

Religion and Life

Revision Guide

Use the following checklist to make sure you have revised everything.

The origins and value of the universe	Done? ✓
The origins of the universe including:	
• religious teachings about the origins of the universe and different interpretations of these	
• the relationship between scientific views, such as the Big Bang Theory and religious views	
The value of the world and the duty of humans to protect it, including religious teaching about stewardship, dominion, responsibility, awe and wonder	
The use and abuse of the environment, including the use of natural resources, pollution.	
The use and abuse of animals including:	
• animal experimentation	
• the use of animals for food	
The origins and value of human life	
The origins of life including:	
• religious teachings about the origins of human life, and different interpretations of these	
• the relationship between scientific views such as evolution, and religious views	
The concepts of sanctity of life and the quality of life	
Abortion, including situations when the mother's life is at risk	
Ethical arguments related to abortion, including those based on the sanctity of life and quality of life	
Euthanasia	
Beliefs about death and an afterlife, and their impact on beliefs about the value of human life	

Key Words and Definitions

Abortion – the deliberate ending of a pregnancy

Adoption – permanently becoming the legal parent of somebody else's child

Afterlife – a time and place where the soul or body goes after death on earth

Animal Experimentation – testing products on animals to see whether they are safe

Awe and wonder – the feeling of amazement gained from appreciating the world that God created

Big Bang Theory – the scientific explanation of the origin of the universe

Creation – the religious idea that God made the universe and humans

Dominion – the idea that humans can use the world to suit them because it was given to them by God

Environment – the natural world, including seas, forests, mountains and all living things

Euthanasia – the deliberate ending of somebody's life because they are terminally ill

Evolution – the scientific explanation of how different animals and humans have developed

Ex nihilo – 'from nothing' – Christians believe that God created the world from nothing

Hospice – a place where terminally ill people can be cared for before they die

Literal Interpretation – the idea that the Bible is completely true, word for word

Metaphor – (in relation to the Bible) the idea that the creation stories are symbolic, not literally true

Myth – a traditional story which helps to explain natural phenomena

Natural Resources – materials that exist in nature which can be used to benefit humans, e.g. coal, wood, metals etc

Non-Literal Interpretation – the idea that the Bible is helpful and important but shouldn't be seen as completely true

Origins – how things (such as the world and humans) started

Pollution – when poisonous chemicals used by humans damage the environment

Quality of Life – how pleasant somebody's life is (often contrasted with the sanctity of life)

Responsibility – duty to care for something (e.g. the planet or animals)

Sanctity of Life – the idea that life is holy or sacred because God made it

Stewardship – the belief that God put people in charge of the Earth to look after and protect it

Universe – everything that exists

The Origins of the Universe

Christian Teachings about the Origins of the Universe

According to the Bible, the world was created by God in six days from nothing (the phrase for this in Latin is *ex nihilo*). The first book of the Bible, Genesis, tells the story of how the Earth was created. After each day of creation, God looked at what He made and was pleased with it; He saw that “*it was good*”.



- Day 1: God said “Let there be light.” He called the light *day* and the darkness *night*.
- Day 2: God made the sky and separated it from the Earth.
- Day 3: God formed the land and the seas and He created trees and plants.
- Day 4: God created the sun, moon and stars.
- Day 5: God filled the sky and the sea with creatures: birds and fish.
- Day 6: God created all of the land animals and finished by making humans “*in his own image*.”
- Day 7: God rested on the seventh day and made it holy.

Interpretations of these teachings

Some Christians believe that the creation story is absolutely true, word for word. Others think that it is more of a story with a message. There are four ways in which it can be interpreted:

Literal Interpretation - The Creation account in the Bible is a true account of what happened to cause the universe to exist. This means that the Earth is only 6000 years old, dinosaurs did not exist and evolution did not take place.

Non-Literal Interpretation - The Creation account expresses the way that the world was made, though it is not completely true. The story could be a **myth** used to help people to explain the origins of the universe in a time before scientific discovery. Or it could be a **metaphor** – a symbolic account, representing the order that the universe came to exist, though it is not a true.

The Scientific View of the Origin of the Universe

The **Big Bang Theory** is the way that scientists explain how the universe came to exist. There was initially nothing except a singularity (a dense, hot point) which rapidly expanded (nobody knows exactly why it started to expand). It has been expanding for almost 14 billion years and is still doing so today. It got cooler and cooler over time and atoms started to join together to create planets and stars. Around 3.8 billion years ago life appeared on earth and began to develop through the process of evolution, by which organisms became more and more complex until they developed into the plants and animals that we know today.

The relationship between Scientific and Religious views

Christians who accept the **Literal** interpretation of the Biblical story of creation do not accept that the Big Bang took place. They believe that the Bible is the absolute word of God and anything that challenges it is untrue.

Christians who see the creation story as a **myth** or **metaphor** are often happy to accept that the Big Bang is true, but they may think that it was the method that God used to create everything.

The value of the World and the duty of humans to protect it

Stewardship and Dominion

Based on the creation story, Christians have two different views about how the world should be treated.



Stewardship is the idea that God has given humans a duty or **responsibility** to look after and care for the world. In the Genesis story, Adam (the first man) was given the task of looking after the Garden of Eden, where he lived: *"The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"*. Christians believe that they should continue Adam's task and protect the world by using it in a sustainable way.

Dominion is the belief that humans have power and control over every other creature in the world and can therefore use it however they choose. In the Genesis story, God told Adam and Eve (the first humans) to *"Fill the Earth and subdue it."* This means that they are the dominant species and so they don't have to worry too much about protecting other animals or the environment.

Christians often have feelings of **awe** and **wonder** in response to the beauty and grandeur of the world. They believe that the world is a wonderful gift from God and that God's qualities can be seen in the things that He created.

"For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen." Romans

For example, they may feel amazed at the view from a high mountain or the beauty of a flower and they may see these beautiful things as evidence of God's love for the world. Equally, they may look at the vastness of space and feel God's power.

Some of this amazement is expressed in the Bible in Psalms: *"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them."*

The use and abuse of the environment

In order to meet humans' demand for electricity and new products, the environment can get damaged. Oil and coal is taken out of the Earth and will eventually run out; the world's forests are cut down for timber or so that we can use the land for farming; the burning of fossil fuels for energy leads to climate change.

Those Christians who see themselves as **stewards** are very concerned about the impact of humans on the environment and will often promote ways of protecting it. For example, they will try to use renewable energy, recycle as many goods as possible, and cut down on their energy use. Those who feel that they have dominion may also be concerned about the way in which environmental damage can harm humans.

Leaders from several world religions have gathered together on two occasions (once in Assisi in Italy and once in Ohito in Japan) to discuss how the world can be protected. Pope Francis has highlighted the need for all humans to care for the world by protecting the environment. He wrote a letter in which he said that *"the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."* He talked about how we need to avoid polluting the world by, for example, using renewable forms of energy.

The Bible teaches that *"The world is the Lord's and everything in it,"* which supports the need for all human beings to be stewards of God's creation. People are also instructed to *"love your neighbour,"* which means that we need to avoid damaging the world in ways that will cause human suffering.

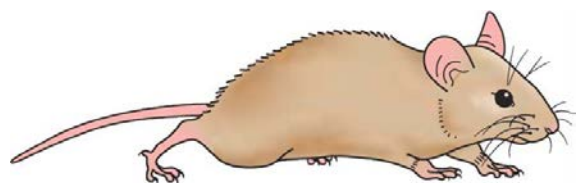


The use and abuse of animals

Animal experimentation

When scientists develop new medicines and cosmetics, they often test these products on animals to make sure that they are safe before being used on humans. Some of these tests are harmful to animals, causing them pain, and the animals are generally killed after they have been tested on. The big question is whether it is worth making animals suffer in order to improve the lives of humans.

The testing of cosmetics is banned in many countries, including the UK, but medicines are regularly tested on animals. Some animal testing is very effective, for example we wouldn't have vaccinations for TB or polio without animal testing. However, sometimes humans and animals react very differently to tests, so even if something is safe for animals it may still cause problems for humans.



The use of animals for food

Many different animals are farmed so that people can eat meat and dairy products. Some of these animals are kept in unpleasant conditions where they can suffer and therefore some people choose to be vegetarian (don't eat meat) or vegan (don't eat or use any animal products). Another reason why people choose not to eat meat is that farming has a negative impact on the environment.



Christian beliefs about the use of animals



Christians believe that humans were created by God as the most important species on Earth. This can mean that they should have control over animals, but also means that we are responsible for caring for them.

God gives Adam and Eve permission to eat animals and he tells Noah *“Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you.”* However, the Bible also makes it clear that animals should be cared for; in Proverbs we are told that *“The righteous (good) care for the needs of their animals,”* and Deuteronomy instructs people *“Do not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”* Both of these quotes make it clear that animals should be cared for.

Most Christians feel that we should avoid unnecessary cruelty to animals, but they disagree about what is acceptable and what isn't. The majority of Christians eat meat but some may avoid eating meat that has been farmed in unpleasant conditions. The Bible makes it clear that people are free to choose to eat meat or to be vegetarian *“The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.”*

Most Christians support the testing of medicines on animals where it protects humans. The Bible teaches that humans are the most important species and therefore human survival is more important than animal survival. However, they also believe that all life is created by God and should therefore be treated with as much respect as possible. Therefore, we should only test on animals when this really benefits humans and when it is the only way to make sure that medicines are safe.

The Origins of Human Life

Religious teachings about the origins of human life

According to the Bible, the first humans were made by God "*In his own image*". Being in the image of God doesn't mean looking like him; it means that humans have a similar spiritual nature to God and can have a close relationship with him. The creation of humans is explained in the first two chapters of the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. The stories are slightly different in each chapter.

Genesis 1:

"So God create mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

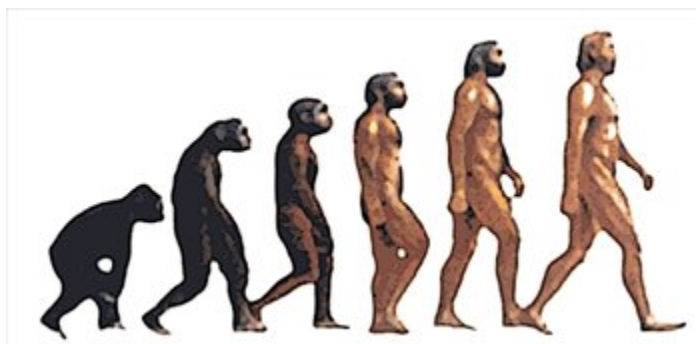
Genesis 2:

The first man, Adam, was formed from the earth by God and was given the task of looking after the Garden of Eden, which was a beautiful place. He was told that everything was his for food except for the fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God then made birds and animals and finally decided that Adam needed a helper. He took one of Adam's ribs and made it into Eve, the first woman.

The Scientific view of the origins of human life

The scientific view of where human life came from is known as the Theory of Evolution. This idea was first explained by Charles Darwin in his book *The Origin of Species*, which was published in 1859.

- Within each species there is variation between individuals (i.e. not every human is identical, not every dog is identical).
- Some of these variations help that species to survive, while others do not. The term 'survival of the fittest' is used to describe this fact.
- The individuals with the helpful variations are more likely to survive and to pass on their variations to their children.
- Through this process, new species evolve. Humans started to evolve around 2.5 million years ago and the first humans to look like us evolved around 200,000 years ago.



The relationship between Scientific and Religious views

Literal Interpretation - Some Christians believe that the Bible stories tell the truth exactly as it happened. These Christians do not believe in evolution. They may say that fossils and other evidence for evolution were put on Earth by God to test people's faith.

Non-Literal Interpretation – Most Christians (including major churches such as the Catholic Church) do not accept the Genesis account as precisely true. They see it as a way of explaining God's involvement in the world but they also believe in evolution. They believe that the Genesis story highlights the idea that humans are special and can have a relationship with God, unlike other animals. They may believe that God has some control over evolution.

The concepts of Sanctity of Life and Quality of Life

When decisions are made that affect human life and death, there is sometimes disagreement about which should take priority: sanctity of life or quality of life.

Sanctity of life is the idea that life is sacred (holy and special) because it was made by God. All Christians view life as sacred because of the Genesis creation story and they see support for this idea in Bible quotes such as *"The body is the Temple of the Lord," "God sets a time for life and a time for death,"* and *"You shall not murder."*

Quality of life is not a religious idea, but is important to many Christians. Quality of life refers to the idea that what is important is the ability to enjoy life and to make the most out of it. People living in pain or with serious impairments such as paralysis may not enjoy a good quality of life.

When making decisions about issues such as **euthanasia** and **abortion**, there is often a debate between those who concentrate on the sanctity of life and those who concentrate on the quality of life. Should life be preserved at all costs because it was made by God and is sacred, or should we concentrate on the quality of life and allow people to die if they are experiencing extreme suffering?

The following quotes can be used to support or oppose abortion and euthanasia

Quotes to support abortion and euthanasia	Quotes to oppose abortion and euthanasia
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Love your neighbour• Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience• Blessed are the merciful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You shall not murder• The Body is the temple of the Lord• God sets a time for life and a time for death

Abortion, including situations when the mother's life is at risk

Abortion is the termination of a pregnancy.

The law in England allows for a woman to have an abortion during the first 24 weeks of her pregnancy so long as she has the approval of two doctors. The doctors must agree that continuing the pregnancy would be worse for the mother's physical or mental health than having an abortion. In some other countries, abortion is illegal. Sometimes, continuing with a pregnancy can put the pregnant woman's life at risk. For example, if the woman's waters break but she doesn't go into labour or if the foetus is growing in the fallopian tube (an ectopic pregnancy).



The Roman Catholic Church does not support abortion in any circumstances, not even if the mother is likely to die if she continues with the pregnancy.

- They see the sanctity of life as more important than the quality of life.
- They believe that the life of the unborn child is as important as the life of the mother.
- They believe that life begins at conception (when the sperm and egg meet).
- The Bible says *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,"* suggesting that God cares about every human being even before they are born.
- The Catholic Church says *"God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end,"* suggesting that people shouldn't choose when life comes to an end.

Protestant churches accept that abortion may be necessary in some circumstances. They see the life of the mother as more important than the foetus and usually put the quality of life before the sanctity of life. Many Protestants do not believe that life begins at conception. They believe that *"love your neighbour"* means we should do the kindest thing in a situation. Abortion is permitted by many protestant churches if:

- The pregnant woman's life is at risk.
- The unborn child is likely to have serious health problems.
- The pregnancy was a result of rape.

Arguments for Abortion	Arguments against Abortion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women should be allowed to choose what happens to their body• Children born as a result of rape or in other difficult situations may not be loved or wanted• Children with serious health problems should not have to be born into a life of suffering• The mother's life is more important than the foetus's life and should be protected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unwanted children could be adopted• The life of the foetus is as important as the life of the mother, so shouldn't be sacrificed to save the mother• Some people think life begins at conception, so abortion is murder• Some people argue that the foetus can feel pain

Euthanasia



Euthanasia, or assisted suicide, is the killing of somebody who is terminally ill and in pain. It may be voluntary (the person wants to die) or non-voluntary (the person cannot make the decision e.g. because they are in a coma).

In the UK, euthanasia is illegal. It is legal in some European countries including Switzerland, where some British people go if they want to end their lives. There is a medical clinic in Switzerland called Dignitas where people can ask a doctor to prescribe them a mixture of drugs which cause them to die peacefully.

Some people think that the quality of life is more important than the sanctity of life. This means that when a person is suffering then they shouldn't have to continue to live. Some Christians therefore support Euthanasia. They may argue that Jesus tried to prevent people from suffering, for example by performing miracles, so he would not want people to suffer. They may see euthanasia as the most loving thing to do.

For people who believe that the **sanctity of life** is the most important thing, euthanasia is sinful as it is taking away life that God values. Most Christians, including the main churches, take this view. They argue that life was given by God and only God should take it away: *"God sets a time for life and a time for death."* Helping somebody to die may be considered murder: *"Do not murder."* Taking your own life would be seen as suicide, which many Christians see as an unforgivable sin because taking life is a sin and the suicide victim cannot ask for God's forgiveness once they are dead.

The Catholic Church states *"Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God,"* and *"Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being."*

The Church of England is also against Euthanasia. It has stated that human life should be cherished, not brought to an end.

Many churches set up **hospices** (homes providing care for people who are dying) so that people can spend the last weeks of their life in comfort, without feeling the need to end their lives.

For people who believe that quality of life is more important than sanctity of life, euthanasia can be seen as the most loving thing to do when a person is suffering.



Arguments for Euthanasia	Arguments against Euthanasia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People should be allowed to make decisions about their own body and life • Nobody should be forced to live in pain • Jesus helped people who were suffering – euthanasia also helps people who are suffering • Why prolong this life when Heaven awaits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People may feel pressured to die because they are a burden on others • Doctors are supposed to protect life, not end it • It could be used to hide murder • Life is made by God and is therefore sacred

Beliefs about death and an afterlife, and their impact on beliefs about the value of human life

Christians believe that there is an afterlife, so death on Earth is not the end. *See the Christian Beliefs revision booklet for more about Christian beliefs about Heaven and Hell.*

Because they believe that good Christians will go to Heaven, they may feel that there is no point in prolonging suffering on Earth. Therefore, some Christians believe that rather than extending people’s life through lots of medical treatments, it is acceptable to let people die or even to help them to die through euthanasia.

However, many Christians believe that they will not go to Heaven if they end their own lives through euthanasia or suicide. Therefore, they will accept the suffering that God has given them rather than deciding to end their lives.

Sample Exam Questions

1 Mark Questions

- 1.1 Which one of the following is the religious belief that the Earth is God's creation and should be cared for?
- 2.1 Which one of the following is the idea that human life is sacred because God made it?
- 3.1 Which one of the following is the scientific term for the origin of the universe?
- 4.1 Which one of the following means the deliberate ending of somebody's life because they are terminally ill?

2 Mark Questions

- 1.2 Give two ways in which animals are used to benefit humans.
- 2.2 Give two different interpretations of the Bible.
- 3.2 Give two reasons why somebody might want an abortion.
- 4.2 Give two ways in which humans cause harm to the environment.

4 Mark Questions

- 1.3 Explain two contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about euthanasia. In your answer, you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religions.
- 2.3 Explain two contrasting ways in which religious people view their responsibility towards animals.
- 3.3 Explain two contrasting religious views about the value of human life.
- 4.3 Explain two contrasting views about the origins of life.

5 Mark Questions

In each answer you must refer to sacred writings or another source of Christian belief and teaching.

- 1.4 Explain two religious teachings about abortion.
- 2.4 Explain two ways in which religious beliefs about life after death may influence beliefs about the value of human life.

3.4 Explain two religious approaches to the use and abuse of the environment.

4.4 Explain two religious beliefs about animal experimentation.

12 Mark Questions

Each question will include a statement and the following instructions:

Evaluate this statement. In your answer, you should:

- *refer to Christian teaching*
- *give developed arguments to support this statement*
- *give developed arguments to support a different point of view*
- *reach a justified conclusion.*

1.5 “A woman should have the right to choose an abortion.”

2.5 “The environment must be protected for future generations.”

3.5 “There is no good reason to end a human life.”

4.5 “Humans can use animals in whatever way they choose.”