanists and other atheists might disagree with this statement. One reason is because they might consider looking after the planet a more important activity. For non-religious reasons, they believe that it is important to care for the environment because earth is our home and doing so improves the quality of people's lives. They might say this is more important than working for peace since everyone's quality of life is affected by the condition of the planet, whereas war only affects some people's quality of life. Moreover, they might say the dangers of climate change are greater than the dangers of war. For example, while the weapons of war are of danger only to the people in the vicinity of those weapons, rising global temperatures could cause extreme weather, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, the extinction of certain species and have an impact on all life on earth. By affecting the whole planet, demonstrating good stewardship could be seen as a more important thing for a person to do than working for peace.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement. I find the agreeing view weak because while working for peace is a noble thing to do, most people are not really in a position to help resolve global conflict. I find the disagreeing view strong because everyone can play their

part in helping the environment (e.g. recycling), and since doing so helps improve the world for everyone, this is also a way meeting Jesus' instruction to love our neighbour (as Pope Francis made clear in *Laudato Si'*).

(b) Describe what *Gaudium et Spes* teaches about peace. [5]

Gaudium et Spes identifies the ending of inequality and discrimination as essential to achieving world peace. It states that 'the basic equality of all' should be recognised because 'all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness'. It also states that human dignity and world peace are damaged by 'excessive economic and social differences' between people. It suggests that peace is 'not merely the absence of war', but rather an 'enterprise of justice' and 'the fruit of love' when it results from respecting other people and their dignity.

1.11 Interfaith dialogue



- 'Interfaith dialogue' refers to discussion and collaboration between people of different faiths and no faiths, including Humanists and other atheists
- Organisations such as the Interfaith Network, the Forum of Faiths and the Council of Christians and Jews work for social cohesion (people of different cultures living peacefully together with respect, tolerance and shared values)
- Pope Francis made a gesture of reaching out to people of other faiths by washing the feet of two Muslim inmates while celebrating a Maundy Thursday Mass in a prison
- Previously, Pope Benedict XVI had often stated the importance of interfaith dialogue, once saying, "Interreligious and intercultural research and dialogue are not an option but a vital need"
- Catholics see engaging in interfaith dialogue as a good way of recognising how everyone is made *imago Dei* and of following Jesus' teaching to love our neighbour
- In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus made clear that our neighbour is everyone, including those from outside our own religious group
- The Second Vatican Council saw the Catholic Church reaching out to other faiths more, with *Lumen Gentium* recognising elements of 'sanctification and truth' in them
- The need for such interfaith dialogue has increased due to societies (including the UK) becoming more multi-faith (religiously mixed)
- While living in a multi-faith society has positives (e.g. it can help improve

understanding, address misconceptions and increase tolerance)...

- ...there can also be problems (e.g. tensions between religious groups, incidents of discrimination, scapegoating and intolerance as a response to religious extremism)
- Interfaith dialogue is one way of addressing these problems and contributing to social cohesion

Past/possible exam questions

(b) Describe the role of the Catholic Church in interfaith dialogue. [5] **2021 Q!**

(d) 'Interfaith dialogue is important for everyone in the UK.' Discuss. [15]

(b) Describe the role of the Catholic Church in interfaith dialogue. [5]

The Catholic Church regards participation in interfaith dialogue (discussion and collaboration between people of different faiths and no faiths) as important. Pope Benedict XVI once described it as 'not an option but a vital need'. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught that everyone is our neighbour, including those from outside our own groups. As such, the Catholic Church takes part in interfaith dialogue because it is seen as a good way of following Jesus' command to love our neighbour. This is because it can help build social cohesion in a multi-faith society.

(d) 'Interfaith dialogue is important for everyone in the UK.' Discuss. [15]

Catholics would agree with this statement. One reason is because interfaith dialogue is seen as important by the Catholic Church. For example, Pope Benedict XVI described interfaith dialogue as 'not an option but a vital need', while Pope Francis made a gesture of reaching out to people of other faiths by washing the feet of two Muslim prisoners during a Maundy Thursday Mass. Since Popes are seen by Catholics as having authority through apostolic succession, they would accept that interfaith dialogue is important for everyone. Furthermore, interfaith dialogue could be seen as an important way of obeying Jesus' instruction to love our neighbour. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught that everyone is our neighbour, including those from outside our own groups. By reaching out to people from outside the Catholic Church, British Catholics may see interfaith dialogue as a means of demonstrating concern for all in the UK and a desire to live peacefully alongside neighbours of different religions.

Humanists and other atheists may have mixed views regarding this statement. Some may agree with it because they recognise that the UK is a multi-faith society. By having groups of all faiths and no faiths participating in discussions and collaborating, they may think that this helps address the problems that can arise in

multi-faith societies and so improve the quality of life (an important focus for Humanists) of those living in the UK. For example, they might think such dialogue helps address misunderstandings and so prevent discrimination. On the other hand, some atheists might not wish to engage in interfaith dialogue because they see little point in it. For example, as atheists don't believe in God, they might regard all religious people as simply deluded. If this is the case, they might think it's impossible to find common ground through interfaith dialogue when they themselves do not have a faith in the first place.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement. I find the agreeing views strong because the rise of religious extremism is a problem that affects everyone (whether they are religious or not), and so anything that could help combat this is important for everyone. I find the disagreeing view weak – just because two people have different views about the existence of God doesn't mean they can't have any common ground at all. Most religious and non-religious people would find themselves agreeing on many issues, and through interfaith dialogue they can help identify shared values. This would help with the social cohesion of the UK.

1.12 Catholic Charities



- CAFOD stands for Catholic Agency For Overseas Development
- It is a charity inspired by the teachings of Jesus and the Church
- It works to help end poverty because it sees this as a way of following Jesus' teaching to love your neighbour as yourself
- Its efforts to feed the hungry and house the homeless meet the Church's call to give a 'preferential option for the poor'
- Feeding the hungry and housing the homeless are also things Jesus praises in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats
- One of CAFOD's methods for fighting poverty is through development programmes (e.g. educating homeless street children in Brazil)
- Another method is by having a disaster fund to respond to sudden crises (e.g. sending supplies for the victims of the 2004 tsunami)
- Another is by spending 5% of its budget raising awareness of the problems of poverty and how people can help (e.g. through its website)
- A fourth is through speaking out on behalf of the poor to bring social justice (e.g. CAFOD was involved in the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign)
- SVP stands for *The St Vincent de Paul Society*
- It is a Catholic charity trying to help tackle poverty and disadvantage through practical help
- It does this because of Jesus' teachings such as 'love thy neighbour', the Sheep and Goats Parable, as well as Catholic teachings on stewardship and human dignity
- EXAMPLES: (i) it shows love for neighbours by running support centres that offer things

like counselling and literacy/numeracy training

- (ii) it responds to Jesus' call in the Sheep+Goats parable to care for the hungry by organising soup runs in disadvantaged areas
- (iii) the same parable calls for compassion towards the sick and imprisoned, which SVP members do by visiting them
- (iv) it responds to Catholic teachings regarding stewardship by encouraging people to donate furniture that can be reused rather than be thrown away
- (v) it respects human dignity by helping people regardless of colour, race, faith, status or sexual orientation

Past exam questions:

- (b) Describe the work of a Catholic charity. [5] **2021 Q!**
- (b) Describe 2 ways the work of CAFOD reflects Catholic teaching about dignity. **2019 Q!**
- (d) 'Loving your neighbour is the most important thing a person can do.' [15] **2021 Q!**

(b) Describe two ways the work of a Catholic charity reflects Catholic belief about the dignity of the person. [5]

One thing CAFOD does is provide emergency supplies (food, blankets, shelter etc.) in the aftermath of a natural disaster abroad. This reflects the Catholic teaching that we need to cater to the needs of the likes of the hungry and homeless as a priority ('preferential option for the poor'), and conforms to Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. CAFOD also works to help poorer communities develop sustainably (e.g. supplying solar panels to help generate electricity for domestic and business use in a Kenyan community). This reflects the Catholic teaching that human dignity requires people to prosper economically without ignoring our responsibilities as stewards of the environment.

OR

One thing the St Vincent de Paul (SVP) society does is pay visits to the sick, lonely and imprisoned. This reflects the Catholic teaching that since all humans are made *imago Dei*, all are worthy of respect. The SVP also collects unwanted furniture and redistributes it to those who need furniture but can't afford it. This reflects the Church's 'preferential option for the poor' teaching (the idea that, in order for dignity to be afforded to all human beings, the needs of the poorest should be given priority), and conforms to its teachings on stewardship (as found, for example, in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*).

(d) 'Loving your neighbour is the most important thing a person can do.' [15]

Many Catholics would agree with this statement. One reason is because it is seen as possibly Jesus' main teaching. In the Bible, Jesus taught to love your neighbour as yourself. Since Jesus is seen by Catholics as God incarnate and the second person of the Trinity, they might think that following this divine teaching is the most important thing a person can do. Furthermore, the teaching to love your neighbour is the inspiration behind the work of various Catholic organisations. For example, both CAFOD and the St Vincent de Paul Society try to show love for neighbours in the UK and abroad through their charitable work, while Pax Christi's efforts to help resolve conflicts are also motivated by Christ's teaching. This suggests many Catholics and Catholic organisations would regard loving your neighbour as the most important thing a person can do.

While many Humanists and other atheists might also agree with the statement, many would not. One reason might be because they do not think the instruction to love your neighbour comes from God. As Humanists do not believe in God, they would reject the idea

that Jesus is God incarnate. As such, his instruction to love your neighbour carries no more authority than instructions from any other human. Moreover, they might suggest looking after the environment is the most important thing a person can do. For non-religious reasons, they believe that it is important to care for the environment because the earth is our home and doing so improves the quality of people's lives. They might say this is more important than loving your neighbour because stewardship also benefits the animal kingdom, which Humanists like Peter Singer say should be shown concern as many animals can experience pain and pleasure as well as humans.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement. I find the agreeing view strong because the teaching to love your neighbour is what underpins so much of Jesus' other teachings (such as the teaching from the Lord's Prayer to forgive others and the Parable of the Sheep and Goats). I find the disagreeing view weak because while stewardship is important, it is a way of showing love for your neighbour, with Pope Francis making clear in *Laudato Si'* that we need to look after the planet for the benefit of vulnerable neighbours in poorer countries and for future generations.

SUGGESTED VIDEOS FOR REVISION

Search the following on YouTube:

GCSE RE Catholic Christianity - Creation in Genesis

GCSE RE Catholic Christianity - Science and Natural Law

GCSE RS Unit 3.2 (Part 3 of 5) Abortion

GCSE RE Catholic Christianity - The Bible

GCSE RE Catholic Christianity - Stewardship

Catholic Social Teaching in 3 minutes

GCSE RE Catholic Christianity - Creation in Art Mr McMillan

GCSE RE (Eduqas) - Tree of Life Apse Mosaic 5min recap

GCSE Human Dignity animation | CAFOD

Interfaith Dialogue - GCSE RS Bites

CAFOD and SVP - GCSE RS Bites