Your notes

GCSE Religious Studies: revision notes

Religion and life

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The origins of the universe and life

- Science explains the universe through the Big Bang, about 13.8 billion years ago, and life through **evolution** by natural selection (Darwin).
- Some religious believers take creation accounts literally (creationists). Many accept science as describing how God created; the **Big Bang theory** was first proposed by Georges Lemaître, a Catholic priest.

The value of the world

- **Stewardship**: humans have a God-given duty to look after the world (Genesis 2:15). **Dominion**: humans have authority over nature (Genesis 1:28), which most believers say must not be abused. In Islam, humans are **khalifah** (stewards) of the Earth.
- Environmental problems include pollution, global warming, deforestation and using up natural resources. Pope Francis's letter Laudato Si' (2015) called on everyone to care for 'our common home'.
- Animal rights: views differ on animal experiments and eating meat. Many Buddhists are vegetarian because the first precept teaches not to harm living beings.

Abortion

- The **sanctity of life** is the belief that life is sacred because God created it. **Quality of life** considers a person's well-being.
- In Great Britain, abortion is legal up to 24 weeks if two doctors agree, and later in some circumstances.
- The Catholic Church teaches that abortion is wrong. Many other Christians accept it in some cases, such as when the mother's life is at risk. Many humanists support a woman's right to choose.

Euthanasia and death

- **Euthanasia** is ending a life to relieve suffering. Assisted dying is currently illegal in England and Wales, although Parliament has debated a bill to allow it for terminally ill adults.
- Many religious believers oppose **euthanasia** because of the **sanctity of life**, and support **hospice** care, which began with Dame Cicely Saunders' St Christopher's Hospice (1967). Some believers and many humanists support it out of compassion and respect for a person's choice.
- Beliefs about death vary: Christians and Muslims believe in heaven and hell, Buddhists in rebirth, and many non-religious people believe death is the end.
- Some people see near-death experiences, or claims about ghosts and mediums, as evidence of life after death. Non-religious arguments against it include the lack of scientific evidence, the brain's role in producing consciousness, and the view that belief in an afterlife is wishful thinking.

Issues of Life and Death (Eduqas)

- Eduqas Component 1, Theme 2. Learn its eight concepts: afterlife, **environmental sustainability**, **euthanasia**, **evolution**, abortion, quality of life, sanctity of life and soul. You must know non-religious views (Humanist and Atheist) too.
- Genesis 1 and 2: some Christians read them literally (creation in six days); many read them as showing why God made the world rather than how. Many see no conflict with science.
- The physicist Brian Cox explains the universe's origin through the **Big Bang theory**, using evidence such as the expanding universe and the cosmic microwave background.
- Charles Darwin's theory of **evolution** by natural selection explains how life developed. Richard Dawkins argues it shows that life needs no designer.
- Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:6 give humans **dominion** over the earth; most Christians read this as **stewardship**: caring for creation. Humanist Climate Action, a Humanists UK group, campaigns on climate change because this planet is all we have.
- **Sanctity of life**: Christians believe life is holy because God made it (Genesis 1:31; Jeremiah 1:5, 'before I formed you in the womb'). **Quality of life** asks how good a life is, and many non-religious people use it in decisions about abortion and **euthanasia**.
- Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, argues that '**speciesism**' (valuing humans above other animals just because they are human) is wrong: animals' suffering counts too.
- Many Humanists support assisted dying for people who are terminally ill and of sound mind, as the campaign group Dignity in Dying does. The Catholic Church opposes **euthanasia**; some liberal Christians accept it in some cases.

Your notes

- Christian funerals in Britain express hope of resurrection and eternal life (John 11:24-27 is often read). Humanist funerals celebrate the person's life, led by a celebrant, with no belief in an afterlife.

Your notes

Key terms

Big Bang theory	The scientific theory that the universe began from a single point about 13.8 billion years ago.
Evolution	The theory that living things change over time through natural selection.
Stewardship	The duty to look after the world on God's behalf.
Dominion	Authority or control over nature.
Sanctity of life	The belief that life is sacred because God created it.
Quality of life	How good or bearable a person's life is.
Euthanasia	Ending a life to relieve suffering.
Hospice	A place that cares for people who are dying.
Khalifah	In Islam, a steward or vice-regent of the Earth.
Soul	The spiritual part of a person that many believers think lives on after death. (Eduqas)
Environmental sustainability	Using the earth's resources in a way that leaves enough for future generations. (Eduqas)
Speciesism	Peter Singer's term for treating humans as more important than other animals just because they are human. (Eduqas)

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is stewardship?
2. What is dominion?
3. What is the sanctity of life?
4. Up to how many weeks is abortion usually legal in Great Britain?
5. What is the Catholic Church's teaching on abortion?
6. What is euthanasia?
7. What is a hospice?
8. Who first proposed what became the Big Bang theory?

Answers

1. The duty to look after the world on God's behalf
2. The idea that humans have authority over nature
3. The belief that life is sacred because God created it
4. 24

5. It is wrong
6. Ending a life to relieve suffering
7. A place that cares for people who are dying
8. Georges Lemaître, a Catholic priest

What to do next

Practise 16 questions on this topic

Try 7 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

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