

GCSE

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Route B Comparisons:

Catholic, Other Christian, Jewish

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Origins and Meaning

	 Catholic Christian	 Other Christian	 Jewish
Origins of the universe	<p>Catholics believe that God is the creator of the universe, and that all things that exist ultimately have their origin in God. Before God created, nothing existed. This is known as the doctrine of <i>creatio ex nihilo</i>, which is Latin phrase which means “creation out of nothing”.</p> <p>However, they do not believe that the creation accounts in Genesis are literal, scientific descriptions of the beginnings of the universe and they accept the scientific theory of the “big bang”. Indeed, this theory was itself first suggested by a Catholic priest and scientist called Georges Lemaitre.</p>	<p>Other Christians also believe that God is the creator of the universe and they would be equally committed to the doctrine of <i>creation ex nihilo</i>.</p> <p>However, many Christians – especially those who belong to fundamentalist Evangelical Churches – reject the scientific accounts of the beginning of the universe. This is because one of the fundamentals they believe in, is the inerrancy of the Bible, which means they believe the Bible contains no errors. Therefore, they would believe that the creation accounts in Genesis are literal, scientific descriptions of the beginnings of the universe</p>	<p>A central belief in Judaism is that there is one God who is all knowing, all powerful and existing always. The Torah begins by showing how God created the world and continues to describe how he made day and night, the earth, vegetation and animals. Some Jews believe that every detail of the creation, as told in Genesis (the first book of the Torah), is true. Others believe the details are examples of what might have happened, but are not meant to be taken literally. For them the most important thing to understand from the creation story is that God is responsible for the creation of all that exists.</p>



Catholic Christian



Other Christian



Jewish

Origin of human beings

Catholics believe that human beings are made *imago Dei*, which means “in the image of God”. This is taken from the Genesis account of the creation of Adam, when God says, “Let us make human beings in our own image.”

However, they do not believe that the Genesis accounts of the Creation of Adam are literal, scientific descriptions of the origins of human beings. They accept the scientific theory of evolution and Pope John Paul II stated there is no conflict between a belief that human beings are created by God and that the theory of evolution.

Other Christians also believe that human beings are created by God in his image. However, many Christians – especially those who belong to fundamentalist Evangelical Churches – reject the scientific theory of evolution as incompatible with the scriptural account of the creation of Adam as the first parent of humanity. They see the Genesis account of Adam and Eve’s creation as literal, scientific descriptions of how human beings came to exist on the earth.

The Torah states that human beings were made in ‘the image of God’ and that all the creatures of the earth are in the control of humans. There are different views about what is meant by ‘image’, although most Jews agree with Maimonides that the Hebrew word translated as "image" in Gen. 1:27 does not refer to the physical form of a thing. Many Jews consider that it is the nature of human beings that is ‘God-like’ through an ability to understand. Some Jews believe the Genesis account of Adam and Eve as literal, but others believe the story can be interpreted. The etymology of the word Adam connects it with Adamah, ‘ground or soil,’ and with Adom, ‘red’ so suggesting that Adam was formed from red soil or clay and that people should always remember where they came from.



Catholic Christian



Other Christian



Jewish

Sanctity/value of human life

The Catholic belief in *imago Dei* means that they believe that human beings were a part of God’s deliberate creative plan and that human beings are like God in some important respects that makes them different from the other animals.

This also means that human life has a special value in God’s eyes. This is called the “sanctity of life”. For this reason, Catholics believe all human life is sacred and must be protected from harm. So, they would reject abortion and euthanasia in all circumstances.

Other Christians also believe that human beings are created in God’s image and that human life is sacred. Many Christians also believe that for this reason, both abortion and euthanasia should be rejected.

However, some Christians – especially those who would consider themselves to be liberal Christians within their own denominations – might believe that there are some circumstances in which abortion and euthanasia may be acceptable.

In Judaism the emphasis is on life and not on death. Saving of life (*pikuach nefesh*) is an important mitzvah (duty) of Judaism. As God is the giver of life so life is sacred, should be preserved and lived to the full. In the Talmud there are references to how other mitzvah, such as keeping Shabbat, can be broken if a life can be saved.

There are different views within Judaism regarding issues such as abortion and euthanasia. Attitudes are often based on individual interpretations of the Torah and Talmud.

Abortion

Catholics believe that a foetus is a human person from the moment of conception and therefore has all the rights of a human being, including the right to life. Therefore, they believe that abortion is wrong in all circumstances and is a type of murder.

If the mother’s life is in danger because of the pregnancy and there are therapies that she could undergo that would threaten the life of the unborn foetus, some Catholics would say that the doctrine of double effect would permit a medical intervention that caused the foetus to die.

Most Christians also believe that a foetus is a human person from the moment of conception, and they would also oppose abortion.

However, some Christians – for example some members of the Church of England – while still strongly opposed to abortion recognise that there are some circumstances (for example, in the case of a pregnancy from rape), where it is better than the alternative.

Most Jews believe that abortions should only take place for serious reasons and that a rabbi should be consulted. The unborn foetus is not considered a ‘person’ in Jewish law until it is born and therefore the principle of *Pikuach Nefesh* allows for the mother’s life to be saved. Orthodox Jews are often opposed to abortion as they believe God is the creator and only He can take life. Reform Judaism teaches that any decision should be left up to the woman within whose body the foetus is growing.



Catholic Christian

Catholics recognise that there are many different literary forms in the Bible, and that those styles of writing need to be understood in order to appreciate what the writer was trying to say. For example, poetry and history and two different literary forms and we do not read them in the same way.

Genesis is thought to be an example of a literary form called a creation myth. This means that the truths it contains are expressed symbolically and reading the Creation accounts as history or science would be to read them wrongly and misunderstand their literary form.



Other Christian

Many Christians also recognise the importance of being sensitive to the different literary forms in the Bible and would also read the Genesis accounts symbolically, rather than literally.

However, some Christians – especially those who belong to fundamentalist Evangelical Churches – would only recognise the different literary forms of the Bible if this does not threaten their fundamental commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible. They would not read the Genesis creation accounts as symbolic but would insist on their literal truth.



Jewish

There are a variety of views and attitudes to the Genesis accounts of Creation. Some Jews, especially those who are ultra-orthodox, believe literally in the creation as described in the Torah and deny the theory of evolution. Some read evolutionary theory into the Genesis account, arguing that the Torah and modern scientific theory describe the same process using different language. However, many Jews reject this view and try to integrate the Genesis account with the findings of modern science. Scientific developments, especially the Big Bang Theory, have influenced views of reconciling the account of creation in the Torah with scientific cosmogony. For some Jews, e.g. Steven Pinker, the account of the creation in the Torah is rejected completely. He argues that no God could possibly have created a world that has so many faults in its design.



Catholic Christian

Peace

Catholics believe in the importance of promoting peace and many recent Catholic popes have spoken of the evil of war. Equally, the Church teaches that peace is not just the absence of war, but the presence of justice.

At the same time, the Church has always taught that war is sometimes necessary, under strict conditions, for a state to defend itself against unjust aggression. These conditions are codified in the doctrine of just war.



Other Christian

Most Christians are committed to the promotion of peace and justice, but many would share the Catholic just war view that war is sometimes necessary.

However, some Christians – such as the Quakers – are opposed to war in all circumstances and have refused to fight in wars because of their commitment to anti-violence and pacifism. This is called conscientious objection.



Jewish

Jews are committed to the ideal of peace. ‘Shalom’ means peace and is commonly used as a form of greeting to convey peace and the importance of striving for peace. In the Tenakh the Prophets talked about the ideal of peace and there are references to the Messiah as a bringer of peace. There are many prayers for peace such as the last of the Eighteen Benedictions. Some Jews are conscientious objectors and refuse to fight in any war. However, pacifism is not a teaching of Judaism and it is taught that war can sometimes be justified but should be a last resort. Obligatory war (milchemet mitzvah) traditionally applied to times when Jews believed it is God’s will for them to capture land e.g. when Joshua led the Israelites into battle against Jericho. Optional war (milchemet reshut) refers to times when Jews consider it acceptable to strike first if an attack is imminent and in order to stop war spreading.

Good and Evil

	 Catholic Christian	 Other Christian	 Jewish
Origin of evil	<p>Many Catholics would appeal to the teachings of St Augustine in saying that evil is the consequence of Original Sin. The doctrine of Original Sin is that God made a perfect world that the first humans damaged by their deliberate choice to disobey God's commands. So evil is the consequence of the misuse of human freewill and is not part of God's plan for the world.</p> <p>Along with this belief St Augustine says that evil is not a part of Creation but is just the absence of good things that God intended. This is called a privation: the absence of good that is brought about by human beings not choosing rightly.</p>	<p>Many Christians – especially those who belong to fundamentalist Evangelical churches – would agree with the Catholic view that suffering is the consequence of sin.</p> <p>Other Christians – for example, those who are influenced by the theology of John Hick – believe that God allows suffering because it helps human beings to become better. Hick says that God deliberately made an imperfect world so that human beings could learn for themselves how to be good and loving.</p>	<p>Judaism does not teach that people are born sinful but that each human is born with a balance of two inclinations – to do good actions (yetzer ha tov) and to do evil actions (yetzer ha ra). All have the ability to make their own choices, and will be held responsible for them. Humans are given free will whether to keep the mitzvot or not. It is not believed that doing one good action will suddenly make someone a good person. Each is considered separately by God during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Sins against God can be atoned for through showing repentance, prayer and giving to charity. Harm done to other human beings must be forgiven by them before God can forgive.</p>



Catholic Christian



Other Christian



Jewish

Meaning of suffering

Catholics have an ambivalent attitude to suffering. “Ambivalent” means having mixed feelings about something. For Catholics suffering is not always an evil. Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*, points out that suffering of Jesus was a gift to the world that made salvation possible and if Christians can offer their own suffering for the good of others it can become part of the saving suffering of Jesus. For Catholics suffering can also be a sign of love, a proof of commitment and even a blessing.

Many Christians would share the Catholic view about the ways in which suffering can be a blessing. For example, John Hick argued that suffering is something God deliberately allows in order to help those who suffer it to become better people. However, some Christians would have a view that is more like that of St Augustine and see suffering as either the consequence of people’s sins, or as a punishment from God for those sins.

Suffering comes from two different sources: human made (for example, the Shoah and natural disasters (for example, floods). In the Tenakh there are references to different reasons for suffering. In Genesis, suffering is seen as a test of faith when Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son. There are also examples which show that God punishes disobedience that can lead to suffering. For many Jews suffering is seen as part of God’s plan which cannot be understood. What is important is the way that people cope with their suffering and how others support those who are suffering.



Catholic Christian



Other Christian



Jewish

Conscience

Catholics believe that conscience is the ability of the mind to know the difference between right and wrong and the impulse to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. For Catholics the existence of conscience is a gift from God and is one of the ways God communicates what he wants to individuals.

Catholics also believe that while a person should always obey their conscience, the conscience can sometimes be wrong because it is not properly formed. The Catholic Church teaches that Catholics have a duty to inform their conscience by listening to the moral teaching of the Church.

Most Christians would agree that the conscience is a gift from God and that obeying one's conscience is the most important element in living a good life.

Some Christians have a stronger view of the conscience than the Catholic view and would not believe it is possible for the conscience to be wrong, because it is the voice of God in each person's heart. Christians who believe this would always trust their own conscience over the authority of the Church.

Although there are references to a human ability to make moral decisions in the Torah, there is no actual reference to conscience (matzpun) in the Tenakh or Rabbinic texts .

Many Jews would consider conscience as the 'small voice' which guides actions but that it is the Torah that represents the 'powerful voice' directing actions. Everyone is born with a balance of two inclinations – to do good actions (yetzer ha tov) and to do evil actions (yetzer ha ra). All have the ability to make their own choices, and will all be held responsible for them. Humans are given free will whether to keep the mitzvot of the Torah or not.



Catholic Christian



Other Christian



Jewish

Sculpture and Statues

Statues are a common feature in most Catholic Churches and are used as a focus for private prayer by many Catholics. For this reason, these statues will often have a place to light candles and to kneel near these statues.

For Catholics the statues are reminders of Jesus, Mary and the lives of the Saints that help them to pray to God with greater reverence. In their prayers, Catholics ask Mary and the Saints to pray for them.

Apart from some Anglican Churches, most other Christians would not have statues in their Churches or homes and would not use them as a focus for prayer.

For some Christians, the Catholic practice of venerating statues they would view as being against the Ten Commandments that prohibit the making of graven images. Some Christians would view the Catholic practices as idolatrous – which means the worshipping of false gods.

The central belief that there is only one God is shown in the design of most synagogues. Although synagogues may be decorative they do not have statues or representations of human beings as it is God alone who should be worshipped. Venerating statues would be viewed as going against the second of the Ten Commandments that prohibit the making and worshipping of graven images. The requirement that a synagogue should have windows is mentioned in the Talmud where it is suggested that the sky inspires a reverence of God.



Catholic Christian



Other Christian



Jewish

Pilgrimage

Going on pilgrimage is an important part of religious practice for most Catholics, who will probably go on at least one pilgrimage in their life. Many Catholics go on pilgrimages at least once a year. Many Catholic pilgrimage sites are associated with places where Mary has been seen by visionaries (for example, Lourdes and Fatima) while others are places where the bodies of saints rest (for example, Rome and Santiago de Compostela).

For Catholics, the act of travelling together with other pilgrims is a visible sign of the journey to God they are making through the whole of their life. Pilgrimages are often deep and life-exchanging experiences for those who make them.

Not all Christians have a tradition of making pilgrimages and may view the practice as focused too much on action and not enough on faith, which can be practiced anywhere.

However, pilgrimages can also be an experience that unites Christians from different denominations who can share their devotion to God and their shared Christian identity. For example, the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in East Anglia is one to which both Catholics and Anglicans make regular pilgrimages and these pilgrimages become an opportunity for ecumenical sharing between the two denominations.

The Torah (Deuteronomy 16:16) refers to Jews being required to go to Jerusalem three times a year on the festivals of Sukkoth, Pesach and Shavuot. These became known as the Pilgrim Festivals and many Jews pray daily to once again be able to fulfil this commandment and for the Temple to be rebuilt.

After the destruction of the Temple pilgrimage festivals continued to be celebrated as synagogue-based worship services.

There are no modern day traditions or duties to fulfil pilgrimages in Judaism. Some Jews consider it important to visit Israel and worship at the Western Wall (the remnant of the Temple) or burial places of famous rabbis or Talmud scholars, e.g. Maimonides, and so follow the footsteps of their ancestors.