

RELIGION AND LIFE MODULE



STUDENT INFORMATION BOOKLET

THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIVERSE

The creation of the universe

Have you ever been amazed at how many stars can be seen on a cloudless night? The size of the universe is astonishing. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is about 100,000 light years in diameter. It would take roughly 2.5 million years to travel to the next galaxy, if travelling at the speed of light (299,792,458 metres per second). The currently observable universe is about 93 billion light years in diameter and contains more than 100 billion galaxies. Does the universe go on forever? We do not know the answer. How did the universe come into being? Was there a time when nothing existed? How did nothing become something?

Christians believe that the universe didn't just make itself, but that it was designed and made by God. They believe that God created all things that exist ex nihilo - a Latin term that means 'out of nothing'.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 gives one of the accounts in the Bible of how God created the universe. In the story, God created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested on the seventh.



A spiral galaxy

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth.
(Genesis 1:1)

Day 1: God said 'Let there be light.' He called the 'light' day and the darkness night.

Day 2: God made the sky

Day 3: God formed the seas and the land, covering the land with vegetation and plants.

Day 4: God created the lights in the sky, the sun, moon and stars.

Day 5: God made fish and other animals in the seas, and birds in the air.

Day 6: God finished by creating all of the animals on the land, and by making humans. He made humans in his own image.

Day 7: God rested on the seventh day and made it holy, He was very pleased with his creation because it was good.

Did this really happen?

Some Christians believe that the creation stories describe exactly how the universe was created. Fundamentalists believe that every word in the Bible has been inspired by God and it therefore correct. Some believe that everything was created in six days, but others interpret 'day' as representing a longer period of time. The Hebrew word 'Yom' has different meanings. It could, for example, mean twelve hours of daylight, or a long, indefinite period of time.

In contrast, liberals regard these accounts as more like parables or symbolic accounts, where the main message is that God brought into being the universe and all that is in it. These Christians might look to science to help them understand how God did this.

Muslims share similar beliefs with Christians and Jews about the origins of the universe. The sacred writings of all three religions state that the universe was created by God in six days (phases). According to these religious texts, before time existed, only God existed and he created the universe with his divine word.

"Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then established Himself on the throne; He makes the night cover the day in swift pursuit; He created the sun, moon, and stars to be subservient to His command. All creations and all command belong to Him. Exalted be God, Lord of all the worlds!" (Qur'an 7:54)

Although some translations of the Qur'an do refer to days, most Muslims understand the original text to mean six phases, or distinct periods of time. The length of these periods is not given. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an does not specify exactly what took place during each period but it does describe at various points some of God's creations.

"And We put firm mountains on the earth, lest it should sway under them, and set broad paths on it, so that they might follow the right direction and We have made the sky as a well-secured canopy - yet from its wonders they turn away. It is He who created night and day, the sun and the moon, each floating in its orbit." (Qur'an 21:31-33)

Once creation had taken place, the Qur'an does not mention a day of rest (unlike the Bible). It describes how, after six periods of creating the heavens and earth, God then organised the whole universe to be under his watchful command, and befitting his glory (Qur'an 57:4). Muslims believe that God's work and creation never ends as it continues with every new birth and every new seed that grows.

The Big Bang theory

The Big Bang theory is currently the leading scientific explanation for how the universe began. It suggests that the universe started with an indescribably small, hot, dense something - a singularity, which expanded over the next 13.8 billion years or so to become the cosmos that we know today. As the universe continued to cool, the matter that had been flung in all directions became stars grouped into galaxies. Because current instruments do not allow astronomers to peer back at the universe's birth, much of what we understand about the Big Bang theory comes from mathematical theory and models.

Key terms:

Universe: All of time and space and its contents; includes planets, stars, galaxies, the contents of intergalactic space, the smallest substance particles, and all matter and energy.

Big bang: a massive explosion of space which set in motion the creation of the universe.



Muslims believe God created the earth and creates new life



An artist's impression of the Big Bang

Is the study of the origin of the universe an area where science and theology meet or disagree? Was creation a supernatural event that took place outside the natural world? Is there a master architect out there? Most scientists believe that the universe had a beginning. Was God the 'first cause'? Is there a conflict between Genesis 1 and the Big Bang? Some Christians would say yes, if you believe God created everything in six days, but others not necessarily if each day stands for a longer period of time. The Big Bang could have been God's way of forming the universe.

Islam and science

Islam encourages the search for clear understanding and scientific explanations that may enable a greater understanding of God. Muslims believe that the discoveries of science are already within the scope of the Qur'an and it is for humans to explore and find out about these discoveries for themselves. For example, Muslims suggest that what is included in the Qur'an concerning creation closely resembles the modern scientific theories such as the Big Bang. For example, the Qur'an fails to refer to the heavens, including the stars, as being at one time in 'smoke' material. This could be interpreted as being similar to the scientific idea that as the universe gradually cooled matter joined together to form the stars.

The important point for Muslims is that the Qur'an is more concerned with why the universe came into being, whereas scientists focus on how. The answer to why is given in the Qur'an as being the result of the creative action of God. It wasn't an accident but was designed, and God's creation was perfect and good.

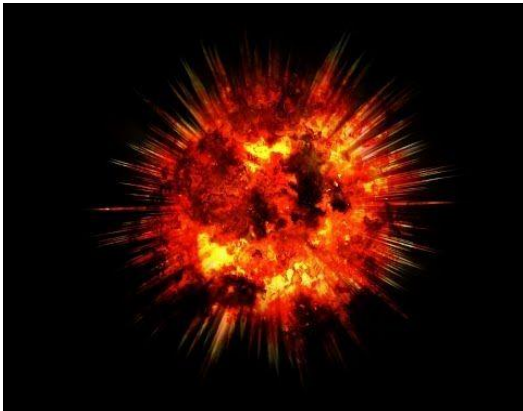
1. What does Genesis 1:1-2:3 teach?
2. Explain the different ways in which Christians interpret the creation story.
3. Explain the Big Bang theory.
4. 'It is possible to believe both the story in Genesis 1 and the Big bang theory.' Do you agree? Explain your reasons
5. How do most Muslims interpret the idea of the six days of creation?
6. Give two examples of differences between the account of creation in the Bible and that of the Qur'an.
7. Most Muslims do not oppose scientific theories about the beginning of the universe. Why is this?

Possible evaluation Question:

"Science has made the creation story unbelievable."

Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:

- Refer to religious teaching
- Give developed arguments to support this statement
- Give developed arguments to support a different point of view
- Reach a justified conclusion.



'There has to be a creator because it is impossible for nothing to become something.'

THE VALUE OF THE WORLD

The value of the world

Add up the value of all the gold, diamonds, precious stones, natural resources, food produced by agriculture and industrial output in the world and it would be a mammoth total. But is that alone the value of the world? No, of course not. We cannot put a price on its value as it is our home, and provides and sustains life. As far as we know, nowhere else in our solar system can sustain life like planet Earth. *Christians regard the world as a priceless gift from God, loaned to humans as a result of his love.*

Awe and Wonder – The world has a wow factor



Left: The awesome landscape of the Valley of Rocks, Lynton, Devon.

Right: The sight of an amazing natural feature such as this waterfall can fill people with awe



Sometimes when people see beautiful landscapes, stars, waterfalls or the power of the sea they are awestruck and filled with wonder. The sheer beauty, complexity and power in the environment are astonishing and magnificent.

'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?' (Psalm 8:3-4)

The world is complex and fascinating. Caterpillars turning into butterflies, black and white cows eating green grass to produce white milk, and trees bursting into life in springtime are just a few examples of the mystery and wonder of life. How could it all happen? *Christians believe that God is responsible.*

'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.' (Romans 1:20)

For Muslims, God's creation of the world inspires awe and wonder. Muslims believe that nature is amazing because it includes everything necessary for life and reflects the glory of God. From the oxygen we breathe, to the seasons providing us with regular harvests (and food), these features make earth very special and precious.

Stewardship

Imagine generously allowing a friend to live for free in a house that belongs to you. The one condition is that they look after it because it is unique and irreplaceable. However, they damage and then destroy it. This would be extremely upsetting.

Christians believe that God has given humans the privilege of living on planet Earth but with the responsibility of looking after it and preventing it from being ruined. There is only one planet Earth and it cannot be replaced. This special responsibility to protect and care for the Earth is known as stewardship. In the story in Genesis 2, Adam, the first man, was given the task of looking after the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). As stewards of the natural world, Christians believe that people have been appointed by God to respect and manage the world, working with nature to preserve what God has given. In return we are able to use what is provided in a sustainable way for our survival. Many Christians believe that they will be accountable to God concerning how well they looked after the Earth.

The Qur'an says that God created the world and gave humans the responsibility of taking care of the planet. In Islam, this is referred to as 'stewardship' (khalifah). Both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims believe that people are stewards (khalifahs) who should protect the environment. Their duty as trustees is to look after the world for God and for future generations and to strive to maintain the harmony and balance which was created. On the day of judgement, humans will be answerable to God concerning how well they have fulfilled his role.

'It is he who has made successors of the earth.' (Qur'an 6:165)

In the Qur'an, it explains that the law of his creation should not be altered. The central belief in tawhid (the Oneness of God) is at the heart of Muslim belief about looking after the environment. This belief recognises one absolute creator and that people are responsible to him for all their actions.

'It is to God that everything in the heavens and earth belongs: God is fully aware of all things.' (Qur'an 4:126)



Key terms:

Wonder: Marvelling at the complexity and beauty of the universe.

Awe: A feeling of devout respect, mixed with fear or wonder.

Responsibility: A duty to care for, or having control over, something or someone.

Stewardship: The idea that believers have a duty to look after the environment on behalf of God.

Dominion: Dominance or power over something; having charge of something or ruling over it.

Environment: The natural world; the surroundings in which someone lives.



Both Christians and Muslims believe humans are God's stewards and as such have a responsibility to look after the planet.

Dominion

In order to manage the Earth, Christians teach that humans were given the power and authority to rule over the world. This is known as having dominion.

'God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number: fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves in the ground.' (Genesis 1:28)

A minority of Christians have interpreted 'subduing the world' as meaning that people can do what they like with it and everything in it because they are in charge. The majority, however, believe that humans have been entrusted to be caretakers (stewards) of God's world. They cannot do what they like to benefit themselves if this damages something that God has made.

Human beings are generally seen as the most intelligent life form on earth. This is against Islamic teaching and beliefs, which explain that each person should live in harmony with other life forms. Muslims believe it is their duty to respect, nurture and care for the environment. Each individual is given this task and privilege in the form of God's trust, but it must be done in humility, avoiding arrogance. Islam does not promote the idea of humans having dominion (doing what they like with the world). Instead, Islam stresses the importance of working with the rest of creation in a harmonious and sustainable way. The world is valued and seen the same way as a place of worship, so damaging it is like harming a mosque and is a serious sin.

'Every single Muslim that cultivates or plants anything of which humans, animals or birds may eat from is counted as charity towards them on his behalf.' (Hadith)



Do we as humans have the power and authority to rule over the world?



1. Explain the difference between stewardship and dominion in Christianity?
2. What are the dangers of humans having dominion over the world?
3. Explain why the idea of stewardship is important to Muslims.
4. Muslims do not support dominion. What do they stress humans should do instead?
5. What other terms do Muslims use instead of calling people stewards?
6. What is meant by 'awe and wonder'?
7. Give two examples of features from nature which might inspire feelings of awe and wonder.
8. 'The earth belongs to us so we can do what we like with it,' Do you agree?

Exam Practice - 5 mark question

Explain two religious beliefs about the duty of human beings to protect the earth.

Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. (5 marks)

5 Mark Question

First belief: simple explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching - 1 mark
detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching - 2 marks

Second belief: simple explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching - 1 mark
detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate teaching - 2 marks

Relevant and accurate reference to scripture /or sacred writing - 1 mark

THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Pressures on the environment

As the world's population increases, demand for natural resources is getting greater, so it is becoming increasingly important to encourage sustainable development. Non-renewable resources are running out, and new methods of obtaining gas for energy (such as fracking) are causing a lot of controversy.

The growth in the world's population causes huge pressure on the environment. It took until around 1800 CE for the world's population to reach 1 billion. Since then there has been a rapid increase. For example, during the twentieth century the population increased from around 1.5 to over 6 billion and today there are well over 7 billion people in the world.



In China, the 1978 one child policy was aimed at reducing the population



Trees felled and stored for use in industry

Population growth has big implications for the environment because of the need for food, homes and natural resources. Large populations also produce more waste and pollution and there is a real danger that the planet is getting seriously damaged. Most **Christians** and **Muslims** recognise the need for sustainable development because future generations need to be considered and the world's natural resources should not be abused. Oil, minerals and soil take hundreds, thousands and even millions of years to be made. These are called non-renewable resources and so should not be wasted or they will run out. Worldwide over 90 million barrels of oil are used a day. That is roughly 14,310,000,000 litres a day. The USA and China use the most oil. The Institute of Mechanical Engineers reports that we have enough oil left from about 40 years at the current rate of consumption. Once it's used, it's gone forever.

The problem of deforestation is also a serious one. Forests (including tropical rainforests) are fast being cut down to make the land available for other uses and to provide timber. Around 7.3 million hectares of forest, roughly the size of the country of Panama, are lost each year. It has been reported that, in 2015, trees covering an area more than seven times the size of New

York City were cleared from the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. **Muslims are taught the importance of replanting trees as part of God's instructions for humans as khalifah on earth. We need trees to change carbon dioxide into oxygen, so they have a major role in sustaining life on the planet and reducing climate change.**

Many other non-renewable resources are also being used up very quickly, and once they are gone the whole world may have to adapt quite drastically in order to live without them. The **Genesis 1 creation story repeats several times 'and God saw that it was good'. This indicates**

that creation does not exist just for what humans can get out of it, but has unique value in God's eyes. God gave permission for people to rule over His creation in a way that sustains and protects the environment (Genesis 2:15 and Psalm 8:6). Natural resources have been provided for people to use but not abuse or future generations will suffer.

Renewable energy sources

Scientists are developing alternatives to fossil fuels that allow us to generate electricity through wind, wave power and the sun. However, wind turbines only generate power when the wind blows and some people believe that they spoil the landscape. Wave power needs more research and is currently very expensive, and solar power is only generated if the climactic conditions are right. While renewable energy sources can theoretically give us unlimited energy, in practice there are currently a number of problems with them, which is why conserving energy is so important both to **Christians** and **Muslims**.

Looking after the world's resources (both **Christian** and **Muslim**)

How can **Christians** and **Muslims** help the planet? Both **Christians** and **Muslims** believe that they should avoid waste, conserve energy and reduce the demand for natural resources. Here are a few ways that this can be done:

- walking, cycling or using public transport instead of the car
- selecting products that don't have a lot of packaging
- turning off lights that are not being used
- reusing bags when shopping
- donating second-hand clothes, toys and furniture to charity shops
- recycling waste.
- Supporting local initiatives to preserve natural resources, such as planting trees, and attempting to live sustainably.

The Assisi and Ohito meetings

Leaders of five different world religions were brought together in 1986 by the World Wildlife Fund, to celebrate its 25th anniversary. They met in Assisi (in Italy) to discuss how their faiths could and should help to care for the environment. Another meeting, in Ohito (Japan) in 1995 brought together religious leaders and environmental scientists.

At these meetings Christians said that being in charge of creation does not give people the right to abuse, spoil, waste or destroy what God has made, as humans are only the tenants of God's world (Leviticus 25:23). Thoughtless exploitation should be opposed.

Key terms:

Environment- The natural world, the surroundings in which someone lives

Natural resources- Materials found in nature - such as oil and trees - that can be used by people.

Abuse- Misuse; of the world and the environment.

Sustainable development- Building and progress that try to reduce the impact on the natural world for future generations.

Non-renewable resources- Things the earth provides that will eventually run out as there is a limited amount of them; E.G - oil coal and gas

Deforestation- The cutting down of large amounts of forest, usually because of business needs.

Renewable energy- Energy that comes from a source that does not run out, such as wind or sun.

Recycling- Reusing old products to make new ones.

Pollution- Making something dirty and contaminated, especially the environment.

The following hadith advises Muslims to take only what is necessary for the world:

"Do not seek from it more than what you need" (Hadith)

As a khalifah for God, each Muslim has a responsibility to help look after the environment and not overuse the world's resources.

The IFEES

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) has developed a specifically Islamic approach to environmental protection. To do this, it set up a training institution for those interested in applying Islamic principles to the environment. This centre has developed knowledge of good conservation practice. IFEES has been able to:

- Produce educational material
- Develop conservation projects
- Share knowledge through organising conferences and seminars and the use of media.

Prince Charles, in an address to Islam and the Environment in Oxford in 2010, specifically praised the Foundation's successful project in Zanzibar. This project, centred on the uninhabited island of Misali, has helped to protect the fragile ecosystem. Local Muslim fishermen had been using dynamite to increase their catches of fish, but this was having a devastating effect on the coral reef, the tropical fish and turtle nesting grounds. IFEES introduced a programme of teaching to encourage the fishermen to understand their responsibilities as khalifahs and to use alternative methods of fishing. IFEES' website, www.ifees.org.uk, covers a range of environmental issues and reports on conservation projects happening around the world.

What are the main types of pollution?

Pollution puts the health of humans, animals and plants at risk. However, despite laws to limit pollutants and attempts to clean up the environment, pollution continues to be a problem as technology advances and the world's pollution grows. There are many forms of pollution, of which a few include:

- **Air pollution:** caused mainly by fumes from factories and vehicles. Long term exposure can lead to asthma attacks, lung cancer and other diseases. It also causes global warming, climate change and acid rain.
- **Land pollution:** caused by the ineffective disposal of waste. When chemicals enter the earth this can poison wildlife, make farming less efficient and result in contaminated food.
- **Water pollution:** caused by dumping waste into the sea. It can have a devastating effect on marine life. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, for example, released over 750 million litres of oil into the sea and killed thousands of birds and marine animals.

Pope Francis challenges the world to help reduce pollution

In an open letter about the need for all humans to care for the world, Pope Francis called on everyone to act to protect the environment. In a letter to his bishops, titled 'On the Care of Our Common Home', he set out the need to tackle the challenges of pollution, climate change and poverty. This letter describes how 'the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth'. It stresses the importance of tackling pollution and waste, and not just throwing things away when they could be recycled.



Smoke from factory chimneys

Pope Francis says human life is grounded in our relationship with God, with our neighbours and the created world. He urges families, the media, schools and churches to help encourage a change in behaviour, and speaks of St Francis of Assisi as a role model for a 'more passionate concern for the protection of our world'. He encourages the transition from using fossil fuels to clean renewable energy.

Pollution - What do Christians believe?

"The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1)

"Every human act of irresponsibility towards creatures is an abomination" (Christian statement in the Assisi Declarations on Nature)

Christians believe the world is on loan to humans, who have been given the responsibility by God to look after it (Genesis 1:28). The parable of the talents/bags of gold (Matthew 25) warns that when God returns he will judge how responsible people have been. Polluting the planet is not good stewardship, as God's creation is being abused. Pollution also harms people, so it is not 'loving one's neighbour' or considering future generations. Christians, out of respect for God's creation, believe they must help to protect the natural world from being harmed by pollution.

Christians working together

Christians in Britain sometimes arrange events to help to tidy up their communities. For example, a group of Christians from South Molton in Devon organised a day to help clean up their town. This was done in collaboration with Hope - a Christian organisation that encourages churches to interact with their local communities. Those taking part were divided into groups and given various tasks to do, such as leaning the town signs or litter-picking in the central park.

Muslim response to pollution

Actions which cause damage to the environment should be avoided wherever possible. Muslims believe that the environment should be nurtured, valued and restored to what God intended it to be. Irresponsible behaviour that leads to pollution is seen as irresponsible. In cases where the consequences are fatal, particularly to human life, pollution is haram (forbidden) in Islam.

THE USE AND ABUSE OF ANIMAL

Christians and animals

Christians believe that animals were created by God for humans to use and care for. Many believe God values animals but humans are more important because they were created in the image of God, and have souls. The story of Noah and the flood shows this. God commanded Noah to take animals into the ark so they would be safe:

"Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth." (Genesis 7:2-3)

However, after the flood Noah is given permission to eat meat:

"Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you." (Genesis 9:3)

The Bible teaches that animals are to be treated kindly, for example:

"Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." (Deuteronomy 25:4)

"The righteous care for the needs of their animals..." (Proverbs 12:10)

Animals are used by humans as pets, for transport and work, for food, sport, experimentation and entertainment.

Islam and animals

The value of animals

Muslims believe the God made all living creatures and they all worship him in their own way. Each animal is valuable to God, has rights and should be treated with kindness and compassion. There are over two hundred verses in the Qur'an which mention animals and six chapters (surahs) named after animals

"The seven heavens and the earth, and everyone in them, glorify Him. There is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise." (Qur'an 17:44)

Using animals

Islam teaches that animals have been made for the benefit of humans but they are not to be abused. Animals must not be beaten unnecessarily nor used to fight each other for human entertainment.

All animal cruelty is to be avoided and factory farming is haram (not allowed). Modern intensive farming practices, such as battery hens or keeping animals in cages, goes against the principles of justice and compassion in Islam. Many people do not support zoos because they object to animals being kept in cages, although some would accept zoos and safari parks which are helping

with the conservation projects and breeding projects and breeding programmes to preserve species from becoming extinct.

Muhammad is seen as a role model in the way that he treated animals. There exists a story of how he cut off his cloak rather than disturb a sleeping cat. On another occasion it is said that Muhammad told a man to return a bird's egg when he saw the distress of the mother bird.

Using animals for food

According to Romans 14:2-3, Christians have the choice to be meat-eaters, vegetarians or vegans. They should also be sensitive to the beliefs of others about what they wish to eat.

'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.' (Romans 14:3)

Most Christians eat meat, as do around 90% of people in the UK. Meat is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals and the Bible does not teach that it is wrong to eat animals.

Those who decide to be vegetarians or vegans usually do so because they are against killing animals, as they believe that animals should not be harmed. Others object to the animal cruelty that can occur in large factory farms. Others argue that if the land used to raise cattle for meat was used instead to grow vegetables, much more food could be produced. A vegan goes a step further and refuses to use any animal product, including milk, cheese, eggs, fur and leather.

Muslims are only allowed to eat meat that has been killed according to Shari'ah law. For food to be halal (permissible) it must have been farmed and slaughtered according to Muslim teaching. This involves killing the animal 'in the name of God'. A sharp knife is used to cut the throat, windpipe and the blood vessels in the neck and the blood is drained. This must not take place in front of other animals. The Qur'an expressly forbids the eating of pig meat (Qur'an 16:115) and it is also haram to eat any animal which has not been ritually slaughtered or has died in the wild.

To provide food is an example of a just cause, but hunting for entertainment and pleasure is not. Most Muslims are meat-eaters but some choose to be vegetarians.

Key terms:

Vegetarian: A person who does not eat meat or fish.

Vegan: A person who does not eat animals or food produced by animals (such as eggs); a vegan tries not to use any products that have caused harm to animals (such as leather).



Muslims are against keeping animals in cages to breed them for food.



A white rat bred for testing



Sheep being reared for meat.

Animal experimentation

Scientists test new products, such as medicines, cosmetics and additives used in processed foods, on animals to check that they are safe for humans to use. Normally, if it is safe to use with chimpanzees, dogs or rabbits, it is likely to be safe for humans. But this is not always the case. For example, Ryan Wilson in 2006 was a volunteer in a drugs trial. The drug had previously been tested on animals and there were no ill effects, But Ryan Wilson reacted so badly that he was in a coma for two weeks, lost all his toes and the tips of some of his fingers.

Testing cosmetics on animals was banned in the UK in 1998 and most **Christians** support this ban. Other types of animal testing have been reduced as scientists have developed alternative methods using computers or cell culture (cells that are grown artificially). Most animal experiments that still occur are on mice or rats that are specially bred for that purpose.

In modern societies Christians generally support limited animal testing, providing there is no other safe way to develop medicines and it is carried out as carefully as possible. Christians believe that all human life is sacred and should be treated with respect; using animals to develop new drugs may benefit millions of people and save many lives.

In contrast to Christianity, Hinduism teaches that all living creatures have souls, not just humans, and all deserve to be protected. While the Hindu parents of a child may wish to benefit from animal research, this has to be balanced with the belief that some animals might contain the souls of ancestors. Many Hindus believe the cow to be a sacred animal, so no experiments would be permitted on a cow.

In Islam causing harm to an animal, doing anything that may harm an animal's life, body or genetic order is not allowed. Causing stress and forcing them to do a job beyond their power is not allowed either. If such actions were to protect and preserve human life, such as the development of medicines, an exception may be made, but the animals must be treated humanely and with care. All suffering must be kept to the absolute minimum. For example, forcing an animal to smoke cigarettes to find out the effects of smoking is not allowed. Testing cosmetics on animals is also seen as wrong. Actions are judged on their intention and animal testing for cosmetics and luxuries is not essential to human needs and is not in keeping with Islamic principles of justice, kindness and compassion

"It is God who provides livestock for you, some for riding and some for your food; you have other benefits in them too. You can reach any destination you wish on them; they carry you, as ships carry you [on the sea]." (Qur'an 40:79-80)

"Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, God will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgement". (Hadith)



1. Give two reasons why Christians believe that humans are more important than animals.
2. How are animals used in a positive way? Give two examples.
3. Explain Christian attitudes towards animal experimentation.
4. Explain Christian views about eating meat.
5. Why do Muslims regard animals as important?
6. Give two examples of what Muslims regard as cruelty to animals that should be avoided.
7. Why is Muhammad seen as a role model in the way he treated animals?
8. What is meant by ritual slaughtering in Islam?
9. Explain Muslim attitudes towards animal experimentation.
10. 'Animals are less important than humans so we can use them as we see fit.' Do you agree?

POSSIBLE 4 MARK EXAM QUESTIONS ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF ANIMALS:

1. Explain two contrasting beliefs about animal experimentation.

In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions. [4 marks]

2. Explain two similar religious beliefs about the use of animals for food.

In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions. . [4 marks]

You have 10 mins to answer both questions

Are you ready for exams?

4 Mark Question

Simple explanation of a relevant and accurate contrast - 1 mark

Detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate contrast - 2 marks

Repeat this twice.

THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN LIFE

Adam and Eve in Christianity

In the story in Genesis 1, God created male and female humans on the final day of creation.

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

The story of Genesis 2 gives a different account of the creation of human beings.

According to Genesis 2, Adam was formed by God from the soil and God breathed life into him. Adam was given the task of looking after a wonderful garden called Eden and was given the instruction not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Then God created the animals and birds and finally a helper for Adam. While Adam was sleeping, God took one of his ribs and formed Eve, the first woman. The intention was that they would live in a close relationship with God.



An artist impression of the Garden of Eden.

Some Christians believe that this story is literally true and that the whole human race is descended from Adam and Eve. Other Christians would say that it is not meant to be a scientific account but is designed to show that humans are very special to God, created by him in his own image. Being in the image of God does not mean being physically the same as God. It means that humans have a spiritual nature like God, unlike the rest of creation, so are able to relate to God in a special way. People have a moral goodness within them which is like their creator.

Muslim beliefs

Muslims believe that after God made the universe, the world and everything that lives on it, he created the first human being. God moulded the first man from clay and breathed life into him. According to the story that some Muslims believe, God named this first human being Adam, taught him the names of all things, and created from the same soul his wife, Eve (Hawwa). Eve is often referred to as the 'mother of humankind'.

"You [humans] were lifeless and He gave you life." (Qur'an 2:28)

As the story continues, God then allowed them to dwell in the beautiful garden of paradise with free will, but commanded them not to eat from one particular tree. However, the evil Iblis was able to convince Adam and Eve to taste the forbidden fruit. They then realised that they were naked and began to cover themselves. Adam and Eve felt regret for having done that which was not appropriate in the presence of God. For Muslims, this incident confirmed two things: that Iblis was always be an enemy for humans on earth, and that an awareness of the regret experienced by Adam and Eve is an essential part of following and serving God. Muslims believe that because God is merciful he had created all the things necessary for Adam and Eve to live on earth. God sent them down to earth in order to start a human world. Also, he made it possible for all human beings who submit to his will to be saved and obtain eternal life in paradise.

Muslims believe that the whole human race is descended from Adam and Eve. The most famous of Adam and Eve's children were Cain and Abel. These brothers were asked to make individual sacrifices to God. Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God but Cain's wasn't. Out of jealousy, Cain threw a rock at Abel and killed him. This was the first murder in human history.

What does science say?

In 1859, the scientist Charles Darwin published a book called 'The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection'. In it he explained the theory of evolution. He suggested that, as the Earth cooled, conditions became right for the beginning of life. Single-celled creatures appeared in the sea which, over a long period of time, evolved (changed) into other species. Some became able to survive on land as well as sea. Some gradually developed the ability to fly.

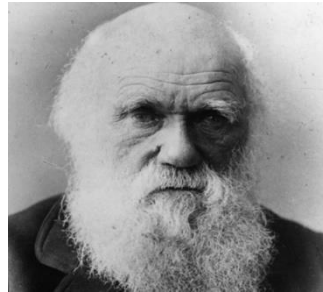
Individuals from the same species can be quite different from one another because of the genes they inherit from their ancestors. Some individuals have certain genes that increase their chance of survival. This means that they are more likely to breed successfully and pass their favourable genes on to their offspring. Darwin explained this process as the 'survival of the fittest'.

According to the theory of evolution, humans evolved over millions of years from other animals on land. Scientists have discovered bones from several different extinct species, which they claim are possible

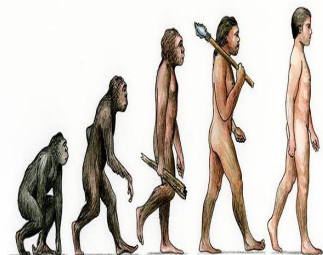
Key terms:

Evolution: the process by which living organisms are thought to have developed and diversified from earlier forms of life during the history of the earth.

Adaptation: A process of change, in which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment.



Charles Darwin



Did humans really evolve from monkeys?

ancestors of the human race. Humans are thought to have started evolving about 2.5 million years ago, and developed into humans with the same anatomy to us about 200,000 years ago.

Generally most atheists accept the theory of evolution because they think it best explains how life has developed on earth. Unlike Christians they do not need to worry about what the theory implies about God's role in creation, and think that Charles Darwin was right to point out that life adapts and changes to survive in new challenging environments.

What do Christians say about evolution?

Fundamentalist Christians believe that the origin of human life was exactly as recorded in Genesis, with God creating each species separately. While some accept that adaptation can occur within a species, they do not believe there is enough evidence to prove that creatures evolve (i.e. change from one species to another).

Some Christians believe in God as the creator but also accept the theory of evolution. They believe the Bible is concerned with the 'why' it happened while scientists are concerned with 'how' it happened because God designed and created the beginnings of life and set everything in motion to develop over the course of history. They believe that evolution is the way God designed life to advance and evolve.

Muslim debate on evolution

In 2013 the Deen Institute in London hosted a controversial debate for Muslims who share a variety of views on evolution. The Muslims on the panel discussed for several hours the scientific theory of evolution and its implications for the teachings of Islam, as well as their personal religious beliefs. The fact that the discussion went on for so long demonstrates the level of debate on evolution that exists in Islam today.

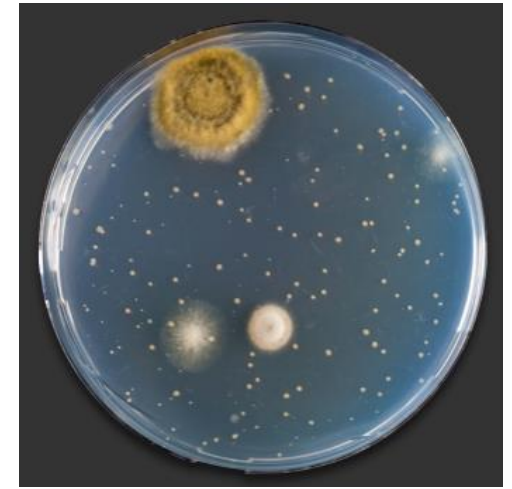
There are some Muslim scholars who are creationists; they reject the idea of evolution altogether, believing that God formed all different species. They believe that the scientific argument for evolution is not compatible with Islamic beliefs and teachings.

Usama Hasan, a scientist and imam, spoke publicly about his views supporting human evolution, and received strong criticism from some Muslims for it. Ehab Abouheif, an evolutionary biologist and a Muslim, considers the scientific theory of evolution to be a key principle of modern biology, and believes that his understanding of this is not irreconcilable with his beliefs as a Muslim. There are other examples of Muslim scientists who accept the mainstream scientific view on evolution, and do not believe that it should cause conflict for Muslims and their faith.

Other Muslim scientists, such as Shayk Yasir Qadhi, share a different view, accepting all of evolution except where it applies to humans. Some Muslims share Qadhi's view that God inserted Adam in the natural order and that, like dominoes, evolution progressed from God's first moment of creation. This view indicates that the human species was created separately by God. Some Muslims go further to say God continues to preside over the evolution of species.



An illustration of modern human next to an early descendent, Homo Erectus; some Muslims believe evolution was brought about by God.



Evolutionary theory explains that bacteria was one of the first life forms on earth.



1. According to Genesis 2, how did humans first come into existence?
2. Explain the different ways in which Christians interpret the story in Genesis 2.
3. Describe Muslim beliefs about the creation of Adam and Eve (Hawwa).
4. Why did Adam and Eve get thrown out of paradise?
5. What is the key idea behind Darwins theory of evolution?
6. What are the different Christian responses to evolution?
7. Explain different Muslim responses to the theory of evolution.
8. 'It is easy to believe that a species adapt to their environment but the idea of changing from one species to another is a step too far.' Do you agree?

ABORTION

What is abortion?

Abortion is the removal of a foetus from the womb to end a pregnancy before the child is born. This happens naturally when a woman has a miscarriage, but abortion usually refers to the deliberate termination of a pregnancy through a medical procedure. The number of legal abortions carried out by doctors in England and Wales in 2014 was 184,571.

The legal position

Before 1967 abortion was illegal in the UK. Under the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, abortion is currently allowed up to the 24th week in a licensed clinic if two doctors agree that one of the following conditions applies:

- the woman's life is in danger if the pregnancy continues
- there is a risk to the woman's physical or mental health
- there is a significant risk that the baby will be born with severe physical or mental disabilities
- an additional child may affect the physical or mental health of existing children in the family.

There is no time limit if the mother's life is in danger or if the foetus is severely deformed.

Christian views on abortion

Christians believe in the sanctity of life and that humans are made in the image of God. Life is sacred, precious and a God-given blessing. Many Christians believe that the sanctity of life therefore means abortion should not happen, as only God has the right to take life away. The Bible states that before birth, God has given each person a purpose in life:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."
(Jeremiah 1:5; also see Galatians 1:15)

Within Christianity there are some contrasting beliefs towards abortion. The Catholic Church and many evangelical Christians believe that life starts at conception. Abortion is therefore wrong and should not happen, except perhaps to save the woman's life. There are several quotes in the Bible that might be used by Christians to support the idea that abortion is wrong, such as:

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13-14)

Other Christian denominations oppose abortion but believe that it is acceptable in some circumstances, for example if the pregnancy is the result of rape or if the child would be severely disabled. The Church of England and Methodist churches believe that sometimes it is the lesser of two evils and the kindest thing to do, for example if the quality of life of the baby looks as though it will be extremely poor. The following quote from Colossians may support this:

"As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12)

Muslim beliefs about abortion

Muslims believe that human life is precious because it is God-given. As God created life, it is sacred and so only God should decide when life should end. This belief is known as the sanctity of life and so Muslims believe that taking life is a sin.

"If anyone kills a person - unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land - it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind." (Qur'an 5:32)



Muslims believe life is sacred and should be highly valued.

However, when assessing the value of a life, many Muslims would consider the quality of life. If the prospect for the unborn child is a life of misery and suffering, then the quality of life will be very poor. This may be because of illness or severe disability. In contrast, a good quality of life enables the person to enjoy happiness, health, freedom, dignity and a good standard of living.

The Qur'an does not explicitly refer to abortion, but clearly shows that Muslims should value life. For many Muslims abortion is generally haram (forbidden) but it should be allowed in particular circumstances. For example if a situation arises where a choice must be made over the child's or the mother's life, the life of the mother is believed to be more important. Or if a child that is kept will cause severe physical or mental harm to the mother, the mother's life and wellbeing takes priority. This is seen by many Muslims as the lesser of two evils. The mother already has a life, is important to the family and has duties and responsibilities, whereas the foetus is only a potential life.

Some Muslims believe that abortions should be allowed if the foetus will be born with either physical or mental disabilities or if conception

Key terms:

Abortion: The removal of a foetus from the womb to end a pregnancy before the child is born, usually before the foetus is 24 weeks old.

Sanctity of life: The theory that life is holy and given by god, therefore only God can take it away.

Quality of life: The general wellbeing of a person, in relation to their health and happiness; also' the theory that the value of life depends upon how good or satisfying it is.

Enoulment: The period from when Muslims believe the foetus is given a soul.



A foetus in the womb at 20 weeks.

was the result of rape. Some Christians believe that there are circumstances in which an abortion, while regrettable, would be acceptable. The Qur'an forbids abortion if the reasons given is that the parents are unable to afford another child.

If circumstances are such that an abortion is to take place, then the earlier it is carried out the better, and certainly before ensoulment. There are varying understanding in Islam of when a foetus receives its soul and life begins. Some Muslims believe it is after 40 days, some others say after 120 days of pregnancy. In Islam, having an abortion after ensoulment is seen as taking a life. One of the gravest sins, as recorded in hadith, is 'murdering an innocent soul'

In some countries in South and East Asia, where there is a preference for sons, there is a practice known as sex-selective abortion. Although this practice may occur among religious communities it is important to know that it is a cultural and not religious practice, and authorities in Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam officially condemn it.

Arguments for and against abortion

Pro-choice groups, such as Abortion Rights, agree with legalised abortion because they argue that the woman's life comes first. She carries the baby, goes through childbirth and looks after the child and so should have the right to choose whether she continues the pregnancy. Her life is affected and if there is a danger that she might be harmed mentally or physically, then an abortion should be allowed.

Pro-choice groups believe that human life does not really start until birth, or at the earliest at viability (the time a foetus can survive outside the womb), so the mother's life is more valuable. They believe it is cruel to bring a severely physically or mentally disabled child into the world.

Pro-life groups, such as the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), argue that life begins at conception because all the DNA is present to create a unique individual, so abortion is a form of murder and therefore wrong (Exodus 20:13). The unborn child needs to be protected as stated in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Pro-life groups believe that disabled people can enjoy a good quality of life, and that unwanted children can be adopted by those who are unable to have children of their own. They remind people that often those who have an abortion suffer depression and guilt as a result.



Left: Pro-life supporters.



Right: A pro-choice supporter.

1. What is an abortion?
2. What is the difference between the sanctity of life and the quality of life?
3. Do you think the law as it stands should be changed, either to make abortions harder or easier to obtain?
4. Explain briefly the key arguments for and against abortion.
5. Explain why the Catholic Church opposes abortions.
6. Explain why some Christians say that abortion is sometimes 'the lesser of two evils'.
7. Give two circumstances where Muslims might allow an abortion and one where they would not.
8. What is the significance of 40 days and 120 days for Muslims when considering abortion?

POSSIBLE EXAM QUESTIONS ON ABORTION:

1. Explain two contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about abortion.

In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions.
[4 marks]



4 Mark Question

Simple explanation of a relevant and accurate contrast - **1 mark**

Detailed explanation of a relevant and accurate contrast - **2 marks**

Repeat this twice.

Euthanasia

What is euthanasia?

If a person is suffering from a very painful and worsening illness, and there is no hope that they will ever recover, some people argue that they should be allowed to die. The word euthanasia comes from two Greek words: eu meaning 'good' and Thanatos meaning 'death', so euthanasia means 'a good or gentle death'. The intention is to end the life of someone who is in pain or has poor quality of life due to a serious illness. There is much debate about whether the law should allow it in the UK. In Belgium, Holland and Switzerland the law is less restrictive than it is in Britain. In Holland a law was passed in 2002 which means that doctors who perform euthanasia will not be prosecuted if they comply with certain legal conditions: the patient's suffering must be unbearable and, after consultation with two doctors, it is decided that euthanasia is the most compassionate thing to do.

Those opposed to euthanasia argue that it is dangerous to allow someone to make a decision about whether a person should live or die. It could become a slippery slope to compulsory euthanasia at a certain age or be open to abuse. A relative wanting to inherit property might persuade their elderly relative to request euthanasia even though they are not suffering. Other argue that they should have the right to say when they want their lives to end. They believe that if they are suffering, euthanasia would allow them to die with dignity

Types of euthanasia

- Voluntary euthanasia is when a person asks a doctor to end their life as they do not wish to live anymore. This is their own choice.
- Non-voluntary euthanasia is when the person is too ill to request to die, for example because they are in a coma, but a doctor will end their life for them because it is thought to do so would be in the best interests of the person.
- Involuntary euthanasia is when the person is able to provide consent but does not, either because they do not want to or because they are not asked, but their life is ended anyway. (as happened in Nazi Germany)

Forms of euthanasia

- Active euthanasia is when active steps are taken to end someone's life, for example giving them a lethal injection.
- Passive euthanasia is when doctors stop providing treatment or do something that is intended to quicken the natural process of dying. For example, when a person is not resuscitated after a heart attack, or doctors might remove a feeding tube or switch off a life support machine.

Euthanasia is currently illegal in the UK and treated as murder or manslaughter. However, if doctors taking care of a terminally ill patient agree that there is no hope of recovery, then they may stop trying to prolong their life. Also, life support machines may be turned off for patients believed to be in a persistent vegetative state, because it is considered to be unnaturally prolonging life.

The right to die

In September 2015, the British Parliament rejected plans for a 'right to die' law in England and Wales. 118 MPs were in favour and 330 against allowing some terminally ill adults to end their lives with medical supervision. The vote followed a passionate debate; some argued that a 'dignified and powerful death' should be allowed. Sarah Wootton, the chief executive of Dignity in Dying, called the result an 'outrage' as she claimed MPs had gone against public opinion. Dr Peter Saunders, campaign director of Care Not Killing, was delighted with the outcome, saying that it was necessary to protect the depressed, disabled, elderly and sick.

Christian beliefs

Many Christians believe that taking a life is interfering with God's plan. They think it is comparable to murder and open to abuse. For example, if euthanasia was legalised, it could potentially lead to those who are very old feeling pressure to ask for euthanasia in order to not burden their families. Most Christians believe that euthanasia is against the sanctity of life, and only God has the right to take life away.

'You shall not murder.' (Exodus 20:13)

Modern drugs and hospice care provide the dying with a chance to end their lives with dignity and without pain. Where suffering is unavoidable, some Christians say that this can bring people nearer to God and can help them to understand the suffering of Jesus.

'All people deserve compassion and care in their suffering and dying. Euthanasia and assisted suicide should not, however, be considered acceptable responses. They undermine human dignity and are morally wrong.' (The Salvation Army)

Some Christians do support euthanasia and believe that the drugs that are used to end a suffering person's life are God-given, and should be used if it is the most living thing to do. They believe that God has given people free will so they should be able to choose when to end their lives. This contrasts with the beliefs of Islam, which strictly forbid euthanasia in any form.

"Blessed are the merciful" (Matthew 5:7)

... all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:16)

Key terms:

Euthanasia: Killing someone painlessly and with compassion, to end their suffering

Active euthanasia: Ending a life by deliberate action, such as by giving a patient a lethal injection.

Passive euthanasia: Allowing a terminally ill or incurably ill person to die by withdrawing or withholding medical treatment.



Care not killing supporters rallied outside Parliament in 2015, campaigning against the government's proposed 'right to die' law



Hospices provide care for the dying

Muslim teachings

Euthanasia is not included amongst the reasons allowed for killing in Islam. Muslims believe in the sanctity of life. They believe that all life is a gift from God and therefore it should be valued and looked after. No person has the right to take away a life, only God decides when it will be ended - not when the person themselves decides, or their family or doctor.

'Do not take life, which God has made sacred, except by right.' (Qur'an 17:33)

'No soul may die except for with God's permission.' (Qur'an 3:145)

No one knows the plans of God and if a person is suffering, maybe there is a reason. For example, God could be testing their faith or providing an opportunity for someone to help look after them and do the good necessary to gain them entry into paradise.

Euthanasia is therefore haram (forbidden) and is considered a sin against God, the community and the individual. Euthanasia involves all three of these: it is against the will of God, it affects those who are left behind or have to carry it out, and it ends the individual's life before it would have ended naturally. Muslims believe that God is omnipresent (everywhere), omnibenevolent (all loving) and omnipotent (all powerful). They believe in Al-Qadr (predestination), that God has planned every person's life. To end a life prematurely is going against God, because it is interfering with God's plan.

Some organisations campaign against euthanasia and assisted dying for religious or moral reasons,



Case study - Euthanasia for the incurably ill

When thinking about euthanasia most people think of an elderly person, suffering from an incurable disease, who wants to die. This is not always the case. A Muslim family, living in India, have eight children, six of whom are suffering from a rare disease which almost paralyses their lower bodies and affects their voices and vision. Aged between 8 and 18 years, the children are in great pain and each day their suffering appears to be increasing.

Their parents, Mohd and Tabassum Nazir are in great distress, because they cannot afford the necessary medical treatment and have written to the authorities in their district asking for euthanasia for their six children. They say that they have exhausted all other options and cannot bear to see them suffering any longer.

1. What is meant by euthanasia?
2. Explain the difference between active and passive euthanasia.
3. Give two reasons why a person might ask for help in dying.
4. Explain the arguments Christians might use to support or oppose euthanasia.
5. Summarise the Muslim beliefs about euthanasia in 5 bullet points or less.

Personal thoughts:

'If euthanasia is allowed for pets, as a loving thing to do when an animal is suffering, then the same logic should apply to humans as well.' Do you agree?





This is Tony Bland the 96th victim of the Hillsborough disaster of 1989. He died on 3rd March 1993.

STARTER - Tony Bland case study:

At 18 years old, Tony Bland went to see his favourite football team, Liverpool FC play in the FA cup semi-final at Sheffield's Hillsborough football stadium on 15th April 1989. Overcrowding and a rush of fans into the stadium led to a crush that resulted in 94 deaths. Tony's ribs were crushed and his lungs were punctured. This interrupted the supply of oxygen to his brain and resulted in irreversible damage, which left him in a persistent vegetative state. Although there was no hope of recovery he was kept alive with foods and fluids that were fed through tubes. The hospital, with his parents' support, petitioned the court for permission to allow him to die. In 1993, the consent was obtained and doctors withdrew the food and fluids that were keeping him alive. This was the first time in the UK that this action was permitted legally. The law did not recognise the removal of Tony Bland's feeding tubes as passive euthanasia. Some critics believe that this was in fact 'euthanasia through the back door'

DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

Christianity

Is death the end?

Generally atheists believe that at death one ceases to exist. They do not believe that there is an afterlife and do not believe that people have souls.

Christians believe that death is not the end and that God judges whether a person will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. The Catholic Church believes in purgatory, where souls undergo purification in order to achieve the holiness necessary to approach God and enter heaven. Some Christians believe in immediate judgement and the transition to heaven or hell; others believe that they will wait until the Day of Judgement and the return of Jesus. Some Christians believe that they will be in heaven with their physical bodies, but others believe that it is their souls that live on for eternity. Christians point to the resurrection of Jesus as evidence of an afterlife (John 11:25). The Apostle's Creed reads "I believe in the resurrection of the body".

What is heaven like?

Christians believe that heaven is indescribably wonderful and is where God resides. Revelation 4:2-6 describes John's version of the throne room of God where he sees everyone worshipping God. Revelation 21:4 says that God will 'wipe every tear from their eyes'. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'.



This painting shows a traditional idea of heaven and hell.

What is hell like?

The Bible says that hell was originally designed for Satan and his demons: 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' (Matthew 25:41). It is also described as a place of punishment for the unrighteous: 'throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'. (Matthew 13:50). Revelation describes hell as a place of torment: 'the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night' (Revelation 14:11).

There are different Christian interpretations of these descriptions. Some take them as literally true. Many think that they symbolise the frustration of not being able to be in the presence of God. Hell is portrayed as something to be avoided.

Eternity in heaven

Christianity teaches that seeking an eternity in heaven is more important than any other ambition: 'What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?' (Mark 8:36). How is it possible to get to heaven? Christians believe that God is holy, and the relationship between himself and his people is broken by sin. To overcome this, God sent Jesus to die on a cross to conquer sin and death.

The price for salvation was paid by Jesus' death, so that those who put their faith and trust in him might be forgiven and have eternal life in heaven. Christians believe that heaven is not gained simply by being a good person, but is a free gift to those who believe and put their trust in Jesus (see Romans 10:9-10). Many Christians believe that following Jesus still means living a life of doing good and avoiding sin (Colossians 3:5-8), but salvation does not have to be earned.

Ian McCormack

New Zealander Ian McCormack went on a world trip in 1980. In Mauritius he went night diving and was stung by a deadly Sea Wasp Box jellyfish. Although he hadn't believed in God, he had been taught the Lord's Prayer by his mother and in desperation he prayed it as he was taken to hospital, paralysed and dying. Doctors could not save him, he was declared dead and put in the morgue. Ian claims he woke up in hell and was terrified at what he saw but then God lifted him up into heaven. There Jesus gave him the choice of either entering heaven or returning to tell others there is an afterlife. He chose to return and woke up in the morgue. He has become a Christian preacher travelling the world to tell people his story.



Ian McCormack today and a Box jellyfish like the one which stung Ian.



Key terms:

Eternity: A state that comes after death and never ends.

Barzakh: An Arabic word meaning 'obstacle', 'hindrance' or 'barrier'.

Heaven (Jannah in Islam): A state of eternal happiness in the presence of God; the place of eternal peace ruled over by God; in Islam also called paradise.

Hell (Jahannam in Islam): Eternal separation from God.

Akhirah: Everlasting life after death.

Bible quote

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Islam

How do Muslims view death?

There is only one certainty in life, that one day our lives on earth will end. Atheists believe that death is the end, and that there is nothing else that follows. However, Muslims believe that death is not final, but rather the beginning of a new stage of being. After death the state of waiting until the day of judgement is called barzakh, which means a 'barrier'. People are unable to come back across the barrier to put right things they did wrong or to warn others. Islam teaches that the soul does not die but continues and that there is a new physical existence after this life which ends in either paradise (heaven/Jannah) or hell (Jahannam). This is known as Akhirah, the afterlife. Muslims view the current life as a test or trial before the next realm of existence. They believe how the current life is lived determines what happens in the afterlife.

"When death comes to one of them, he cries 'My Lord, let me return so as to make amends for the things I neglected.' Never! This will not go beyond his words: a barrier stands behind such people until the very day they are resurrected."

(Qur'an 23:99-100)

The value of human life

Muslims believe that God has given humans free will to choose between right and wrong. Each person has one life on earth and it is their choice how they live it. Muslims believe that what they decide and do in their lives has eternal consequences. This encourages them to follow and obey the instructions of God.

The Day of Judgement

According to Islamic teaching, on the Day of Judgement, the angel Israfil will blow a trumpet announcing the last day and the dead will be resurrected in new bodies. Each person will then be brought in front of God and the book of their life, as recorded by two angels, will be opened. Their good and bad deeds will be seen and weighed, and God will decide the fate of each individual. Those who rejected God, and Muhammad, and the teachings of the Qur'an, and those who failed to do enough good in life will be sent to the punishment of hell. Believers who performed more good deeds than bad deeds are promised the reward of spending eternity with God in paradise.



Will the good deeds outweigh the bad deeds on the Day of Judgement?

"Those whose good deeds weigh heavy will be successful, but those whose balance is light will have lost their souls for ever and will stay in Hell."
(Qur'an 23:102-103)

This belief focuses Muslims on preparing for eternal life so that they have nothing to fear. It also brings comfort when times are hard and they are suffering, as they believe that God may be testing their faith.

Paradise (Jannah)

Muslims aim to reach paradise. After judgement everyone will have to cross the Sirat Bridge over hell. Those who have been given a book of their life in the right hand will get to the other side and enter heaven; everyone else will fall into hell. Paradise is described in the Qur'an as an eternal beautiful garden of physical and spiritual paradise and all wishes will be fulfilled. It will contain lofty mansions beneath which flow rivers (Qur'an 39:20) and there will be provision of delicious food and drink (Qur'an 52:22) and beautiful companions.

Hell (Jahannam)

The Qur'an describes hell using the vivid imagery of a blazing fire and terrible punishment. It is a warning to those who disbelieve in God (Qur'an 67:6-8). Unbelievers suffer both physical and spiritual torture. They must wear heavy chains, drink boiling water, and eat scalding food. They are inflicted with burns from fire and smoke. Muslims who did not do enough good deeds may find themselves in hell. They believe that this punishment will eventually end and they will then enter paradise, but that non-believers will stay there forever.

The idea that every person is accountable for their beliefs and actions is greatly emphasised in Islam. The images of heaven and hell in the teachings of Islam are more than mere ideas for Muslims; they are true descriptions of what they believe will happen after death.



Application of Knowledge

1. What do Christians believe happen when we die?
2. Why do think some Christians believe in Purgatory?
3. How is heaven described in the Bible?
4. According to the Bible what is hell like?
5. Explain what the Bible teaches about how to get into heaven.
6. What do Muslims mean when they say that this life is a test?
7. Explain what Muslims believe happens to a person when they die.
8. Describe what the Qur'an says about heaven and hell.
9. 'There is no proof of an afterlife.' Do you agree?