

# Foundational Catholic Theology

## Origins and Meaning



## Origins and Meaning

**Creation ex nihilo** - creation out of nothing. Before God created the universe, nothing existed. Only God can create out of nothing. **Omnipotence** - the belief that God is all powerful.

### Catholic beliefs about Creation

- Christians refer to the act of God bringing the universe into being as Creation. Nothing existed before God created it.
- Only God creates, because he is omnipotent or all powerful.
- This idea of creating out of nothing is called in Latin, creation ex nihilo.
- This belief can be found in the Bible. It can also be found in the writing of St. Augustine.

### Source of Wisdom St. Augustine Confessions

You, O Lord... made something in the Beginning, which is of yourself, in your Wisdom, which is born of your own substance, and you created this thing out of nothing.

### Differing Christian attitudes to the creation story

The story of creation was written thousands of years before modern science existed. Christians understand the story in different ways, depending on whether they interpret the Bible text literally or non-literally.

Some Christians take a fundamentalist approach. They believe that the account of creation as it appears in the Bible is an accurate account of what happened – this belief is known as **creationism**. They believe that the creation of the world and everything in it took place in six calendar days, exactly as the book of Genesis says. This stems from the view that the Bible is the inspired word of God, which is never mistaken.

Some Christians think that the creation story is not meant to be taken literally. Some try to harmonise the scientific and biblical accounts, claiming that each 'day' of the creation story is actually billions of years.

Catholics read the stories of creation in a symbolic way, believing that they reveal some important things about the nature of the world and humanity. Although the two accounts of creation in Genesis have different details, they share the same truths.

### Jewish Belief

In Jewish belief, God is the creator and source of all life. Each week Jews celebrate the sabbath, recalling that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

Jews share the two stories of creation with Christians as they are in Genesis which is the first book of the Torah, the Jewish Holy book. Some Orthodox Jews believe these stories are true accounts. They were revealed to Moses by God. Others, like Reform Jews, think that the creation accounts are stories which shouldn't be taken as historical facts.

Some Orthodox Jews would have difficulties accepting modern scientific ideas. They would reject evolution and the Big Bang. Others may believe that God started the universe through the Big Bang and has guided the creation of life through evolution. They still have faith in God as a sustainer and provider.

## The Big Bang

- The branch of science which studies the origins of the universe is called cosmology.
- The current scientific thinking about the creation of the world is that it was caused by the **Big Bang**.
- This claims that all matter was originally concentrated into a tiny point which, as a result of a massive explosion in space 13.7 billion years ago, expanded into the universe and is still expanding today.
- This explosion or Big Bang caused particles and atoms to be formed. This led to the formation of stars and planets.
- This theory has led some people, like Stephen Hawking, to doubt the existence of God completely, saying that we can explain how the world without the need for a creator God.
- Powerful telescopes can detect evidence of background radiation which is thought to be left over from the initial expansion at the start of the universe.

### The Catholic view of the Big Bang Theory

- Catholics are happy to accept the Big Bang, as this theory supports their belief that God created the universe out of nothing.
- Many Christians accept the scientific explanations, but say that we must understand Genesis symbolically, not as a scientific explanation of the beginning of the world, but as a theological statement about the world's relationship to God.
- In fact the big Bang Theory was put forward by a Catholic priest, Father Georges Lemaitre.
- Science explains how the Universe came about and Genesis explains why the universe began.

### Conflict between Science and Religion?

Many people think that Science and Religion are in conflict over the origins of the Universe. This is not the case. There is only a problem if a person chooses to interpret the Bible literally. For creationists they are very critical of scientific ideas because they appear to contradict the truth that God has formed all life through his own power.

Even if the scientific view is correct in saying that the universe began with a Big Bang, have they really solved the question of 'where does the universe come from?'. It is reasonable to ask what caused the Big Bang. Christians would argue that this is God.

### Evolution

**Evolution** - the process of mutation and natural selection which leads to changes in species over time to suit particular environments.

### Scientific theories of evolution

- According to science, life came about as a result of a process known as **Evolution**.
- This idea was proposed by Charles Darwin. This is the idea that organisms gradually change and develop into new species by a process known as 'natural selection'.
- Certain characteristics help animals to survive. As they breed and pass these on it leads to new species developing. This is a process which takes millions of years to come about.
- The theory of evolution is supported by fossil records which reveal that a large number of species have died out. DNA research shows that there are many similarities between species.

### Richard Dawkins

- A modern supporter of this view is Richard Dawkins.
- Dawkins is an atheist and believes evolution does away with the need for God and the belief that humans have souls. Dawkins argues that each living organism's body is just a survival machine for its genes and does not serve any other purpose. Humans are just a genetic mutation and are just advanced animals.

### **The Catholic view of Evolution**

- Some Christians do not accept the theory of Evolution; they see it as an attack on their faith, especially if they read the Bible literally.
- Catholics do not interpret the Bible literally. Genesis needs to be understood symbolically.
- Pope John Paul II restated the view of pope Pius XII that there is no conflict between evolution and the teaching of the Christian faith.
- What is important to Catholics is not whether God chose to create through the process of evolution over many millions of years but that in Genesis, God created with purpose and so everything that exists is part of His loving plan.
- This is what is important for Catholics to understand; not *how* it happened but *why* it happened.

**Pope John Paul II's Message To The Pontifical Academy Of Sciences: On Evolution** In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII has already affirmed that there is no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of the faith regarding man and his vocation... Taking into account the scientific research of the era, and also the proper requirements of theology, the encyclical *Humani Generis* treated the doctrine of "evolutionism" as a serious hypothesis, worthy of investigation and serious study.

The Pope's message sees no conflict between evolution and Catholic belief.

### **Catholic views on the origin and sanctity of human life**

#### **Sanctity of Life**

- Most people, religious or not, would accept that human life is special and should be cared for.
- Catholics believe each person is unique because God made them.
- The creation of humans was unlike the rest of creation because they were made in a unique way and in the Image of God. The Latin term for in the Image of God is **Imago Dei**.
- The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred and that everyone has a right to life which should be protected and valued at every stage.

**Saint Catherine of Siena- the image of God (Imago Dei) says that we are made in God's image and our soul is made in the image of God.**

**Imago Dei** 'In the image of God'. The belief that human beings are uniquely a reflection of God's personhood. Unlike the other animals, human beings are rational, free and moral.

St. Catherine had a deep faith. She spent her life with outcasts and sinners showing them that they were created and loved by God. She has two important messages from her writing and referred to humans as 'she'

***"Her dignity is that of her creation, seeing that she is in the image of God."***

**Love** – God creates out of love. The fact that humans are made with dignity and in God's image shows how much he loves them.

*“You are taken with love for her, for by love indeed you created her.”*

### **Jewish Beliefs about Sanctity of Life.**

For Jews, God is creator, he alone gives and takes life. Genesis (the first book of the Torah) teaches that humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-27) and life is precious. In the Tenakh there are references to a relationship with God even before birth (Psalm 139) and Jeremiah (1). The Ten Commandments, believed to have been given to Moses, also forbids the taking of a life.

### **Views on abortion**

Abortion has been widely debated since it was legalised in Britain in 1967. Those against abortion think it is morally unacceptable to kill unborn babies. Others argue if a baby is going to be born with a severe illness or disability it would be kinder to permit an abortion.

A key question in the debate is, “when does a person become a person?” Some argue from the moment of conception. Therefore, terminating a pregnancy is the same as murder.

Others would argue a person only “begins” when they are first aware of their own existence or when independent life is possible. Therefore, terminating a foetus is not the same as murder.

The debate splits broadly into two camps:

<b>Pro-life</b>	<b>Pro-choice</b>
The idea that abortion is always wrong and every human (including embryos) has a right to life.	The idea that a woman should be able to choose what happens to her own body. This includes choosing to end a pregnancy.

### **The Catholic Church and Abortion**

- The Catholic Church is against Abortion in all circumstances because all human life is sacred.
- The Catholic Church teaches that life begins at conception. It is God who gives life at this moment and it is the start of a human being's relationship with God.
- Abortion is therefore seen as murder, a great moral evil, which is against one of the Ten Commandments: 'Do not murder'. The foetus has a right to life and termination is a great moral evil.
- Instead of having an abortion the Church would encourage those in this situation to give a child up for adoption.
- If a mother's life is in danger during the pregnancy (for example ectopic pregnancy) then action to save the life of the mother even if it threatens or destroys the life of the unborn child is acceptable. The intention is to save the mother, the effect on the child is a side effect. This is known as the **Principle of Double Effect**.

### **Other Christian Views**

There is no single view on abortion in Christianity. Some fundamentalist Christians think abortion is never acceptable. Most Christians agree that it is not a good thing, but sometimes it is 'the lesser of two evils'. Some situations where abortion might be the best course of action are:

- If the pregnancy is the result of rape, an abortion might be the best option for the quality of life of the woman.
- If continuing the pregnancy might be dangerous to the woman's physical or mental health, then abortion should be allowed.
- if the child is likely to be severely disabled.

### **Humanist views on Abortion**

There is not one single humanist view on abortion. Humanists value happiness and personal choice. In making a decision they would look at the evidence, consequences and rights and wishes of everyone involved. Some humanists are against abortion except in extreme circumstances because they argue that we should take responsibility for our actions. Life is not sacred but is worthy of the highest respect. Generally, they would take a pro-choice stance and many humanists campaigned for abortion to be legalised in the 1960s so that unsafe, illegal abortions shouldn't take place. At the heart of the debate is whether the rights of the foetus outweigh the rights of the mother. Quality of life would be seen as more important than preserving life at all costs. They believe that abortion is often the most morally acceptable choice to make, and that ultimately, it is a personal choice which should be made considering all the facts and consequences.

### **A humanist's view about sanctity of Life – Peter Singer**

- Peter Singer is a humanist and has some controversial ideas in relation to Abortion and the value of life.
- He argues that even though all human life has value, it is not of equal value.
- If person has no ability to think, relate to others or experience then their life has limited value.
- Therefore, embryos, new born babies, are all examples of biological, but 'non-human persons'.
- Therefore It is morally acceptable to take the lives of these 'non-human persons' if it will bring about less suffering and greater happiness.
- This not only applies to abortion, but also euthanasia (allowing someone suffering from a serious illness to die). A brain dead person, for example, has no real value and therefore euthanasia is acceptable.

#### **Speciesism**

- Singer argues a healthy conscious animal such as a gorilla has more mental capacity and is more of a 'person' than a baby or an elderly person with dementia.
- Singer argues that animals have similar responses to humans, in that they feel pleasure and pain and therefore their interests must be taken in to account.
- Therefore arguing that human life is more important than any other type of life is wrong. This is the same as being racist. It is discriminatory and 'speciesist'

### **Catholic response to Singer's views**

Catholics would argue that humans remain a 'person' whether they are conscious or not, even when they are asleep, in a coma or haven't yet been born.

Catholics would agree that animals should be treated with care and looked after. As stewards of creation they have an obligation to do this.

## The Genesis accounts of Creation

### Comparison of the first and second creation accounts

- The first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, Chapters 1–3, gives two accounts of creation.
- Most Catholics read the stories of creation in a symbolic way, believing that they reveal some important things about the nature of God and humanity.

<b>A summary of Genesis 1-2:3</b>	
Day 1	God created light and separated it from the darkness. God named the light 'day' and the darkness 'night'.
Day 2	God created the sky. God used the sky to divide the water that covered the earth into two halves.
Day 3	God created the sky. God used the sky to divide the water that covered the earth into two halves. God created dry land. The water he called "seas" and the ground "land".
Day 4	God created the sun, moon and stars to light up the sky, govern night and day and mark the passing of time.
Day 5	God created all the species of animals that live on earth.
Day 6	God created the human beings and put them in charge of everything on the earth that had been created.
Day 7	God rested, blessed the seventh day and made it holy. The universe was complete.

**Transcendence** – God exists above and beyond creation which makes Him unlike anything else that exists.

**Eternal** – that God creates heaven and earth "In the beginning", shows that he already existed, God has no beginning.

**Omnipotent** – God is all powerful, creation happens just by him commanding it (Gen 1.3). Before he creates nothing exists. He creates from nothing, Creation ex nihilo.

<b>A summary of Genesis 2:4-24</b>
God created a man, called Adam, out of dust and breathes life into him.
God provides him everything he needed in the Garden of Eden, but told him not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
God creates all the creatures and Adam names them all but none are suitable to be his partner.
God puts Adam to sleep and creates Eve, a woman, from his rib.
Their lives were perfect until they disobeyed him, which led to God banishing them from the Garden of Eden forever.

As well as agreeing with many of the themes of the first account this one shows God is:

**Omnibenevolent** – God creates out of love. He needs nothing but provides everything humans need. God does not want man to be lonely so he creates other species to keep him company, and he allows Adam to name them, but he knew that these were not suitable companions for Adam so he created Eve and they became one flesh

**Immanent**- This means that God is not distant from the world, but is involved in it, he is close to the first humans and does everything for them.

### **Catholic beliefs about nature of human beings and their relationship with creation**

In both narratives the message is that human life is special and sacred. Humans are different from all other animals and have a special responsibility to take care of the World.

**Sanctity of life** – Humans are created last in Genesis 1 and are the high point of God’s creation. In Genesis 2 God personally created Adam and Eve, Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam’s rib. As part of his creation, God reflects again that all that he has made is **good** which includes human beings.

**Image of God** – Humans were created imago Dei-in the image of God, ‘So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.’ (Gen 1.27) which makes them sacred and holy and unlike any other animal.

**Stewards of God’s Creation** – God commands that humans have authority over nature and a responsibility to take care of it. In Genesis 1 God creates humans to rule over his creatures. In the second Genesis account Adam is put in the garden to ‘work it and take care of it’ but his authority is seen when God asks him to name all the animals.

### **The importance of caring for the Environment for Catholics (Stewardship)**

In both stories of creation human beings are the most important part of creation, but they are still creatures and therefore part of Creation. They are not the Creator, but God made humans superior to the rest of Creation by giving them reason and free will. This is the reason why God made humans stewards of the world.

Therefore Catholics should be concerned about looking after the environment and the planet. Catholics need to work to protect the planet, cutting down on pollution, care for animals and make sure that the world is in the best shape to pass on to future generations.

For Christians the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love their neighbour. The idea of neighbour means not just those close to us, but people in different countries. Catholics should be concerned about those who suffer badly from climate change.

The Catholic Church also teaches that every individual has a duty to contribute to the good of society. This is called the common good. Catholics should act justly and seek justice for others, especially the poor. This approach is most likely to lead to good things for everyone everyone would benefit from living in a healthy well cared for environment.



### **Humanist attitudes to Creation and Stewardship**

Humanists would agree with Christians that we need to look after the world, but for different reasons. For humanists, human life has come about randomly because of evolution. No creator God is needed. Humans can use their reason to make ethical decisions. This is what makes humans superior to other animals. Human beings can act to give their lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same. They would say we need to be stewards of the world out of a concern for human beings and other animals, not because we were commanded to do it by a creator God. They would say we should work for a more sustainable world, causing as little harm to the environment as possible. This position is based on reason not because God has commanded it.

### **Catholic understanding of revelation and Inspiration in the Bible**

Catholics believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. God made use of specific people who wrote in a human language, and did so at a particular time and place in history. Not everything they wrote might have been historically or literally accurate. Catholics must work carefully to determine exactly what a sacred author is saying to be true, and when an author is writing metaphorically using as an image to help bring out the truth more clearly.

This is seen as the Holy Spirit giving **inspiration** to believers, who respond by accepting the message and sharing it with other people. As the message comes from God, for believers the Bible has a great **authority**, impacting how they live their lives. Christians should be guided by the teachings in the Bible.

The Christian Bible is divided into two main parts; The Old Testament and New Testament. The word **testament** means an agreement or a promise. So, the Old Testament deals with how God looked after the Jewish people and the New Testament deals with how God sent his Son, Jesus, for the whole world. The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew, the Jewish language, and the New Testament in Ancient Greek.

### **Origins of the Bible**

It took about 350 years for the books that we now know as the Bible to be accepted as authentic records of Christian beliefs. The **Synod** of Hippo in 393CE decided which texts should be included in the Bible. For a book to be accepted into the New Testament it had to fit the following rules:

- It had to be accepted by all Christians.
- The work had to go back to the apostles.
- It had to have an early date.
- It had to agree with other presentations of Christian beliefs.

The words of the Bible have been very carefully preserved over the centuries. The first Bibles were hand written and copies were made so other people could read them. We have copies, or parts of copies, which go back almost to the time when the books were first written.

### **Different Christian views on Genesis**

A minority of fundamentalist Christians believe that the Bible is the literal word of God. For example, they believe that God created the world in a single week and that everything was made perfectly at that time. They would reject the Theory of Evolution. They believe the Holy Spirit *dictated* the Bible and that no one

should question anything that the Bible teaches because it comes from God. Where there appear to be contradictions, they think that this just shows that people do not yet have enough understanding.

This approach rejects any kind of compromise with science.

For Catholics Genesis 1-3 has to be considered as a myth. It is not meant to be read as literally true. It is a story whilst not being “true”, contains great “truths”. As a result, there is no problem accepting evolution and the Big Bang as the Bible is not a science book. The creation story in Genesis is a poetic reflection on the significance of God as creator.

**Jewish views The Torah**

The Torah is the first five books of the Tenakh (Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim) and is believed to be the holiest and most important part of scripture for Jews. Moses is believed to have received the Torah from God on Mount Sinai. For Orthodox Jews they believe it was given by God to Moses and must be taken literally and not changed. Many Orthodox Jews will seek to obey the mitzvot as duties in life. Society may change but Jewish teachings don't. The Torah was given in its entirety to Moses and can never be changed. For many Reform and Liberal Jews, it is not necessary to take the scriptures literally and they believe that sometimes they have to be adapted for modern life.

**Art as an expression of worship**

- Catholic art is used to express faith in God and to glorify him.
- Art can be used as a focus for prayer and meditation.
- Artwork demands a personal response, so it helps people to think and reflect on their own beliefs.
- Art can sometimes challenge people; an artist's interpretation of a Biblical theme or belief might make the viewer rethink or re-enforce their beliefs.

**Michelangelo's Creation of Adam**

There are nine scenes from Genesis on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The most famous is the *Creation of Adam*. God is shown as an old bearded man enveloped in a swirling cloak. Adam is naked and positioned on the lower left. God's right arm is extended as if giving the spark of life into Adam, whose left arm is extended in a mirroring pose of God's. The mirroring pose shows humanity's creation in God's image. The fingers of Adam and God do not touch indicating that God, the giver of life, is reaching out to Adam with life.

ADAM	MEANING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adam is on the left of the painting, lying back on the earth from which he has been formed as described in Genesis: “Then the LORD God formed a man from dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Gen 2. 7)</li> <li>● Adam is a perfect human being; young, handsome and strong.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Humans were created by God</li> <li>● God created a perfect world</li> <li>● Humans are made in the image and likeness of God</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adam resembles God, like a son looks like his father.</li> <li>● Adam mirrors the pose of God.</li> </ul>	
<b>GOD</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● God is presented as a dynamic, active figure as if He is hard at work at His greatest creation. God reaches out to the more passive figure of Adam.</li> <li>● God is shown as older than Adam, yet he is strong and powerful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The viewer is reminded of the belief that God is both eternal and all powerful</li> <li>● The difference in age between Adam and God also signifies the parent-child relationship that exists between God and humanity, God is the Father of all Creation</li> </ul>
<b>HAND</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adam and God are seen reaching out to touch each other with their fingertips.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The touch of fingertips represents the spark of life given to all humans by God</li> <li>● human life is sacred and a gift from God.</li> </ul>
<b>CLOUD</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● God is on a cloud, carried by a group of angels. This is a contrast to Adam on Earth</li> <li>● Some believe the cloud is in the shape of a brain showing God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom</li> <li>● Others believe that the cloud represents a womb because of the red background. Also, the green cloth hanging down could be the umbilical cord</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This shows the greatness and transcendence of God</li> <li>● God is omniscient.</li> <li>● This signifies the idea that God gives all life, in the same way that the womb gives life to a new child.</li> </ul>

### **The Tree of Life Apse mosaic at San Clemente**

The Tree of Life Mosaic can be found in the Apse of the Church of San Clemente in Rome. An apse is a semi-circular dome which is positioned above the altar in a church. It dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The mosaic is filled with symbolism. The central image is a cross which merges with many other important symbols.

#### **The Cross and the Tree**

The cross is a crucifixion scene with Mary and St. John beside it and the hand of God the Father above, offering a wreath of victory to Christ.

The Apostles are represented in several different ways in the mosaic. First, the apostles appear as doves surrounding Jesus on the cross. In the Catholic faith doves are symbols of peace and is a sign of the Holy Spirit filling the earth on Pentecost.

At the base of the cross is a tree, considered to be the tree of life. The tree of life is a reference from Revelation 22:2. "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Through the crucifixion, people of all nations are saved. Some may even see the cross itself as being the tree of life: this can be seen with the way the cross emerges out of the tree and is then wrapped with the vines. Branching out from the tree on both sides are swirling vines that cover the entire mosaic branching out to all of humanity.

The tree is also a reminder of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate the fruit bringing sin and death into the world. Jesus reverses the disobedience of Adam by being obedient to God and offering his life on the cross. St. Paul writes about this, calling Jesus the New Adam.

Adam went against God and brought pain, suffering and sin into the world. Jesus was faithful to God and brought a way back to God and a new way to be human.

*"The first man Adam became a living being", the last Adam, a life giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:45-47)*

### **Alpha and Omega and Chi-Rho**

Above the cross is the Chi-Rho symbol with the Greek letter Alpha and Omega either side of it.

- **Chi-Rho** –The symbol looks like the letters X and P which are the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek. It is a very early symbol of Christianity and can be viewed as the first Christian cross.
- **The Alpha and Omega** -. They are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This reminds Christians that God is the beginning and ending of all things. In the book of Revelation, God speaks of himself as the Alpha and Omega and from early Christian times it was also used to refer to Jesus. We are therefore being reminded that Jesus is eternal because he is God .

### **The Lamb**

At the bottom of the cross there are twelve lambs who are facing towards a lamb at the centre of the picture directly under the Cross. This central lamb is the 'Lamb of God' or Jesus.

A lamb is a symbol of sacrifice. In the story of the Passover in the Old Testament, a lamb was sacrificed and its blood put on the doorposts of the homes of the Israelites. The Angel of Death 'passed over' these houses and instead killed the first-born sons of the Egyptians. The event is celebrated by Jews every year in the feast known as the Passover. The Israelites had been saved from their slavery.

Jesus is described as the 'Lamb of God' because his death on the cross saved humanity from their sin and death, just like the sacrificed lamb had saved the Israelites

The twelve lambs are The Apostles. They also lived a sacrificial life, they gave up their homes and families to follow Jesus and spread the word after his death.

### **The Four Evangelists**

Above the apse are symbols for the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

- The image for Matthew is a man. Matthew is the Gospel of Christ's humanity and His humbleness and humility are highlighted throughout the book.
- The image for Mark is a winged lion. The winged lion, which signifies leadership and royalty, is therefore seen as a symbol for Christ as king.
- The image for Luke is a winged ox. An ox was used in sacrifice in the Temple. The winged ox is a reminder of the priestly character of Jesus and of his sacrificial death for the sins of all mankind.
- The image for John is a flying eagle. An eagle is of the sky. This book is totally unlike the three other gospels in that it begins with a high theological meditation upon the meaning of the fact of Christ.

### Catholic social teaching

Catholic Social Teaching is a set of principles about building a just and fair society. At the heart of Catholic social teaching is human dignity. Catholics believe that humans were created in the image and likeness of God, and that each human life is sacred. This is linked to Jesus' teaching that we must 'love our neighbour, as we love ourselves.' This belief has a huge impact on how Catholics support people with disabilities, how they address global inequality and their approach to civil-rights issues.

### Justice, Peace and reconciliation

Peace and reconciliation are at the heart of the gospel. Catholic social teaching condemns the arms trade and supports those who refuse to take up arms on grounds of conscience. It looks towards the kingdom of God and tries to find ways we can create a lasting peace in the world, a peace that is experienced and learnt about from a relationship with God.

### The common good

The Church promotes the idea of the common good. This means seeking the conditions in society that promote the fulfilment of all people, both as individuals and as groups. In order for people to flourish and reach their potential, society needs to promote respect for human rights and the dignity of each person, space to develop spiritual and material well-being, and peace and security within society.

### **Imago dei: Gaudium et Spes**

Since all people possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, the basic equality of all must receive greater recognition...

### Catholic Charity

Being a Catholic isn't limited to prayer, or things they might do on Sundays. It is about putting faith into action, and involves every aspect of life. Catholic Charities try to reflect Catholic beliefs that:

- humans were created in the image and likeness of God, and that each human life is sacred.
- This is linked to Jesus' teaching that we must 'love our neighbour, as we love ourselves.'
- Respect for human life means respecting all of God's creation.

### CAFOD

The major Catholic agency working for world development and supported by the Catholics of England and Wales is CAFOD (Catholic Fund for Overseas Development). It was started by the Catholic bishops of England and Wales in 1962.

- CAFOD is an organisation which tries to live out the Church's mission on a global scale. It tries to help those in need. It promotes **long-term development** so that less-developed countries can support themselves.
- CAFOD also has a disaster fund to help natural disasters and refugees. **Emergency aid** might mean sending food, medicines and shelters to victims of a disaster, or sending blankets and food to war refugees.

- About 5% of CAFOD's budget is spent on educating the people and churches of England and Wales about the need for development and the ways in which Catholics can help less-developed countries.
- CAFOD works for social justice challenging unfairness and tries to bring an end to poverty.

### **SVP**

The St Vincent de Paul Society is an organisation of Catholics who try to help those in need in the UK. Small groups of the SVP, known as conferences, are found in many parishes, schools, universities and hospitals across the UK. Their activities may be any or all the following:

- regular visiting and personal care to help families who are finding it difficult to organise their family or home, help the lonely or bereaved and the housebound, organising children's camps for children from poor or troubled homes, and holiday schemes to provide a break for family carers, to give poor families a holiday or a break, organising stores for unwanted furniture, which can be used when housing the homeless, providing drop-in centres to give lonely people an opportunity to socialise.

### **Britain: A multi-faith Society**

- The UK has a strong Christian heritage, but modern Britain is a multi-faith society, including Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists.
- In the UK people have religious freedom which
- it is up to the individual to choose which religion they practise or not.
- Atheism, not believing in God, is much more common now.

### **What is Inter-faith dialogue?**

This means co-operative, constructive and positive engagement between people of different faiths and people of no faith such as humanists and atheists, to;

- promote mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and harmony
- identify common ground
- engage in shared action for the common good of society

### **Why do we need inter-faith dialogue?**

Living in a multi faith society brings many benefits. Different religious cultures and traditions bring with them a variety of food, clothes, music, and literature in to our lives. With this comes new ways of living and enjoying life. By living and working alongside those from other religious backgrounds we can gain greater tolerance, respect and understanding towards those who have a different viewpoint to us. This leads to harmony and a safe, happy society.

### **The Catholic Church and Inter-faith dialogue**

- Catholics believe they have a duty to put across the Gospel message.
- They believe non-Christian religions have some truth, but only Christianity has the whole truth.
- Other religions should be respected.
- All people are created in the image of God.
- The Popes have spoken out about the importance of respect and tolerance between different faiths. For example, Pope Benedict said, "Together with all people of good will, we aspire to peace. That is why I insist once again: interreligious and intercultural research and dialogue are not an option but a vital need for our time." [February 2007]

- The Vatican II Council stressed the importance of dialogue with Jews and Muslims.