



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**Leaving Certificate**

Ordinary Level and Higher Level

# GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

## **INSIDE**

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THE SYLLABUS**

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**USEFUL RESOURCES AND  
WEBSITES**

**PLUS**

Planning options,  
including a curriculum  
framework for senior cycle



**NCCA**

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment  
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curraicim agus Measúnachta

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# INTRODUCTION

## Religious education in the curriculum

Leaving Certificate programmes place particular emphasis on the preparation of students for the requirements of further education or training, for employment and for their role as participative, enterprising citizens. The syllabuses for Leaving Certificate emphasise the importance of a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, problem-solving, self-reliance, initiative and enterprise. This syllabus has been prepared in the light of these emphases, and of the particular contribution of religious education to a Leaving Certificate programme.

Reflective engagement with the particular knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes which form the foundation of the religious education syllabus will support the development of the inquiry, thinking and problem solving skills central to the Leaving Certificate programme. The emphasis in the syllabus on the value of religious belief and on diversity and mutual respect is of particular relevance for national and global citizenship.

The student who pursues this course of study must assume the roles of critical questioner and reflective searcher – roles which are at the heart of a commitment to lifelong learning. Religious education in the Leaving Certificate programme calls for the exploration of issues such as meaning and value, the nature of morality, the development and diversity of belief, the principles of a just society and the implications of scientific progress. Such exploration takes place in personal, local and global contexts and will be a valuable resource for the active, participatory citizenship envisaged in the aim of education.

## The aims of religious education for Leaving Certificate

Leaving Certificate religious education offers continuity and progression from the Junior Certificate programme. The aims outlined below are the aims for religious education for assessment and certification in the post-primary school.

- 1 To foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples of all ages and at all times.
- 2 To explore how this search for meaning has found and continues to find expression in religion.
- 3 To identify how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live and continue to have an impact on personal lifestyle, inter-personal relationships and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts.
- 4 To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life.
- 5 To contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student.

In proposing the same aims for the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate courses, the relationship between the two programmes is emphasised. While the Junior Certificate programme offers students a strong basis on which to approach study at Leaving Certificate level, students who have not studied the course for Junior Certificate should be able to engage in the Leaving Certificate course of study. This ab initio study is facilitated by the structure of Section A which acts as an introduction and overview for the rest of the course.

While the aims for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate are common, the depth of engagement with the topics for study is different and is clearly indicated by the objectives for each section and by the outcomes associated with each part of the course.

## Aims of the guidelines

These guidelines are designed to support teachers of Leaving Certificate religious education in planning their programmes, in designing the learning experiences for their students, in assessing and evaluating those experiences and in guiding the students in preparing for the Leaving Certificate examination. In preparing these guidelines, particular account was taken of the strong tradition of active and experiential methodologies associated with senior cycle religious education. Building on this tradition, the guidelines also draw upon adult learning approaches, and on some of the innovative approaches to learning emerging as a result of research into how young adults are motivated, how they learn, and how they evaluate their own learning.

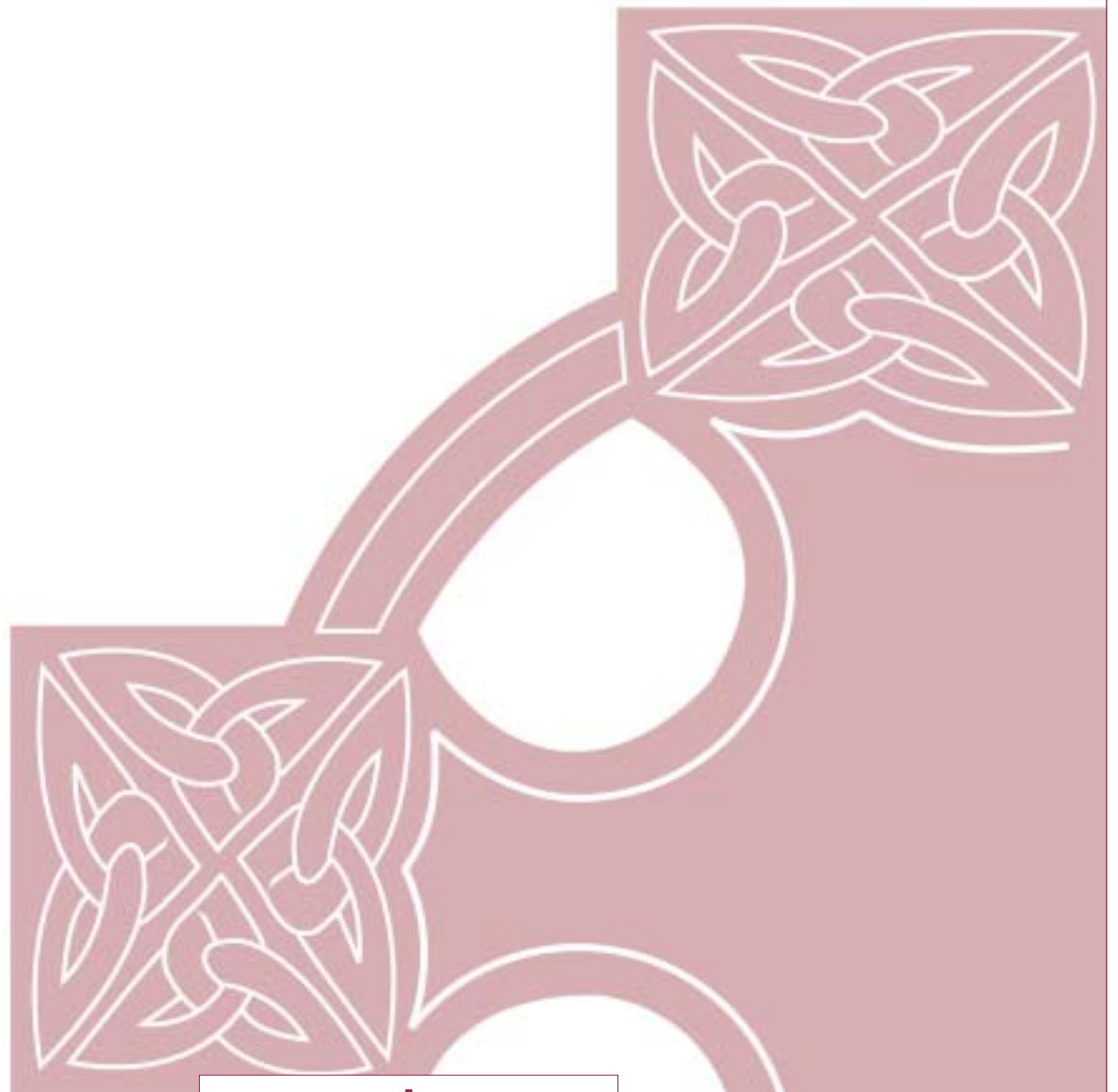
It is vital that these guidelines are used in conjunction with the syllabus. Teachers should check the syllabus for differentiation between higher and ordinary level material.

As with all teacher guidelines prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, they are published initially in draft form. As teachers introduce the syllabus to students, as students work with the topics and outcomes, further material will be developed to provide additional support. The guidelines are always an unfinished project. They can only be completed when the professional insights of teachers working with the syllabus in classrooms are included. This is particularly the case for a subject like religious education, included in the Leaving Certificate for the first time.



# PART 1

## THE SYLLABUS



# PART 1

## THE SYLLABUS

### Syllabus structure, sequencing and options

The syllabus consists of 10 sections divided into three parts. It is recommended that Leaving Certificate religious education be timetabled for 180 hours.

#### Part one

This section is **obligatory** for all students.

**Section A:** The search for meaning and values

#### Part two

Students must study **two** sections from the following:

**Section B:** Christianity: origins and contemporary expressions

**Section C:** World religions

**Section D:** Moral decision-making

#### Part three

Students must study **one** of the following for the terminal examination. The topic selected for examination must be different from those designated for coursework.

**Section E:** Religion and gender

**Section F:** Issues of justice and peace

**Section G:** Worship, prayer and ritual

**Section H:** The Bible: literature and sacred text

**Section I:** Religion: the Irish experience

**Section J:** Religion and science

### Sequencing

It is recommended that the syllabus be taught in the order outlined above. However, this does not preclude the possibility of making linkages with different sections of the syllabus according as the opportunity arises. Coursework can be done in either year one or year two of the programme or spread over two years. It is advisable that it be done either at the end of year one or the beginning of year two in order to avoid unnecessary stress towards the end of the second year.

### Planning

When planning a programme of study it is important to keep in mind the aims, objectives, content and learning outcomes as set out in the syllabus. The assessment of religious education in the Leaving Certificate examination will be based on the objectives relating to knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes within each section of the course as well as the learning outcomes.

## Sample two-year plans of work

### Option 1

The first approach suggests a systematic and thematic presentation of the course following the sequence of the syllabus.

## YEAR ONE

### Term one

#### Section A: The search for meaning and values

- 1.1 The contemporary context
- 1.2 The tradition of search
- 2.1 The language of symbol
- 2.2 The tradition of response
- 3.1 The gods of the ancients
- 3.2 The concept of revelation
- 3.3 Naming God, past and present
- 4.1 Religion as a source of communal values
- 4.2 Secular sources of communal values

### Term two

#### Section B: Christianity: origins and contemporary expressions

- 1.1 The pattern of return
- 1.2 Jesus and his message in contemporary culture
- 2.1 The impact of Rome
- 2.2 Evidence for Jesus of Nazareth
- 2.3 The teachings of Jesus and their impact on the community
- 2.4 Jesus as Messiah
- 3.1 Conflict with establishment
- 3.2 The death and resurrection of Jesus
- 4.1 The first Christian communities as seen through the writing of Paul
- 5.1 Interpreting the message today

### Term three

#### Coursework

- 1 Agree topic
- 2 Research and gather information
- 3 Analyse and reflect on information
- 4 Write up coursework project in draft format



## YEAR TWO

### Term one

**Review, edit and complete coursework.**

#### **Section C: World religions**

- 1.1 Religion as a world-wide phenomenon
- 1.2 Primal religion
- 2.1 A vision of salvation
- 2.2 The community of believers
- 2.3 A celebrating tradition
- 2.4 Challenges to the tradition
- 2.5 Inter-faith dialogue
- 3.1 Cults and sects
- 3.2 Some new religious movements (Higher level)**
- 4.1 A living tradition

### Term two

Any one section from Part 3 can be chosen, excluding those designated for coursework.

### Term three

#### **Section B**

#### **5.2 Trends in Christianity (Higher level)**

#### **Section C**

#### **1.3 The holy (Higher level)**

#### **Part 2: The relationship between Christianity and Judaism (Higher level)**

#### **4.2 Traditions in dialogue (Higher level)**

Revision

**Note:** Higher level students must not only address additional topics but must also engage with the entire programme of work in a more detailed and critical fashion.

## YEAR ONE

<b>Term three</b>	
Coursework	2 Research and gather information
1 Agree topic	3 Analyse and reflect on information
	4 Write up coursework

## YEAR TWO

<b>Term one</b>	<b>Term two</b>
<p>The main emphasis this term is on Section J of the syllabus, making links to other sections as relevant.</p> <p><b>Section J: Religion and science</b></p> <p>2.1 Science and religion go their separate ways – Galileo, the sources of modern science, the various reactions of religion</p> <p>2.1 Science versus religion, science and religion in the enlightenment, Descartes and Newton</p> <p>2.2 Science and religion in tension – Darwin’s context and theories, reaction from one major world religion</p> <p>2.3 Science and religion in dialogue – the ecological crisis, a theologian’s perspective and a scientist’s perspective on the crisis, the understanding of creation in one major world religion</p> <p><b>A contrasting understanding from another religious tradition (Higher level)</b></p> <p><b>Revisit Section C:</b> World religions (year 1)</p> <p>2.1 A vision of salvation – the vision of salvation proposed by two traditions, the image of the human person, the nature of the relationship between the transcendent and the human</p> <p><b>Revisit Section A:</b> The search for meaning and values (year 1)</p> <p>3.1 The gods of the ancients – the concept of God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam</p> <p><b>Section J: Religion and science</b></p> <p><b>3.2 The new physics and religion – emerging questions (Higher level)</b></p> <p>Review, edit and complete coursework.</p>	<p>The main emphasis this term is on Section C of the syllabus, making links to other sections as relevant.</p> <p><b>Section C: World religions</b></p> <p>1.1 Religion as a world-wide phenomenon</p> <p>1.2 Primal religion</p> <p><b>1.3 The holy (Higher level)</b></p> <p><b>Section A: The search for meaning and values</b></p> <p>3.2 The concept of revelation – divine revelation in two different texts and traditions, <b>the meaning of the transcendent in two religious traditions. (Higher level)</b></p> <p><b>Section C: World religions</b></p> <p>2.2 The community of believers (in two traditions)</p> <p>2.3 A celebrating tradition (in two traditions)</p> <p>2.4 A challenge to the tradition</p> <p>2.6 <b>Inter-faith dialogue – the relationship between Christianity and Judaism (Higher level)</b></p> <p>3.1 Cults and sects</p> <p><b>3.3 Some new religious movements (Higher level)</b></p> <p>4.1 A living tradition</p> <p><b>4.2 Traditions in dialogue (Higher level)</b></p>
	<b>Term three</b>
	Revision

**Planning a two-year programme for Leaving Certificate religious education.**

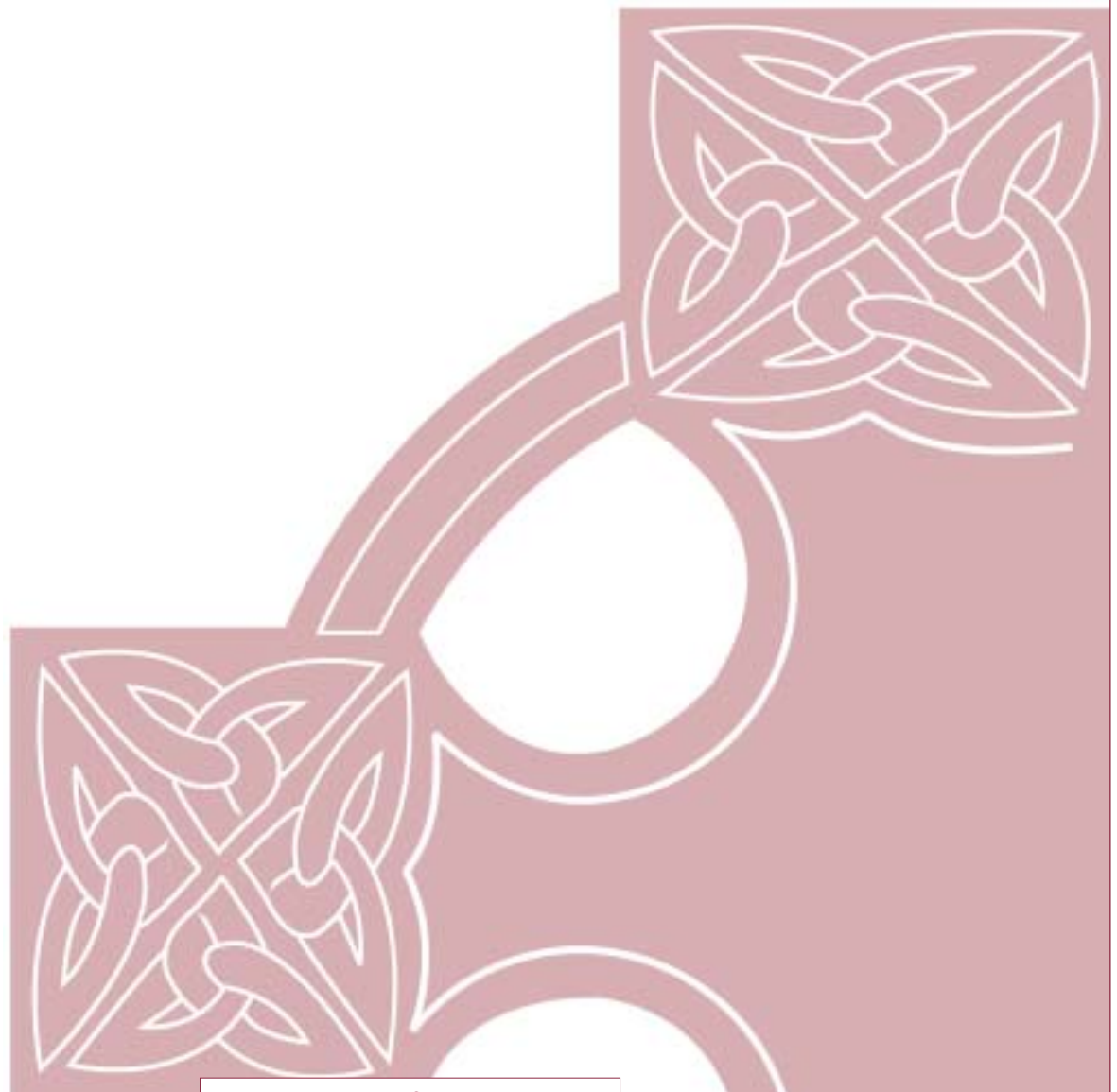
The following blank planning sheet is designed to help you in planning your own programme of work

<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>
<p><b>First term</b></p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p>	<p><b>First term</b></p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Complete coursework</b></p>
<p><b>Second term</b></p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p>	<p><b>Second term</b></p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p>
<p><b>Third term</b></p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p>Section _____ Part _____</p> <p><b>Begin coursework</b></p>	<p><b>Third term</b></p> <p><b>Revision Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

**Note:** It is recommended that Leaving Certificate religious education be timetabled for 180 hours.



**PART 2**  
**TEACHER GUIDELINES**  
**ON EACH SECTION**  
**OF THE SYLLABUS**



# INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, each section of the syllabus is explored in some detail. **These materials are intended as background reading for the teacher and are not intended as a student resource.** The aim is to

- help the teacher gain a better understanding of the core topics and content unpinning each section of the syllabus
- suggest practical and creative ways that a teacher might open up and explore these topics in a classroom context.

Each piece includes

- background information for the teacher on the key topics of the syllabus
- suggested student activities
- suggested teaching approaches
- links to other sections of the syllabus which may have relevance
- useful resources and websites.

The resource materials listed are not exhaustive, but represent a sample of those available and suggested by teachers. It is always advisable to check the suitability of website material before recommending it for student use.

In the pages that follow teachers will find a valuable resource for class planning to be used in addition to the syllabus, which is always the source document for teachers. Teachers should consult the syllabus in order to ensure that the learning outcomes and objectives for each section of the syllabus are achieved.

# SECTION A

## The Search for Meaning and Values

This section of the syllabus is divided into four parts: the first focuses on the context within which the search for meaning and values takes place, the second on the response to the quest for meaning and values, the third on belief in God as a locus for this quest, and the fourth on the manner in which religion both responds to and shapes these great questions of life.



### Focusing activity

A visit to the Chester Beatty Library or its website could be a good introduction to this part of the course.

### Part one: The quest for meaning

This section is divided into two parts: the first looks at the contemporary context for the search for meaning and values, and the second situates that search in the larger cultural context of core questions that have shaped the history of philosophy. The purpose of this division is to assist the teacher to ground the search for meaning and values in the contemporary experience of the students, but equally to illustrate the point that the questions that articulate this quest are ones that transcend all cultural and generational boundaries. Not only does every person seek for meaning and value in their lives but there is also a common set of questions that highlight this search. Examples of these key questions include

- is there a goal and purpose to life and if so, what is it and how do we attain it?
- is there such a thing as the good life and, if so, what is it and how can we know what it is?
- what causes suffering in the world, how ought we cope with it, and will we ever be able to eliminate it?

One of the key insights of this section of the syllabus is the acknowledgement that these questions are to

be found in each and every recorded culture since the dawn of civilization.

In 1.1 students are also asked to identify cultural factors that can block the quest for meaning and values and to give examples of the contemporary phenomenon of indifference to the search for meaning. When addressing this issue it might be helpful to recognise two very different forms of indifference that have roots in

- an unquestioned acceptance of the logic of instrumental reasoning
- a failure to find any meaning in life.

We are becoming aware of the increasing dominance in contemporary culture of instrumental reasoning – that consumerist type of reasoning that promotes the ‘logic of the marketplace’, where everything and everybody has a price and a shelf life. Such an ethos marginalises the type of values that are to be found in virtue ethics; foundational issues of meaning and value tend to be set to one side in favour of more short-term pragmatic concerns. Obviously, this cultural ethos can contribute to a climate of indifference. However, indifference is a complex attitude that can also in many cases be a mask that hides a deeply pessimistic attitude to life and/or an experience of emptiness or indeed a failure to find any meaning in life. Such an attitude may have its origins in the experience of illness, loneliness, unemployment or the experience of rejection in a relationship. Expressing itself in phrases such as ‘So what’, ‘It does not matter’. This indifference proclaims not just that there is nothing to believe in, but no one to believe.



## Syllabus links

Section J: Religion and science - Part 1.



## Student activity

- In looking at the contemporary context (1:1) students are encouraged to give examples from contemporary culture – music, art, literature or youth culture – that illustrate the human search for meaning. Students can work in small groups to come up with their own examples.
- Some examples might include:
  - Patrick Kavanagh: *The Great Hunger*
  - Picasso's painting: *Guernica*
  - U2: *I still haven't found what I'm looking for*
  - Diana Ross: *Do you know where you're going to?*



## Teaching approaches

In developing this theme, students are asked to provide examples of key questions surrounding the search for meaning and values. It is important to invite students to generate their own 'big' questions.

Examples might include

- what makes for happiness?
- why be good?
- why do bad things happen to good people?
- why is there evil in the world?
- can good come out of suffering?

Students might be asked to identify views of happiness in modern life as found in the media. For example, the story of a person winning the Lotto.



## Resources

Cassidy, Sheila, *Audacity to Believe*

Keenan, Brian, *An Evil Cradling*

Tuohy, D. and Cairns, P. (2000) *Youth 2K: Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture*  
Dublin: Marino Institute of Education

Frankl, Viktor, *Man's Search for Meaning*

For some quotes from this text, see:

<http://www.geocities.com/~websinds/frankl/quotes.htm>.

Teaching resources on Frankl are available on [www.teachnet.ie](http://www.teachnet.ie) (see senior cycle RE)

Wiesel, Elie, *Night*, Crossword publications

See also the Logos web site ([www.materdei.ie/logos](http://www.materdei.ie/logos)), section D, part two where there are two articles on this theme

- 'The Search for meaning'
- 'Sources of meaning in human life'.

There is also a short article in section D, part five entitled, 'Apathy and religious indifference'.

The introduction of key figures in the history of philosophy into the syllabus at this point (1:2) is designed to provide us with another point of entry to reflection on the key questions that frame the human search for meaning and values. The nature and purpose of philosophy is to reflect on these foundational questions, giving recognition to the viewpoint that what is unique to the human species is the search for wisdom. One way of understanding the history of philosophy is to see it as the record of human beings search for wisdom as the foundational questions of meaning and value are re-shaped by each successive generation and culture.

In 1.2 students are required to be able to present a summary of two of the main ideas of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They are also required to be able to explain why each idea was important in the development of philosophy. Each of these philosophers is grappling with issues that are part of universal human experience. For example, one could argue that in the Socratic dialogues such as the Gorgias and the Protagoras we witness a struggle between two diametrically opposed ways of viewing the world that is played out daily on our contemporary world stage. Against the Sophists, Socrates argues that

- it is better to suffer evil than to inflict evil
- justice cannot be regarded as the set of rules laid down by the strong on the principle that might is right
- we are obliged to seek the truth rather than simply to persuade others that our views are true
- the good life is not identical with pleasure.

In all cases, Socrates in opposition to the Sophists, argued for the objectivity of values such as justice,



goodness and truth. Furthermore, he believed passionately that the human person is both capable of discerning the true nature of these values and is obliged to adhere to them. The alternative as he saw it is a type of moral anarchy that enshrines the power principle that only the fittest survive. Today, we can see that this debate is just as relevant as our society seeks to challenge the subjectivist standpoints of both emotivism and power politics.

The contribution of Plato is crucial in refining the Socratic belief in the objectivity of concepts such as truth, goodness, justice, etc. His theory of *Ideas* is an expression of this conviction. Based on an intuition that what is worthwhile, valuable and real must be

- i something which is eternal rather than finite
- ii something that is objective not subjective – whose existence or value does not depend on me
- iii something which is immutable, not transient.

It was Plato's conviction that the universal or the Form/Idea is that which really exists. The individual or the particular is merely a copy of the Form/Idea. It exists only to the extent that it participates in the Form/Idea. Beauty, truth, goodness, justice, etc, really exist. They are universals that are eternal, objective, immutable, spiritual and real. The writings of Plato remind us of the manner in which the goal and purpose of life, the search for meaning and value is shaped by the universal love of beauty, truth, goodness and love. These concepts are not just figments of my imagination or subjective creations; beauty is not simply in the eye of the beholder, nor can the good life be determined simply by that which I feel is good (emotivism). Beauty, truth, goodness, and love really exist, and furthermore, they are immortal.

Despite its obvious attractions, Plato's theory of *Ideas* is not without its critics. In particular, many would have little sympathy with its dualist character – the creation of two separate worlds of Form (immaterial/universal) and Matter (material/particular). Furthermore, no less a philosopher than Aristotle, Plato's student, would fundamentally disagree with Plato's contention that it is the universals or the Forms/Ideas that really exist. For Aristotle what is primary is the individual – it is the individual substance that really exists. The universal is an abstraction that has no separate existence.

However, even if one were to accept these criticisms of Plato's philosophy it does not take away from the genius of this philosopher and his extraordinary contribution to the history of European civilization. His conviction that there is a higher rational standard according to which we can judge human behaviour is one that is not only held by Aristotle, but one that is shared by Aquinas and the Natural Law theorists that

follow in his path to this day. This is a radical standpoint that directly challenges an increasing acceptance of relativism in the contemporary 'western' world. The relevance of objective standards continues to manifest itself in their application by international jurists in cases of crimes against humanity, etc.

The continuing relevance of classical thought is also demonstrated by Aristotle's insistence that to understand something's essence is to grasp its potentiality. He urges us to think beyond immediate experience and to attend to the goal, end or purpose (telos) of all living beings, and as he recognized, we only grasp our goal in life if we are conscious of the species to which we belong. For Aristotle, every being (substance) is composed of 'matter and form' – prime matter and substantial form. The matter is what makes me unique whereas the form tells me the species to which I belong. Thus, just as in biological terms we only understand an acorn if we grasp its potentiality to become a fully developed oak tree, so too, in terms of the meaning and value of an individual human life, Aristotle would urge us to look beyond the immediate horizon and to think instead of the human form – the potentiality of human nature.

Aristotle is convinced that the question of meaning is ultimately linked to questions about the goal or purpose of life. Furthermore, he recognizes that the realisation that every living organism exists for a purpose is a powerful argument in favour of an ordered universe and the existence of an intelligent being who is the cause of this order. In common with Plato, Aristotle maintains that there is a right, rational and natural order to the quest for individual and social self-realisation, an order that finds its articulation in an analysis of the substantial form, i.e. human nature.

As the syllabus points out (1.2) Aristotle is also universally recognised for his contribution to scientific thought and principles. Science of every kind is dedicated to explaining the reason for experiences through the process of uncovering the existence of a cause or causes of these experiences. Not only did Aristotle provide the first systematic analysis of the nature of causation but he also recognised that the intelligibility of the universe and thus the possibility of physics, depended on the acknowledgement of a first cause, which he named God.

Higher level students are asked to explore the development of philosophy in Ancient Greece with special reference to the Sophists. The most valuable entry point into this world is to reflect upon the extraordinary beginnings of philosophy in that small geographical area in the eastern Mediterranean that lies between Ionia on the western seaboard of present day Turkey and the small communities that

populated southern Italy and Sicily. In the 6th century BC, the Greek culture of that area gave rise to a breakthrough in civilization that has few if any parallels. The speculations that marked the beginnings of a quest to understand the world were founded on the remarkable intuitions that

- a the cosmos is no mere plaything of the gods but is rather an ordered universe
- b this order is intelligible, i.e. it is accessible to human reason.

The idea that the universe is open to rational rather than mythological explanation is what marks the early Greek thinkers as being truly epochal. Today's scientific and technological world would be unthinkable without this leap in human understanding.

The earliest philosophers are commonly called the Pre-Socratic philosophers. They concerned themselves with such foundational questions as

- a is there a unity to the cosmos, and if so, of what does it consist?
- b how does one account for the individuality or the diversity of experience?
- c how does one account for that most universal of all experiences namely movement, change or becoming?

The last question accompanies the universal experience of birth, growth, decay and death. In its confident belief in the power of the human mind to unlock the secrets of the universe, this ancient Greek culture can truly be said to be the birthplace of European civilization.

The following century saw the rise of Athens to become the undisputed centre of Greek culture. In the latter part of the 5th century there appeared in Athens a class of thinkers (Sophists) who found employment as itinerant teachers. Among the practical arts that the Sophists taught, the most important was rhetoric – the art of persuasion. Their influence on early classical education was significant although not universally perceived to be beneficial. Some of their oft-quoted comments on the nature of morality and the best way for a city to be governed include 'man is the measure of all things' (Protagoras), and 'justice is simply the interest of the stronger' (Thrasymachus). These viewpoints would seem to offer grounds for the accusation that the Sophists favoured a society that would be prepared to sacrifice all commitment to truth, goodness and justice on the altar of moral relativism and political expediency. Whatever the truth of this criticism, there is no doubting the seriousness of the struggle between Socrates and the Sophists (see above).

In addition to the study of classical philosophy, higher level students are also required to be able to outline three key moments in the history of philosophy. Inevitably, there will be an element of subjective preference in any choice of this nature. However, no list would be adequate that ignored the philosopher Descartes and the extended moment in history that gave rise to Modernity. In addressing the factors that influenced the rise of Modernity, teachers should draw the attention of students to the effects of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the development of modern science.



### Student activity

Compare Plato's idea of beauty with contemporary advertising which sells an image of beauty.



### Resources

Teachers might find helpful the recent series of books entitled *Very Short Introductions* published by Oxford University Press.

In particular see

Annas, J. (2000) *Ancient Philosophy*  
Oxford: OUP Very Short Introductions Series

Barnes, J. (2000) *Aristotle*  
Oxford: OUP Very Short Introductions Series

Taylor, C. (2000) *Socrates*  
Oxford: OUP Very Short Introductions Series

Resources that will facilitate student engagement with the world of philosophy include

Delius, C. ed. (2000) *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Cologne, Konemann

Gardner, J. (1995) *Sophie's World*  
London, Phoenix House

Robinson, D and Groves, G. *Introducing Plato*. Icon Books (A cartoon book)

Movie links – *Dead Poet's Society*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Lord of the Flies*.

This section also links with the Junior Certificate classical studies syllabus.

## Part two: The response to the quest

Divided into two parts: the language of symbol and the tradition of response, the main focus of this section is to highlight the manner in which, from the earliest recorded civilisations, the search for meaning finds expression in the language of symbol and myth, a language that highlights a sense of the sacred. One excellent resource for the teacher is Mircea Eliade. His writings offer a penetrating analysis of the mythologies of ancient communities and how these myths express insights from these communities on the meaning and destiny of the human species.

In 2.1 the syllabus explores the language of symbol. Symbols emerge in the formulation of responses to the questions of life because of the transcendent dimension of the experiences that give rise to these questions. Mircea Eliade, amongst others, explores the power of symbolic language on individuals, groups and societies. An example of one of the many themes explored by Eliade is that of 'ascent'. As he explains it, the symbol of ascent is used in many civilizations to mark a breakthrough to a different level of existence. Death, for example, is about transcending the human state and passing to the beyond. Typically, the journey to some 'higher sphere' is depicted or understood as an upward journey, a trudge up a mountain path, a grappling. In Indian myth, the first person to die, Yama, leads others through the mountain passes. In Egypt, Ra uses a ladder to climb from earth to heaven. Australian aborigines spoke about a great tree which souls climbed to get to heaven. Reaching heaven, then, is an ascent. In religious texts this symbol of ascent appears frequently – Jacob's ladder, Mohammad seeing a ladder rising from the temple, St. John of the Cross depicts mystical perfection as the ascent of Mount Carmel.



### Student activity

Invite students to take a particular life event and look at how different religious traditions mark this event using symbolic language.



### Syllabus links

Section G: Worship, prayer and ritual - Part 1.1.

Section H: The Bible: literature and sacred text - Part 3.3.



## Resources

Teachers might find the following helpful:

Eliade, M. (1976) *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*  
London: Fontana Library, Collins, 5th Impression.

Frankfurt, H. (1974) *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*  
London: Penguin Books - chapters 1 and 2, entitled respectively, 'Myth and Reality' and 'Egypt: The nature of the Universe'. Chapter 7, entitled 'The Good Life' contains an excellent treatment of the epic of *Gilgamesh*.

## Tradition of response

In 2.2 the syllabus explores the tradition of response. Students are asked to outline three myths from ancient cultures that attempt to answer key questions. These myths could include

- the Genesis creation account
- the epic of Gilgamesh
- the myths of ascent introduced above.

Ireland is fortunate to have an abundance of ancient burial mounds that offer the possibility of seeing at first hand the power of symbolic language to reveal hidden meanings. Perhaps the most celebrated of these sites are the geographically adjacent burial mounds of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth that are called passage graves. The notion of passage from one form of being to another seems to be a constant in world mythologies and religions. It gives expression to a complex set of experiences such as the passage from darkness to light, from the womb to the world, from life to death, to a new existence after death. In particular, myths associated with the symbol of passage are linked to a journey to the centre, where the centre is seen as paradise, the place where heaven and earth meet.

The philosopher Brendan Purcell uncovers the rich abundance of symbols that are evident in Newgrange. Among the symbols at Newgrange that he uncovers are those of place and time, the symbols of partnership or marriage, the symbols of belonging to a cosmic oneness, and the symbol of passing through death to the heart of being.



## Resources

Purcell, B. (1985) 'In Search of Newgrange: Long Night's Journey into Day', in Kearney, R. ed. *The Irish Mind* Dublin: Wolfhound Press pp 39 – 55 and 319 – 323.

*In Search of Ancient Ireland*, a series of documentary videos. Littlebird productions.

[www.mythicjourneys.org/big/myth](http://www.mythicjourneys.org/big/myth) Creation myths from around the world.

The syllabus (2.2) requires students to be able to

- i provide evidence of the existence of a sense of the sacred in contemporary society
- ii identify three key people in the humanist tradition
- iii define and explain atheism and agnosticism.

Higher level students are asked to briefly outline two cosmologies of modern science and explain, in more detail, non-religious responses to the search for meaning.

In response to (i), students might examine statistics from the European Values Study 1999/2000 that show evidence of a marked reluctance on the part of secular Europe to ignore the sacred character of key events in life. One example of this is the very high percentage of adults who think it important to have religious ceremonies at births, marriages and death.

In response to (ii), one might draw attention to key figures in the Humanist tradition such as Erasmus (1466 – 1536), Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Albert Camus (1913 – 1960). The differences between these three philosophers remind us of the broad character of the Humanist tradition.

In response to (iii), there is a useful set of definitions on the LOGOS web site [www.materdei.ie/logos](http://www.materdei.ie/logos). in section D, part five under the heading of 'The Challenges to Faith'.



## Resources

In pursuing this theme teachers might find the following helpful:

Article by Jeff Chu, 'O Father Where Art Thou?' A study of European religious practice. Time Magazine, 16.6.2003.

Cassidy. E. ed. (2002) *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* Dublin: Veritas

[www.europeanvalues.nl](http://www.europeanvalues.nl)

Any internet search engine will find numerous websites on humanism which explain their ideas.



## Syllabus links

Section I: Religion: The Irish experience - Part 1.1

Section J: Religion and science - Part 3.1.

## Part three: Concepts of God

This section is divided into three parts:

- i the Gods of the ancients
- ii the concept of revelation
- iii naming God, past and present.

The overriding purpose of this section is to help students to reflect on the way in which the concept of God is bound up with the search for meaning and values in religious traditions. The manner of this search shapes the way in which God or gods are portrayed.

In Part 2 students will have reflected upon the wide range of mythic stories that illuminate the search for meaning and value in ancient cultures. This is a recurring theme and one that is developed in 3.1, a section that examines the manner in which God or Gods are portrayed in these stories. One of the most rewarding ways in which the teacher could introduce this theme would be to introduce students to the wide variety of gods in Hinduism and to the roles they play in the search for meaning and value in the Hindu religion.

To what extent Hinduism is a polytheistic religion is an open question but polytheism is the norm rather than the exception in the religions of the world. There are three great exceptions to this rule, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam – the three classical monotheistic religions. Judaism is the earliest example of a monotheistic religion and its early history provides ample evidence of the titanic nature of the struggle to defend this stance against the influence of polytheism in the cultures of the neighbouring peoples.

Teacher exposition of this theme in early Judaic history would undoubtedly help students to understand the religious and cultural context for the emergence of monotheism. Another way of assisting students to understand this phenomenon would be to remind them not only of the very strong links between Judaism and Christianity but also the religious and cultural links that bind both religions individually and collectively to Islam.

In 3.2 the syllabus calls for an examination of the concept of divine revelation. In approaching this topic students should be made aware, that in contrast to a religion such as Buddhism, the three main monotheistic religions are often called



'religions of the book' because of the high premium that they place on divine revelation in the form of the written word.



## Syllabus links

Section C: World religions – Part 2.1.

Section E: Religion and gender – Parts 1.2 and 2.1.

Section J: Religion and science – Part 1.1.

In 3.2, higher level students are asked to outline their understanding of the transcendent in two religious traditions. One could usefully reflect upon Islam and Christianity as they offer some contrasting views of God's transcendence. For instance, Muslims would reject any doctrine that might suggest the possibility of an incarnate God.

In 3.3, students are asked to name and explain three traditional and three contemporary images of God. Examples of these might include:

- God as father
- God as creator
- God as omnipotent Almighty
- God as love
- God as mother
- God as friend
- God as liberator.

Teachers might consult Chapter 5 'Imagination and the Development of Religious Concepts' in Watson, B. (1993) *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education* London: Longmans p.54 - 71.

Students are also asked to identify a number of different religious experiences found within contemporary human experience.

- Examples of the prophetic could include reference to the experience of working with the marginalised.
- Examples of the mystical could include reference to contemporary forms of Buddhist meditation.
- Examples of the holy could include reference to a traditional religious service.
- Examples of the poetic and the aesthetic could include the experience of 'moving beyond' through engagement with literature, music and art.

The idea that the concept of God is bound up with the search for meaning and value is most clearly seen in what might be described as the traditional proofs for the existence of God. This theme is to be addressed by higher level students.

The classical ways of illustrating the credibility of religious belief can be grouped under two headings based upon two different starting points,

- i the starting point that begins with the world of the human subject
- ii the starting point that begins with the world outside the human subject.

The former approach is best articulated by quoting from that famous passage from the Confessions of the fifth century bishop, Augustine of Hippo: '*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*'. This passage alerts us to the desire in us all to understand ourselves and the world in which we live; a yearning for truth and a search for happiness and peace, one that in every generation and in every culture has found expression in the search for God.

Another version of this approach from the human subject is to be found in the writings of Anselm (1033 – 1109), abbot of Bec in Normandy and Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm's conception of the rational basis of faith led him to wonder how he might give intellectual support to his belief in God. In his famous treatise the 'Proslogion' Anselm developed what has come to be known as the 'Ontological Argument'. The starting point for this argument is pure reason rather than human experience. For Anselm, the definition of God as supremely perfect necessarily entails His existence. From an initial conception of God as '*something greater than which no greater can be thought*', he argues to the conclusion that since God exists in the mind then God must also exist in reality, because otherwise God would not be '*something greater than which no greater can be thought*'. The ontological argument is not without its criticisms, many of which Anselm himself anticipated. However, it retains a fascination even today because of the confidence that it exhibits in the ability of the human mind to reach knowledge of God in this life.

In contrast with the ontological argument, the celebrated five ways of the thirteenth century philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas, take as their starting point the cosmos – the world outside of the human subject. They are entitled the 'Cosmological Arguments'. Each of the five 'proofs' begins with the recognition of experiences that draw attention to the contingent or accidental nature of existence as it is experienced. As Aquinas observed, we encounter the world as intelligible, ordered and purposeful and beautiful, and yet the world does not possess within itself an explanation either for its existence, or for its intelligibility, or beauty. For believers, this paradox points inexorably towards the acceptance of God as the origin and goal of the world as it is experienced.

## Part four: Religion and the emergence of values

Students are asked to

- i outline the relationship between the understanding of God and the concept of the human person
- ii give examples of how these connections determine behavioural norms in religious traditions.

A good way of arriving at these related outcomes would be to draw some comparisons between the three classical monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Although united in their adherence to monotheism, the concept of God differs somewhat in these three world religions. With this type of approach, students could be brought to understand that a religion's portrayal of God and its understanding of the divine/human relationship has behavioural/ethical implications that shape the manner in which the search for meaning and values is conceived.

Under the heading of 'Secular sources of communal values' (4.2), the syllabus offers the student the possibility of a sustained reflection on non-religious responses to the great questions of life, a topic that has been a recurring theme throughout this section. Secularisation is the process by which culture defines itself in a 'this-worldly' context, one that in its most radical form, secularism excludes any reference to a religious, sacred or transcendent horizon of meaning.

In 4.2, students are asked to identify three key moments in the emergence of a secular value system. These could include

- the rise of secular humanism that has its origins in the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The development of a secularist outlook is closely associated with the rise of the modern scientific disciplines in subsequent centuries
- the emergence of a 'Human Rights' culture in the wake of the French Revolution
- the development of Existentialism during the twentieth century, with a value system centred upon an expose of human freedom. Associated with the French philosophers Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, Existentialism made a significant contribution to the development of a contemporary form of secular humanism
- the emergence of Post-Modernism. Post-Modernity is a term used by philosophers, social scientists, art critics and social critics to refer to aspects of contemporary culture, economics and social conditions that are the result of the unique features of late 20th century and early 21st

century life. Included are globalisation, consumerism, fragmentation of authority and the commodification of knowledge.

In 4.2, students are also asked to show how communal values can be shaped by sources other than religion. One approach might be to focus on 'western' societies where the non-religious sources of communal values tend to centre upon the need to support the existence of liberal democracy. The core communal value associated with liberal cultures is that of tolerance. Tolerating differences within certain limits is premised upon two other core values, namely the freedom and equality of all citizens. These values normally find expression under the umbrella of a commitment to some form of a human rights culture.

Invite students to research examples of communal values at work, e.g. the value of equality as evidenced in equality legislation.

Finally, students are asked to reflect on the different relationships between religions and the secular world. Different ways in which religions relate to secular culture vary from those that advocate a Theocracy to those that advocate complete separation of Church and State.



### Syllabus links

Section C: World religions – Part 2.1

Section D: Morality – Part 1.2



### Resources

Cassidy, E. 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland: 1980 – 2000' in E. Cassidy ed. (2002) *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* Dublin: Veritas p.17 – p.45.

[www.teachnet.ie](http://www.teachnet.ie)

[www.utm.edu/research/iep/](http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/)

[www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/contents.html](http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/contents.html)

[www.philosophypages.com/socrates.clarke.edu/](http://www.philosophypages.com/socrates.clarke.edu/)

[www.connect.net/ron/plato.html](http://www.connect.net/ron/plato.html)

[www.plato.evansville.edu/](http://www.plato.evansville.edu/)

[www.socrates.clark.edu](http://www.socrates.clark.edu)

[www.aquinasonline.com/Topics/5ways.html](http://www.aquinasonline.com/Topics/5ways.html)

[www.secularhumanism.org/](http://www.secularhumanism.org/)

[www.humanism.org.uk/](http://www.humanism.org.uk/)

[www.answers.org/apologetics/atheism2.html](http://www.answers.org/apologetics/atheism2.html)

# SECTION B

## Christianity: Origins and Contemporary Expressions

The primary focus in this part of the course is to enable students to explore the historical nature of Christianity and the role of cultural context in the shaping of belief and practice from the time of Jesus to the present day. Teachers should identify the dynamics of continuity and discontinuity as well as diversity and adaptability within the centuries old Christian tradition as belief and practice take shape in new cultural contexts.



### Focusing activity

To introduce this part of the course teachers might invite students to look around their locality for signs of Christianity today. These might be historical or contemporary signs. Invite students to look for signs of continuity and change.

A visit to the Chester Beatty Library or its website ([www.cbl.ie](http://www.cbl.ie)) could be a useful introduction to this part of the course.



### Resources

[www.holylandnetwork.com](http://www.holylandnetwork.com)

Cross, F. ed. (1997) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* Oxford

Dodd, J.H. (1974) *The Founder of Christianity* London: Collins

Freyne, Sean (2002) *Texts, Contexts and Cultures* Dublin: Veritas

Hogan, Maurice (2001) *Seeking Jesus of Nazareth: an Introduction to the Christology of the Four Gospels* Dublin: Columba Press

Johnson, Elizabeth A. (1990) *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* London: Geoffrey Chapman

Kung, Hans (1995) *Christianity: Essence History and Future* New York and London: Continuum

Lane, Dermot A. (1975) *The Reality of Jesus* Dublin: Veritas

Macquarrie, John (1990) *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* London: SCM

McGrath, Alister E. (1998) *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* Oxford

*The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought* (1993) Oxford

Pelikan, Jaroslav (2000) *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* Yale University Press

Introductions to the Bible include:

Bruce Metzger ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of The Bible*

Brown, R.E Fitzmyer J.A. & R.E. Murphy eds. (1990) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* London: Chapman

Brown, Raymond (1997) *An Introduction to the New Testament* New York and London: Doubleday

## Part one: The return to origins

'Returning to origins' suggests a dynamic process that operates in all areas of life, both human and natural. In terms of human institutions this process implies a return to the founding vision of the group or movement with a view to rediscovering the original founder's vision. This process can take place in order to deal with a crisis, either internal or external, that threatens the very survival of the institution. Or, alternatively, in order to re-ignite the enthusiasm and freedom of expression of the founding experience at times of over-reliance on established structures, which can often be impervious to change in the name of fidelity to the past. Returning to origins involves a critical dialogue between the past and the present. It is important to avoid the pitfalls of selective memory or romantic idealisation which distort the true purpose of the exercise, namely plotting a direction for the future that is at once faithful yet challenging.

This part examines the Christian pattern of return to origins. Teachers might begin by helping students to examine the pattern of return to origins (with its causes and consequences) as a pattern in secular and religious institutions.

They could present the founding vision of a number of organisations/groups both secular and religious to show how all organisations have a founding vision (e.g. GAA and renewal of Gaelic games; United Nations and a world order based on law and democracy). It is a vision of the future that can inspire and motivate an individual or a group. When a vision is lost, so too is a sense of direction. Over time, organisations need to repeatedly rediscover their founding vision and reinterpret it in the context of the current situation.

Teachers might explore the motivation for return to origins by examining situations of 'crisis' (a situation where things hang in the balance, where old ways come to an end but room for new possibilities open a time for decision) leading to new direction.

Examples from the secular tradition include the foundation of the European Union based on law and democracy with a view to restoring stability, peace and economic prosperity after the horror of the destruction of WWII and the threat of the Cold War (see the inspiration of founders such as Adenauer, De Gasperi, Monnet and Schumann); the post-1989 situation with East European countries going back to Parliamentary origins. See websites such as [www.europa.eu.int](http://www.europa.eu.int)

Examples from the religious traditions the contemporary interest in Celtic spirituality in Ireland. Within Buddhism, the renewal movement of the Rissho-Rosei-kai that seeks to highlight the message of altruism, peace and harmony with the universe.



## Student activity

A creative attempt to enter into Jesus' founding vision might be an imaginative exercise (role-play, letter-writing, group work) encouraging students to place themselves in the situation of first followers recalling Jesus' life and vision. What would they remember about his public ministry, its successes and disappointments? What were the key messages? What was the vision that Jesus had held up that so attracted his followers? Why was it so appealing?

### 1.1 The pattern of return

The focus here is the constant pattern of re-discovering the founding vision in Christianity.

- For the Céli Dé see Maher, Michael (1981) *Irish Spirituality* Dublin: Veritas pp. 22-3 and O'Dwyer, P. 'Celtic Monks and Culdee Reform,' in J. P. Mackey ed. *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, pp. 140-171
- For the Mendicant Orders and their founders, see Oxford Dictionary (and consult history teachers).
- For Martin Luther see, McGrath, Alister (1998) *Historical Theology* Oxford
- For the Evangelical Movement in early 19th century Protestantism, see McGrath, Alister (1998) *Historical Theology* Oxford
- For Second Vatican Council see Sullivan, Maureen (2003) *101 Questions and Answers on Vatican II* Paulist Press
- For Liberation Theology, see writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff and Hans Kung.

For Christians the 'return to origins' pattern is always about starting again from Jesus Christ who is not trapped in history but whose message has relevance for every age.

### 1.2 Jesus and his message in contemporary culture

As well as music, art, and literature, film and IT are new cultural modes of presenting Jesus and his message in contemporary culture. In this section, teachers might work together with the departments of Music, Art and English. Teachers might also encourage students to explore website material.

#### Some examples:

Georges Rouault made the face of Jesus the great subject of his art. Moving from his early expressionistic work to his mature iconlike paintings of Jesus, he attempted to present an image of Jesus in today's world. He depicted Jesus among the poor,



the destitute and the proletariat life in Paris. His imagery of Jesus was an attempt to recover his message for our day.

The Irish poet, Patrick Kavanagh, presents a sacramental image of Jesus present in the bits and pieces of life. He gives expression to how Jesus is in relationships and events, and not relegated to distant sanctuaries of the divine.

See Tom Stack, (2002) *No Earthly Estate: God And Patrick Kavanagh: An Anthology* Dublin: Colomba

The following are some suggestions reflecting different cultures, inspirations and contexts.

**Music:** Arvo Paart (Estonia); Henryk Gorecki (Poland), Jim McMillan (Scotland); John Tavener (England) Oliver Messien (France)

**Art:** Georges Rouault (France); Andy Warhol's later works (America); Marc Chagall, Stanley Spencer, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Hughie O'Donoghue

**Film:** Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* and Piero Pasolini's *The Gospel according to Matthew*; see also films directed by Kryzstof Kieslowski, Olmi and Andrey Tarkovsky

**Literature:** Alexander Solzhenitsyn (Russian); Ivan Dostoevsky (Russian); Walker Percy (American); Leo Tolstoy (Russian)

Neil MacGregor's series of documentaries on the images of Jesus Christ are available on the *Seeing Salvation* video (BBCV, 7179). Teachers might also consult Daniel Murphy, (1997) *Christianity and Modern European Literature* Dublin: Four Courts Press.

## Part two: The vision of Jesus in context

Teachers are to enable students to distinguish between the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as an historical person and the interpretation of his life from the witness of faith.

An interesting theme to develop with students is the issue of how we can know the historical Jesus. A brief review of the 19th century search for the historical Jesus and biographies of Jesus may be instructive. It led to the discovery, expressed by Albert Schweitzer, that attempts to summarise Jesus' vision can often be a projection of our own agendas onto our description of Jesus.

*The study of the life of Jesus has had a curious history. It set out in quest of the historical Jesus, believing that when it had found him it could bring him straight into our time as a Teacher and Saviour. It loosed the bands whereby he had been riveted for centuries to the stony rock of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once*

*more, and the historical Jesus advancing, as it seemed to meet it. But he does not stay but passes by our time and returns to his own. What surprised and dismayed the theology of the last 40 years was that, despite all forced and arbitrary interpretations, it could not keep him in our time, but had to let him go. He returned to his own time, not owing to the application of any historical ingenuity, but by the same inevitable necessity by which the liberated pendulum returns to its original position.*

Albert Schweitzer (1906) *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* p.399.

### 2.1 Impact of Rome

At the time of Jesus, Palestine was under Roman rule. Teachers can begin by reflecting on how any political regime affects the way people act as a social body. They can then point out how in the Christian Creed, reference is still made to the fact that Jesus 'suffered and died under Pontius Pilate', the Roman procurator at that time.

In this section, teachers need to present a good, concise historical background to Jesus (especially from the conquest of Alexander the Great in 323 onwards and Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.). This history should be taught in a way that describes the time of Jesus as one of intense transition and crisis that had repercussions on political, social and religious levels. See Seán Freyne, (1988) *The World of the New Testament* Dublin: Veritas. Maps of the Ancient Near East, especially Palestine, will also be useful.

In identifying the impact of Roman rule, the following points should be presented:

#### Political system

Rome stood for political order in Palestine at the time of Jesus. It was a foreign power and most people felt helpless in the face of this power, with inevitable feelings of hatred. Jesus refers to one incident when there was a clash in the temple in which some Galileans were slaughtered by the Roman soldiery (Lk 13:1-5).

#### Social system

The Herodian dynasty had been very unpopular. There was much corruption among the Roman administration. Taxes were a source of contention. All of this led to much social unrest in Palestine at the time of Jesus. The people of Israel resented being ruled by others when they believed they were God's chosen people.

#### Religious system

Although there were good and devoted religious teachers, many religious authorities of the day had become quite secularised, furthering their own ambitions by subservience to the Roman power.



## Resources

Barrett, C.K. , *The New Testament Background. Selected Documents*; chapters. 1 and 2.

Freyne, S., (2002) *Texts, Contexts and Culture* London: Collins

D. Oakman and K.C. Hanson (1998) *Palestine in the Time of Jesus. Social Structures and Social Conflicts* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Malina, Bruce (1996) *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* London: Routledge.

Much scholarship today emphasises Jesus' Jewishness. In discussing the Jewish background of Jesus it is important to begin not with the parties/philosophies/sects, but to identify 'the common Judaism' as practised in Jesus' day. This included temple, sacrifices, pilgrimage, offerings from the land, prayers, observance of the law, Sabbath, circumcision, hopes for the future (messianism and eschatology)

See E. P. Sanders, (1992) *Judaism. Practice and Belief* 63 bce- 66 ce, London: SCM Press or his more popular *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, Penguin Books, (1993)

In outlining the role of the Zealots and Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes, the distinctive feature of their response to the time of crisis should be explored, helping students to move beyond simplistic stereotypes. A description of these groups can be found in Barrett, *The New Testament Background* and in Sean Freyne, *Texts, Contexts and Cultures*, chapters 3, 9 and 10.

### 2.2 Evidence for Jesus of Nazareth

This section invites a consideration of textual sources of evidence for Jesus, of which there are both religious and secular. Material for this section should be readily available as many books on Jesus Christ begin with a discussion concerning the evidence for Jesus.

**Pliny the Younger:** He was appointed imperial legate of the Roman province of Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor in 111 A.D. In one of his letters to the Roman Emperor, Trajan, he advises the emperor how he ought to treat the rapidly expanding religious group known as 'Christians'.

**Tacitus:** He was a Roman historian who wrote in his *Annals* of the great fire that swept through the city of Rome in 64 AD. He told how the Emperor Nero who was generally believed to have started the fire, falsified a charge of fire-raising against the Christians

in Rome. He says Christians got their name from Christ who was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius.



## Resources

Stanton, Graham, (1992) *Gospel Truth?* London: Harper Collins, chapters 8-16.

Theissen, Gerd, (2002) *In the Shadow of the Galilean* Reprint London. This is an imaginative treatment of Jesus in his context.

Freyne, Seán (1988) *The World of the New Testament* Dublin: Veritas.

Kee, H.C. (1991) *What can we know about Jesus* Cambridge University Press.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf (1995) *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press.

Theissen, Gerd & Merz, Annette (1998) *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* London: SCM Press.

### 2.3. The teachings of Jesus and their impact on the community

*'Anyone who gets involved with Jesus gets involved with the Kingdom of God.'*

Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, page 7.

*The reign of God is the situation that results when God's will is really done. What is God's will? As revealed in Jesus, God's will is our well-being. God wants the wholeness, the healing, and the salvation of every creature and of all of us taken together. The reign of God, then, involves justice and peace among everyone, healing and wholeness everywhere, fullness of life enjoyed by all....What would the reign of God be like in urban images, in images taken from life in the United States, in Central American images, in Palestinian images, in South African images?*

Elizabeth Johnson (1990) *Consider Jesus* London: Geoffrey Chapman p. 52.

Teachers might read Elizabeth Johnson's quote above and ask students to discuss what the kingdom (reign) of God might look like in Ireland today.

Teachers need to highlight how Jesus brought God's kingdom in his own person, words and deeds. Its concrete signs are Jesus himself and his kerygma (preaching), his praxis and his deeds for the poor and the vulnerable, his life and community.

Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus: teachers can link this section with the religious and socio-political context of the time (2.1). The expression 'Kingdom of God' had its roots in the early political history of Israel. The people of Israel believed that since God was transcendent, created everything and sustained the Jewish nation, he was the one and only king of Israel. But as time went on they felt they needed an earthly king who would rule them with God's justice and be his representative among the people. King David was the very best of Israel's kings, but even he had his shortcomings. Around David's time there was a belief that one day a son of David would be raised up who would let God rule and bring God's peace to the land. At the time of Jesus the rabbis taught the people that they ought to live as though the Kingdom of God had already come so that their quality of life would change. Jesus, however, announced that the Kingdom had indeed arrived.

#### Four key characteristics of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus

- a The Kingdom is centred on God the Father who forgives sinners and frees the poor (Mt 11:25-27; see also the 'Our Father' prayer [Mt 7:9-10; Lk 11:11-12]). It is important to examine with students what Jesus means when he calls on the 'Father' (Abba). He is not proposing patriarchy but rather proposing an image of God as loving parent. The focus of Jesus' mission that he receives from God the Father is to bring God's peace to the world (see the Beatitudes: Mt 5:9). This peace is linked to the Jewish notion of Shalom. It means the perfection of fulfilment in every sense. Jesus proposes an art of loving that creates this culture of peace. Teachers can brainstorm with students to come up with examples of the key features of Jesus 'art of loving.' Include going beyond usual categorisation of people; loving others as yourself; loving your enemy (Mt 5:43-44).
- b It is because Jesus himself experiences the sustaining, merciful, compassionate and liberating aspects of the Father (Abba) that he goes out to the poor, the afflicted, the hungry, saying: 'God is near you, he saves you, he frees you'. This inclusive outreach to the excluded is another feature of the Kingdom. It is manifest in signs such as the eating with sinners (Mt 9:12), the parables such as Lk 15 (mercy parables); Mt 22:1-14 (those invited to the banquet); Lk 14:15-24 (those invited to the marriage feast); the Miracles (pardoning and freeing people from concrete situations of marginalisation) and Exorcisms (Jesus liberates people from demonic possession; [Mt 12:27; Lk 10:18]). These signs of the Kingdom are linked to the 'New Exodus'. Just as God intervened in Egypt to free his people from slavery, now through word and deed, Jesus is

freeing people from all forms of slavery (Mt 6:30-44; Mt 14:13-20; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-15).

- c The Kingdom of God has consequences both for people's *religious attitude* and *social attitude*. In terms of religious attitude, the relationship with God is to be one of a child before a loving Father, putting God first in one's life and following Jesus' radical demands (Mt 6:1-8; Mt 6:25-34; Mt 7: 7-11). In terms of *social attitude*, teachers can explain how Jesus takes up the classic 'Shema' prayer of love of God alone (so central in Jewish religion, see Deut 6:4) and links it with another commandment, that of love of neighbour (Lev 19:18). A key text noting this link is Mk 12:28-34. Some examples that might be used to see link include Mt 5:23-24 (offering to be left at altar and first be reconciled); Mt 25:31-46 (scene of the Last Judgement); Jn 13:34; 15:12-13.17 (the 'New Commandment'); Lk 15:11-32 (Prodigal Son) and Lk 10:29-37 (Good Samaritan). Above all, Jesus proposed a culture of sharing as opposed to amassing of wealth (see Lk 6: 20, 30, 38).
- d The new community that begins with Jesus is a fraternal community of men and women (Mt 23:8-12). The relationship between them is one of *mutuality and equality* (Jn 13:35). Their life-style is different, with no one allowed to 'lord it over them' (Mk 10:42-44). If Jesus serves and washes the feet of his disciples, they too are to serve one another (Jn 13:14). Teachers might note in particular the position of women in Jesus' new community: Mt 19:3-9; Jn 4 (Samaritan woman); 8:3-11 (woman caught in adultery); Lk 7:36-50 (the 'sinful' woman in the Pharisee's house); Lk 8:1-3 (women sharing in his mission). Women are among the most faithful of Jesus followers and persevere to the end: Mt 27:55; Jn 19:25; Jn 20:11-18.

#### 2.4 Jesus as Messiah

The title 'Messiah' means 'Anointed One'. Jesus himself was reluctant to use the title because of the wide range of socio-political expectations that were associated with this title. There were several strands of messianic expectation at the time of Jesus. Jesus would not be the Messiah of popular expectation, but through his life of service, preaching the Kingdom and laying down his life for others, Jesus showed an alternative meaning of the title 'Messiah'. However, it would be important to stress that the notion of the messiah was not as central to Jewish thinking as Christian theology sometimes suggests. It would also be important to emphasise that the Messiah is primarily a human figure, though such other-worldly images as Son of Man begin to appear in the apocalyptic tradition. This makes it difficult to unravel how Jesus might have used it himself or how it might have been applied to him by others in his own life-time.



John Collins (1996) *Apocalyptic* (Routledge) has a good chapter on the messiah and its application to Jesus.

See also Freyne, S and Beuken, W. eds. *Messianism through History* Concilium, An International Journal in Theology, 1993, SCM Press, London.

#### i. Priestly

In the Old Testament the priesthood was associated with Aaron and the tribe of Levi. Priests were seen as the indispensable mediators for entrance into the sphere of the divine. Priesthood became particularly important under Hasmonean rule two centuries before Christ. It led to the idea of a priestly Messiah of Levi or Aaron who would help re-establish God's kingdom. Jesus never spoke of himself in terms of this priesthood. He was critical of some priests' attitudes (see Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan [Lk 10:31ff]).

#### ii. Davidic

'Within Judaism it was expected that a descendant of David would inaugurate the messianic era (Mk 11:10) – a fact which explains the christological importance of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke who trace the descent of Jesus back through David (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38)' – D. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, p. 77. The people saw David as the idealised founder of the Israelite monarchy and they expected a second David to intervene in their difficult socio-political situation. We see the people wanting to crown Jesus king at the miracle of the loaves and fish, but Jesus goes away.

#### iii. Prophetic

'Jesus is understood as a prophet within the long line of prophets that had gone before him...In the eyes of those around him he clearly comes across as a prophet...A prophet in those days was usually understood as an authoritative messenger and spokesman of God...Thus we find the crowds referring to Jesus as a prophet and in the same breath claiming: 'God has visited his people' (Lk 6:16)...The theophany accompanying (the baptism of Jesus) and the going forth with a mission is very characteristic of the prophetic call'. D. Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, pp. 33-34.

The people expected a powerful prophet like Moses who led the people out of slavery and into freedom. See Jesus' rejection of Peter's view of Messiah (Mk 8:31ff).

See Christology books such as C.H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (London: Collins, 1970) and R. Kereszty, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 1991).

### Part three: The message in conflict

The message in conflict refers to the reaction of opposition that Jesus and his followers' experienced.

This part requires sensitive treatment on the part of teachers. It deals with elements of Christian belief that risk being trivialised if too superficial a reading is given to events (such as simply presenting Jesus as a social agitator who gets into trouble). Care has also to be taken to avoid a negative presentation of the Jewish people. See relevant documentation on this issue in E. Fisher ed., *Catholic-Jewish Relations* (1999) London: CTS.

#### 3.1 Conflict with establishment

This refers to the negative response on the part of political and religious leaders to Jesus and his vision. Teachers might use role-play in exploring the threats posed by Jesus' person and message.

##### The threat to Roman imperial values

Jesus' notion of the Kingdom is perceived as a threat to the Roman powers in Palestine. Jesus' notion of power as one of service (whoever is first is last, whoever is last is first) seems to turn imperial values upside down.

##### The threat to Jewish religious establishment

Jesus' claims about and attitudes to the Law (Torah) seem to question the Law. His words about destroying and rebuilding the Temple are misunderstood as a rebellious act. He claims to forgive sins and so is rejected by official leaders as a blasphemer. One needs to be careful in describing the teaching of Jesus within the context of Jewish thinking. In particular his 'intensification of norms' (You have heard that it was said...But I say to you) should not be read as being against the law (Mt 5, 21-46) His rejection of divorce is done via citing Genesis against Deuteronomy; his concern for human need superseding religious



#### Resources

There is an article on Jesus and the Kingdom in vol. 4 of the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday, 1992) 7 volumes (also now available on CD-ROM) by Denis Duling. It deals with all the issues that arise, both historical and ethical about the kingdom and shows how different understandings have emerged in contemporary scholarship.

Horsley, Richard *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, and most recently, *Jesus and Empire, The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*.

Lane, D. (1975) *The Reality of Jesus*  
Dublin: Veritas

Jürgen Moltmann, (1994) *Jesus Christ for Today's World* London: SCM

Theissen, G. and Merz, Annette (1998) *The Historical Jesus. A Comprehensive Guide*  
London: SCM Press.

obligations (Sabbath e.g.) is not a rejection of Jewish ethics, but rather, is in line with the prophets critique of religion without morality (e.g. Amos, Hosea). Unlike Greco-Roman paganism, where ethics and religion were two quite separate areas, Jewish faith has been described as 'ethical monotheism' and it is in that perspective that Jesus' moral teaching must be viewed (e.g. Sermon on the Mount). Jesus' action in the temple (Mk 11, 15–19; Jn 2, 13-22) is a challenge to the religious institution in some form, and scholars have interpreted it very differently. This is a good episode to get students involved in working out the various possibilities. Ultimately, it should be seen against the background of Jesus' whole ministry and not taken as an isolated act, either at the beginning or the end of his public life.

### 3.2 The death and resurrection of Jesus

Giving an account of the sentencing and death of Jesus as an historical event means re-constructing as best as possible from the Gospels the sequence of events that include both a Jewish trial and a Roman trial. Teachers can highlight the movement between the Jewish and Roman trial. The Sanhedrin did not have the authority to issue sentences of death, so they needed to refer Jesus to Pilate. This shows an interesting collusion between religious and state authorities in reaction to Jesus.



#### Resources

Dodd, C.H. (1992) *The Founder of Christianity*

D. Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait* Mahwah: Paulist Press.

Theissen, Gerd & Merz, Annette (1998) *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* London: SCM Press.

To help students analyse the faith response of Jesus' contemporaries, a number of responses might be reviewed: that of Peter and the apostles who flee, Mary who stands faithfully at the cross, the Centurion who stands before the Cross and says 'truly this man was the Son of God'. From Paul's writings we see how Jesus' condemnation to death on a cross was interpreted as a sign of exclusion. It was a form of death reserved for the worst criminals and those who were considered 'outside' of God's covenant. Teachers might ask students to research and compose short diary accounts from the perspective of one witness of Jesus suffering and death.

A key text for the resurrection is: 1 Cor. 15. Possibly the oldest written testimony of the resurrection, it is a testimony relating to around 38-40 CE.

*In spite of irreconcilable divergences all traditions agree on one thing: Jesus appeared to certain disciples after his death; he proved himself living and was proclaimed to have risen from the dead. That is the centre, the core, where all the traditions (about the Resurrection) meet... The various statements are, as it were, always on the move to try to put this central point into words. The actual centre, the Resurrection itself, is, however, never directly reported or even described... The reality of the Resurrection is inseparable from its testimony. This means that in considering the Resurrection, we are not considering a unique and finished, identifiable fact of the past, but a present reality which influences Christians today. Historical facts, the empty grave in particular, can serve as indicators and signs for faith, but they cannot provide proof of the Resurrection. Far more important than such 'facts', however, is the existential proof of the credibility which the witnesses of the Resurrection gave in their life and in their death for their faith.*

Kasper (1976) *Jesus the Christ* New York: Paulist Press, p. 129.

The resurrection marks a time of change for the disciples. After the crucifixion they are thrown into crisis and flee for their lives. The experience of Jesus' resurrection marks a new beginning (the Emmaus story of Lk 24:13-35). Through faith, the disciples recognise the Jesus risen, alive, working and present in history. Jesus now gives them strength to go forth and preach the coming of God among them. Teachers can highlight how the community comes to life in a new way. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke gives a summary statement of the early community with the elements of listening to the teachings of the Apostles (and therefore the Word), the meetings, the breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42). Matthew emphasises the covenant. In ancient times God made a covenant to be with his people. Now the presence of Jesus risen is seen to be the eschatological presence of God in the midst of his people. It might be possible to outline briefly the structure of Matthew's Gospel written in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. It moves from Jesus' name 'Emmanuel' (Mt 1:23) to his promise 'where ever two or three... I am in their midst (Mt 18:20) to his final promise 'I will be with you always' (Mt 28:18-20). John's Gospel (Jn 20-21) shows the community gathering around the risen Jesus Christ.

## Part four: The formation of Christian community

Teachers are to present one of three communities, Corinth, Thessalonica or Philippi, with which Paul engaged in correspondence.

It is important that teachers show how an early Christian community's life and faith was shaped in the context of life within a Greco-Roman city. The focus is the appreciation of the cultural context of the community and how the teaching of Jesus' life, death and resurrection impacted on the formation of that community. A constant in any review of early Christian communities is the issue of whether the background is Jewish or Gentile, or mixed.



### Resources

#### Biblical commentaries:

Brown, Raymond E. Fitzmyer, Joseph A. & Murphy, Roland E. (1990) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* London: Geoffrey Chapman

School libraries may have the series of biblical-theological commentaries entitled *New Testament Message* published by Veritas in the 1970s and 1980s.

See:

Murphy-O'Conner, Jerome (1979)  
1 Corinthians Dublin: Veritas

Fallon, Francis T. (1980) 2 Corinthians  
Dublin: Veritas

Getty, Mary Ann (1980) Philippians & Philemon  
Dublin: Veritas

Reese, James M. (1979) 1 & 2 Thessalonians  
Dublin: Veritas

In the case of the community at Philippi, a city ten miles from the Aegean, teachers could bring out the issue of the values and lifestyle of the community that were at odds with that of the surrounding culture. Since the community is faced with considerable antagonism from their fellow citizens (1:28-30), Paul calls upon them to be 'children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation' (2:15). Yet, Paul also sees part of their problems is their own internal divisions, caused by self-seeking and pride. There are values in the culture that they can embrace. Paul exhorts them: 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, think about these things' (4:8). Teachers should assist students to explore the link between certain attitudes within the community and the threat to its unity, viz. selfish ambition and conceit (2:3). Paul proposes Jesus' own way of life as their model.

In examining the Christian community of Thessalonica, the most populous city and capital of Macedonia and one of the larger cities in the Roman Empire, teachers can highlight Paul's sense that this is a fledgling community living in a hostile environment, needing Paul's pastoral care and guidance. The reference to the Thessalonians having turned from 'idols' (1:9) indicates that this church is a predominantly Gentile-Christian community. The treatment of the theme of manual trades in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, may suggest that the majority of church members belong to the working (middle or lower) class. Paul himself worked at his trade at a shop in the market place (2:9). It is also clear from 4:13-18 that Paul judges the hope of the Thessalonians to be deficient, especially in the face of the painful experience of the death of some of their members. Accordingly, the focus is on Jesus' triumph over death and the future coming of the Lord, the parousia. They are to live preparing for this event, but that does not mean idleness, as seems to have been the case of some in the community who were bringing hardship to others (4:11-12; 5:14).

During Paul's time, Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Many of the colonists were former slaves or freedmen. Geographically it was well located as it had access to both the Aegean and the Adriatic seas, making it an important crossroads between East and West. It was a port city, rich in commerce, with a thriving economic life. It had an immense volume of trade, and huge numbers of travellers passed through it. The city was noted for the Isthmian games, celebrated every second year, and second in importance only to the Olympic games. Most of the named Christians in this letter appear to be prominent and wealthy people. Yet, it is clear from 1 Cor. 1:26-29 that the majority of the church were not from the upper social stratum of the time, i.e. those who were 'wise... powerful... of noble birth'. Some were slaves at the time of their calling (7:21; 16:15), and Paul can refer to some in the church as 'those who have nothing' (11:22). Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during his lengthy stay in the city of Ephesus (16:8). He has heard a disturbing report about serious divisions in the community from 'Chloe's people' who had returned from Corinth to Ephesus (1:11-12). The unity of the church was being threatened by actions and attitudes the Corinthians didn't seem to even notice. This explains the emphasis in the first letter on the priority of love as the authentic life in Christ (13:1-13) and on the church as the one body of Christ (12:1-31).



### Syllabus links

Section E: Religion and gender – Part 2.2.



## Student activity

Explore how some Christian communities today are trying to return to the original vision.

Identify the characteristics of one early Christian community that you have studied.  
Do a collage to illustrate those characteristics.

## Part five: The Christian message today

Through the latest census figures, students can investigate the changing religious landscape of Ireland, not least with an increasing number of Greek, Russian and Romanian Orthodox Christians in Ireland as well as many African Christian churches. Students might be asked to reflect on their experience of encountering Christians of different traditions.



## Resources

Liechty, Joseph & Clegg, Cecilia (2001) *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* Dublin: Columba Press

Cooney, Dudley Levistone (2001) *The Methodists in Ireland* Dublin: Columba

Ellis, Ian (1992) *Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations* Belfast: QUB

Holmes, Finlay (2000) *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland: A Popular History* Dublin: Columba

Milne, Kenneth, *A Short History of the Church of Ireland*, Dublin: Columba Press

Sykes, Stephen et al., (1999) *The Study of Anglicanism* London: SPCK

Ware, Timothy (1997) *The Orthodox Church* London: Penguin

### 5.1 Interpreting the message today

Students might be encouraged to conduct interviews with their parents/grandparents/elderly neighbours on how the Christian message was understood and lived in their youth with regard to some of the issues listed in 5.1.

Teachers have to choose to explore how the teaching and work of one Christian denomination sees itself as carrying on of the mission of Jesus. The websites of the different Christian denominations will indicate links on each of the topics.

Within the Roman Catholic traditions some of the new ecclesial communities such as L'Arche ([www.larche.ie](http://www.larche.ie)), Focolare ([focolare.org](http://focolare.org)) and Sant'Egidio ([santegidio.org](http://santegidio.org)), all of which have ecumenical contacts with various denominations, could be explored as concrete examples of the work of one Christian denomination and how it sees itself carrying on the mission of Jesus.

The World Council of Churches brings together more than 340 Christian churches in over 100 countries and its website outlines its various activities ([www.wcc-coe.org](http://www.wcc-coe.org)).



## Syllabus links

Section F: Issues of justice and peace



## Resources

On the topic of Christians faced with violence, intolerance and sectarianism, see Liechty, Joseph & Clegg, Cecilia (2001) *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* Dublin: Columba Press.

See also Bardy, Peter and Grosch, Paul (1994) *The Puzzle of Ethics* London: Fount (especially chapter 14 on Just War Theory).

See also the *Peace Education Programme* of the Irish Council of Churches [www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org).

An ecumenical project initiated by the World Council of Churches to mark the decade to overcome violence [www.overcomingviolence.org](http://www.overcomingviolence.org).

On the Christian understanding of a just and inclusive society, see the Vincentian Refugee Centre in Phibsboro, Dublin. [www.vincentions.ie](http://www.vincentions.ie)

Catholic Bishops' Letter, *The Work of Justice* (1977).

See also the Corrymeela ([www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org)) and Cornerstone Communities ([www.cornerstone@dnet.co.uk](http://www.cornerstone@dnet.co.uk)).

On Christians and the work of justice, see the Roman Catholic Church's agency for development, [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org) and also the Anglican Church's agency for development [www.Christian-aid.org.uk](http://www.Christian-aid.org.uk).

A student-friendly R.E. resource on this theme has been produced by Trócaire entitled *Faith in Action – Trócaire at work*.



On the Christian response to dying and death, see the Hospice Foundation in Harold's Cross of the St. Francis' Hospice, Raheny. See also the Hospice in Belfast ([www.mariecurie.org.uk](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk)).

On structures and authority of the Christian community, see websites.

Examples of authority:

- for the Presbyterians it is the General Assembly ([www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org))
- for the Church of Ireland it is the General Synod ([www.ireland.anglican.com](http://www.ireland.anglican.com))
- for the Methodist Church it is the Conference. ([www.irishmethodist.org](http://www.irishmethodist.org)).

## 5.2 Trends in Christianity

The topics of the final section are examples of the current 'return to origins' in two central areas of Christian life – worship and Christology. Teachers are to help higher level students explore contemporary trends and developments within *either* the search for Christian unity *or* worship contemporary issues of Christology. Both topics illustrate variety and contextual plurality, yet draw clear lines between the acceptable and the unacceptable in the early church. These aspects are seen as ways of re-invigorating contemporary belief and practice.

The section on Christology brings us back to the beginning. There we cited Schweitzer on the difficulty of recapturing the historical Jesus and of bringing him into our times. Here we see how that connection is made through Christology. The connection was already made in the early church at Thessalonica, Philippi and Corinth, where the emphasis was more on the fact of Jesus' human life than on the details of it. Paul is talking and writing from the perspective that Jesus is the Christ, the giver of the Spirit, Lord, Son of God in power, etc. This is the beginning of Christology in the light of the resurrection experience. The Gospel writers carry on this development, superimposing their faith pictures of the Christ on narratives about the historical Jesus, since for them there was no distinction between the Jesus of the past whom they knew and the Risen Christ in whom they now believed. This process culminates in John's statement that Jesus is the Logos, or the self revelation of God. Subsequently there was the encounter with Greek philosophy leading to the formulation of Chalcedon 'Truly God and truly man'. The Reformation saw a return to the biblical theology focusing more on Christ as Saviour; the Enlightenment saw the break down of the hitherto unquestioned relation between Jesus and the Christ, and gave rise to the Jesus of history versus Christ of faith debate that is still very much with us

today (See chapter 8 of *Texts, Contexts and Cultures* by Sean Freyne). The contemporary debates in Christology have been largely concerned with this issue of how to bridge the gap between Jesus and the Christ (cf. e.g. Schillebeeckx' major 2 volume work, *Jesus and the Christ*). Dermot Lane's book, *The Reality of Jesus* is an excellent treatment of this issue. More recent trends have been to see how Christology relates to some of the key issues of the modern and the post-modern world, e.g. Feminist Christologies (Johnson, Schussler-Fioorenza), Liberation Theology (Boff, Sobrino), World Religions (Knitter; Tracy), Ecology (Edwards; Mackey, Mc Donagh).

In examining the search for Christian unity, it is important to identify both achievements and difficulties. Teachers might invite speakers representing other church traditions to meet the students and talk of their experience of the search for Christian unity.

### Key achievements include:

New friendships established; improvement in the understanding and acceptance of regulations regarding mixed marriages; ongoing serious theological dialogue; lively co-operation in prayer services during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; active participation by women of all denominations in the Annual Women's World Day of Prayer; the growth of Church fora in Northern Ireland of clergy and lay from all denominations; the involvement of candidates for ministry in ecumenical initiatives; practical levels of co-operation such as in educating for peace programmes; courses in ecumenical studies, outings and cross community initiatives; cross border visits; Christmas carol services in common; conferences, art exhibitions; historical studies and publications organised jointly.

### Key difficulties:

Doctrinal difficulties in understanding of Eucharist, Church and authority; inheritance of prejudices and memory of the past; geographical distribution of the churches in Ireland (mostly Protestant in North; predominantly Catholic in South) with the result that there often is little contact between members of different traditions; sectarianism; political troubles.



### Student activity

In explaining how two rites of Christian worship remember Jesus, students could be invited to participate in or observe a communion service or Mass. A priest/minister from another church could be invited to come and speak to the students.



### Contemporary issues in Christology:

Teachers can choose from a variety of writers to find contemporary understandings of Jesus. For example, Jürgen Moltmann emphasises Jesus' abandonment and victimhood from a post-Holocaust perspective. He also underlines Jesus' link with the Spirit and the relevance of Jesus message in a time of ecological crisis.

Elizabeth Johnson writes from within a liberation theology and feminist theology perspective. She notes Jesus' preaching of justice and peace, inclusiveness of women, his preaching of Abba in a way that creates a human community of mutuality, his particular treatment of women with grace and respect. She notes the stories of women in the Gospel.



### Resources

See pamphlet on *Ecumenical Relations in Ireland* available from Irish Council of Churches (48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT 9 6 AZ or [www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org) ).

See also Hurley, Michael (1998) *Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Second Spring*  
Dublin: Veritas

For examples of ecumenical relations on different levels in Northern Ireland, see [www.community-relations.org.uk](http://www.community-relations.org.uk).

The World Council of Churches has an excellent website covering many of the themes dealt with in this section of the syllabus.  
[www.wcc-coe.org](http://www.wcc-coe.org).



# SECTION C

## World Religions

When approaching the study of another religion it is important to allow the religious tradition to have its own voice. Begin with the experience and living reality of how the religion is practised, and then introduce the particular concepts to be explored. Deal with comparisons and contrasts as they emerge. If possible, invite a member of the religious tradition to meet the students with a view to dealing with the issues to be explored in this section.



### Resources

A useful essay for beginning this study is 'The Comparative Study of Religions', in Brodd, J. and Wilt, M. (1998) *Teaching Manual for World Religions - a voyage of discovery* Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, which offers an explanation of concepts and examples of how these are found in different religions.

Devitt, P. (2000) *Willingly to School* Dublin: Veritas. Chapter 8 'Why teach world religions?' is a useful introduction for the teacher to some of the issues involved in teaching world religions.

The World Council of Churches has an excellent website. [www.wcc-coe.org](http://www.wcc-coe.org). The links section to world religions is particularly useful.

A visit to the Irish School of Ecumenic's library would also be most useful for students or teachers wishing to access literature on world religions. (phone 01- 2601144) or visit their website at [www.tcd.ie/ise/](http://www.tcd.ie/ise/)

### Part one: The phenomenon of religion

#### 1.1 Religion as a world wide phenomenon

Students will need to have an understanding of the phenomenon of religion (Section A Part 3.1) to deal with the concepts explored here.

#### Types of religion

The variety of religions indicates the ways that people have responded religiously to the experience

of their sense of mystery in life. In order to understand that religious belief is ancient, diverse and dynamic, it would be useful for the students to explore the types of religion that exist, identifying key characteristics of the religion so as to determine

- what is distinctive about a religion
- what various religions hold in common.

The 2001 edition of Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopaedia* identifies 10,000 distinct religions, of which 150 have one million or more followers.

The 'Major Religions of the World' web page [www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com) lists 22 'major world religions' and only includes those religions with a significant presence beyond a single country.

A way of describing types of religion might be to attempt to categorise a number of religions under the following headings:

- Primal/Tribal
- Ancient
- Non-theistic
- Theistic
- Monotheistic

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/> offers a way of doing this under 'families of religions'.



### Focusing question

What might a study of the distribution of religions tell us about the religion?

Maps and charts indicating the global distribution of religions can be found at <http://www.wadsworth.com> See under maps.

For up to date statistics about numbers and distribution, visit <http://www.adherents.com>

### The religion of Europe

The religion of Europe has traditionally been Christian. However, changes in settlement patterns and a growth in secularism have changed the religious profile of the continent.



### Resources

Cassidy, E. ed. (2002) *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* Dublin: Veritas

Chu, Jeff, 'O Father, Where Art Thou?' in Time Magazine, 16/6/2003.  
(An article about European religious practice.)

### Religious traditions in Ireland



### Focusing question

Using the information available from the 2002 census, what trends do you notice developing in Ireland?

The Central Statistics Office <http://www.cso.ie/text/principalstats/cenrel.html> has statistics dating from 1881. A worthwhile exercise is to analyse the information from the 1991 and 2002 census and examine emerging trends.



### Resources

LOGOS (2002) *Communities of Faith in Ireland Today* Dublin: Mater Dei Institute of Education, CDROM

[www.materdei.ie/logos/A3](http://www.materdei.ie/logos/A3) has a links page to the websites of many of the religious traditions to be found in Ireland today.



### Student activity

Survey your local area to find out what religious traditions are in evidence.



### Syllabus links

Section 1: The search for meaning and values.  
Part 1: Changing pattern of religious belief in Ireland today.



### Resources

Tuohy, D. and Cairns, P. (2000) *Youth 2K: Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture* Dublin: Marino Institute of Education.

Ward, C. and Greeley, A. (2000) 'How 'secularised' is the Ireland we live In?' *Doctrine and Life* 50 pp.581-617.

### 1.2 Primal religion

All religions are rooted in the primal traditions of early peoples. Primal (meaning original or first) religion dates back as far as 50,000 BCE, and emerges from the traditions of tribal people who depended on the land and on the forces of nature. This grouping includes thousands of distinct religious traditions which have been grouped together because of similarities such as a pre-technological worldview, the all-encompassing nature of religion, a lack of rigid boundaries between the spiritual and secular dimensions of life, the use of an oral rather than a written canon, and the enactment of myth in ritual.



### Student activity

- In groups, select a primal religion, research its myths, rituals, art, music, and traditions and present it in a creative way to the class.
- Look in your own area for examples of early Celtic religions (Link to Section A) and its influences on the development of Christianity.
- Prepare a ritual in traditional style - look at sacred sites, totem poles, how the shaman dressed, the Mayan cross, Celtic prayers, etc.
- Look at texts such as Chief Seattle's speech to indicate how primal religions have adapted to modern issues.  
<http://www.webcom.com/duane/seattle.html>



### Focusing questions

What elements of the religion you have studied can be seen in contemporary religions?

What is the influence of primal religion on all religions?



### Resources

Brodd, Jeffrey (1997) *World Religions A Voyage of Discovery* Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press. Brodd provides a portrait of the Yoruba of Africa, the Aborigines and the Lakota tribe of North America.

Aborigine people:

<http://www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/index.htm> to listen to stories from the Aboriginal tradition.

### Mana

The concept of mana refers to power that is not simply the cause, but the reason why particular things happen. It is the production of effects in the world by words or actions which are often ritualised but whose source of power is not open to observation. Mana comes from kinship with gods and famous ancestors. Tribal chiefs embody the mana of their people and land, as do all who are strong, wise or skilful.

### Tabu

Anything possessing mana is tabu or taboo (meaning marked off). Rules of tabu preserve the power and holiness of mana. A breach of tabu means a release of uncontrolled mana dangerous to life and social order. Taboo relates to the power of particular people, places or objects. The rules of taboo dictate that certain things and activities due to their sacred nature are set-aside for specific members of the group and are forbidden to others.



### Student activity

Give examples of taboo from your own tradition – why are these activities, places or objects forbidden?

### Totem

The word is from the Ojibwa of Canada dotem/oteman meaning 'the person is a relative of mine'. The term refers to a natural entity (usually an animal, plant or some natural phenomenon) that symbolises the spiritual essence of an individual or a group. Clans are often named after animal species, so the totem express membership of the same clan

and the members of the clan will always be identified with the particular totem which connects the individual with their spiritual ancestry.



### Student activity

- Construct a totem.
- Think about a person you admire, what are their qualities and traits? Think of an animal or feature of the landscape that might represent them.

### Shaman

The word 'shaman' comes from the Evinki people of Siberia and may be found in many primal traditions. Shamans are important to many primal religions as the religious and spiritual leaders of their peoples, healers, and interpreters of natural phenomena. They have committed to memory the tradition of their peoples and handed it down through songs, tales, and drama. The shaman was a man or a woman who inherited the gift of the shaman from his or her ancestors with the purpose of being a living mediator between humanity and the spirits inhabiting the cosmos. Shamanism is a growing phenomenon in the Western world.

For an online exhibition about shamanism: <http://www.tampere.fi/vapriikki/nayttely/samaanit/shaman.htm>



### Student activity

Look for examples of how these concepts have evolved in the religious traditions you are studying.



### Resources

Smith, J.Z. ed. (1996) *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion* San Francisco: Harper

Lienhardt, R.G. 'Primitive Religion' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Crim, K. ed. (1981) *The Perennial Dictionary of Living Religion* San Francisco: Harper

### 1.3 The holy

All religions begin with a reflective experience of the holy and the importance of human response to the something that they term holy. Rudolf Otto describes the holy as that which is beyond rational/ethical conceptions. It is the non-rational or emotional aspects of a religion. It is the experience of mystery, the sense of Otherness, the acceptance that there is a reality that transcends the level of ordinary experience.

## The relationship between the sacred and the profane in religion

The word 'sacred' derives from both French and Latin meaning in both instances 'to consecrate', and refers to those elements of experience that elicit attitudes of respect and reverence. It is not the intrinsic quality of a thing that makes it sacred, rather the fact that it invokes in the person or community a sense of awe/mystery. The sacred doesn't exist in a vacuum; instead it is encountered in certain places or at certain times. It can be experienced in nature or objects and in particular people whom we may refer to as holy. The response to this becomes formalised in a variety of rituals, practices and observances.

The profane refers to the ordinary experiences of life.



### Syllabus links

Section G: Worship, prayer and ritual.



### Resources

Drumm, M. & Gunning, T. (1999) *A Sacramental People*, Dublin: Columba Press

Beck, M. et al ed. (1997) *Exploring Religion* Australia: Oxford University Press Chapter 15, 'Ways of Holiness'.



### Student activity

- Students could research how particular objects such as light, water, oil, icons, beads, etc. are used in different traditions (e.g. prayer beads in Islam, rosary beads in Catholicism and mala beads in Buddhism).
- Explore how objects are used in religious rituals - such as the use of oil, water, bread or light in the sacraments of some Christian denominations.
- Explore the veneration of places as sacred: <http://www.arthistory.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/sacredplacesintro.html>
- Research the life of a person from your own tradition and from another tradition, whom you consider to be holy:
  - How does this person reveal the holy?
  - What qualities do they embody?
  - From your own life experience whom do you consider to be holy?
- What is it about them that led you to this view of them?

## Part two: A closer look at the major living traditions

Note that two religious traditions must be studied by all students: one from list A and one from list B in the syllabus. In addition, higher level students must undertake a study of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, under the topics outlined under 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 of the syllabus.

### 2.1 A vision of salvation in the two traditions

Religions in general are deeply concerned with salvation. Salvation may be understood as freedom or safety from forces that are destructive. It refers to a sense of health or wholeness. Depending on the religion, salvation can refer to this life or to an afterlife and is either an activity initiated by God, or depends entirely on the action of the individual. The question of salvation is related to the question of destiny; where is human life headed? This question is more complicated for religions that teach that humans live more than one lifetime.



### Student activity

Within the two traditions identify: What the terms salvation and liberation mean – are they understood as being the same or are there differences? How is salvation achieved?



### Resources

For a Christian exploration of these concepts see Gutierrez, G. (1973) *A Theology of Liberation* New York: Orbis Books Ch. 9 'Liberation and Salvation'.

### The image of the human person

Religions not only tell us about God but also tell us about what it is to be human. The question of anthropology in each of the major religions is explored in Holm, J. & Bowker, J. ed. (1994) *Human Nature and Destiny* London: Pinther Publishers

To understand the image of the person it may be necessary to consider the image of God found in a particular religion.





### Student activity

- Read an account of how the person was created according to the sacred text of the religious tradition - what does it tell you about the human person? Compare and contrast it with an account from a differing tradition.
- Prepare a collage of stories/quotes/pictures/songs/music/sacred text from each of your chosen traditions. This collage should allow people to compare and contrast the image of the human person found in these traditions.

### The nature of the relationship between the transcendent and the human

In researching the two traditions some questions that need to be addressed are:

- What does the term transcendent mean in this tradition?
- In what way is the connection between the transcendent and the human understood and expressed?

### 2.2 The community of believers



### Teaching approaches

A way of approaching this section is to prepare a profile of a living community preferably in your own area. The profile could involve an interview with a member of the community in which the following issues could be addressed and reported on. (This interview could form the basis of a report or newspaper article that could be submitted to a local newspaper).

Issues to be addressed might include

- the number of members of the community
- how the community is organised/ how it is structured?
- how it is funded?
- who is in charge?
- who leads the worship?
- the role of women in the community
- who makes decisions for the community?
- does the community have any connection with a global or wider community?
- how is authority understood within this community and where does authority come

from - is it in a text, the leader, the people, or the tradition?

- how do the members of this community involve themselves in issues around them, for example, involvement in social justice or inter-religious activities?
- what is their attitude to the world and the society they are part of?

### 2.3 A celebrating tradition

Religious rites are found in all religious traditions. Rites are conducted through the use of human actions, they are part of the normal sphere of human activity but incorporate the elements of symbolism, consecration – the making holy or sacred, repetition, and remembrance which give the particular rite its religious meaning.



### Student activity

- Observe/participate in/recall a rite of initiation. What elements of a rite were evident? What was being expressed in the rite? How was it celebrated?
- Interview somebody about to undergo a rite of initiation or a parent of a baby about to be baptised. What are their expectations of the rite? Why are they undertaking this rite? Compare and contrast this with the rite of initiation in another religion.



### Resources

Drumm, M. (1998) *Passage to Pasch*  
Dublin: The Columba Press

Beck, M. et al ed. (1997) *Exploring Religion*  
Australia: Oxford University Press, Chapter 11  
'Religious Rites'.

### Marking and celebration of time and/or the seasons

Building on the concept of 'times of significance' students should be introduced to the concept of how religious traditions mark the passing of time and seasons. One way into this is to explore the differences between the lunar and solar calendars and compare the ways that different religious traditions mark time. In any religion certain events that occurred in the past are central to its story and characterize the beliefs and practices of those who are members. These events are also recalled at particular seasons.



### Student activity

- Make a calendar of the seasons celebrated in your chosen traditions  
<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org>
- Identify how the season is celebrated – what festivities mark the season? If possible mark the celebration of a particular season or festival in a tradition other than your own.

### Celebration of stages in the life cycle

All religions mark key moments in the lives of its people – birth, death, entry into adulthood, loss, death, marriage, illness, etc.



### Resources

A useful website comparing rites of passage is:  
<http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/re/passage>.

A useful resource to begin this study in an interactive way is *The Usborne Internet-linked Encyclopaedia of World Religions*.

A series of informative articles about a variety of Jewish festivals is available in both English and Irish on the LOGOS website  
[www.materdei.ie/logos/C3](http://www.materdei.ie/logos/C3)



### Student activity

Select a stage in the human life cycle – birth customs, marriage, the transition to adolescence, funeral rites and present a report on how this stage is celebrated in each of the two traditions you are studying.

### 2.4 Challenges to the tradition

The following questions could be posed:

- what are the challenges facing this community?
- what are the future possibilities for this community?

### 2.5 Inter-faith dialogue

In an increasingly pluralistic world many people feel that they need to understand other religions and how the members of other religions view the world. The term ‘inter-faith dialogue’ is used to describe the dialogue between the religions. A dialogue is a discussion or exchange of ideas and opinions, especially between groups with a view to resolving conflict or achieving agreement. A key requirement of such dialogue is a sustained interest in how other religions express their experiences of the sacred.

The idea of inter-faith dialogue began with the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.



### Student activity

- Find out what is happening in your local area to promote inter-faith dialogue.
- Find out about the Inter-faith Gatherings, Assisi, 1986 and 2002.
- Organise an event where members of different religious traditions can share their experiences of dealing with a particular issue.



### Resources

[www.multifaithnet.org](http://www.multifaithnet.org)

### The role of religious belief in two of the world’s contemporary conflict situations



### Resources

[www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org)

[www.overcomingviolence.org](http://www.overcomingviolence.org)

## Part three: New religious movements

### 3.1 Cults and sects

#### What is a cult?

The word cult comes from the French *culte*, and is rooted in the Latin *cultus*, which means ‘worship’ or ‘devotion to a person or thing’. The word ‘cult’ is an ambiguous term due to the fact that there is no universal definition of a cult and there are differing opinions as to its meaning. In some respects it has become a catchphrase for any group, religion or lifestyle that people don't understand, or with which they happen to disagree. No one ever considers their own religion to be a cult because of the negative connotations of mind-control and other forms of manipulation that are associated with this term. Media attention tends to focus on the less benign characteristics of cults which may include:

- use of psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain its members
- secret initiation rites
- a founder/leader who is self-appointed, dogmatic, charismatic and messianic
- a belief that 'the end justifies the means' in order to solicit funds and recruit people
- the formation of an elitist totalitarian society



The most extreme examples of this include destructive doomsday religious groups whose members have been murdered or committed suicide, e.g. the Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate groups.

Teachers can help students become sensitive to the dangers of labelling a faith group as a "cult" simply because one is unfamiliar with its beliefs and practices.

**What is a sect?**

The term sect, sometimes used instead of cult, is similarly ambiguous. It comes from the Latin *secta*, which means an 'organized church body.' Therefore a sect can refer to

- a religious denomination
- a dissenting religious group, formed as the result of schism (division; separation).
- a group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or leader.

Theologically, the term sect is used of a group that has divided from a larger body or movement - generally over minor differences in doctrine and/or practice - but whose teachings and practices are generally not considered unorthodox.

**4.1 Some new religious movements**

The phrase can refer to a wider spectrum of new or emerging faith groups. These new religious movements are a very complex and diverse phenomenon. They are 'new' in that they present themselves as alternatives to official institutional religion. They are 'religious' in that they claim to offer a religious vision of the world, and to respond to the fundamental questions of life.



**Resources**

- Dialogue Ireland  
[www.esatclear.ie/~dialogueireland](http://www.esatclear.ie/~dialogueireland)
- Centre for Studies on New Religions  
[www.cesnur.org/default.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/default.htm)
- Factnet  
[www.factnet.org/index.html](http://www.factnet.org/index.html)
- American Family Foundation  
[www.csj.org](http://www.csj.org)
- Apologetics Index  
[www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex](http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex)
- Christian Resource Institute  
[www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org)
- Statistics  
[www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com)

Religious Tolerance  
[www.religioustolerance.org/cultmenu.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/cultmenu.htm)

Watchtower Fellowship Inc.  
[www.watchman.org](http://www.watchman.org)

Church of Scientology  
[www.scientology.org](http://www.scientology.org)

Bartley, Peter (1989) *Mormonism, the Prophet, the Book and the Cult* Dublin: Veritas

Barker, Eileen (1991) *New Religious Movements* London: HMSO

Coulter, Carol (1984) *Are Religious Cults Dangerous?* Dublin: Mercier

Harris, Doug (1999) *The Jehovah's Witnesses. Their beliefs & practices* London: Gazelle Books

Harrison, Shirley (1990) *'Cults', the Battle for God* London: C. Helm

Hassan, Steven (1988) *Combating Cult Mind Control*, Aquarian Press

LeBar, James J. (1989) *Cults, Sects, and the New Age* Indiana: OSV

Vilar, Juan Diaz (1992) *Religious Sects, A summary of their basic beliefs* New York: Catholic Book Publishers

Useful series: Zonderan Guide to Cults and Religious Movements.

**Part four: Other living traditions**

**4.1 A living tradition**



**Student activity**

Invite students to undertake project work using websites and books, allowing the major world religions and living traditions to speak for themselves. See example below.

**The Baha'i Faith**

The Baha'i faith only began in the nineteenth century in Iran and presently has over three million followers worldwide. It takes its name from a man known as Baha'u'llah, which means 'Glory of God'. Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is the most recent in the long line of prophets, which include Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad.

The most important principle for a Baha'i is the oneness of humanity. There is only one race, the human race and it is our responsibility to strive for a new order of peace, justice and an end to religious and racial prejudice.

The five main Baha'i beliefs are

- 1 Everyone is equal, regardless of sex or race.
- 2 There should be unity among religions.
- 3 There should be no extremes of poverty or wealth.
- 4 Everyone should be educated.
- 5 True religion should be in harmony with scientific knowledge.

Contact: Baha'i Faith, National Assembly of Ireland,  
24, Burlington Road, Dublin 4.  
Tel: 01-6683150



### Resources

<http://www.bahai.ie/>

<http://www.bahai.org/>

### Chinese religion

Two important religions to come from China are Taoism and Confucianism. They both developed in the 6th century BCE and although China is a communist country, where religion is not encouraged, each religion has about five million followers.

Taoism (pronounced 'dowism') is based on the teachings of the Tao Te Ching. This book is believed to have been written by Lao-tzu but some scholars claim that it had several authors. The Tao is often translated as 'the Way'. In order to live life in accordance with the Tao, followers need to avoid worldly distractions and live spontaneously.



### Resources

<http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/contao/laotzu.htm> – a translation of the Tao Te Ching

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/taoism/intros.htm> – a useful links page to Taoism.

<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Taichi/books.html#taoism>

### Confucianism

Confucianism is a system of moral, social, political, and religious teachings established by Confucius, a sixth century Chinese philosopher. The writings of Confucius were originally intended as a guide for the rulers of China and emphasised the importance of correct conduct in society. These ideas have since been developed by his followers and have absorbed aspects of Taoism and Buddhism. Confucianism puts

more emphasis on becoming a good citizen than on spirituality but rituals play an important role in this tradition too.



### Resources

<http://religion-cults.com/Eastern/Confucianism/confuci.htm> an introduction to Confucianism with suggested reading material.

### Sikhism

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism approximately five hundred years ago in India. It is a distinctive monotheistic faith envisioning one Supreme Creator God. Sikhism has its roots in both Islam and Hinduism and is understood to be an attempt to reconcile the differences between them.

The Sikh community in Ireland may be contacted at: 78, Serpentine Avenue, Merrion Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.



### Resources

<http://www.sikhs.org/summary.htm> – A general introduction to Sikhism

<http://punjabgovt.nic.in/Culture/culture.htm> – The culture and history of the Punjab.

### African traditional religion

<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/> - an excellent website providing information on African traditional religions, a bibliography, a map of the distribution of followers and essays on meetings points between African traditional religions and other major world religions.

# SECTION D

## Moral Decision Making

The term morality can be defined in many different ways, some of which are more simple than others. However, even when one uses a relatively simple definition (e.g. morality is concerned with what is right and wrong, or good and evil), a deeper analysis of the definition inevitably reveals more complex questions: How does one know what is right and wrong? Is something right if it causes pleasure? How do we know that something is good? Does evil exist? Why do we choose to do wrong when we know it is wrong? Is morality about actions or character? How do we become good people? Do we need religion to be moral? What is the relationship between what is good for me and what is good for others? How do I approach difficult moral decisions? Section D of the syllabus addresses many of these questions.



### Focusing activity

In introducing this section, students could be encouraged to consider concrete situations in which human beings act in a way that is agreed to be 'good'. Using examples from media sources, students could identify what is good about the person (the moral agent) and his/her actions, what might motivate the person (e.g. concern for those in need), why that person is willing to make personal sacrifices (e.g. comfort, safety) to help others, and what enables a person to act morally (e.g. human beings have free will - they can therefore make moral choices; human beings tend to seek or aspire to what is good; human beings are social, and therefore act in a way that reflects awareness of others; human beings have the capacity of reason, which enables them to reflect upon what is good and to act in accordance with this reflection, rather than acting on instinct). This can later be linked to Section D, Part 2, which deals with the relationship between morality and religion.

### Part one: Thinking about morality



### Resources

Mc Quarrie, John ed. *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*

Newland, George (1985) *Making Christian Decisions* Mowbray

Malherbe, Abraham L. (1986) *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press

Norman, Richard (1998) *The Moral Philosophers: An Introduction to Ethics*, Second Edition New York: Oxford University Press (This book is a good source on Plato and Aristotle.)

Copleston, Frederick (1993) *A History of Philosophy Volume 1: Greece and Rome from the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus* New York: Image

Holm, Jean and Bowker, John eds. (1994) *Making Moral Decisions*, from the series *Themes in Religious Studies* London: Pinter (Chapter 5 of this book deals with morality in Judaism, including Hebrew scripture).

## 1.2 Why be moral?

Why be moral? This is a question which is probably best approached initially through brainstorming and discussion, rather than the presentation of theory, as these activities will encourage students to reflect personally on the reasons for seeking good and avoiding evil. These activities might then be followed by the consideration of clear definitions of values (personal and community values). One might define a value as a desired quality or characteristic of thought and behaviour that is considered good, important and worthwhile. Personal values are those that influence the morality of the individual (e.g. loyalty to friends; the pursuit of excellence; compassion). Community values are those that influence the moral attitudes and conduct of communities such as religious groups, families, society (e.g. the promotion of education; the protection of a clean and safe environment; compassion; care for the marginalised; equality). Students might be encouraged to consider the relationship between their own values and those of the different communities to which they belong. Have they a lot in common? Do they hold personal values which conflict with any of the values of these communities? For example, if one of my personal values is securing a healthy and happy life for myself and some of my friends value going out on a Saturday night and getting drunk, there may be conflict between personal values and peer group/community values. The balance between personal and community values might be revisited again in Part 3 (in relation to moral conflict in a pluralist society) and Part 4 (in relation to moral maturity and conscience).

Part 1.2 also asks students to consider how personal and community values are expressed in two charters. This provides an opportunity to relate Section D with Section F (Issues of Justice and Peace) and Section H (The Bible as living classic).

The *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights* can be accessed easily on many websites, including [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

Another interesting charter is the *Declaration Toward A Global Ethic*. This is the result of an attempt by the Parliament of the World's Religions to identify the moral values which different religions hold in common. The Declaration itself can be accessed at [www.uni-tuebingen.de](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de) - or in Küng, Hans and Kuschel, Karl-Josef eds. (1993) *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* London: SCM Press. A more in-depth background to the thinking behind this declaration can be found in the above book, and in Küng, Hans (1990) *Global Responsibility: In Search of A New World Ethic* London: SCM Press. The responses of members of different religious traditions to the Declaration can be found in Morgan, Peggy and Braybrooke, Marcus eds. (1998) *Testing the Global*

*Ethic: Voices from the Religions on Moral Values* Oxford: The World Congress of Faiths/CoNexus Press. The latter is designed as an educational tool, and therefore suitable for school students. Students might be encouraged to identify personal values (e.g. the right to private property) and community values (caring for the poor of the world) in these documents, and to consider how the documents demonstrate the inter-relatedness between personal and community values and, in particular, the need to consider the values of the community when asserting individual values.

Considering world events which arise during the period of study may help students to look concretely at the relationship between personal and community values.

## 1.3 The common good and individual rights

Part 1.3 considers the common good and individual rights. The two charters above would again be useful resources, and allow for the development of an awareness among students of the links between the various sub-sections of Section D. In addition, students might consider definitions of the common good from documents such as *Gaudium et Spes* and *Pacem in Terris* (available on [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)). Outside of a religious context, and in simple terms, the common good might be defined as that which is best for the whole community/society. In other words, morality is not just about an individual seeking what is good for him/herself alone. It also involves taking into consideration what is good for others and how the good of society as a whole can be served. The utilitarian emphasis on the idea of the greatest good for the greatest number of people (sometimes, it is argued, at the expense of individual rights) might be contrasted with an understanding of the common good which attempts to retain consideration for the good of individuals while at the same time promoting the good of society at large.



### Student activity

- In studying how the common good and individual rights are expressed in Irish civil law, one might consider laws relating to driving (e.g. speed limits, limits on drinking and driving) and how they reflect a need to balance the rights of individuals to drive, with the rights of others to safety. Legislation on smoking in public places is another useful example. These topics can be approached through research on legislation, public opinion and classroom debate.
- Following a debate in the media over a period of time might also be useful (e.g. a newspaper's letter section on topics such as



the banning of smoking in pubs and restaurants, or whatever is topical at the time). Consideration of imaginary scenarios might also be useful. The exercise below provides a possible model:

In the following examples, a decision needs to be made about what would best serve the common good. One of the decisions must be made very quickly, while in the other, the individual has more time to consider his options. How do you feel the common good would be best served in each? Give reasons for your answer and identify the strengths and weaknesses of your conclusion.

- 1 A police car is chasing a stolen vehicle through the streets of a large town in the afternoon. In their efforts to escape, the occupants of the car engage in very dangerous behaviour, moving from lane to lane at great speed. The police realise that there is a grave threat to public safety if these people escape, as they are known to have engaged in violent behaviour previously. They also realise that children will be coming out of a school further down the road in a few minutes time.
- 2 An individual feels that the taxes in this country are too high. He is already wealthy, but knows that the savings he would make by evading some of his taxes would help him pay off a loan he took out in order to expand his business. His business provides jobs for previously unemployed people. He figures that he has saved the state (and taxpayers!) money by providing employment. He also knows that the country is facing recession, and that cutbacks are being made in the provision of healthcare and education.
- 3 A natural disaster (e.g. a hurricane) leads to the need to evacuate a large centre of population in order to save lives. However, there is a danger that the large number of vehicles on the roads out of the city will cause traffic chaos, seriously slowing down the speed of the evacuation process. The government orders that, where public transport vehicles are serving a particular area for the purposes of evacuation, residents must use them, and leave their personal vehicles behind. Some people object to this, as they know their vehicle may be destroyed by the hurricane, and they would prefer the privacy of their own vehicle to a crowded bus/train.

## Part two: Morality and religion



### Resources

Bauman, Zigmund (1993) *Post Modern Ethics* Blackwell

Bigar, Nigel (1997) *Good Life: Reflections on What we Value Today* SPCK

Gula, Richard (1989) *Reason Informed by Faith*: Paulist Press (There is a good chapter on the relationship between faith/religion and morality.)

Hauermas, Stanley (1981) *Vision and Virtue* Notre Dame Press

Hollenbach, David (2002) *Common Good and Christian Ethics* Cambridge University Press

MacNamara, Vincent (1988) *The Truth in Love: Reflections on Christian Morality* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

MacNamara, Vincent (1985) *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* Dublin: Dominican Publications

The above are theological texts recommended for *teacher* reference. They would only be suitable for the most able of students. For an easier treatment of the topic see:

Brown, Colin (1998) *Crash Course on Christian Ethics* London: Hodder and Stoughton

Jenkins, Joe (1999) *Ethics and Religion* (from the series *Heinemann Advanced Religious Studies*) Oxford: Heinemann. This is an A-level text, which also deals with topics relevant to other parts of Section D.

### 2.1 The relationship between morality and religion

For a consideration of the differences between a religious and a moral person, students might be encouraged to consider the idea of three different people performing the same good and bad acts. One is a Christian, one a humanist, one a Muslim. How can we distinguish one from the other? The action is the same (e.g. helping another or stealing). The action can therefore be said to be the part of their morality that is easily visible. There is a significant part of morality which lies deeper than the action, however - motivation, intention, way of looking at the world (worldview), etc. All of these factors shape the person who performs the action. The person who is not religious can be moral, but what underlies his/her good action differs from that of the religious person, whose morality is shaped by their religious



worldview. Similarly, a person can be 'religious', in the sense of believing in God, praying, etc., but (s)he can also do wrong.

The exploration of morality since the enlightenment covers a vast period of history and a vast range of ideas. However, texts such as *The Moral Philosophers* (already referred to) and other introductory texts on philosophy provide information on some of the key ideas which emerged from the time of the enlightenment (e.g. the freedom and rights of the individual) and the philosophers who developed these ideas. In relation to concrete issues such as slavery, war, capital punishment, child labour, etc., students could be encouraged to engage in web-based and library-based research on the history of these issues, which might include consultation with organisations such as Amnesty International ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)), Trócaire ([www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)), and Antislavery International ([www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)).

## 2.2 Morality and the Christian tradition

Part 2.2 expands on the relationship between morality and religion by considering morality in the Christian tradition, referring to the Decalogue and Covenant, the key principles and the ethical vision of Jesus' preaching, Jesus' understanding of right relationship, and Jesus' understanding of the law of love. A detailed study of gospel texts, illustrating Jesus' moral vision (e.g. parables; the Sermon on the Mount; healing on the Sabbath, etc.) would be recommended here. An attempt to apply Jesus' vision to contemporary situations would be useful, and would again allow links to be established with other sections of the syllabus. (For example, how might Jesus' understanding of right relationship and love influence contemporary issues relating to asylum seekers, the needs of people in the developing world, etc.?)

Part 2.2 also refers to the perspective of different Christian traditions on the relationship between religion and morality. Sources for teacher reference on this issue are the same as those for 2.1 on the relationship between morality and religion.

Holm, Jean & Bowker, John eds. *Making Moral Decisions* (Already referred to.)

Morgan, Peggy & Lawton, Clive eds. (1996) *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

## 2.3 Religious perspectives on moral failure

Part 2.3 explores religious perspectives on moral failure, referring to personal and social sin and the relationship between the two. Drawing from the ideas of covenant, right relationship, love, etc. already covered in Section 2.2, sin might be described as any thought, word or action which damages my relationship with God, with myself and with others, both inside and outside of the Christian community. It needs to be acknowledged that one's concept of sin is significantly shaped by a person's overall religious vision or lack thereof. For example, a person (of any religious tradition) who sees God as the maker of laws and the granter of salvation may see sin as 'the breaking of God's law'. Someone who sees God in terms of a loving parent figure might see sin as the failure to love in return. It can be understood as an experience of alienation, in the sense that the damage I do can alienate me from God, from myself (because I have not been true to myself) and from others. That is, it creates a distance and lack of harmony because what I have done is contradictory to my moral vision, and damages my relationship with those I claim to love and have concern for. Personal sin can be understood as any wrong chosen freely by an individual and which has consequences for him/herself and/or for those directly affected by the wrong (s)he does.

Many sins, however, have a social dimension, in that they can have consequences for society as a whole. Sin can therefore be social because the actions of an individual can have social consequences, and also because society itself can choose to do wrong (e.g. through the development of policies which damage others, such as apartheid). There are a number of ways in which personal and social sin are related. For example, the greed of individuals can be reflected in a society which ignores the needs of others. The racial violence of individuals can spill over into social violence (e.g. riots). The pursuit of wealth by individuals can develop into the widespread exploitation of poor workers in developing countries. Social sin can also manifest itself as structural injustice, in which something wrong is supported by the official, organised structures of society (e.g. racism).

Many Christian churches' encyclicals/pastoral letters on social justice refer to the idea of structural injustice and the relationship between personal and social sin.



### Resources

MacNamara, Vincent *The Truth in Love* (Already referred to.)

Brown, Colin *Crash Course on Christian Ethics*

Brown, David (1993) *Choices, Ethics and the Christian* Blackwell (For Roman Catholic and Anglican understanding of natural law.)

Harrington, Donal (1996) *What is Morality?* Dublin: The Columba Press

For a recent treatment of sin, see Connolly, Hugh (2002) *Sin* from the series *New Century Theology* London: Continuum.

For a treatment of the understanding of moral failure in a non-Christian tradition, see Jean Holm and John Bowker's *Making Moral Decisions*.

Students might also be encouraged to engage in dialogue with members of another tradition, with teachers perhaps arranging visits from representatives of that tradition, facilitating them in a comparison of the Christian and non-Christian understanding of moral failure/sin, and how this stems from their understanding of God.

### Part three: Moral principles and theories

Part 3.1 considers morality in a pluralist society. In ordinary conversation, people generally use the term pluralist to describe a society in which many different beliefs and practices exist. Strictly speaking, the term applies to a theory which holds that there are many different views or schools of thought within society and that all groups have a right to carry out their cultural and religious practices. Obviously, this can lead to moral conflict, when the values of one group clash with the values of another. An example of this would be the conflict between pro-life and pro-choice groups in the abortion debate. Another might be the conflict, in Britain, of pro- and anti-hunting groups. The source of conflict between the pro-life and pro-choice groups is, on the one hand, the belief that the unborn human being must be protected from harm and, on the other hand, the belief that it is up to a woman to decide whether or not she wants to have a child. The source of conflict between the pro- and anti-hunting groups lies, on the one hand, in the belief that hunting is cruel and unnecessary and that the life of all animals is valuable and, on the other hand, the belief that some animals (such as foxes) are pests and should be hunted, or that hunting is a source of social enjoyment for rural communities, and therefore valuable. For a discussion on the role of religion in the context of pluralism see: Hollenbach, David (2002) *Common Good and Christian Ethics* Cambridge University Press.

Fundamentalism is usually taken to refer to an emphasis on the literal interpretation and application of a religion's scriptures and laws, and may include the belief that the laws of the particular religion should be the laws of the state. This topic needs to be treated sensitively, as common perceptions of Islam are often based on stereotyped perceptions of Islamic fundamentalism.

Francis Beckwith and Gregory Kousser define the phenomenon of relativism as *the view that when it comes to moral issues there are no universally objective right or wrong answers, no inappropriate*

*or appropriate judgments, and no reasonable or rational ways by which to make moral distinctions that apply in every time, in every place, and to every person.*

*Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, (1998) Grand Rapids: Baker Books, pp. 12-13.

John Kekes writes that, according to relativism:

*What values people accept depends on the context in which they were born, on their genetic inheritance and subsequent experiences, on the political, cultural, economic, and religious influences on them; in short, what they value depends on their subjective attitudes and not on the objective features of values. The implication of relativism is that there cannot be a uniquely reasonable system of values, because when all is said and done no value any conception embodies can be justified on objective grounds.*

John Kekes (1993) *The Morality of Pluralism* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

A useful way of teaching these terms, having given definitions, would be to consider how those who make moral decisions according to each principle might treat topics such as abortion, euthanasia, war, etc.



### Resources

For a treatment of terms listed in Part 3.2 of the syllabus, see Joe Jenkins, *Ethics and Religion* and Colin Brown, *Crash Course on Christian Ethics*. See also: Cooke, David (1983) *The Moral Maze: A Way of Exploring Christian Ethics* London: SPCK.

### Part four: Moral development

Part 4 considers moral development, conscience and decision-making in action. Students might be encouraged here to think of how children they know seem to think and act in relation to morality - those with very young siblings can make particularly useful observations. Many A-level/first year third level psychology textbooks provide an overview of moral theorists such as Lawrence Kohlberg. See for example, Gross, Richard and McIlveen, Rob (1998) *Psychology: A New Introduction* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 382-392.

In considering the complex topic of conscience, students might be encouraged to contrast inadequate descriptions (e.g. conscience is about what I feel is right or wrong) with those which take into account the idea that there is an objective right/wrong, that conscience needs to be informed, and that religious traditions can contribute to the

moral decision-making of an individual, and that conscience can be mistaken if it is not properly informed, or is based excessively on feelings. Students might be encouraged to consider a number of moral dilemmas, and how a person's decision might differ, depending on their moral maturity, whether or not they relied on feelings alone, whether or not their conscience was adequately informed, etc. The same dilemmas can elicit discussion about the different demands made by conscience, religious authority and civil authority. This could be supplemented with students following debates about these issues in newspapers, etc. On crime and punishments, teachers might use a number of methodologies which employ discussion, project work, and even the study of film (e.g. *Dead Man Walking* or *Million Dollar Baby*).

In considering the process of moral decision-making, many existing senior religious education textbooks can be used (e.g. Niall Boyle, *The Challenge of God*). Using concrete examples of moral decisions, students can be encouraged to identify stages in moral decision-making. These might include the identification of the issue/action involved, a consideration of the intention, reason or motivation for making the decision, and the rightness/wrongness of this intention, reason or motivation.

Other 'stages' include: reflection on the moral values (including those which have religious sources) that are important to the person, and how these values can inform the decision; informing of conscience from various sources of authority; reflection on the sort of person (s)he wants to be, and how this might inform the decision (e.g. I want to be an honest, compassionate person, and not a dishonest, self-centred person); consideration of the consequences of the decision for the person and others (this might include the consequences for the person's character, as well as more concrete consequences).



## Resources

Hogan, Linda (2001) *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition*, Darton, Longman and Todd

Gula, Richard (1998) *Reason Informed by Faith*

Harrington, Donal (1998) *What is Morality*

The Irish Bishops' Conference, *Conscience* Dublin: Veritas

For the final section, dealing with issues such as crime and punishment, medical ethics, etc., McKenna, John *Moral Choices* (1992) Dublin: School and College Publishing, is a teaching resource, providing much material for discussion in class.

# SECTION E

## Religion and Gender

### Part one: Gender, society and religion

#### 1.1 Gender and society

Gender equity in society is about eliminating stereotypes that limit the life opportunities and choices of both the male and female sexes. In contemporary times, great strides have taken place in the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, biology and psychology expressing and influencing the changing roles of men and women in society. The term 'gender' is a social construct and includes both male and female. The term 'sex', on the other hand, denotes either of the two characteristics of male or female, based on the organisms of their reproductive functions.



#### Focusing activity

##### Group work and feedback:

Ask the students to discuss their understanding of the following terms: 'gender', 'sex stereotyping', 'sexual discrimination'.

Each student might write the main point of each groups' answers in their journals/copy books and feedback.

##### Follow-up activity:

Explain to the students that gender equity has been researched/studied by people who are experts in the areas of philosophy, sociology, biology and psychology.

Using the following statements as a basis for discussions, ask them which of the four terms underlined above pertain to the following sentences:

- 'Males and females view the world differently' (Gilligan 1982, philosophy).
- 'Although men and women share common biologies, we cannot assume they are not treated differently' (Harrison 2001, sociology).

- 'There may exist a great deal of neurophysiological and anatomical differences between the brains of males and females' (Sabbatini 1997, biology).
- 'Boys become fascinated with the legal elaboration of rules while girls have a more pragmatic approach to rules' (Piaget 1972, psychology).



#### Resources

##### Philosophy:

Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

##### Sociology:

Harrison, W. (2001) 'Truth is slippery stuff' *Investigating Gender* Buckingham: Open University Press

##### Biology:

Sabbatini, R. (1997) 'Are There Differences between the Brains of Males and Females?' <http://www.epub.org.br/cmn11mente/eisntein/cerebro-homens.html>

##### Psychology:

Krupnick, C. (1985) 'Women and Men in the Classroom: Inequality and its Remedies'

Note: Often website addresses are difficult to obtain if the user simply clicks on to them or types in the web address. However, if the user types in the name of the authors below and the titles corresponding to their names into a search engine the entire websites will readily appear.



## 1.2 The place of women and men in the sacred texts and living traditions of different religions

The question of gender pertains to all religions. Increasing numbers of men and women find it necessary to challenge the well-known gender patterns of their respective traditions in the best interests of their own self-realisation and that of their faith communities. In many of the texts of the major world religions, men play a dominant role with God/gods being imaged as predominantly male. Certain theologians and scripture scholars have argued that this has significantly devalued the status of women. Increasing numbers of men and women find it necessary to reinterpret their religious texts in order to expose real or perceived gender biases. Andocentric (male-centred) cultural biases in the traditions of the major world religions are continually being challenged. Yet, closer examination of the sacred texts and traditions will show that these religions, in principle, carry an essential message of equality.



### Student activity

- Divide the class into research groups of four to five. Ask each group to select a major world religion and prepare a speech on the topic: ***This religion has more to offer by way of gender equality than any other.*** Select a speaker/s from each group to argue the case. The following statements might be useful in getting started.

‘So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ (Gal 3:28, Christianity)

‘The Qur’an offers both sexes moral and spiritual equality’ (Kassam, 2001, Islam)

‘So God created men and women in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them’, (Gen 1:27 Hebrew Scriptures, Judaism)

‘Buddha said, “There must be no trafficking of slaves or women” (Colledge, 1999, Buddhism);

‘The rite of initiation (upanayana), which marked the beginning of Vedic studies, was open to both men and women’ (Sugirtharajah, 2000, Hinduism)

- Use the web addresses under section C of the syllabus to research world religions.



### Resources

#### Christianity:

Malone, M. T. (2000) *Women and Christianity* Dublin: The Columba Press

#### Islam:

Kassam, Z. (2001) ‘Islamic Ethics and Gender Issues’ *Ethics in the World Religions* Runzo, J. and Martin, N. eds. Oxford: Oneworld pp. 115-134

#### Judaism:

Wright, A. (2000) ‘Judaism’, *Women in Religion* Holm, J. and Bowker, J. eds London: Continuum pp. 113-140.

#### Buddhism:

Colledge, R. (1999) *Mastering World Religions* London: Macmillan Press pp. 209-251.

#### Hinduism:

Sugirtharajah, S. (2000) ‘Hinduism’ *Women in Religion* Holm, J. and Bowker, J. eds. London: Continuum pp. 59-83.

## Part two: Gender and Christianity

**One of 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 or 2.4 to be chosen.**

### 2.1 Women and men in the Hebrew Scriptures

Women of the Hebrew Scriptures have often been seen as less important than the men of their times. Examples include Ruth (Ruth 1-4), and Esther (1:10). Ruth, for example, is known for her peaceful and loyal devotion during violent times while Esther by her great courage saved her people from extermination. Other lesser-known unsung heroines include Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16) an Egyptian princess from the most exalted of families who finds herself a slave to the wife of Abraham, Sarah. Her job is providing Abraham with a son because of Sarah’s barrenness (Gen 16:1) and she has no say in the matter. She is treated cruelly enough to run away. Yet, she is found by a messenger of the Lord, who is none other than God. She becomes one of the very few select in the Bible who has ‘seen’ God and lived. Hannah, (1 Samuel 1:1-2.10; 2:18-21) who in the midst of her country’s destruction by the pagans, suffers the great catastrophe for a woman of that time, infertility. Yet, through the sneering of her contemporaries, she holds great faith in God and becomes the mother of Samuel, grand-mother of King David and six more children. At a much later time, Mary of Nazareth provides her own memorial to Hannah when she sings the great *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-56). Two more women worthy of serious



consideration are Eve (Gen.2.4b-4, 2a; 4.25) who partners Adam and Sarah who partners Abraham (Gen. 11.29-23.20). Eve has been much maligned in the tradition, entering dialogue with the snake and the tempting of Adam. A closer look at Eve shows she is created in the image of God (Gen. 1.27) She does not actually tempt Adam, but like Adam, was beguiled by the snake (Gen 3.6b). Her punishment, increased toil and pregnancies (Gen 3.16), is no greater than Adam's punishment, to toil all the days of his life (Gen 3.17-19). Eve is co-creator with God 'Eve', 'Mother of all living'. Sarah, like Hannah is barren, therefore, disgraced. Her husband, Abraham is the exemplary man of faith. She is treated like a servant and scorned (Gen 18.6). However, though much more is made of her husband in the Scriptures, she gets to talk to God (Gen 18.15). Although she is very old, she is eventually rewarded for her faith by the promise of a son (Gen 17. 19, 21).

Faith stories about men in the Hebrew Scriptures are plentiful but their relationship to women, where that is recorded, is secondary in comparison to the part they play in salvation history. The prophets Amos (1-9), Hosea (1-14), Isaiah (1-66) and Jeremiah 1-52) are best known for their struggles against the social injustices of their time. Where women were of significance to these men is clearly seen in their unrelenting criticisms of the poor and the oppressed, of which women and children were at the bottom of their societal structures. With great passion and courage, they continually begged their beloved peoples to return to God so that justice would flow freely. Two other most significant men are Moses and Job. Moses is the abandoned, rescued baby, the prince who suffers, the exile who returns home from the desert with a family and a mission. He is the reluctant prophet and one of The Bible's most colourful and vibrant characters. He is the epitome of pious humility (Num 12.3), prophet, priest, judge and king. He is unique because of his unparalleled intimacy with God (Ex 33-34) and father and mother to his people (Num 11.12). He twice foregoes the honour of begetting a new nation (Ex 32.10); is condemned to die in the wilderness for the sins of his people (Deut 1.37); buried in an unknown grave (Deut 34.6); is described as a god to Aaron and Pharaoh (Ex 4.16) but his face shines with divine splendour (Ex 34.29-35). Job, for his part, is the true paragon of virtue whose faith is unassailably secure (Job 1.2); yet this faith is tested endlessly by Yahweh (1.13-22; 19.8-12) and taunts from his friends (4.1-14; 5.17). His friends force him to curse the day he was born (3.2-5) but he continues to search for God and wisdom but neither are to be found (28.1-9). Job's unjust suffering forces him to change his images of God so that, as a just man of faith, he might understand his suffering. He images God as the oriental monarch, the God of retribution, the God of justice, and the God of omnipotence. To no avail, finally he learns that in his human condition he can

only stand in awe and wonder of a God he will never fully understand. In the end, however, it was only Job and not his friends who sensed that God is greater than human understanding.



### Student activity

The teacher might take a brief look at the introductions to each of the above characters in the *Good News Bible*, Collins/Fontana. These introductions offer a brief and succinct account of the content of the Bible stories. Students can select some of the scriptural references above dealing with both the male and female characters. Compare the virtues/characters portrayed by the men to those of the women.



### Resources

Dennis, T. (1994) *Sarah Laughed* London: SPCK

Guttierrez, G. (1986) *On Job* New York: Orbis

Propp, W. (2000) 'Moses', *Eerdman's Dictionary of The Bible*, Freedman, D. ed. Michigan: Eerdman's Publishing Company, pp. 919-922

Walton, R. (1970) *A Source Book of The Bible for Teachers* London: SCM Press

Schneiders, S. (1986) *The Gender of God in the New Testament and the Spirituality of Women*, New York: Paulist.

## 2.2 Women and men in the Christian Scriptures

As the teacher will note from just a few of the select scriptural references in the 'activity' box, next page, Jesus had numerous encounters with women. **Mary Magdalene** is one of the most prominent of the Galilean women to have followed Jesus. Although none of the gospels tells the story of the initial encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, she appears in all four gospels, most significantly as a witness to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, not to his disciples or to his mother. Magdalene went and told Jesus' companions but they did not believe her (Mk 16.9-11). This is the woman who stood by Jesus throughout his life; she is the woman portrayed by The Bible as being the closest to him. She was not a prostitute but is confused in later tradition as such, possibly due to the commonality of the name at that time and number of 'Marys' in the Scriptures. She suffered from serious mental illness and became a follower of

Jesus as a result of her cure. Her encounter with Jesus at the tomb portrays a special relationship between them.

The story of the **Samaritan woman** is considered to be one of the most surprising encounters in the gospels that Jesus had with women. She asks, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' She knew that there was a two-fold scandal in Jesus' approach to her, firstly she was a Samaritan and, therefore, despised by the Jews and secondly her gender. Jesus' disciples were troubled when they returned to find them talking together (John 4:27). In that cultural context it was enough to find Jesus speaking with a woman, never mind a Samaritan one. Also she had numerous husbands but as a woman of her time, she was not allowed to initiate divorce and it was relatively easy for a husband to walk away. Clearly this is an 'easy' woman finally being held accountable for her promiscuity. She has been going through husbands for years. But Jesus does not see as we see. In Christ, there is no longer Jew or Samaritan, there is no longer respectable or disgraced, there is no longer male or female. He is able to look at her and see just a person. They are two people at a well in the heat of the day. She has a bucket. He is hot and thirsty. And so he says: 'Give me a drink'. So begins a conversation that will quench her thirst. He will not merely speak to her. He offers her a chance to leave behind the ruins of her broken life and redefine herself as someone with something important to proclaim. Against all odds she accepts his call and so becomes the apostle to the Samaritans.



### Student activity

- The teacher might invite the students to read the biblical stories listed below and discuss Jesus' approach and attitude to women as evidenced in the stories.

The following references are a selection of some of Jesus' encounters with women :

**Mt.** 1:1-17; 5:27; 8:14-17; 9:18-26

**Mk.** 1:29-31; 5:21-43; 7:24-30; 16:1-8

**Lk.** 1:14; 2:17-18; 5:14; 16:14-15

**Jn.** 2:1-11; 4:1-42; 11:1-44; 20:1-2

- Ask the students to select one story from any or a number of references below, and in small groups to dramatise the event in their own words. Alternatively groups of students might prefer to write a short poem or a newspaper account of the encounter in

their own words. A time may be appointed for the students to perform/read their work in front of their peers.

Acts 12:12-14; 16:13-14, 15, 40; 18:2-3; 18:26 and in Paul 1 Cor 7; 1 Cor 11; 1:14-34; Eph 5:24.

- Perhaps more adventurous classes might like to divide into two groups and debate the following statement:

*Mary Magdalene received the highest revelation of the meaning of the resurrection. The right of women to equal place among the disciples is defended through her.*

(Ruether, 1977).



### Syllabus links

Section B: Christianity: origins and contemporary expressions. – Part 2.3.



### Resources

Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1992) *But She Said* Boston: Beacon Press

Schneiders, S. (1991) *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* New York: Harper Collins

For a more general introduction see the *Introducing Feminist Theology* series of books by Sheffield Academic Press.

### 2.3 Changing perspectives on Mary, mother of Jesus

As with other stories in the New Testament, the Evangelists do not all contain exactly the same stories of Mary. For example, Matthew and Luke contain the infancy narratives, Mark and John do not. Only John writes of her at Cana (Jn 2.1-11). If this is not made clear to young students, credibility difficulties with the scriptures may manifest themselves. What is of considerable importance, however, is to show the very real humanity of Mary. To rediscover the historical Mary, it is necessary to return to the scriptures where her story emerges. They reveal a woman who has loved, lived and suffered an earthly existence. She experiences great surprise (Lk 1:26-38); she flees the wrath of Herod (Mt 2.13); loses her child (Lk 2.41-49) and witnesses his agonising death (Mt 27:32-55). She has exceptional courage (Lk 1.38) and faith (Lk 2.19) and lives the destiny of the poor and marginalised. She belonged to a people colonised by the great Roman

Empire. In the midst of all this, we find in Luke's *Magnificat* one of the most important testimonies to her faith (Lk 1.46-56).

It has been argued that Mary's humanity was played down in the long tradition of Christianity making it impossible for ordinary human beings to emulate her as a model. For example, it is sometimes contended that Mary has been turned into an impossible icon especially for women, e.g. the 'Virgin and Mother'. For others she is the great liberator, who, through her humanity is in solidarity with the human race. Mary has been the focus of theological logic, devotional piety, popular misconceptions and hundreds of images throughout a 2000-year period. The rise of the cult of Mary began in the 431 AD when she was proclaimed *Theotokos* (God-Bearer) at the Council of Ephesus. (The Latin term *Mater Dei Incarnati* means Mother of God Incarnate). By the Middle Ages her status came close to divinisation in the popular imagination, which met with disapproval from Church authorities. Accounts of her apparitions have fuelled popular devotion and shrines to her are best known at Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje and Knock. These are recognised by millions, Christians and non-Christians alike as places of great spiritual and physical healing.



### Teaching approaches

One way to approach this topic is to help the students to rediscover the historical Mary by selecting some/all of the above scriptural quotations as a basis for teaching. The gospels of Matthew and Luke are worth noting in their entirety as some of their stories differ. It would be a useful exercise to write out overheads or handouts with the scriptural references of each of these Evangelists and ask the students to note the differences in the stories.



### Student activity

- Invite students to visit their local church/place of worship and to pay attention to icons, paintings, pictures, carvings and Stations of the Cross depicting Mary.
- Prepare a short report on what they have found and what kinds of images of Mary are most visible. Do they reflect the historical Mary or an artist's ideal impression of Mary? Then report back to the class.



### Resources

- Reuther, R. (1979) *Mary the Feminine Face of the Church* SCM Press
- Brown, R. ed. (1978) *Mary in the New Testament*, New Jersey: Paulist Press
- O'Carroll, M. (1982) *Theotokos*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press
- Cunneen, S. (1996) *In Search of Mary*, New York: Ballantine Books
- Balasuriya, T. (1997) *Mary and Human Liberation* London: Mowbray
- Macquarrie, J. (1992) *Mary for All Christians* London: Harper Collins
- Mc Loughlan, William and Pinnockk, Jill, eds. *Mary for Earth and Heaven: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*

### 2.4 Gender perspectives on empowerment and exclusion

Inaccessibility or difficulty of access to the ordained ministry is one of the most contentious issues in some Christian traditions. In the Roman Catholic church, the most important bar is based on the necessity of maleness for admittance to ordination. Counter claims argue (in agreement with the Council of Chalcedon 451 AD) that Christ did not redeem humankind through his maleness but through his humanity. Many argue that such exclusion makes it impossible for a woman to answer a call of the Holy Spirit to Holy Orders. This practice also means that women are not given the opportunity to enter into important decision-making processes in the Church.

Many women attend interdenominational schools and debate in theology while remaining within their respective churches. Access to theological education and ministry has taken place e.g. Congregationalists (1853), Unitarians, Universalists, Methodist Protestants (1870-80's). Women's ordination was approved by Methodists and Northern Presbyterians (1956), Lutherans (1965) Episcopalians (1975); Church of Ireland (1990). From the 1960's, Catholic women have become prominent as theologians. Their emergence reflects a very important movement in the Catholic Church. It also encouraged a new ecumenism opening debate between men and women of all Christian denominations.



## Student activity

Under the guidance and prior research of the teacher, invite a guest speaker to come to your class to give a balanced account of someone who has experienced exclusion and/or empowerment in religion because of gender.



## Resources

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1976) *Inter Insigniores* Catholic Truth Society

McEnroy, C. (1996) *Guests in their own House* New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/99-112D.html>

<http://www.womenpriests.org/church>

[http://www.scotland.anglican.org/history\\_women.html](http://www.scotland.anglican.org/history_women.html)

## Part three: Women's stories

Feminist theology and spirituality emerged in Europe and in the United States around the 1970's. These theologies were a response to the realisation by feminists in the secular world that oppression of women exists and has continued to exist for many, many centuries. Feminist theologians, particularly in the major world religions, began to study the scriptures and the teachings of their respective traditions to find that women's accounts were seldom written or told. His-story was seldom matched with accounts of Her-story and where they did exist they were forgotten, suppressed or lost.

### 3.1 Feminist theologies and spiritualities

Three characteristics of feminist theology include

- the need to recognise a male bias in theology
- the need to challenge such biases
- the need to reconstruct theological themes by seeking an alternative vision for humanity and the earth.

Feminist theologians have concentrated their reconstruction on critical scriptural studies. They also continue to revise approaches to church history looking afresh at the tradition and comprehensively re-thinking it in light of current research and understanding. Feminist theology also addresses issues of ethics and pastoral psychology.

Three characteristics of feminist spiritualities include

- the need for women to tell their own stories, i.e. about their own respective faith traditions
- the need for emphasis on ritual that is participative, aesthetic, and communitarian, and which relates to the experiences of women
- the need to make links between personal spiritual growth and social/ecclesial justice.

In the past and in contemporary times, many women have left their faith traditions because they believe that their faith communities have not listened to them and have only permitted practice of the faith through male understanding. They feel that they have been forced to find new approaches to theology and spirituality, sometimes outside of their respective faith traditions.

### Feminist theology and Christian traditions

There is much common ground between feminist theologians and the Christian traditions. Christian feminism is not about walking away from a much valued faith. Instead, those who espouse Christian feminism base it on Gospel values. They strongly claim that a return to the central teachings of the gospels will show that sexism is contrary to Christianity. In this respect, the scriptures can be and are being reinterpreted by feminist theologians within the Christian tradition. This is a tradition that is not in the past, but a powerful force of ongoing life in the community capable of change without losing its identity. In the early Church, women were given the status of heroines, martyrs and ascetics. They studied scripture, theological reading in Greek and Latin and trained in Hebrew. From early times, the Church had an order of widows who performed various religious and charitable deeds. In the fourth century, there were orders of deaconesses who aided the bishop with ritual and teaching functions pertaining to women. Authors outlined in section 3.1 below are examples of feminist writers who have spent their lives reconstructing women's stories from scripture and tradition to make them relevant for both women and men today. It is important to note that men as well as women can be feminist in their approach, because feminism is about the marginalisation of women's experience and the building of a more just, inclusive world for all.





## Student activity

- Ask the students to do a collage of words outlined in the definition of feminism below. Each of the words should be looked up in a dictionary and the meanings of those words should be inserted in some creative way into the collage.

### Definition

*Feminism is a comprehensive ideology rooted in women's experience of sexual oppression; it engages in a critique of patriarchy as an essentially dysfunctional system; embraces an alternative vision for humanity and the earth; actively seeks to bring this vision to realisation.*

(Schneiders, 1991).



## Resources

Schneiders, S. (1991) *Beyond Patching*  
New York, Dublin: Paulist Press: pp. 391-396.

Parsons, S. ed. *Feminist Theology*  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Johnson, E. (1992) *She Who Is*  
New York: Crossroad

Holloway, R. ed. (1991) *Who Needs Feminism?  
Men Respond to Sexism in the Church*  
London: SPCKL (This latter text contains a selection of articles by male theologians who espouse the principles of feminism.)

### 3.1 The contributions of women

Women studied should be those who by their lives, work, attitudes and teachings helped to shape the Christianity of today as well as former times. Two key writers of the Middle Ages are Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). Julian is best known for her theology of God's motherhood. She was an English religious writer, an anchoress, or hermit. She completed her work, c. 1393, *Revelations of Divine Love* which is an expression of mystical fervor in the form of 16 visions of Jesus. The dominant ideas in her work include the great love of God for men and women and the detestable character of human sin. She is considered one of the greatest of mystics.

Catherine of Siena is best known as a mystic, champion of the poor and lay doctor of the Church. From her earliest childhood Catherine began to see visions and to practice extreme austerities. At the age of seven she consecrated her virginity to Christ. In her sixteenth year she took the habit of the

Dominican Tertiaries. After three years of celestial visitations and familiar conversation with Christ, she underwent the mystical experience known as the 'spiritual espousals', probably during the carnival of 1366. She began to tend the sick, especially those afflicted with the most repulsive diseases, to serve the poor, and to labour for the conversion of sinners.

Those in the religious orders who had a huge influence on social and religious reform would include Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179); Teresa of Avila (1515-1582); Mary Ward (1585-1645); Louise de Marillac (1591-1660); Catherine McAuley (1778-1841); Mary Aikenhead (1787-1858); Jean Jugan (1792-1879); Teresa Ball (1794-1861); Catherine Laboure (1806-1876); Margaret Aylward (1810-1889); Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897).

Scholarly contemporary writers, whose material is readily available include: Rosemary Radford Ruether; Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza; Sandra Schneiders; Rita Gross; Carol Christ; Nicola Slee; Mercy Amba Oduyoye; Susan Frank Parsons; Bridget Gilfillan Upton; Kowk Pui-Lan; Sally McFague; Madonna Kolbenschlag; Joan Chittister; Carolyn Osiek; Kari Borresen; Carter Heyward; Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz.



## Teaching approaches

The internet is particularly useful for profiles of women, their biographies and stories. A plethora of information is given on the internet by typing in any one of the above names on a recognised search engine.



## Student activity

- Students might also be encouraged to select any one/two of the names outlined above, that is, of the feminist writers, theologians or founders of religious orders and research information for a class or individual project.
- Alternatively, the students might contact one of the religious orders and request an interview with a member/s on its founder's vision, and the role of the religious order in contemporary Ireland. Some pointers for the interview may focus on the foundation of the order, its founder, her life, work and vision, the cultural context of her day, current involvement in health/education/social justice/the parish community.





## Resources

Slee, N. (2002) 'The Holy Spirit and Spirituality' *Feminist Theology* Parsons, Susan ed. Cambridge University Press

Cavallini, G. (1998) *Catherine of Siena*, London: Geoffrey Chapman

Tinsley, A. (1997) *A Neighbour Kind and Known; The Spirituality of Julian of Norwich* Dublin: The Columba Press



## Additional resources

### Topic 1.1

Drudy, S. and Lynch, K. (1993) *Schools and Society in Ireland* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

Eby, D. (1990) 'Gender and Brain Imaging', [online] <http://www.talentdevelop.com/gender.html>

Gray, J. (1992) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* Harper Collins

Oakley, A. (1972) *Sex, Gender and Society* London: Temple Smith

Boys, M. (1989) *Educating in Faith* San Francisco: Harper

Skelton, C. (2001) 'Typical Boys? Theorizing masculinity in educational settings' *Investigating Gender* Buckingham: Open University Press

### Topic 1.2

Ahmed, L. (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam* New Haven: Yale University Press

Brodd, J. and Wilt, M. (1998) *Teaching Manual for World Religions* Minnesota: St. Mary's Press

Colledge, R. (1999) *Mastering World Religions* London: Macmillan Press

Franklin, A. and Sturme Jones, R. (1987) *Opening the Cage* London: Allen and Unwin

Narayanan, V. (2001) 'Hindu Ethics and Dharma' *Ethics in the World Religions*

Runzo, J. & Martin, N. eds. Oxford: Oneworld pp. 177-195.

Zaehner, R.C. (2001) *The Hutchinson Encyclopaedia of Living Faiths* Oxford: Helicon pp. 263-341.

### Topic 2.1

Carmody, D.L. (1988) *Biblical Women: contemporary reflections on scriptural texts* New York: Crossroad

Clines, D. (1990) *What does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

Meyers, C. (1988) *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Pace, S. (1990) *The Women of Genesis; From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* Minneapolis: Fortress Press

Trible, P. (1978) *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* Philadelphia: Fortress Press

### Topic 2.2

Barton, S. (1991) 'Women, Jesus and the Gospels' *Who Needs Feminism?* Holloway, D. ed. London: SPCK pp. 32-58.

Gillfillan Upton, B. (2002) 'Feminist theology as biblical

hermeneutics' *Feminist Theology* Susan Parsons ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp. 97-113.

Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1995) *In Memory of Her* New York: SCM Press

Struthers Malbon, E. (2000) *In the Company of Jesus* Louisville: John Knox Press

Moltmann Wendel, E. (1982) *The Women around Jesus*, London: SCM Press

Witherington, B. (1987) *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Carroll, D. (1998) *Unusual Suspects* Dublin: The Columba Press

### Topic 2.3

Anthony, M. (1989) 'Mary in the Orthodox Tradition' *Mary in the Church* Hyland, J. ed. Dublin: Veritas pp. 95-103.

Flannery, A. (1996) 'Our Lady', *Vatican Council 11* ed. Dublin: Dominican Publications pp. 80-95.

Leahy, B. (2000) *The Marian Profile*, London: New City

Paterson, J. (1989) 'Anglicans and Mary: A Church of Ireland Response to the Paper of Dom Alberic Stacpoole' *Mary in the Church*, Hyland, J. ed. Dublin: Veritas pp. 79-94.

Paul VI, *To Honour Mary* (1974) Rome: The Vatican Polyglot Press

Stacpoole, A. (1989) 'Mary in ecumenical dialogue' *Mary in the Church* Hyland, J. ed. Dublin: Veritas, pp. 57-78.

Tavard, G. (1996) *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* Minnesota: The Liturgical Press

### Topic 2.4

Grey, M. (1993) *The Wisdom of Fools?* SPCK: London: Lakeland, P. (1975) *Can Women be Priests?* Dublin: The Mercier Press

Ruether, R. (1986) *Women-Church* New York: Harper and Row

Swidler, A. and Swidler, L. (1977) *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* eds. New York: Paulist Press

### Topic 3.1

Ruether, R. (1983) *Sexism and God-Talk* London: SCM Press

Kolbenschlag, M. (1987) *Women in the Church* Washington DC: The Pastoral Press

Ruether, R. (1987) 'Feminist Theology' *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Eds. Komonchak, J; Collins, M; Lane, D.) Gill and Macmillan

Ruether, R. (1998) *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* Minneapolis: Fortress Press

Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1994) *In Memory of Her* SCM Press

### Topic 3.2

Cady, S. and Ronan, M. (1986) *Sophia: the Future of Feminist Spirituality* San Francisco: Harper & Row

Christ, C. and Plaskow, J. (1979) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, San Francisco: Harper & Row

Conn, J.W. (1987) (Eds. Komonchak, J; Collins, M; Lane, D.) 'Spirituality' *The New Dictionary of Theology* Wilmington: Glazier

# SECTION F

## Issues of Justice and Peace

### Part one: Reflecting on context

*“Social analysis can be defined as an effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships.”*

Peter Henriot S.J.

In part one, students are required to develop their knowledge and understanding of the principles of social analysis and to learn how to apply those principles to actual situations at the local, national and international levels.

The aim is to investigate the way things are and to ask why they are so. One explores issues, and more importantly, one tries to get behind the issues to see what are their causes. This will involve looking at economic issues such as labour, poverty, income distribution, employment and unemployment, patterns of production and consumption, etc. Political issues will include government, law, justice system, trade unions, lobby groups, and so on. Cultural factors will involve investigating the assumptions we all live by and asking where they come from and how they are maintained. The education system, mass media, and religious influences are significant factors in this regard. Social structures need examination too, and this will include looking at how society is divided into groups or sections and how these are related. For example, families, social classes, vocational types, ethnic groups, etc.

Social analysis is aimed at giving people the tools to help them to understand their situation in order to take action for change. Ultimately, social analysis is a tool for social transformation. This kind of approach to investigating society is not value-free, and it is a controversial activity. Teachers should alert students to this fact. Part of the educational process will be to help students to think critically about, and evaluate the different ways of understanding how society works (or fails to work); who benefits and who loses; who has power and who is powerless.

### 1.2 Social analysis in action

Social analysis in action asks the students to apply the principles of social analysis to one (O.L.) or two (H.L.) areas out of a list of three: world hunger, poverty in Ireland, and discrimination in Ireland. **(Higher level students will be required to compare and contrast the two areas studied.)**

The following three-step method provides a summary of what is involved in carrying out a social analysis.

- 1 The first step is to make explicit the values which one brings to the task. This means we need to be in touch with the perspectives, biases and stances which influence the questions we ask and the judgements we make. This is linked to the fact that no investigation is value-free.
- 2 The next step is to make a general description of the situation we are trying to understand (e.g. poverty, discrimination, violence, etc). This can be done by gathering facts and trends, by gathering stories, or by talking to people most prominent in the situation. A more systematic approach might be taken through a survey or questionnaire. The aim at this point is to enter into the picture and get an initial understanding of the situation.
- 3 The third step is analysis. This involves working through a series of questions about the history of the situation, the major structures which influence the situation, the key values operative in the situation, who holds power, what are the key relationships influencing the situation, and what the future direction of the situation might look like. Then, by a process of critical questioning, one begins to draw some conclusions about the root elements of the situation.

Once the principles of social analysis have been taught and applied to representative examples by the teacher, students could apply these principles to

the specific areas required in part 1.2 (i.e. world hunger, poverty in Ireland, discrimination in Ireland). They would need to be encouraged to be as accurate, fair and comprehensive as they can be in investigating what are complex and emotionally charged topics. The teacher should model this attitude of fair critical reflection in presenting material and organising discussion. A guest speaker (carefully chosen) with experience of a particular social situation could be useful in this process.



### Student activity

- Students might be helped to become critical readers of the media so as to discover what values are being brought to, and expressed in, their reports and commentary. Teachers and students will find relevant contemporary material in the business sections of newspapers and magazines and especially in 'Features' and 'Opinion' sections. End-of-year analyses and budget discussions will be particularly helpful in this regard. Students could be encouraged to build up a file of cuttings from these sources.
- Develop students' capacity to question critically by practicing 'The Five Whys'. This method uses a process of asking 'why?' at least five times to unpack complex issues. Begin with a statement of fact, for example:

The child has a septic foot.

*Why?*

Because she stepped on a thorn.

*Why?*

Because she has no shoes?

*Why?*

Because her parents cannot afford to buy her any.

*Why?*

Because her father is paid very little as a farm labourer.

*Why?*

Because he is not allowed to join a trade union.

Then invite the students to look at the first question and the last answer and discuss the links.



### Resources

Holland J. and Henriot, P.(1980, revised edition 1983) *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* Washington DC: Orbis Books

S. Healy and B. Reynolds, (1985) *Ireland Today: Reflecting in the Light of the Gospel* Maynooth: Kairos

Dunne, J. Ingram, A. and Litton, F. eds. (2000) *Questioning Ireland: Debates in Political Philosophy and Public Policy* Dublin: Institute of Public Administration

Healy S. and Reynolds, B. eds. (1998) *Social Policy in Ireland: Principles, Practice and Problems* Dublin: Oak Tree Press

Irish Bishops' Pastoral, *Prosperity with a Purpose* available online at [www.prosperitywithapurpose.ie](http://www.prosperitywithapurpose.ie)

Cassidy, Eoin ed. (2000) *Prosperity with a Purpose: What Purpose?* Dublin: Veritas

80:20 *Development in an Unequal World* (2002) England: 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World, Ireland and Tide (Teachers in Development Education)

Drumm, M. (1998) *Famine*, Christian Perspectives on Development Issues Trócaire, Veritas, Cafod

Trócaire has produced a short teaching resource entitled *Hunger – The Real Reasons*, which takes a case-study approach to examining the causes of world hunger.

Dorr, Donal (1991) *The Social Justice Agenda* Dublin: Gill and MacMillan

#### Websites

CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) Justice website: [www.corie.ie/justice](http://www.corie.ie/justice)

Trócaire can offer good information and speakers in relation to poverty and hunger in the developing world. [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

Other websites of interest include:

Development education: <http://www.developmenteducationireland.org>

Bread for the World Institute: <http://www.bread.org/>

Development organisations: <http://www.oneworld.net/>

United Nations:

<http://www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus/index.html>

Combat Poverty: <http://www.cpa.ie/>

National 'Know Racism' site:

<http://www.knowracism.ie/>

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism: <http://www.nccri.com/>

The Equality Authority: <http://www.equality.ie/>

Travellers' website:

[http://www.paveepoint.ie/pav\\_home\\_a.html](http://www.paveepoint.ie/pav_home_a.html)

## Part two: The concept of justice and peace

This part is divided into four subsections:

- 1 justice
- 2 peace
- 3 religious perspectives
- 4 violence.

### 2.1 Visions of justice

Visions of justice looks at five ways to understand the concept of 'justice'. '**Right relationship**' is mentioned first. Justice is concerned with the web of relationships that constitute our lives. Justice is seen as fidelity to a rightly ordered set of relationships. Reason can grasp the sense in this approach to living well together. An explicitly religious approach defines right relationship as right relationship with God, self, others and creation. Accordingly, God's relationships with humanity and creation is seen as the model of right relationship which we are called to follow.



#### Student activity

Students might map out the various relationships in their lives and reflect on the requirements necessary for these relationships to work well. Injustices can easily be understood as those behaviours that hinder good relationships. Examples of these are not hard to list and would furnish good food for class discussion.

Justice as **retribution** is mentioned next. The focus here is on the balancing of wrongs done with punishments for these wrongs. If someone does an injustice, justice requires that the balance be put right. The famous phrase from the Bible, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' (Ex 21:24) will often crop up in classroom discussions of crime and punishment. This phrase expresses the retributive aspect of justice. A

weakness in this understanding of justice is its failure to balance justice with mercy. It fails to recognise that sometimes it is right to be merciful and to forgo the strict requirements of justice, especially when there is a need to break the cycle of violence and patiently work for reconciliation (e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa).

This concept of justice is challenged by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where he exhorts his followers to be radically people of peace (see Mt 5:38-48).

**Fair play** is the most simple and direct understanding of justice, and one that students will have no difficulty grasping. How are we to determine what is 'fair'? The Golden Rule is one of the best known ways to answer this important question: Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. In its positive or negative form, this precept is found in several religious traditions. Aquinas, echoing Aristotle, defined the virtue of justice as 'the strong and firm will give everyone their due'. But then what is a person's due? Aristotle favoured calculating this arithmetically, with every person receiving from society in proportion to what he or she contributes. A weakness of this position is that justice can become legalistic, with Lady Justice weighing the scales according to what everyone deserves.

Justice as the **promotion of equality** is based on a recognition that we are all human beings with equal rights and dignity. For a treatment of the idea of justice as equality see Forrester, D.B. (2001) *On Human Worth: A Christian Vindication of Equality* London: SCM.

Justice is understood, finally, as the upholding of **human rights**. This articulates the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Today, the linking of justice and human rights is a common way of expressing the universality of the demand for justice and its requirements. Examples of this should be easy to come by. Teachers will immediately think of referring to the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights in this regard.



#### Resources

Hogan, L (1998) *Human Rights*. Published by Trocaire, Veritas and CAFOD

The Human Rights Watch site is at <http://www.hrw.org>

Amnesty International site: <http://www.amnesty.ie/>

Teachers and students might find interesting an essay by Mary Ann Glendon about the UN Declaration : [http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/social\\_justice/sj0006.html](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/social_justice/sj0006.html)



## 2.2 Visions of peace

One way of defining peace is as an absence of overt discord or dissension. This might nevertheless ignore hidden or unacknowledged injustices. A more adequate definition of peace would acknowledge that injustices must first be removed before a true peace can occur. Justice and peace then are symbiotic.

In the Judeo-Christian traditions both are central to God's vision of shalom; 'the fruits of justice are peace' (Isaiah 32:17).

In recent times, there has been great interest in peaceful 'conflict resolution' (2.2). Mediation is one common model. The work of George Mitchell in the Northern Ireland peace process is a good example of a mediator in action. The aim is to get both conflicting parties to engage in genuine dialogue, really listening to each other in a secure context, with a third party to mediate between them. The object of the process is to understand the true nature of conflict and to avoid emotional and other obstacles to gaining a new perspective on the situation. The avoidance of laying blame is an important element in the process; so, too, is empowering the parties to learn to take responsible control of their destinies and to compromise if necessary without losing their pride. By the use of appropriate skills and the goodwill of those concerned, the parties can be enabled to resolve their differences peacefully.



### Student activity

- Having studied the skills of conflict resolution in class, invite students to role-play how specific conflicts might be resolved. There are many student-friendly books available on this including:

Macbeth, Fiona and Fine, Nic (1995) *Playing with Fire: Creative Conflict Resolution for Young Adults*  
Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers

Stacey, H. (1997) *Let's Mediate: A Teacher's Guide to Peer Support and Conflict Resolution Skills for All Ages*  
Bristol: Lucky Duck Publishers

A teachers' website with resources in this area can be found at <http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans>  
Use the site search engine to find lesson plans on 'conflict resolution'.



### Resources

Singer, P. ed. *A Companion to Ethics*. Provides a philosophical, secular exploration of the general area of justice and peace.

Another general introduction is Beauchamp, L. (2001 third edition) *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* Boston: McGraw Hill

More popular in style is Ingram, D. & Parks, J. (2002) *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Ethics*, Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books.

Ecumenical perspectives on justice and peace can be found in Department of Theological Questions/Irish Inter Church Meeting, (1997) *Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today* Dublin: Veritas.

See also Williams, T. and Falconer, A. (1994) eds. *Sectarianism: Papers of the 1994 Corrymeela Ecumenical Conference* Dublin: Dominican Publications in association with the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Non-Catholic Christian views on justice and peace issues can be found in:

Geisler, N. (1991) *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*  
Grand Rapids, Mich. Baker House

Hauerwas, S. (1981) *A Community of Character* Notre Dame, Ind. University of Notre Dame Press

Hauerwas, S. (1985) *Against the nation: war and survival in a liberal society*  
Minneapolis, Winston Press

Meeks, M.D. (1989) *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*  
Minneapolis: Fortress Press

An explicitly Roman Catholic religious approach to justice and peace is to be found in Charles, R. (1999) *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* San Francisco.

Ignatius, and Himes, K. (2001) *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*  
New Jersey: Paulist

A website, containing the full texts of all the relevant documents from the Catholic magisterium, including *Pacem in Terris* and *The Challenge of Peace* can be found at <http://www.osjspm.org>

Groome, T. (1998) *Educating for Life*, Allen, Texas: Thomas More, has a useful discussion of justice and the R.E. teacher in chapter 8.



## 2.3 Religious perspectives on justice and peace

### Judeo-Christian tradition

For Hebrew faith, justice is an absolute mandate because God is just and those in covenant with God must live justly. The Hebrew Scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann writes, 'In biblical faith, the doing of justice is the primary expectation of God'. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures God relates to humanity, not as a blindfolded judge balancing the scales of justice to measure our legal deserts, but with compassion, mercy and loving-kindness. Key texts include the Creation accounts in Genesis, the Exodus story, the call back to the covenant by the Prophets (especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea). In the New Testament, one might emphasise the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5), the parable of the Last Judgement (Mt 25), the whole of Luke's Gospel and the Letter of James, amongst other texts.

Information on justice and peace in the Bible can be found in several of the books already mentioned and, in addition, see:

Brueggemann, W. (1986) *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly* New York, Paulist Press

Donohue, J. 'Biblical Perspectives on Justice' in Haughey, J. (1977) *The Faith that does Justice: examining the Christian sources for social change* New York : Paulist Press.

Charles, R. (1998) *Christian Social Witness and Teaching: The Catholic Tradition from Genesis to Centesimus Annus, Vol. 1: From Biblical Times to the Late Nineteenth Century* Herefordshire: Gracewing chapters 1 and 2.

Also helpful is a biblical introduction to moral theology: O'Rourke, B. M. (1996) *Living the Truth in Love* New York: St. Paul, especially chapters 7 and 8.

### Islam

Islam is built on 'five pillars' for living; five religious duties as the foundation for submission to God. The Zakat is the fourth pillar and involves almsgiving. The Qur'an encourages generosity and commends 'those who remain steadfast in prayer; and those in whose wealth is recognised wealth for the needy who asks and him who is prevented for some reason from asking' (Sura 70:23-25).

Thus the Zakat is intended to get beyond mere spontaneous help in times of emergency. Almsgiving is seen as a demand by God for the sake of equity and justice (Sura 2.110). In Islam what we own is for the benefit of those in need. The rule is that all adult, healthy Muslims are to give a percentage of annual earnings. The poor are free of this obligation.

### Hinduism

The Four Varnas of Hinduism refers to one's position (or class) in society. In Hindu societies, especially India, this

has manifested itself as the caste system. Its original purpose, it would seem, was economic rather than religious, in that it divided people according to their role in life. Ancient society was divided into four classes (varnas): the Brahmins, the Nobles or Warriors, the Commoners and the Serfs. The system developed to keep the social fabric in harmonious condition but in later ages it became a divisive force. Those in the fourth class came to be seen as the Untouchables, at the bottom of the hierarchy, with the Brahmins at the top. Although Untouchability is now legally prohibited in India, untouchable castes constitute about one fifth of India's population. They live on the outside of villages and survive by performing menial and polluting jobs such as working with leather in the tanneries or doing manual farm labour. Modern Hinduism is critical of caste and there is a strong movement to alleviate the social conditions and raise the status of those formerly regarded as untouchable. Students might like to research the life of Gandhi who campaigned for the emancipation of the Untouchables, whom he called Harijans, 'the children of God'.

### Buddhism

The 'Eightfold Path' is central to Buddhism. It is constituted by right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditational attainment. Wisdom is the fruit of following this path. No progress can be made without it. While on the surface this code for living may appear negative in that it speaks of refraining from doing certain things, what might be couched in negative language holds positive within it. Modern socially engaged Buddhists are quick to point out that it involves practicing positive qualities, such as kindness, compassion, generosity, truthfulness and justice. A central principle of Buddhist philosophy is that it is more noble to give than to take.



### Resources

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [CD-ROM] or other good CD-ROM encyclopaedias.

There are fine articles on Indian, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish and Christian ethics in the Blackwell *Companion to Ethics*.

One excellent place to start general research on the above themes is the BBC education website, which contains links to several relevant resources:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/library>

Logos Site (many links of Irish interest): [www.materdei.ie/logos](http://www.materdei.ie/logos)

Multi-faith Net (with many links to specific faiths): <http://www.multifaithnet.org/>

<http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/>

## 2.4 Violence

One way people have tried to ‘resolve’ conflict is through violence. Protecting personal rights or national rights (to security, for example) are reasons sometimes given to legitimise violence. ‘Personal’ violence is easily described, but what is ‘structural’ violence? This refers to harm done by unjust laws, for example, or unfair political, legal or social procedures or systems. The economic exploitation of the poor in many countries is one example. State violence in the form of torture is another. Poverty, particularly when it is extreme, even to the point of causing widespread death, could be termed a kind of violence. The Roman Catholic Church speaks of ‘institutionalised violence’:

*As the Christian believes in the productiveness of peace in order to achieve justice, he also believes that justice is a prerequisite for peace. He recognizes that in many instances Latin America finds itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence, when, because of a structural deficiency of industry and agriculture, of national and international economy, of cultural and political life, whole towns lack necessities, live in such dependence as hinders all initiative and responsibility as well as every possibility for cultural promotion and participation in social and political life, ...thus violating fundamental rights*

Latin American Bishops’ Conference, Medellin, 1968. ‘Peace’ document, no. 16.

War is the most extreme example of violence, especially in modern times. The ‘just war theory’ was developed in the 4th century by St. Augustine. It begins with the presumption that war is evil and then tries to balance this with the principle of self-defence. ‘Just war theory’ claims war can be justified as the lesser of two evils, though only under certain strict conditions. The ‘jus ad bellum’ conditions deal with why and when recourse to war is permissible: just cause, competent authority, right intention, last resort, probability of success, and proportionality. The ‘jus in bello’ conditions deal with the conduct of war: proportionality (the good intended proportionate to the evil done) and discrimination (which prohibits direct attacks on non-combatants and non-military targets). Whether a particular war fulfils these conditions is often difficult to determine, especially at the outset of war.



### Student activity

Invite students to look at one example of war and apply the just war criteria to it. Discuss with students whether this theory is still relevant or useful in today’s world.



### Resources

From the Reformed tradition, see Ramsey, P. and Hauerwas, S. (2001) *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* Rowman and Littlefield

From a secular perspective, see Walzer, M. (1992, second edition) *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations* Basic Books

Trócaire has produced educational resources to help teachers and students examine recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Available on request.

## Part three: The religious imperative to act for justice and peace

The third part of Section F deals with the environment as an urgent issue of justice.

### Crisis – what crisis?

In May 2002 the UN Development and Environment Programme published a book called *The Global Environment Outlook 3* in preparation for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in August 2002. The report set about surveying the increase in environmental degradation since the first UN conference on environment and development that was held in Stockholm in 1972. It then looked ahead 30 years to see how the world might be in 2032 if we continued in a business-as-usual manner. The message of the report was chilling for everyone, especially young people who, like every previous generation, are brought up to expect a brighter future for themselves than that experienced by their parents. The report states that unless we change our destructive ways there will not be a bright future for any succeeding generation, because we already are beginning to see the death of life.

If we continue living in a business-as-usual way it is estimated that within 30 years one quarter of the world’s mammals will have become extinct. Over 11,000 species of plants, and 1,200 species of birds are also heading over the abyss of extinction. This is the sixth largest extinction spasm in the 3.8 thousand million years of life on earth and is a direct result of human activity destroying the habitat of other creatures.

The report estimates that by 2032 over two-thirds of the world’s population will be living in water-stressed areas. In fact, it is predicted that the wars of this century will be fought not over access to fossil fuel but about access to water.

We like to think of Ireland as relatively unspoiled environmentally. We have a small population and did not industrialise until very recently. Yet a recent report had this to say:

*Ireland's environmental record is one of the worst in Europe, cited as unsatisfactory in seven of ten major categories by the European Commission. Ireland has been brought to the European Court of Justice or is on notice for breaches of the directives concerning waste management, water, environmental impact assessment, habitats, combustion pollution, the disposal of toxic waste, pollution by nitrates and waste oil. Under the Kyoto agreement to reduce greenhouse gases by 8 percent by 2012 in the European Union, Ireland got a special arrangement to increase its level of pollutants by 13 percent (Indeed may overshoot the increase by between 40 and 60 percent). Irish water quality standards have been in decline for 25 years. The proportion of unpolluted waters in Ireland fell from 76 percent in 1987 to 67 percent in 1999, with a rise in moderately polluted rivers and lakes from 11 percent to 14 percent.*

Brian Harvey, *Rights and Justice Work in Ireland: a new base line*

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (2002) p. 23.

### The 'greening' of the Church

A concern for the integrity of creation has been an important part of the agenda of the World Council of Churches (WCC) for the past three decades. The 1948 WCC meeting in Amsterdam after World War II called for creation of a 'just' society. By 1975 the WCC was committed to a 'just, participatory and sustainable society'. The term 'sustainable' captured some very important elements in the justice debate, especially the idea of the fragility of ecosystems. Some delegates felt the need for a more explicit theological dimension, so at the 1983 WCC meeting in Vancouver the Council opted for 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation'. The WCC has held numerous consultations on a variety of ecological topics. One of the best known is the document on global warming called *Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril*, Test of Faith published in 1994.

The Catholic Church was slower to embrace environmental concerns. In 1988 the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines published the first pastoral letter on the environment called *What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?* Other Conferences of Bishops have addressed environmental issues in their own countries. Pope John Paul II, aware of the perilous state of the global environment, called for an 'ecological conversion' at a general audience on January 17th 2001. He stated

*If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's*

*expectations. Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric spheres and turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialization, humiliating the flower-garden of the universe to use the image of Dante Alighieri (Paradiso, XXII, 151.) We must therefore encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Man is no longer the Creator's 'steward', but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss.*

Archbishop Dermot Clifford of Cashel and Emly published a pastoral letter on the environment in 2003 entitled *The Whole of Creation is Groaning*. To date, the Irish Catholic Bishops have not issued a pastoral letter on the environment.

There are many religious groups and organisations who take seriously the moral imperative to work for justice with particular attention to ecological issues. The Columbans provide a website ([www.columban.com/index.htm](http://www.columban.com/index.htm)) with plenty of discussion and information on ecological and justice issues.



### Resources

The bibliography below includes a number of commentators on religion and the environment.

Berry, Thomas (1999) *The Great Work* New York: Bell Tower

Boff, Leonardo (1995) *Ecology and Liberation* New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll

Boff, Leonardo (1997) *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* New York: Orbis Press

Collins, Paul (1995) *God's Earth: Religion as if matter really mattered* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

Colborn, Theo, Myers, John Peterson, Dumanoski, Dianne, (1996) *Our Stolen Futures* London: Little Brown and Company

Douthwaite, Richard (1992) *The Growth Illusion* Dublin: The Lilliput Press

Foltz, Richard, C (2002) *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment; A Global Anthology* United States: Thomas Wadsworth



*Global Environment Outlook United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2002)*  
London: Earthscan Publications, 120 Pentoville Road, London, N1 9JN, United Kingdom.  
[www.earthscan.co.uk](http://www.earthscan.co.uk)

Goldsmith, Edward (1996) *The Way: An Ecological World-View* Devon: Themis Books, Foxhole, Dartington, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6EB.

Grey, Mary ed. (1999) *Ecotheology*  
England: Sheffield Academic Press

Habel, Norman ed. (2001) *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

Hallman, David ed. (1994) *Ecotheology*  
New York: Orbis Press, Maryknoll

Hill, Brennan (1998) *Christian Faith and the Environment* New York: Orbis Press, Maryknoll

Johnson, Elizabeth A. (1993) *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit* New York: Paulist Press

Lovelock, J.E. (1987) *Gaia; A new look at life on Earth* Oxford University Press.

McFague, Sally, (1993) *The Body of God*  
London: SCM Press

McDonagh, Sean (1986) *To Care For the Earth*  
London: Chapman

McDonagh, Sean (1990) *The Greening of the Church* London: Chapman

McDonagh, Sean (1995) *Passion for the Earth*  
London: Chapman

McDonagh, Sean (1998) *Greening the Christian Millennium* Dominican Publications

McDonagh, Sean (2001) *Why are we Deaf to the Cry of the Earth?* Dublin: Veritas

Moltmann, Jurgen (1985) *God in Creation*  
London: SCM

Rasmussen, Larry (1996) *Earth Community and Earth Ethics*  
New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll

Shiva, Vandana, (1991) *The Violence of the Green Revolution* Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network

Toolan, David (2001) *At Home in the Cosmos*  
New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll

Wilson, Edward (1999) *The Diversity of Life*  
Britain: Penguin Books



## Teaching approach

This part of the syllabus would benefit from cross-curricular links with science, geography, literature, poetry and art.

TV documentaries on ecological issues are worth keeping an eye out for.

## 3.2 Religious traditions and the environment

### Judaism

The concepts of Sabbath, Schmittah (also spelled 'Shemitah' or 'Shmita') and Jubilee are found in the Holiness Code (see especially Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15). The Sabbath year (every seventh) was a time for rest and remission of debts. The Jubilee year (every 50 years) was radical mechanism for restoring justice and giving a fresh start to the poor. Freedom from debt, freedom from slavery and redistribution of the land are at the centre of the Hebrew vision of Jubilee. These concepts express an appreciation of the earth as ultimately belonging to God and therefore the earth and all it produces is for the benefit of all.

In Judaism, creation is seen as good, and it reflects the glory of the creator. Biodiversity, the rich tapestry of nature, is to be cherished. Living organisms range from lower to higher, with humankind at the top. Genesis 1 depicts a process of creation of order out of chaos. The web of life encompasses all, but humans are at the apex of this structure. Humans have the responsibility to actively maintain life. Setting humans at the top of the hierarchy of creation places them in a special position of responsibility towards nature.

The land and the people depend on each other. The Hebrew Scripture is the story of the chosen people and the chosen land. The prosperity of the land depends on the people's obedience to God's covenant: 'If you pay heed to the commandments which I give you this day and love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and soul, then I will send rain for your land in season.' (Dt. 11:13- 17).



## Resources

Carroll, D *Land* (1998)  
Published by Trócaire, Veritas and CAFOD

Excellent articles on the Sabbath can be found at <http://judaism.about.com/cs/shabbat/> and <http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm>

'Jubilee' will be linked in many minds with the recent and ongoing campaign to cancel Third World debt. See <http://www.debtireland.org> <http://www.jubilee2000uk.org/> and <http://www.jubileeusa.org/> for lots of information on this.

On 'Jubilee' itself in Jewish thought see [http://www.allsands.com/Religious/Jewish/whatisjubilee\\_vtb\\_gn.htm](http://www.allsands.com/Religious/Jewish/whatisjubilee_vtb_gn.htm)

See also [http://judaism.about.com/library/asktherabbi/bl\\_simmons\\_jubilee.htm](http://judaism.about.com/library/asktherabbi/bl_simmons_jubilee.htm)

## Buddhism

The 5 precepts of the Buddha are moral principles requiring people not to kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct, lie, or take intoxicants. A peaceful 'living-in-harmony-with' one's body, nature and other people is the ideal.

The first precept relates directly to the environment and all living creatures. It calls for followers to abstain from killing living beings. This includes human beings, animals and insects. This is why many (but not all!) Buddhists are vegetarians as the eating of meat involves the slaughter of animals. Interestingly, the Buddha, didn't forbid the eating of meat altogether. His monks were allowed to eat meat providing it hadn't been killed for them specifically.

According to Buddhist philosophy, all of life is precious and all life is connected. This respect for life not only requires restraint from killing any life but also protection and care for life. The second precept – not to take what is not given – also encourages an ecological concern. This implies reflection on human consumption, needs and wants. It leads a follower to ask, 'How much do I need in this world in terms of material possessions? Am I taking more than my share of the earth's resources?'



## Resources

Simple school material can be found at [http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/pbs\\_unit06.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/pbs_unit06.htm)

A detailed article on the meaning of the five precepts is at: <http://www.kwanumzen.com/primarypoint/v14n1-1996-spring-NeilBartholomew-TakingFivePrecepts.html>

Sites about Buddhism and ecology include the following:

<http://www.buddhismtoday.com/index/ecology.htm>

<http://www.loudzen.com/skydancer/links/ecolinks.html>

## Islam

'Viceregent of the Earth' is an Islamic concept that is very similar to the Judeo-Christian concept of 'stewardship of the earth' (found in Genesis accounts of creation). 'Khalifa – or the role of stewardship – is the sacred duty God has ascribed to the human race. It is estimated that there are 500 verses in the Qur'an which give guidance on how Muslims should view the natural world and relate to it, such as the following which neatly summarises humanity's role: *It is He who has appointed You viceroys in the earth* (6: 165.) According to Islamic law, the elements of nature such as land, water, air, fire, forests and sunlight are considered to be the common property of every creature and are not exclusively for human use. And so, humankind has a special place in God's scheme. We are more than friends of the earth; we are its guardians. Although we are equal partners with everything else in the natural world, we have added responsibilities. We are called by God to look after creation in co-operation with the Lord of creation.

*It is God who causes the seed-grain and the fruit-kernel to split and sprout. It is He who brings forth the living from the dead; and the dead too from the living. How is it, then, that you are still in a delusion?*

(Qur'an 6.95)

A useful website on Islam and ecology is: The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences: <http://www.ifees.org>



## Syllabus links

Section J: Religion and science. Part 2.4.



## Resources

Flood, Gavin (reprinted 1999) *An introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press

Tucker, Mary Evelyn & Williams, Duncan Ryuken eds. (1997) *Buddhism and Ecology* Harvard University Press

Harris, Elizabeth J. (1998) *What Buddhists Believe* Oxford Oneworld Publications

Sivaraksa, Sulak (1992) *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* California: Parallax Press

Khalid, Fazlun & O'Brien, Joanne eds. *Islam and Ecology* London: Chapman

Rose, Aubery ed. *Judaism and Ecology* London: Chapman

**Note:** The above books and many more are available on loan from the Irish School of Ecumenics, phone 01-2601144.





# SECTION G

## Worship, Prayer and Ritual

### Part one: Symbol, ritual and sacrament



#### Focusing activity

In order to appreciate the importance of symbols it is necessary for the students to reflect on the role of symbol making in their lives.

In small groups students might discuss questions such as:

- how do we express our love for another person using symbols?
- how do we remember the dead using symbols?
- how do we celebrate friendship using symbols?

Students could also be encouraged to compose a journal of symbols which would reflect the identity of each individual. This activity helps students to appreciate the role of symbols in their own lives.

#### 1.1 Symbols

The experience of symbols is a significant aspect of human life. In order to appreciate the function of ritual and worship it is important to understand that human existence is characterised by the ability to create and interpret symbols. Every day we use words and language to communicate ideas, desires, feelings and information. Words serve us well but begin to flounder when we try to speak about deeper and mysterious realities like love, death or the spiritual realm. Students could be encouraged to discuss the difficulties they encounter with language in these situations and to create symbols which point to these deeper realities.

When words lose their ability to adequately reflect human experience, symbols are used. Students need to appreciate the power of symbol in these situations. Symbols can communicate a reality that

can be reached in no other way. Whereas a sign will convey a single piece of information, symbols are multivalent, opening up many meanings. A given symbol will mean different things to different people. Symbols can interpret human experience and so can affect people deeply.

**Different types of symbols** (the teacher should present actual symbols to the class)

- 1 There are symbols that convey national identity such as a flag, colour or style of dress. National symbols can arouse strong feelings and strengthen identity.
- 2 There are personal symbols which may only bear meaning for the individual concerned such as a letter, a picture or a place.
- 3 There are religious symbols that reveal the nature of the divine or alternatively express a person's response to such revelation.



#### Resources

[www.symbols.com](http://www.symbols.com)

[www.symbols.net](http://www.symbols.net)



#### Student activity

- Students could explore the use of symbolic language in everyday life, for example in telephone texting, in road signs, etc.
- Students could examine the richness of symbols central to the identity of the major world religions. Given the visual impact of these symbols a wall chart could be made for the religion room or classroom. This activity is suitable for group work.



#### Syllabus links

Section A: The search for meaning and values – Part 2.1.

## 1.2 Ritual

Very significant events are celebrated in ritual. The two best examples are birth and death. In every culture we find rituals associated with the birth of a baby and the death of a person. A ritual is a rite which follows a set pattern using words and symbols to celebrate important events or transitions. The key transitions in life that are common to all cultures are birth, puberty/adulthood, marriage/commitment and death. Clearly all of these events are deeply personal so the individual needs help in order to interpret their meaning. Through ritual, these events become communal and the participation of a community helps reinforce a particular new identity.

Because rituals repeat the same pattern over and over again we can speak of ritualism. The negative aspect of this is that people can just get into a habit of going through the motions in a particular ritual and then it loses its meaning; the positive dimension is that by encountering the same pattern over and over again, people can come to an ever deeper understanding of the meaning behind the ritual.

One can speak of two types of ritual – religious and secular. Religious rituals (for example celebrating birth, marriage and death) affirm individuals as members of a faith community and deepen their relationship with others and with God. An example of a secular ritual is a wedding in a registry office. Here a couple gather with their family and friends to celebrate a new identity but without any reference to the transcendent/God.



### Resources

For further information on the various types of worship and rituals in Ireland see:

CD ROM *Communities of Faith in Ireland Today* Dublin: Mater Dei Institute of Education and website [www.logos.ie](http://www.logos.ie)

Drumm, M. (1998) *Passage to Pasch* Dublin: Columba Press, pp. 27-37.

A good website on liturgy can be found at [www.obs.org/liturgy/](http://www.obs.org/liturgy/)

Groups of students could participate in or observe rituals in different faith traditions and in a secular context and report back to the class on the detail of the ritual and the participation of those present. (See *Teaching for Diversity*, Part 3, for more on this.)

## 1.3 Sacrament

Sacraments are central to worship in some Christian traditions. Initially, it is important that students reflect on the ability of an experience of sign/symbol to bring about a change in a person. Students also need to reflect on the capacity of sign/symbol to

reveal a deeper reality. A religious understanding of sacraments can then be better understood – as signs/symbols instituted by Christ to reveal a deeper reality called grace. Grace can be viewed as a special encounter with God.

- The sacraments are religious rituals belonging to the Christian tradition whereby those participating can celebrate an identity that is determined by the life and death of Jesus Christ. Note here how sacraments can function as rituals.
- Sacraments use word and symbol to reveal a deeper reality called grace. It is important to note that sacramental symbols not only reveal a deeper reality but also participate in that reality.

The Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions differ in their understanding of sacrament. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the seven sacraments are understood as an encounter with Christ. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit the sacraments make present what they signify. The seven sacraments are central to the life and religious experience of Roman Catholics as it is believed that they were instituted by Christ and for this reason they are a guarantee of grace.

Within the reformed tradition, Anglicans (for example) would underline the objective nature of God's action through the sacraments, but would place a stress also on the crucial importance of faith within the individual recipient of divine grace. Anglicans have historically emphasised Holy Communion and Holy Baptism as the two 'Gospel sacraments', flowing as they do from the direct instruction of Christ himself in the Gospels.



### Student activity

Students might participate in or observe a sacramental gathering in two different Christian churches. They could interview the leader of the gathering and some of those who are present. Alternatively, a Priest or Minister from a particular faith tradition could be invited into class for a discussion about sacraments.

## Part two: Prayer



### Focusing activity

Discuss with students why it is important for young people to reflect on life. After some discussion students may find that they reflect during times of change or at important or decisive moments in their lives. The discussion can help students to identify some of the key decisions and dilemmas in life faced by a young person: career/study, friendships/relationships and responsibility/duty.

### 2.1 The need for reflection

One can speak of two types of experience; ordinary/daily experience or depth/extraordinary experience. An example of a depth experience is a religious experience. These are experiences which open the individual to that dimension of life which is called religious.

- The religious dimension of human experience may be characterised by its ability to open the individual into a new realm of meaning.
- A religious experience brings new meaning because it creates or changes the relationship between the self and the transcendent.
- A religious experience affirms the value of life even in the face of great difficulties.



#### Student activity

- Students could be invited to assess the amount of time they spend alone or in silence. Use a self-assessment activity here.
- Students could also be invited to reflect on the role that a diary and journaling can play in reflection. Suitable examples of diaries include *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Go Ask Alice*.
- Students could assess the extent to which their own school environment allows for students to spend time in silence or reflection. If there is no prayer or meditation room in the school they could be asked how they would set about transforming an ordinary room into a meditation room. The challenge here is to create an environment that would accommodate all religious traditions along with those who are affiliated to no religious tradition.

### 2.2 The human being as pray-er

Prayer can be broadly understood as the human communication with divine or spiritual realities. Prayer can take the form of a text or an act of speech but what fundamentally characterises this activity is the move from speaking about the Transcendent in the third person ‘he’ or ‘she’ to addressing the Transcendent in the second person ‘you’. Prayer is an activity of the heart and mind in unison directed to the Transcendent as meaningful Other. In the major religious traditions, prayer can be seen to originate in God for it is God who has first been revealed to us. Prayer is a personal response to this revelation.

Worship is a response on the part of the believer. Through rituals and ceremonies, believers respond

to the supernatural or divine mystery which they believe envelops them. Such worship is sometimes characterised by a sense of awe – a feeling of being overcome by some reality far greater than humanity – and this can give rise to silence, fear or reverence.



#### Syllabus links

Section C: World religions – Part 2.3.



#### Student activity

Students might identify and, where appropriate, participate in some of the techniques of meditation and prayer used by the major religious traditions.

[www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)

### 2.3 Contexts for prayer

Prayer can occur anywhere or at any time, but prayer that originates within the worship of a faith community will most often express itself in sacred places and at sacred times. Thus we speak of **sacred time** and **sacred space**. It is important to awaken students to how they encounter these two concepts in their own lives if they are to grasp the meaning of worship, prayer and ritual.

These are times of such significance that rituals and symbols become associated with them. The best examples in ancient civilisations concern cosmic, agricultural and personal/family rituals. In most of the major world religions a particular day is set aside every week for prayer, worship and ritual (Moslems – Friday; Jews – Saturday; Christians – Sunday). Students should also be encouraged to identify such times in contemporary society and in their own lives.

#### Examples

##### Cosmic/Agricultural:

The longest and shortest days of the year; new moon, full moon; harvest festivals. In Celtic tradition there were four key festivals associated with four key times; Samhain (1st Nov), Imbolg (1st Feb), Bealtaine (1st May), Lughnasa (1st Aug).

##### Personal/Family:

Birth, death, marriage.

##### Religious:

Sabbath day, holy days, major festivals.

##### Contemporary:

Graduation, New Year, major sporting occasions.

See [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org) for all major religious events and dates.

These are places where people gather to pray and celebrate. Sometimes they become known as centres of pilgrimage. There tends to be a heightened awareness of symbol and ritual. Examples today include pilgrimages to holy wells, Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick, Glendalough, and Downpatrick in Ireland and great religious centres such as Jerusalem, Mecca and Rome. In the lives of individuals places can become sacred because of their association with important events or people. At a local level places of worship function as sacred places within the different religious traditions.



### Student activity

- At the beginning of the school year, students could identify the key significant dates for the major world religions. These could be put on a wall chart and reference made to them as the year progresses.
- *Intercultural Calendar*: This calendar highlights all the major religious festivals. Available from Access Ireland, 40-41 Lower Dominick St, Dublin 1 (Tel. 01 878 0589; email: [accessireland@connect.ie](mailto:accessireland@connect.ie)) or see [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org)
- Students could be encouraged to visit local sacred places and report back to the class.
- Students can investigate what elements determine that a place is sacred for any religious tradition. Is the place associated with a significant person or event in the history of a religious tradition?

### 2.4 The praying tradition

The Way of the Cross/Stations of the Cross is one example of formal prayer. This prayer is popular due to its simplicity and repetition. The intention is to help those who pray to reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Morning and Evening prayer within the Anglican tradition is another example of formal prayer, while the Prayer Wheel in Buddhism and the five daily prayers of Islam are other examples.

Students may also be familiar with the Shema as a central prayer of the Jewish liturgy. The Shema is made up of three biblical passages; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41. It is recited twice a day, once in the morning and again in the evening.



### Resources

Collins, P. (2000) *Prayer in Practice*  
Dublin: Columba Press

De Mello, Anthony (1986) *Wellsprings: A Book of Spiritual Exercises*  
Garden City, N.Y: Image Books

## Part three: Meditation and contemplation

### 3.1 Meditation

Meditation is common to all religious traditions. In Buddhism it is understood as a process of self-emptying. This is achieved through the repetition of a mantra which is a short phrase. Today we use the term 'mantra' to convey the simple and continuous repetition of a phrase so as to root it in the heart. In Christian tradition meditation is associated in the early monastic period (5th-12th century) with lectio, a reading aloud and memorising of scripture in a way that integrated mind and body. This was reminiscent of earlier Jewish practices. It was a focusing of the mind on the scriptures. Major figures within the history of Christian meditation include Ignatius of Loyola (1495-1556) and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).

Meditation in the Buddhist tradition involves a self-emptying in which the individual systematically removes from consciousness that which is not part of the quest. 'Samatha' is the calming of the contents of consciousness and a subsequent release from external circumstances. The goal of Buddhist meditation is to turn consciousness away from self toward an encounter with the divine Other. It is believed to be a movement away from egoism toward selflessness.

Students could do a case study on one of the major figures in the history of meditation.



### Resources

*Prayer Body and Soul: Methods and Practices of Anthony de Mello* (1997) Dublin: Columba Press.

### 3.2 The contemplative traditions

There is a strong tradition in Christianity of contemplative communities who usually live in monasteries removed from the general activities of normal life in order to foster silence and recollection. Male contemplative communities include Cistercian and Benedictine monks, whilst female communities include the Poor Clares and the Carmelites. The Taizé community in France is an example of an ecumenical contemplative community. Whilst these traditions may appear unusual there are many contemporary expressions of the contemplative tradition. These include retreats, pilgrimages and hermitages.



- A retreat can be defined as a limited period of isolation whereby an individual or small group withdraws from the regular routine of normal life for the purpose of religious renewal.
- People usually go on pilgrimages for a temporary release from social ties to be at one with humankind and nature. A place of pilgrimage may be associated with miracles, apparitions, the birth, life or death of a significant figure or some other spiritual magnetism.
- A hermit is a religious ascetic who lives alone in order to attain complete openness to God through solitude, silence, penance and prayer. In contemporary life individuals visit hermitages to temporarily experience a hermit's life.



### Student activity

Students could go on a retreat or a pilgrimage and keep a journal of reflections on the experience. If possible, they could also visit a monastery and interview some of the community.

### 3.3 The mystic tradition

A mystic can be defined as a person whose experience of the Absolute is direct, intuitive and immediate. Students need to appreciate that how and what mystics experience is particular to their faith and cultural contexts. How they experience the Absolute is also dependent upon their own consciousness and lifestyle. Many mystics speak of an ecstatic experience where they appear to stand outside themselves and overcome the limits of the ego. They also speak of the long inner journey of pain and desolation as their hearts are purified. Thus they commonly speak of the inner journey to the 'distant shore' or the 'furthest island' or the 'highest mountain'.

Examples of mystics within the Christian tradition are Julian of Norwich (d. c. 1420) and Meister Eckhart (d. 1327) author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It should be noted that a life of contemplation does not remove one from the responsibilities of service or charity.



### Syllabus links

Section C: World religions – Part 2.3.



### Resources

Tinsley, A. (1997) *The Spirituality of Julian of Norwich* Dublin: Columba Press

Students could be encouraged to read some of the writings of the mystics such as Eckhart, Meister *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Given the diversity of patterns of worship, prayer and ritual across the various religious traditions there is a wealth of information available. One excellent source is Eliade, Mircea (1987) *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* New York: Macmillan

For religious symbols visit [www.symbols.net](http://www.symbols.net)

[www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)

[www.monks-of-adoration.org/chapel.html](http://www.monks-of-adoration.org/chapel.html)



# SECTION H

## The Bible: Literature and Sacred Text

### 1.1 The Bible as living classic

The Bible is one of the great classics of literature. A classic text is one that has been recognised over time to be of high quality and of established value to a wide audience. The Bible certainly fits into this category. It has had a profound influence on Western religious thought, art, music and literature (see below); it has been read for its wisdom and inspiration, its vision of the world, its moral guidance and its profound insights into human life. It is part and parcel of our cultural as well as our religious heritage and it has influenced individuals and societies down the ages (see below). It was the first book to be printed (1455) and remains the most printed book in the world, with an estimated 2.5 billion copies distributed since 1815. It has been translated into all the major languages of the world.

Among a list of classic texts important for our cultural heritage one could include the *Illiad* and *Odyssey* of Homer, the *Aened* of Virgil, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare's plays, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, to name but a few. All major religions have their own classic texts. Judaism, for example, has its Torah, Mishna and Talmud; Islam, its Qu'uran or Koran.

#### The writing of the Bible and its literary genres

While the Bible is seen by Jews and Christians as the word of God written by inspired authors, it is also the work of human authors, and the methods used to study any piece of literature must be applied to the study of a biblical passage or book. The first step in this study is to recognise the literary form or genre of the passage or book. As an obituary in a newspaper differs from a biographical sketch of the same person, or a match report differs from a news

item, so too the description of the Exodus in the song of Moses is very different from its description in the narrative of the book of Exodus. Equally a psalm is very different from a piece of historical writing (e.g. Books of Kings) and a gospel from a letter of Paul. The recognition that the Bible contains various types of writing or literary forms is crucial for its interpretation. Biblical writers used different types of writing depending on circumstances. In the Bible one finds stories, heroic sagas, genealogies, historical lists, poems, prayers, hymns, infancy stories, songs, parables, sermons, prophetic oracles, proverbs, myths, law codes, apocalyptic writing, historical narrative, prophetic writings, letters, and so on. To appreciate the message of the text it is necessary first to establish its literary form or genre.

#### Biblical influence on literature

The influence of the Bible on literature has been surprisingly rich and varied. Biblical characters, motifs and events from Genesis to Revelation have caught the imagination of writers of prose, poetry and plays of all ages. The medieval mystery plays took a series of stories from the Bible and wove them into plays which provided popular instruction for the people (e.g. *Noah's Fludde*, *Harrowing of Hell*). The riches of the biblical treasures were exploited in literary works by Chaucer (*Canterbury Tales*), Spenser (*Faerie Queene*), Shakespeare (Plays), Milton (*Paradise Lost*), Byron (*Sennacherib*), T.S. Eliot (*The Wasteland*, *Journey of the Magi*), Thomas Mann (*Joseph and his Brothers*), and in many other prose and poetic works. Shakespeare's plays abound in biblical references. *Hamlet* and *Othello*, for example, have more than fifty references each. The title of the play *Measure for Measure* is actually based on the words of Jesus in Mt 7:2 (see N. Shaheen, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*).

Biblical themes and allusions are also to be found in Irish writings such as those of Swift, Shaw, Yeats, Joyce, Beckett and others. The extraordinary creature of the book of Job, the Behemoth finds a place in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* while the early chapters of Genesis and particularly the story of the fall, figure in G.B. Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*. In Irish, Herod, Tetrarch of Galilee, is the central character of the short story by Ó Conaire, Pádraig (1956) 'Teatrarch na Gaililí' *Scothscealtaí*, ed. De Bhaldraithe, T. ed. Dublin: Sairséal agus Dill, 11-26.

An example of a term that has become such a part of modern speech, film and literature is Armageddon. Mentioned in Rev 16:16, it was to be the scene of the final victorious battle that would see Christ and his followers victorious over the beast, the false prophet and the kings of the earth (Rev 19).



### Student activity

The influence of the Bible could be traced in some examples from the literature suggested above or from literature already familiar to the students.

### Influence of the language of the Bible

In the English speaking world, the introduction of printing and the translation of the Bible into English (Tyndale, Coverdale, Geneva Bible, King James Version) made the Bible much more accessible to English writers, and this in turn led to the increasing influence of the Bible on the language. New terms and phrases became part and parcel of the English language, for example:

Eye for an eye (Ex 21:24)

Scapegoat (Lev 16:6)

Birthright (Gen 25:31)

Fallen from grace (Gal 5:4)

Keys of the kingdom (Mt 16:19)

Filthy lucre (1 Tim 3:8)

Lillies of the field (Mt 6:28)

Patience of Job (James 5:11)

Get behind me Satan (Mk 8:33)

The Salt of the earth (Mt 5:13)

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mt 26:41)

Render unto Caesar (Mt 25:15-22)

Leviathan (Job 41:1)

Writing on the wall (Dan 5:5)

Thief in the night (1 Th 5:2)

Leopard changing his spots (Jer 13:23)

Doubting Thomas (Jn 20:25)

Armageddon (Rev 16:16)

Feet of clay (Dan 2:33)

Baptism of fire (Mt 3:11)

The signs of the times (Mt 16:3)

Fight the good fight (1 Tim 6:12)

Behemoth (Job 40:15)

The influence of Hebrew in Tyndale's translation of the Old Testament left us such phrases as 'a rod of iron' (2:9), 'the mouth of babes and sucklings' (8:2), 'the valley of the shadow of death' (23:4), 'the sins of my youth' (25:7), 'in time of trouble' (41:1), and so on.



### Resources

Jeffreys, D.L. (1992) *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*

Grand Rapids Eerdmans (very useful for biblical influence on English prose and poetic works.)

Abrams, M.H. & Greenblatt S. eds. (2000) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*  
London: Norton

Shaheen, N. (2002) *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*, London-Newark:  
University of Delaware Press

Ó Conaire, P. 'Teatrarch na Gaililí' De  
Bhaldraithe, T. ed. (1956) *Scothscealtaí*  
Dublin: Sairséal agus Dill 11-26.

### Bible's influence on speeches and declarations

Given the undoubted influence of the Bible on individuals down the ages it is not surprising to find that the Bible has influenced important speeches and declarations.

Biblical influence may be pointed out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) in its recognition of the 'inherent dignity' and of the 'equal and inalienable rights' of every human being. In the preamble to the Declaration and in the first article we see the influence of Gen 1:26 where it is said that humanity is in the image and likeness of God.

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

First Article.

The influence of Gen 1:26 may also be pointed out in the statement in the American Declaration of Independence which declares that 'all men are created equal', that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'.

In his famous speech 'I have a dream' of 1963, Martin Luther King makes Isaiah's dream of a new exodus (Is 40) his own as he speaks in prophetic tones:

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.*

In the inauguration speech of his Presidency in 1977 Jimmy Carter used a famous quotation from Mic 6:8, the text of which lay open before him as he spoke.

*Here before me is the Bible used in the inauguration of our first President, in 1789, and I have just taken the oath of office on the Bible my mother gave me a few years ago, opened to a timeless admonition from the ancient prophet Micah: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.'*

(Micah 6:8)

Carter referred to the text later in his speech when he said that he hoped that when his presidency had ended that people would say about America *that we had remembered the words of Micah and renewed our search for humility, mercy, and justice.*



### Student activity

Imagine you are a political leader. Write a speech using imagery from a bible passage of your choice outlining your vision for a better world.

### Bible's influence on the lives of individuals and societies

Down the centuries, the Bible has exercised an influence on individuals of all kinds such as artists, composers, and writers. Theologians have studied its pages and it has been read for its spiritual and moral guidance. It had a crucial role in the conversion of St. Augustine. For the Reformers such as Luther and Calvin, the Bible assumed an even greater importance, with the Bible alone being seen as normative for Christian faith and doctrine. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of Europe saw its influence growing in the lives of

individuals. In 17th century Ireland William Ó Domhnaill, William Bedell and Robert Boyle combined to make the Bible available in Irish to the people.

Bible societies emerged from the Protestant movement in Germany early in the 18th century and their influence gradually spread to England and beyond. In Ireland, their presence was a subject of controversy in the first half of the 19th century.

John Wesley (1703-91) founded a religious society in England in the 18th century known now as the Methodists. Its purpose was to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. Other societies were founded by individuals deeply influenced by the Bible (Baptists, Quakers, etc.).

### The influence of the Bible on art

The influence of the Bible is evident from early Christian times in the Roman catacombs, in mosaics from the 4th and 5th centuries found in churches in Rome (S. Maria Maggiore, S. Paolo fuori le Mura) and Ravenna (S. Apollinare), and in the beautiful wooden doors of S. Sabina in Roma. It may be seen in early medieval mosaic work in churches in Constantinople and elsewhere (Nicaea, Thessalonika, Rome), in masterpieces of manuscript illumination (Vienna Genesis, Paris Gospel of St. Matthew, Vatican Bible, German codices), in the biblical scenes of the Irish High Crosses (Monasterboice, Durrow, Kells, etc.), in Romanesque and Gothic sculpture (Arles, Chartres, Nuremberg, Pisa, Siena), in the extraordinary stained glass windows of churches such as Chartres and Rheims, and in the frescoes of Duccio and other artists in Italy.

The early Renaissance witnessed a flowering of art which saw bible cycles painted by Giotto or sculpted by Pisano and Ghiberti (Florence). From this period come the famous Florentine frescoes of Masaccio in church of S. Maria del Carmine (Banishment of Adam and Eve, Tribute money), Donatello's passion cycle in the pulpits of S. Lorenzo and Fra Angelico's cycle of frescoes in S. Marco. As the Renaissance progressed and art flourished artists such as Piero della Francesca, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Tintoretto and Titian were inspired by biblical events and motifs. Michaelangelo left an extraordinary cycle of biblical paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel and much more besides (e.g. Last Judgement, Pauline chapel frescoes, David, Moses). Raphael, too, left unforgettable images of biblical scenes, the best known perhaps that of the Transfiguration. The work of Caravaggio introduced a new era in art, but one in which the Bible continued to offer inspiration to him as to artists such as Rembrandt, Rubens and others throughout Europe. In more recent times there is the stained glass work of Harry Clark, Evie Hone and Marc Chagall and the contemporary art of Irish artist Patrick Pye.





## Student activity

- It is interesting to compare the way in which different artists approach the same biblical theme. Compare for example the Moses sculpted by Michaelangelo (Rome) or that painted by Rembrandt (Moses breaking the Tables of the Law), the Prodigal Son of Rembrandt and Rubens, the crucifixion scenes of Masaccio and Rubens, Rembrandt's Descent from the Cross and Michaelangelo's Pieta, the Emmaus supper of Caravaggio and Rembrandt.
- Visits to art galleries, High Crosses, and churches. For example, students could retell the biblical stories that are represented on a particular High Cross, such as Muireadach's cross at Monasterboice, highlighting the relationship between the scenes depicted.



## Resources

'Bible Cycles', in *New Catholic Encyclopedia II*

Bernard, B. (1983) *The Bible and its Painters*  
London: Orbis (introduction by L. Gowing)

Gombrich, E.H. (1972 12th edition) *The story of Art*  
London: Phaidon

Harbison, P. (1992) *The High Crosses of Ireland: an iconographical and photographic survey I-III*, Bonn: Habelt

Harbison, P. (2002) *From Genesis to Judgement. Biblical Iconography on Irish High Crosses*  
Dublin: NBSI

### Bible's influence on music

The Bible has provided inspiration for musicians from time immemorial – for classical composers and for authors of more popular compositions alike. The libretto of Handel's oratorio *Messiah* could be described as a collage of texts from the Old Testament prophets and psalms, the New Testament infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke and from other NT texts that speak of Christ.

The 17th century composer Henry Purcell found inspiration in the Song of Songs (*My Beloved Spoke*) and Jeremiah (*Let Mine Eyes run down with Tears*), Mozart in the Gospel of John (*Agnus Dei*), Bach in the Magnificat (Lk 1:46ff.) and in the gospel passion narratives. He actually composed five Passions on the gospels. Brahms in *A German Requiem* included quite a few biblical references. The attraction of the Psalms for composers in all ages never waned.

Cantatas were written for major feasts (e.g. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*). The Bible also provided inspiration for a whole host of Negro Spirituals, Gospel Songs and Christmas music.



## Student activity

- Students could study the text of Handel's *Messiah* with a view to highlighting the Messianic texts taken from the Prophets or his use of the Book of Psalms and examine how Handel used and interpreted these texts.
- Students could examine biblical influence on a Negro Spiritual or a Gospel song.

## 1.2 The Bible as sacred text

### The Bible as revelation

The Bible was, and continues to be, a classic text for Western civilization and may be studied and read from a literary point of view, applying literary methods common to the study of literature. It is also, for Jews and Christians, a religious text of profound religious significance: the Hebrew scriptures for Jews, the whole Bible for Christians. For them the Bible is the Word of God, that is, a collection of sacred writings inspired by God, written by divinely inspired authors who tell the sacred history of God's dealings with humanity. It communicates God's message to humanity, a message of truth which 'guides and inspires, challenges and consoles' (*New Jerome Biblical Commentary*).

An appreciation of the human quality of the scriptures and the human processes by which they were produced is necessary for the interpretation of these sacred writings, which emerged from the religious experience of the Jewish and Christian communities, and were written by human authors using a great variety of literary forms.

### The canon

The term 'canon' comes from the Greek word 'kanon' which signifies a rule or norm. The canon of scripture refers to a collection of sacred writings believed to be inspired by God and seen as normative for faith and practice. For Christians, the canon of scripture refers to the collection of books found in the Old and New Testaments. For the Jews it is the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament. The acceptance by Jewish and Christian communities of such writings as normative was part of an evolving process that began after the Babylonian exile and continued up to the 3rd or 4th centuries of the common era (CE), and even beyond.

### The Old Testament canon

From about the time of the exile to the first century CE, the Law, the Prophets and the Writings emerged as normative, governing the life of the Jewish people. That the canon was still evolving may be seen from the existence at the end of the first century CE of Palestinian and Alexandrian lists of the books accorded canonical status. The Palestinian canon contained books written in Hebrew. The larger Alexandrian canon reflected dependence on the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The need to draw up such a list was created in part by the crisis brought about by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, the dispersion of the Jewish communities and the use by the Christians of the Jewish scriptures. An attempt to define a canonical selection of Jewish writings probably occurred at Jamnia (c. 90 CE), but it was some time before the Jewish canon of 39 Hebrew books finally emerged. Meanwhile Christians had come to accept as canonical a collection of 46 books, that is, those books on the Alexandrian list.

The Reformation led to the acceptance by the reformers of the Jewish canon of 39 books. This left seven books outside their canon: Judith, Tobit, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Ecclesiasticus or Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, as well as passages from the books of Daniel and Esther.

### The New Testament canon

The emergence of a NT canon of 27 books was also an evolving process over a long period. That the OT writings were seen as sacred in the time of Jesus is clear from the NT (see 2 Tim). Reliable accounts of the career and teachings of Jesus, of his miracle and of his passion, death and resurrection were needed by the community's teachers, preachers and missionaries. With the gradual disappearance of those who had known and heard Jesus, there was a need for more permanent written accounts. This led to the emergence of the gospels. The need to exercise oversight over the faith of early Christian communities led to the emergence of a second type of literature, namely, letters written to communities to help them live out the faith which they had adopted in the face of various difficulties. These letters came to be publicly read in the early Christian communities (see Col 4:16). Other works were also produced (Acts, Revelation) and continued to be produced right through the 2nd and 3rd centuries (writings such as letters, gospels and apocalypses). The process of deciding which books were authoritative and normative for the faith and life of the Christian community and which were not, was a process of the community itself.

The late 2nd or early 3rd century 'Muratorian canon' provides information on the books that were then regarded by the Christian communities as canonical. Origen (c.185-251) and Eusebius (c.260-340) are

later witnesses to the emergence of a NT canon. In 367 a list of the canonical books of the New Testament as we know it finally appeared, drawn up by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria.

In deciding which books were to be considered canonical and which were not, a number of criteria were important, namely that these writings were publicly read in the community and thus were writings on which the community placed a high value; that they were in some sense of apostolic origin; that they were quoted in ancient (i.e. early Christian) writings; and that they passed the Rule of Faith (the common faith of the Christian community).



### Resources

Achtemeier, P. Green, J. Thompson, M. (2001) *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Bruce, F. F. (1988) *The Canon of Scripture* Downers Grove: InterVarsity

Gamble, H. Y. (1985) *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* Philadelphia: Fortress

Metzger, B.M. (1987) *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* Oxford: Clarendon

### Pieces of literature omitted from the canon

Gospels and letters continued to be produced until well into the second century. As a consequence, Christian communities were engaged in a continuing process of deciding which books should be accepted by the community as 'canonical' and which should not.

### Gospel of Thomas

One of the best-known gospels not accepted as canonical by the early Christian community was the *Gospel of Thomas*, a second century collection of sayings of Jesus. A 4th century text of the *Gospel of Thomas* in Coptic was discovered in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945 and published in 1957.

This gospel contains 114 sayings nearly all of which are introduced by the phrase 'Jesus said'. Most of the sayings are brief and terse; many are enigmatic. There is no narrative, only a minimum amount of dialogue. About half of the sayings are similar to sayings in the canonical gospels. It also contains some parables (e.g. Sower, Lost Sheep).

The *Gospel of Thomas* offers valuable comparative material for a study of the sayings of Jesus. It is possible that some of its sayings come from an early

independent oral tradition - many are shorter, and theologically less developed than their parallels in the canonical gospels. Parables are found without elaboration or explanation.



### Student activity

Compare some of the sayings of the Gospel of Thomas to parallels in the canonical gospels (e.g. the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Sower); for a translation of the text see <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gthlamb.html>.



### Resources

Bruce, F. F. (1988) *The Canon of Scripture* Downers Grove: InterVarsity

Gamble, H.Y. (1985) *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* Philadelphia: Fortress

Metzger, B.M. (1987) *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*, Oxford: Clarendon

### Archaeological discoveries

Since the early 19th century, archaeological discoveries throughout the Middle East have had a major impact on biblical studies. They have helped throw light on biblical chronology, on Israel's history, its laws, and customs. They have also thrown light on everyday life in ancient times, on places mentioned in the Bible and on the biblical narrative itself.

Archaeological discoveries from the ancient Near East have thrown light on the creation stories of Genesis (e.g. Enuma Elish and the Epic of Gilgamesh mentioned below in Myth), the law codes of Ex 21-23 (Code of Hammurabi, displayed in the Louvre, Paris), and the psalms (texts found in Ugarit in present day Syria contain poetry very similar to some of the poetry in the psalms).

The archaeological discoveries made at Qumran from 1947 onwards have been very important for biblical studies. The documents found there have brought much new information on the state of the text of the OT before the birth of Christianity. Indeed every book in the OT except Esther is represented in the fragments found in Qumran. They also shed light on NT texts (for Qumran texts see <http://faculty.smu.edu/dbinder/archaeol.html>).

Archaeological investigation continues at sites throughout Palestine associated with the New Testament. An inscribed slab found at Delphi and having a reference to Gallio (see Acts 18:12-17) helps to date the letters of Paul. While it is often difficult to identify NT sites, material that is valuable for NT studies has been discovered in places such as

Caesarea (a monument erected by Pontius Pilate and bearing his own name; see <http://www.materdei.ie/logos/>; <http://www.livius.org/pi-pm/pilate/pilate08.html>), Jerusalem (some of the ruins of the temple reconstructed by Herod and destroyed in 70 CE were still to be seen, as, for instance, the Wailing Wall; the discovery in burial caves near Jerusalem in 1968 of the remains of a man who had been crucified before 70 CE shows how people were crucified at that time (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/crucifixion.html>) and Galilee (a 1st century Galilean fishing boat was discovered in the mud of the Sea of Galilee in 1986; see <http://www.kchanson.com/ARTICLES/fishing.html>); for other archaeological discoveries in Palestine see <http://www.faculty.smu.edu/dbinder/archaeol.html>).



### Student activity

Student could look at the kind of documents that were found at Qumran, or compare the laws of the Code of Hammurabi with biblical laws. For the text of the code, see <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/hammenu.htm>



### Resources

Boadt, L. *Reading the Old Testament*, 59-65 with bibliographies.

### Redaction criticism (higher level students only)

Redaction criticism focuses on the contribution of the editor or redactor of a text, endeavouring to discover the redactor's concerns and ideas. Redaction criticism may be applied to Old Testament writings (see below) as well as to those of the New Testament where it is used primarily in relation to the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

Redaction criticism has been a feature of the study of the synoptic gospels since the 1950s in the wake of studies on the gospels of Mark (Marxsen), Luke (Conzelmann) and Matthew (Bornkamm, Barth and Held).

Redaction criticism took as its working hypothesis the two-source theory, namely that Mark's was the first gospel, and that Luke and Matthew made independent use of Mark and a sayings source called Q (see below). A systematic comparison of how Matthew and Luke used Mark led to the detection of the theological tendencies, concerns and interests of the individual evangelists. This approach is easier to apply where it is believed that Matthew and Luke used Mark (e.g. the baptism and temptation of Jesus

in Mt 3 :13-4:11 and Lk 3:21-4:13); less so but still possible in the case of material that is common to Matthew and Luke but not in Mark, that is, Q. See, for example, how each presents the parable of the lost sheep (Mt 18:11-14; Lk 15:4-7). In the case of Mark's gospel the application of redaction criticism is more difficult, but it is possible to detect Mark's concerns and interests through a study of particular passages of the gospel.

Redaction criticism developed from its early focus on the changes which the evangelists made to their sources to take more account of their overall arrangement of their respective gospels, the order in which the material is presented, the links between individual scenes and the inclusion or not of specific material. This has highlighted further the contribution of the evangelists in choosing, arranging and editing the content of their gospels. The evangelists were individual authors in their own right who selected, arranged and edited the material at their disposal from a definite viewpoint and with a definite purpose in mind and did so in the context of a community and for a community with its own particular concerns.



### Student activity

Compare how Matthew and Luke redact Mark's story of the baptism of Jesus.

## 2.1 The formation of the Hebrew scriptures

### Why stories are important to humankind

People are always interested in stories. They enjoy listening to a well-told story or reading. Stories can inspire, teach, challenge, console. They can be used to explain the world around us, as for instance the origin of customs, place-names, why things are as they are, and so on. Stories are a powerful means of preserving a community and sense of identity. To a considerable extent, we interpret the world, ourselves and other people through stories.

Contemporary examples of oral tradition are to be found in Ireland in the many stories that surround the lives of saints, holy wells, historical events (e.g. 1798 in the south east of Ireland); historical sites (e.g. Tara, Seir Kieran); placenames (Leaba Dhiarmada agus Gráinne, Devil's Bit). The great deeds of sportsmen are still recounted in story and song, for example the songs about John Joe O'Reilly the footballer from Cavan or Christy Ring from Cork. The Folklore Commission in Ireland has collected a large body of traditional oral material of which stories form a considerable part.

### The Hebrew scriptures and oral tradition

The earliest body of stories that constitute the Hebrew scriptures was transmitted orally by tribal communities that valued their oral traditions and carefully preserved them from generation to generation. Oral traditions are constantly changing and developing because each telling of a story is different. The writing down of oral traditions preserves them or freezes them at that point in time. The editor or redactor who gathers together and orders or organises such traditions leaves his own perspective on the resulting work. Later editors who combine such accounts into larger accounts likewise leave their own imprint on their production.

When and where such stories were first committed to writing is not clear. Writing probably developed during the monarchies of David and Solomon with court officials who compiled administrative records, collections of laws and religious documents. It would be some time, however, before the first written narrative appeared in the shape of the Yahwist's narrative in the 9th century. Even then oral tradition continued to be highly valued alongside the written tradition.

Oral traditions were preserved in the Hebrew scriptures in the form of songs in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) and the Song of Moses (Ex 15). They were preserved in narrative form in the stories of Abraham and Sarah (Ex 12-22), Samson (Jdg 14-16) and Elisha (2 Kgs 2). The preaching of the prophets was often preserved by their disciples and later written down (e.g. Amos, Jeremiah).

Evidence of redactional activity is to be found behind various phases of the biblical narrative as may be seen in the Torah or Pentateuch and in the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's Histories (see the following paragraphs).



### Student activity

Students could visit their local county library and examine the folk traditions collected in their own areas in the 1930s and 1940s. Alternatively, they might interview some old people in their area who may have stories or songs about the locality. On folk traditions see <http://www.tuosist.com/sosuilleabhain.asp>



### Resources

Ó Súilleabháin, S. (1952) *Scéalta Cráifeacha* (1967) *Storytelling in Ireland* (1974) *The Folklore of Ireland*

Ó hÓgáin, D. (1990) *Myth, legend & romance: an encyclopaedia of the Irish folk tradition* London: Ryan Publishing



Ó Caithnia, L.P. (1984) *Apalóga na bbFilí 1200-1650* Dublin: An Clóchomhar

MacNeill, M. (1962) *The festival of Lughnasa : a study of the survival of the Celtic festival of Lughnasa*. London: Oxford University Press

Soggin, J.A. (1989) *Introduction to the Old Testament* London: SCM

## Torah

The Pentateuch, from the Greek *pentateuchos*, or Torah, as it is known in the Hebrew canon, consists of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It covers the story of Israel from the creation of the world and humanity down to the farewell discourses of Moses on the plains of Moab and contains 'the foundational events and theology of the people of God' (Murphy, NJBC, 7).

The composition of the Pentateuch is a complex one. Four main periods in its composition may be suggested. An initial body of oral and written traditions was gathered together and organised into a coherent whole with some unifying themes. This work is attributed to the 9th century BCE Yahwist writer (J) who was a lively storyteller. This body of material was edited and added to in the 8th century BCE by the Elohist (E) whose particular interests may be detected in his redaction of the material. The third strand present in the Pentateuch is that of the 7th century BCE Deuteronomist editor whose main contribution is evident in the book of Deuteronomy. In language and style that are characteristic of him he insists on obedience to the divine commands and threatens punishment on those who do not obey. The final phase in the production of the Pentateuch is usually attributed to the postexilic Priestly writer (P) whose priestly concerns are evident in his redaction of the material (e.g. cult and ritual in Leviticus, genealogies in Genesis). He too had his own language and style.

See R.E. Murphy, 'Introduction to the Pentateuch', NJBC I, ed. R.E. Murphy, 3-7.



## Student activity

Compare the creation accounts of Gen 1:1-2:4a (P) and Gen 2:4b-25 (J), pointing out the characteristics of each writer.

## Deuteronomistic history

The Deuteronomistic history which traces the history of Israel from the time of Moses and the conquest of the land to the exile (587-538) is to be found in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel

and 1 and 2 Kings with Dt 1-4 acting as a prologue. It is so-called because it gets its major inspiration from the theology of Deuteronomy. It has a uniform style and outlook and prophecy is central to the work.

The aim of the Deuteronomistic writer is to give a theological explanation for the fall of the two kingdoms. The God of Israel was not powerless. The disasters that had befallen Israel were not the result not of weakness but of the power of Yahweh. The people and its leaders had been warned repeatedly by the prophets of the consequences of their unfaithfulness. The prophets had repeatedly exhorted conversion, but they had failed to respond. This failure brought the predicted divine judgement in the shape of the fall of the kingdoms of Israel (722/1) and Judah (587/6 BCE) and the exile in Babylon. But God had not abandoned Israel. This was part of the great scheme of things. Keeping the covenant still meant blessing, but breaking it meant punishment. The work, with its vision of a faithful God who remains true to his people despite their unfaithfulness, is intended to encourage a people on its knees.

The history was initially put together in the 7th century BCE after the death of Josiah, when stories, chronicles and other elements were gathered together to form a continuous narrative which reflected the community's sense of identity. It was redacted during the exile (587/6-538 BCE), in light of the tragedies that had befallen Israel.

## Chronicler's history

The 4th century Chronicler's history represents a rereading of the history of Israel. It is 'sacred history'. It begins with genealogies from Adam to David (1 Chr. 1-9), and continues with the lives of David (1 Chr. 10-29) and Solomon (2 Chr. 1-9) and the break-up of David's kingdom to the exile (2 Chr. 10-36). Most of it represents a rereading of the narrative of Samuel and Kings. It is the first major example of reinterpretation of earlier biblical material. The main part of the Chronicler's history was written after the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the rebuilding of the temple (516) and it was intended to help Israel rebuild itself.

In his work of redaction and reinterpretation, the Chronicler omits some material and adds more. Some of the information contained in his history comes from a reliable source not recorded in the books of Samuel and Kings (e.g. Josiah's reform in 2 Chr 34:3-7). But he has his own particular theological viewpoint and accommodates historical events to that viewpoint. He approaches certain historical problems in terms of reward and punishment, as in his explanation of the long reign of the wicked Manasseh. He extols the works of God in history and traces the rules of life and worship back to Abraham, Moses and David. He does not give prophecy a



central place in his work, as the Deuteronomist had done. For him, the temple and its worship are central to the history of Israel and he clarifies religious organisation in society. David is portrayed in a much more positive light than in the Deuteronomistic history. His positive points are highlighted and his faults omitted or downplayed.



### Student activity

Compare the portrait of David presented in the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's histories.

## 2.2 The Gospels

### The gospel as oral form

Today the term 'gospel' which comes from the old English 'godspel' meaning 'good tidings' is taken to refer to a book that narrates the story of Jesus, especially one of the four canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. The term is used to translate the Greek word euaggelion (Latin evangelium) which means 'good news'. Originally, however, the Greek word did not refer to a written document but rather to the 'good news' of salvation. It referred to the good news that Jesus himself preached (Mk 1:15; Lk 4:18) or the apostolic preaching about Jesus (Acts 5:42; Rom 1:1-3). Jesus did not leave anything in writing. His teaching and his actions were preserved in various forms (miracle stories, pronouncement stories, parables and sayings) by his disciples and by the communities formed on the basis of their faith in Jesus.

The 'good news' was preached by 'evangelists' (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11) for several decades before there were any written accounts of Jesus' ministry. When the gospel was being written down the term still applied to the contents of what was being written, not to the 'type' of book that was produced.

The formation of communities based on their faith in the risen Christ facilitated the preservation of material about Jesus and this material in turn helped to develop the communities' identity. Gradually, collections of stories and sayings were made, and the telling and retelling of such traditions shaped the tradition. Sayings' collections such as Q (see below) and the collection that may underlie the 2nd century gospel of Thomas (see above) were probably first made as a help to teachers and preachers. But it is likely that the earliest accounts were of Jesus' passion and death.

What prompted the appearance of the first written 'gospel' is difficult to say. It may have been the passing of early eyewitnesses or concerns about the accuracy of what was being preached or taught. But the traditions about Jesus did not cease to circulate in oral form simply because much of it had been written down.

### The gospel as literary form

In the second century, the term gospel began to be applied to the books produced by the four evangelists (Cf. Didache 15:3-4; 2 Clement 8:5). It then began to be used as a designation for a type of work. Gospel in this case is being treated as a literary form. Some argue that 'gospel' is a unique genre first exemplified in the gospel of Mark and later developed by Matthew, Luke and John, the canonical gospels. The designation 'gospel' is, however, also applied to works that are quite different from the canonical gospels. These appeared in the second century and later, and contain elements similar only in part to those found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (narrative, sayings, stories).

### The formation of the four gospels

The gospel tradition had been forming and developing for decades from the time of Jesus' ministry (c.27/30-30/33) but a time came when the need was felt to preserve the traditions about Jesus in a narrative account. This third stage in the formation of the gospels saw the appearance of three synoptic gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke. They are called synoptic because they give a 'common view' of the story of Jesus. The striking similarities between them suggest that there is some kind of literary relationship between them. The study of this relationship is known as the Synoptic Problem (see below). The fourth gospel was attributed to John, and while it shares much in common with the synoptic gospels it is also very different from them (see below).

It is generally accepted that the gospel of Mark was the first of such works and was written shortly before 70 CE. According to Papias, Mark's primary source was the oral preaching of Peter. But whatever the link between the two, it is clear that the author of Mark's gospel had a number of different sources at his disposal when he composed his work. These included a tradition concerning John the Baptist, controversy stories, parables, miracle stories, community instruction, and an earlier passion narrative.

It is possible that a general outline of Jesus' ministry such as one finds in the preaching of Peter in Acts 10:34-43 had already emerged (including stories of John the Baptist, Jesus' ministry in Galilee and Judea, his death in Jerusalem, the resurrection, appearances to witnesses, mission). Mark may have used such an outline, although he concludes his gospel somewhat abruptly with the empty tomb story and without any appearances of the risen Christ. Whatever happened, it is clear that Mark imposed a literary form and arrangement of his own on the material that he gathered together. Working with a purpose and a readership in mind, and against the background of the concerns of his own community, he produced a story full of pathos and

drama with a vividness and intensity that one does not find in the other gospels.

Many hold that those for whom the gospel was written were Roman Christians who were suffering persecution or under threat of persecution. Suffering, lack of understanding and failure were part of their lives as Christians – and are part of the presentation of the theme of discipleship which is such a prominent feature of Mark's gospel.

Most scholars today are of the view that the author of Matthew's gospel, the second longest of the three synoptics, took the basic outline of his work from Mark. While preserving 90% of Mark's material and its order to a considerable extent, he reshaped and redacted it as he retold the story of Jesus (see redaction criticism). In so doing he was addressing the needs of a Christian community endeavouring to define itself in relation to Judaism. The community's dialogue with the synagogue is reflected in its focus on Jewish customs and rites, on the Mosaic law, and on the fulfilment of prophecy, elements that give the work a definite Jewish tone. But evidence of an outreach to the Gentiles is found right throughout the gospel (2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 27:54), and especially in the mission charge of 28:16-20. The gospel may have been written in Antioch of Syria, between 70 and 85 CE. Its comprehensiveness in comparison with the gospel of Mark may suggest that the author was anxious to provide a more complete account of the traditions about Jesus in order to meet the emerging concerns and needs of his community.

Evidence of Matthew's reshaping of Mark's gospel may be seen from the very beginning of the gospel. Whereas Mark begins with John the Baptist, Matthew begins with a genealogy (1:1-17) and other stories about Jesus' birth as well as quotations from the Hebrew scriptures, to show that God's plan is being fulfilled. His gospel concludes, not as in Mark with the frightened women leaving the empty tomb, but with resurrection appearances of the risen Lord and a mission charge. Another feature of Matthew's gospel that distinguishes it from Mark's is his presentation of Jesus as a teacher. A striking feature of the gospel is the arrangement of Jesus' teaching in five main discourses or 'sermons', the first of which, the Sermon on the Mount, sets the tone for his ministry.

Quite a substantial amount of the material in Matthew's gospel came not from Mark's gospel but from other sources – partly from a sayings' source shared with Luke's gospel, namely, Q (see below), and partly from what is referred to as Matthew's 'special tradition' or M.

At roughly about the same time that Matthew produced his gospel, the Gospel of Luke appeared. The author indicates at the beginning of the work that he made use of a number of sources (Lk 1:1-4).

It is generally accepted that one of these sources was Mark's gospel, about half of which he included in his work and whose basic outline he followed. Like Matthew he reshaped this material considerably and added to it a substantial amount of material from other sources, namely, the sayings' source Q (see below) and his own special material not found in Matthew or Mark and referred to as L. Using a three part geographical principle of arrangement, he divides his narrative into three parts: a Galilean ministry of Jesus (Lk 5:1-9:50); a long travel narrative (9:51-19:48); and a final phase in Jerusalem (Lk 20-24). Like Matthew, he begins his work with an infancy narrative and concludes it with resurrection appearances and a universal mission given to the disciples. Luke is a good storyteller, leaving us with such gems as the parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37) and the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). The gospel is sometimes called the gospel of reconciliation, because of its images of a Jesus who reaches out continually to sinners (5:29-32; 7:36-50; 15: 19:1-10; 23:43). Other characteristics of the gospel are its presentation of Jesus as a model and teacher of prayer, the universality of its inclusive message of salvation, its positive attitude towards women, and its teaching on discipleship and possessions, and on the dangers of wealth. Unlike the other synoptic gospels, the gospel of Luke does not stand alone but is the first part of a two volume work, Luke-Acts.

The fourth gospel to appear was the gospel attributed to John. While it has many points in common with the synoptics, it is also very different from them. The story of Jesus which it tells, emerges from the concerns and beliefs of a Johannine community and is written for that community. It is presented against the background of the liturgical life of Israel. Significant individual encounters and dialogues between Jesus and individuals have an important role in its message. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Lamb of God. He speaks in long discourses about himself and his mission. His world in John's gospel is not a world of sayings and parables, but of concepts such as light and darkness, life and truth, peace and conflict, unity and division, love and enmity. John is more reflective, more theologically minded, and is interested in the significance of the facts.

The gospel presents the story of Jesus in two parts: his public ministry in Jn 1-12; and his passion, death and resurrection in Jn 13-20. It was probably produced nearer the end of the first century and over a period of time (see 20:30-31, the first ending and a later ending in 21:25). In the synoptics, Jesus' ministry begins in Galilee and moves gradually towards Jerusalem, especially in Luke. In John, Jesus' ministry begins in Judea and moves back and forth between Judea and Galilee.

Like the other gospels it uses several sources. And like the synoptic writers John reshaped the material that he gathered with his own concerns and the concerns of his community in mind and with a purpose – to strengthen the faith of his readers (20:30-31).

### Synoptic problem

None of the evangelists tells us that he has read the other's gospel - Luke's preface comes nearest to doing that. But a reading of the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke shows that they have a great deal in common. The synopses which place the three gospels side by side in parallel columns show how true this is. Almost all of Mark's gospel is reproduced in either Matthew or Luke or both, and largely in Mark's order. The outline of Jesus' ministry is similar in all three, beginning in Galilee, calling the twelve and sending them out, a journey to Jerusalem, teaching in Jerusalem, passion, death and the announcing of Jesus' resurrection.

There are striking agreements between all three (triple tradition) and between Matthew and Luke (double tradition) in content, in the order of episodes and in the vocabulary of the stories and sayings they have in common. But there are also striking differences between them, differences that suggest a complex relationship between them. The problem of explaining the relationship between these three gospels is called the synoptic problem.

The most popular solution to the synoptic problem nowadays is the so-called two-source theory. This theory claims that the gospel of Mark was written first and was then used as a source by Matthew and Luke, who also had access to another body of material usually known as Q (see below). The theory recognizes that Matthew and Luke also had traditional material of their own (M and L; see above).

Another solution to the synoptic problem is provided by the recently revived Griesbach hypothesis, which suggests that Mark's gospel was written after that of Matthew (first) and Luke with the purpose of reproducing what was common to both. This theory dispenses with Q. There are other solutions to the synoptic problem, some of which make use of other oral traditions in their explanations of the relationships between the gospels. Given the complexity of these relationships, any theory that is solely based on documentary sources may be an over simplification.

### The Q source (higher level only)

The priority of Mark does not explain the close parallels between Matthew and Luke in material that is not found in Mark. The two have about 235 verses of non-Markan material in common. There are remarkable similarities between them at some

points, as for example, their treatment of John the Baptist's preaching, but there are also major differences, as in the Sermon on the Mount/Sermon on the Plain, and their placing of events and sayings of Jesus. The solution to this was to posit the existence of a collection of sayings which is known as Q from the German Quelle or source. Q, then, is a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings that circulated initially in Aramaic and later in Greek.

Many feel that Q was a written document and offer both linguistic evidence and evidence from the order of the material to support this. They are of the view that Luke's order is the one that best reflects the likely original order of Q.

## Part three: The literature of the Bible

### 3.1 The language of story



#### Resources

Chatman, S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press

Rhoads, D. & Michie, D. (1982) *Mark as Story. An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* Philadelphia: Fortress

### Job

The book of Job, one of the greatest monuments of OT wisdom literature, is well recognised as one of the classics of world literature. A timeless work it raises for every generation the ultimate questions of divine justice (theodicy), the meaning of suffering in the life of a good person who believes in God, the meaning and purpose of human existence, how it is possible to continue to believe in a world where evil is so prevalent, and so on.

The book is one long poetic dialogue (3:1-42:6), the longest ancient Hebrew piece of poetry that survives, introduced by a prose prologue (1-2) and concluded by a prose epilogue (42:7-11). The characters of the story are Job, his wife, Satan, Job's three friends and God. It has a plot that sustains the whole. The setting of the book may be thought of as the era of Abraham (c.1800 BCE), a man with flocks, camels and great possessions, but its date is anywhere between 1600 and 400 BCE.

The story tells how Job, a man of great wealth and integrity (Job 1-2) is tested by God on the suggestion of Satan. He loses all his possessions and his family, is smitten with a loathsome affliction of the skin and becomes an outcast of society. His wife urges him to curse God and die, but Job retains his integrity. This sets the scene for the drama which follows, in which Job is joined by three friends who come to help him, but who end up criticising him and drawing from



him ever stronger protests of innocence and the unmerited nature of his suffering.

Job is searching desperately for understanding and is demanding an answer from God, but is only met with the stock theological answers ('windy word') of his friends. The climax comes when God answers Job, but not as Job had imagined it. Job's personal encounter with God changes everything for him. The dark night is over. His complete trust in God is restored. In the end, his position is vindicated and his family and fortune are restored.

Job's story has influenced modern writers such as Kierkegaard (*Diaries*), Kafka (*The Trial*), Jung (*Answer to Job*), has had a significant influence on modern existentialists such as Camus (*Myth of Sisyphus*), Addamov (*Notes et Contre-notes*), Beckett (*Waiting for Godot; Endgame*) and Bloch (*Atheismus in Christentum*), and on modern playwrights (e.g. McLeish, Archibald (1961) *JOB: A Play in Verse*, Cambridge, Mass; Riverside Press; Neil Simon, *God's Favorite*). There are elements of tragedy, comedy and irony in the story which follows a basic line that leads in the end to the happiness of the hero.



## Resources

Cox, D. (1990) *Man's Anger & God's Silence. The Book of Job*, Slough: St. Paul's

Cox, D. (1978) *Triumph Of Impotence: Job And The Tradition Of The Absurd* Rome: PIB

Whybray, R.N. (1998) *Job, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

Gutierrez, G. (1986) *On Job* New York: Orbis

Kushner, H.S. (1982) *When bad things happen to good people* London: Pan books

For a practical approaches to storytelling see

<http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/eest.htm>

<http://www.eldrbarry.net/rabb/joy.htm>

## Parable as genre

A parable is a story drawn from everyday life which conveys religious or moral teaching in a vivid and memorable way and aims to evoke a response, a decision, an action or a change of heart.

Jesus did not invent the literary form. The parable was already found in the OT where it was known as the *mashal*, translated in the Septuagint by the term *parabolé* which means 'comparison'. Parables are to be found in the Old Testament (e.g. parable of the

vineyard, Is. 5:1-9; the parable of the ewe lamb, 2 Sam. 12:1-8) and rabbinic Judaism.

What are referred to in general terms as parables may be classified into three groups – Similitudes, Parables strictly speaking, and Exemplary stories or Illustrations. The Similitude, the most concise type of parable, is an extended simile or comparison which makes use of a typical or regular occurrence with which the hearers are familiar - leaven being added to meal (Mt. 13:33), grain ripening for the harvest (Mk 4:26-29), mustard seed being sown (Mk. 4:31-32).

The Parable, strictly speaking, is an invented or freely composed story or narrative which tells of some interesting or particular case – what happened on one occasion – in a vivid and stimulating way. It does not refer to a typical event or situation but remains true to life. A sower went out to sow (Mt 13:1), a rich man had a steward (Lk.16:1), a man gave a great banquet (Lk. 14:16). As in the similitude, the things compared are dissimilar.

The Illustration or Exemplary story is also an invented story, subject to the same laws of storytelling as the parable. It presents a particular that illustrates a general principle. In this case the two things compared are similar. Notice how the story of the Good Samaritan ends: 'Go and do likewise' (Lk. 10:37).



## Resources

Boucher, M.I. (1981) *The Parables* Dublin: Veritas

Dodd, C.H. (1961) *The Parables of the Kingdom* London: Collins

## Studying the parables: useful examples

### 1. Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3-9)

The parable of the Sower is told by Jesus while sitting in a boat on the lake teaching the multitude (Mt 13:1-2). It is the first in a chapter of seven parables, two of which are accompanied by explanations. The central theme of his preaching here is the Kingdom of God. In this case Matthew has redacted Mark's version of the parable (4:3-9). The parable is also found in Lk 8:5-8 and in the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas* (9; see above).

The story, which falls into two parts with four scenes, is a straightforward one. The farmer, having ploughed the land, sows the seed in soil which appears the same to him but in reality is not. In the first scene, the seed falls on or alongside a path which may have been a right of way or a path around the field. It is taken by the birds. In the second, it falls into soil that is shallow because of the underlying

rock and lasts only a short while. In the third case, it falls into soil that hides weeds or thistles, which eventually spring up and choke it. In these three cases the sowing is unsuccessful. The parable comes to a climax in the 4th scene, which tells how the seed falls on soil that is good and productive and produces an abundant harvest – ‘hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold’ – stressing perhaps the variety of the harvest. The three also balance the three types of failed seeds and correspond to the different failures.

The original context for the parable is probably early in Jesus’ ministry. The parable was originally told to encourage his hearers who may have been discouraged by the lack of success of his preaching. It contrasts the present lack of success with the certain extraordinarily abundant harvest in the future.

This parable was retold in the early Christian communities where another interpretation was added. The parable now related to the word of God and its reception by Christians. Thus it carried a message of encouragement extolling them to withstand the trials and tribulations that may affect them.

## **2. The Labourers in the Vineyard/The Generous Employer (Mt 20:1-16)**

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard is told to Jesus’ disciples (20:1) but may originally have had a different audience. The parable is in two parts: the first part narrating the hiring of the day’s labourers and the instructions for their payment (vv.1-8), and the second (vv.9-15), their actual payment. The landowner hires the workers early in the morning, agreeing to pay them a denarius – a day’s pay for a day labourer. He goes out again at the third hour, and hires more, agreeing to give them what was right or just. He does the same at the sixth and ninth hours. He goes out about the eleventh hour (c.5 p.m.) and finds some still idle. He hires them also, but without an agreement.

At the end of the day (c. 6 p.m.) the workers are paid, as was customary (see Lev. 19:13). Those hired last are paid first and surprisingly paid one denarius, the sum agreed with those hired first. When they come to be paid, not surprisingly, they grumble (v.11). After all they have borne ‘the burden of the day and the scorching heat’ and believe they have been treated unjustly. The householder reminds their spokesman of their agreement and urges him to accept it and go, adding that he is free to do as he chooses with what belongs to him (20:14b-15).

What point is the ‘householder’ making? Why are all given the same pay despite working different hours, and particularly the last who have only worked for one hour? Is this egalitarian approach a piece of arbitrary injustice or a whim of generosity?

One approach is to see it as teaching the limitless generosity of the householder and thus illustrating the ‘overflowing generosity of God’s love which ignores claims of human merit and works’ (Meier, *Matthew*, 224), ‘the grace of God’s reign’ (Boucher, *Parables*, 89), that there are no degrees of reward in heaven but that all is based on generosity (Bauer).

Jeremias, who entitles it ‘The Parable of the Good Employer’, argues that the original parable is not about limitless generosity since all receive only one denarius, a bare subsistence wage, but is about compassion and sympathy for the poor (*Parables*, 136).

For the early Christian communities, the parable may have been seen to defend God’s freedom to extend God’s salvation to whomsoever he chooses – God loves and rewards all equally – the parable challenges discrimination between people (Bloomberg, *Parables*, 222)

## **3. The Wedding Attendants (Mt. 25:1-13)**

The parable of the ten ‘wedding attendants’ or the ten virgins as it is more commonly known, is set in the Last Judgement discourse of Mt. 24-25 and may have been told to a general audience. It illustrates the saying in 24:42: ‘Watch therefore because you do not know in what day your Lord comes’. It falls into four parts: an introduction (vv.1-5), a central portion (vv.6-10), a brief and tragic denouement (vv.11-12), and an exhortation (vv.13ff.). The parable is a realistic story, reflecting Jewish customs at the time – the wedding feast at nightfall, the accompaniment of the bride to the bridegroom’s house first, the women going to meet the bridegroom and accompanying him to the house for the feast (Jeremias, *Parables*). In the parable the kingdom is compared to the whole complex of events that is narrated about the wedding festivities.

From the beginning, the story focuses on the five foolish attendants. They are portrayed as shortsighted and ill-prepared, not realising that the bridegroom might be delayed and that they might not have enough oil for their lamps and not bring extra oil for an emergency. The wise maidens have the foresight to bring oil with them in case it is needed.

The bridegroom is indeed delayed, and all fall asleep. When his coming is announced, the ten maidens rise to trim the wicks on their lamps and fill them with oil. The ‘foolish maidens’ realise that they need oil and turn to their companions for some, but are refused. The fear, presumably, is that there would not be enough for both and there would be no torchlight procession at all. They have to go and buy oil. And while they are away the bridegroom arrives. All who are ‘ready’ go in to the marriage feast with him and the door of the house is shut.



When the others came later they knock and try to get in, but are not admitted. The groom's response seems harsh and somewhat disconcerting: 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you'. These are the only words he speaks in the parable. Those who were unwise and unprepared are shut out – judgement is irrevocable.

The story exhorts the hearers to be prepared for the bridegroom whenever he comes. The foolish maidens expect the bridegroom to come when they are ready. They are imprudent. They act according to their own expectations rather than paying heed to what could happen – that he could be delayed. Because of their lack of foresight they are not prepared when he does come and are tragically excluded – the door is closed on them, their opportunity is lost.

What does the parable say to the original audience? It tells that the bridegroom may be delayed and, like the wise attendants, one must be prepared for this. Certainly, it reminds them that one should not be so unprepared as to find oneself excluded from the eschatological feast, otherwise the door may be shut, and then it will be too late. The message for Matthew's community is that, it too must be prepared for the Lord's return.

#### 4. The Unjust Steward (16:1-13)

The parable of the unjust Steward is one of Luke's parables on poverty and riches (Luke 12:13-21; 16:1-13; 16:19-21). It is told to the disciples (16:1) in the hearing of the grumbling Pharisees (15:2; 16:14), but was probably originally addressed to a general audience. The original parable (16:1-8a), has always been difficult to interpret, particularly the Lord's commendation of the steward's apparently dishonest action (v.8a).

The story tells how a rich man, an owner of a large estate in Palestine, summarily dismisses his steward on foot of accusations against him of having squandered his property and orders him to provide an account of his management. The steward responds by calling in his master's debtors and having them rewrite their promissory bonds for much lesser amounts: 50% in the case of the man who owed 100 barrels of oil, the more valuable commodity; and 20% in the case of the man who owed 80 barrels of wheat. Was this further dishonest behaviour or is there another explanation for his actions?

In first century Palestine there were large owners who had stewards who transacted their business with full power. What the steward did was simply call in debtors and eliminate his own commission from the original bonds. It is this action that is praised, not the falsification of accounts. The remission of the debt would reflect well on the landowner who would be lauded for his generosity with the result that he

might reinstate the agent, or give him a favourable recommendation. The steward's plan paid off. He is praised for his 'shrewdness'. He has at one stroke benefited his employer, his clients and himself (see Herzog II, W. *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (1994) Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, p.258.

What is praised is the steward's prudent use of material possessions to ensure his future security. It is his prudence that is praised. As a prudent man who uses material possessions for his own good and also the good of others, he is a model for the Christian disciple.

The attached sayings of vv.8b-9 represent the first application of the parable. Christians could learn something from the prudence of the 'children of this world' who are equated with the steward. Disciples are urged to make prudent use of material possessions. The point of the second application in 16:10-12 is that of responsibility and faithfulness. The third application in 16:13 sums up a general attitude towards wealth: one must choose God or mammon.



### Resources

Boucher, M.I. (1981) *The Parables*  
Dublin: Veritas

Dodd, C.H. (1961) *The Parables of the Kingdom* London: Collins

Bailey, K. (1976) *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Bailey, K. (1980) *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style* Grand Rapids; Eerdmans

Jeremias, J. (1955) *The Parables of Jesus* London: SCM

Hultgren, A.J. (2000) *The Parables of Jesus. A Commentary*, Grand Rapids; Eerdmans

### 3.2 The language of reflection

The depth of thought and feeling that is expressed in the Psalms, the great collection of Hebrew poetry, calls out to the deepest yearnings and emotions in the reader.

Poetry is an attempt to express, in exalted language, convictions, insights, feelings and emotions that are not easily expressed in prose. However, an awareness of the rules and conventions of a particular type of poetry is helpful if we are to fully appreciate it. This is particularly so with poetry that originated in a culture that differs from our own.

The main feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. The simplest form of parallelism is 'synonymous

parallelism', where the thought of one line is repeated in different words in the next line (e.g. Ps. 6:9). In 'antithetic parallelism' the thought expressed in the second line contrasts with the thought of the first line (e.g. Ps. 1:6).

The psalms use imaginative language very effectively. For example, the righteous person is like a flourishing tree (Ps 1:3); one's enemies are 'bulls' or 'dogs' (Ps. 22:12,16); the Lord accompanies the believer even in 'the darkest valley' (Ps. 23:4). Examples of animal imagery are to be found in Pss. 7:2; 32:9; 42:1. Bird imagery occurs, for example, in Pss. 17:8; 55: 6-8; 84:3; 102:6-7.

### Useful examples

Ps. 145 is an acrostic psalm, that is, a psalm in which every verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a psalm in praise of God's goodness, seeing him as king, provider and saviour.

Every verse of Ps. 114 is in synonymous parallelism. But to understand the psalm fully we must know, for example, that in v. 1 the word 'Israel' means the same thing as 'the house of Jacob', and we must be aware that turning a rock, or flint, into water (v. 8) refers to the action of Moses who brought water from the rock in the desert (Ex. 17:1-7).



### Student activity

- Students could be asked to find other examples of parallelism in the psalms. Discussion could be encouraged on themes such as:
- How does Psalm 1 answer the question 'How can one be happy'?
- Are there similarities between psalm 137 and Thomas Moore's poem 'The Harp that once through Tara's Halls'?

### 3.3 The language of symbol (higher level only)

Symbolic language is commonplace right throughout literature and especially poetry. One can mention the plays of Shakespeare (e.g. King Lear; Macbeth), the poetry of John Keats (*Ode to a Nightingale*), Milton's *Paradise Lost*, T.S. Eliot's poem *The Wasteland*, W.B. Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*, and *Byzantium* (Byzantium a symbol of art and culture), James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

In the Bible, symbolic language abounds – not just in the psalms, the prophets, and in apocalyptic writing where it is especially prevalent – but throughout, from Genesis to Revelation. The language of symbol is used to describe God, to clarify God's will and activity. God is spoken of in anthropomorphic terms

(potter, father, mother, king, judge, gardener, etc.). God is present in a pillar of cloud by day, in fire by night (Ex13:21-2); in a storm (Jer. 30:23) or a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12-13). The serpent that Moses raises in the wilderness is a symbol of life (Num); Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:7) become symbols of rebellion in biblical literature; Sodom becomes the symbol of a place of depravity; Egypt the place of bondage; Jerusalem, the holy city; the temple, the place where Yahweh dwells.

In the NT, symbolic language is used to convey the significance of Jesus – titles such as the Son of Man with its echoes of Dn. 7:14, Messiah, priest, prophet and king. In the gospel of John he is the Logos made flesh (1:1-18), the lamb of God, the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10), the way that leads to life. There are many other examples of the language of symbol in the gospels (e.g. parables, miracles) and in the writings of Paul (the cross, the great symbol of life and love).

Apocalyptic writings are especially full of symbolic language. In Apocalyptic writing (e.g. Dan. 7-12; Rev.), animals, colours, numbers and places are all endowed with special symbolism (see below).

### Myth

A myth may be defined as a story or narrative which uses traditional motifs, is set in a very different time from that of the narrator, and deals with topics such as the gods and legendary heroes of old, the origin of the world and of humanity, the reasons for the human condition being as it is, or other great questions that human beings inevitably ask themselves. The word itself comes from the Greek word *mythos* which means speech, story or narrative.

Myths usually deal with great questions that humans put to themselves and the answers are usually set in time before history began. Myths are often etiological, that is, they give the reason why something is as it is. Students should not concern themselves with whether or not a myth is true, but with what truth it tries to capture.

The ancient Israelites lived in a cultural context (Canaan, Mesopotamia, Egypt) where such myths were commonplace (e.g. Enuma Elish; Epic of Gilgamesh). They took over ideas from such myths but used them from their own faith perspective, refashioning them and using them for their own purposes. Their use may be seen, for example, in the creation stories of Genesis 1-2, in the strange story of Gen. 6:1-4, Is 27:1 and 51:9, Ps 74:14 or Job 41:1 and its reference to the mythical Leviathan.



### Syllabus links

Section A: The quest for meaning and values – Part 3.1.



## Resources

Charpentier, E. (1982) *How to Read the Old Testament* London: SCM

Ó hÓgáin, D. (1990) *Myth, legend & romance: an encyclopaedia of the Irish folk tradition* London: Ryan Publishing

Murphy, G. (1961) *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland* Dublin: Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland

Keating, G. (1987) *The History of Ireland I*, London: Irish Texts Society: available on line at <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/G100054/index.html> pp.96ff

For myths in Irish literature see Dillon M. ed. (1985) *Irish Sagas* Cork: Mercier, 1985, 27-39 (Battle of Moytirra).

## Epic

An epic is usually a long narrative poem on a grand scale, told or written in an elevated style, centered on a heroic figure who transcends ordinary human limitations and has a central role in a series of events that are significant or foundational for a people or nation.

The epic developed in an oral culture when a people or a nation was reflecting on its historical, cultural and religious heritage. Literary epics are learned imitations of the oral form. The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (3rd millennium) is the earliest extant epic. Other examples of oral epic are the great classical epics of the Iliad, which recounts the story of the Trojan War, and the *Odyssey*, which recounts the story of Odysseus' return home from the Trojan War. The Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, the Indian *Mahabharata*, may also be included among these and the Táin Bó Cuailgne (cf. M. Dillon, ed., (1985) *Irish Sagas*, Cork; Mercier 93ff.; T. Kinsella, *Táin*, 1990). Virgil's Aeneid, an account of the founding of Rome, is a literary creation, the French *Song of Roland* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

The term 'epic' is not confined to poetry but is also applied to prose accounts, novels, dramas and films. It is applied, too, to the dramatic story of the Exodus, a foundational event for the people of Israel, an inspirational event 'central to the traditions and belief of its culture'. It is the story of how one man, Moses, with God's help and guidance, led his people from slavery in Egypt across the Reed Sea to freedom and to a covenant with God at Mt Sinai through, which Israel became God's people, and how he brought them after forty years wandering in the desert within sight of the Promised Land, but died before he could enter it. The epic story is recounted every year during the feast of Passover.

The language of symbol is used to describe God's great act of deliverance. He is presented as a 'man of war' (Ex. 15:3) whose arm is powerful (Ex. 15:16), whose right hand is victorious (Ex. 13:6; Ps 44:3) who repeatedly hardens Pharaoh's heart (e.g. Ex. 7:13) and frees Israel from bondage (see above).



## Resources

B. Childs, *Exodus*,

Ó' Muirheartaigh, A. (1992) *Táin Bó Cuailnge* Dublin: Coiscéim (modern version for younger readers)

Faraday, L.W. *The Cattle-Raid of Cuailnge* (Táin Bó Cuailnge), translated from Leabhar na h-Uidhri and the Yellow Book of Lecan available at [http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/tain\\_faraday.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/tain_faraday.pdf)

<http://www.thetain.com/>

(For popular introduction to the Táin and its itinerary.)

## Apocalypse

The term apocalypse is a Greek word meaning 'disclosure' or 'revelation'. The term apocalyptic is applied to writings dating from about 200 BCE to 200 CE which have a similar worldview. These are to be found in Jewish and Christian literature, but in the Bible there is only one complete work, the Book of Revelation, and parts of others (e.g. Daniel 7-14; Mk. 13 and parallels).

Apocalyptic writings are intended to give hope to the suffering faithful, that God will triumph over the powers of evil in an imminent divine intervention, which will deliver them from their suffering and usher in a new salvific era. They involve conflict of cosmic dimensions between the forces of good and evil.

An apocalypse may be described as a book or part of a book in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being, such as an angel, to a human 'seer'. Revelation may be given in the form of dreams or visions of the heavenly world. The seer's account of these visions or dreams may take the form of a narrative, which describes historic events leading up to the seer's own time, and assuring God's saving intervention in the future. Sometimes heavenly mysteries, such as God's divine plan for the future, are revealed.

Apocalypses tend to make extensive use of numbers, animals and colours as symbols that are interpreted for the seer. In Dn. 7 there is the famous vision of the four beasts, which represent the empires of the Babylonians, Medes, Persians and Greeks. The number 4 is to be found in Rev 7:1-8, where it refers

to the divisions of the created order (earth, wind fire, water) and in Rev 6:1-8 where each of four horsemen of the apocalypse rides a different coloured horse of a different colour (White, Red, Black, Pale Green).

The apocalyptic writer nearly always uses a pseudonym, presenting himself as a worthy figure from the past (Abraham, Moses, Enoch). The author of the only apocalypse in the New Testament identifies himself as John. There are, of course, other Christian apocalypses that were not included in the Christian canon (e.g. Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter).

**Symbols used in the Book of Revelation include:**

White	victory, also the brilliance of the divine glory (6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 13:14)
Red	violence and war
Black	famine and suffering
Pale green	decomposition and death
Lamb	sacrificial martyrdom
Lion	royal kingship of Jesus
Beasts	Satanic figures (Roman Emperor)



**Student activity**

Student could investigate the symbolism of the book of Revelation notably its use of Babylon and its symbolic numbers, particularly 4, 7, 12, 666 and 144,000.



**Syllabus links**

Section A: The quest for meaning and values – Part 2.1

**Part four: Biblical texts**

The following notes will help students in their study of the suggested key texts. A general work on the Bible such as *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Murphy, R.E. Brown, R.E. & Fitzmyer J.A. (London: Chapman, 1990), which has commentaries on each of the biblical books, is a very useful study tool.

**4.1 The Hebrew scriptures**

**Ex 20:1-17: The Ten Commandments**

The fact that the Ten Commandments or more precisely the ‘Ten Words’ (Decalogue) are tied to God’s revelation at Sinai clearly underlines their centrality and importance for the life of Israel. They are the most general and comprehensive series of

laws in the Old Testament (see Ex. 34; Lev. 19) and are set apart from the laws that follow in Ex. 21-23.

Presented as divine utterances spoken to Moses (Ex. 20:1), they function as part of the obligations incumbent on the people of Israel as a party to Yahweh’s covenant with them. They touch areas of great importance in the life of the community (e.g. worship of Yahweh, killing, kidnapping, swearing falsely). They are couched in apodictic (unconditional) form and contain no explicit sanctions, unlike those couched in casuistic (conditional) form, such as the laws found in Ex. 21-23, or the ancient *Code of Hammurabi* 209 (see above). The covenant context provides the sanction. Breaking these commandments sets one outside this covenant relationship.

The length of the commandments in Ex. 20:1-17 varies greatly. The original form was probably much shorter (see vv.6, 7, 8, 9). Eight are in negative form, two in positive. The number ten was probably a teaching aid. The prologue to the commandments, with its reference to God’s liberating act, provides the motivation (Ex. 20:2). According to Childs, the decalogue ‘looks inward and outward; it guards against the way of death and points to the way of life’ (*Exodus*, 398).

The commandments had a long historical development in both oral and written stages as can be seen, for example, in the differences between the versions recorded in Ex. 20:1-17 and Dt. 5:6-21. They are numbered differently in Jewish writings and in the Christian churches. For some, the prohibition against false worship in Ex. 20:3-6 constitutes two commandments, while Ex 20:17 is taken as one. For others, Ex. 20:3-6 is seen as one commandment, while the commandment against coveting of Ex. 20:17 is divided in two. The ‘Ten Words’ are sometimes divided into commandments that refer to humanity’s duty to God (1-3) and to one another (4-10).

**1 Sam 2:1-10: The Song of Hannah**

The story of the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 1-2) is the context for the Song of Hannah, his mother (1 Sam. 2:1-10). An ancient poem, it may date from the 9th or 10th centuries BCE (see Song of Deborah, Jdgs 5; Song of Moses, Ex 15). The Song was originally composed in a different context and was adapted to its present context on the lips of a once barren woman who is celebrating God’s intervention on her behalf.

Hannah, a wife of Elkanah, was childless and an object of derision. She went to the sanctuary at Shiloh to pray for a son and promised him to the Lord (1 Sam. 1:11). Assured that her prayer would be heard (1 Sam. 1:17), she returned home. In due course she conceived, and bore a son whom she called Samuel. Samuel was to become one of the



great figures in Israel's history, a priestly and a prophetic figure who would preside over the introduction of the monarchy to Israel.

When the child was weaned, Hannah brought him to the sanctuary at Shiloh to present him to the Lord and to offer sacrifice. She also offered a prayer to the Lord (1 Sam. 2:1). Her prayer is the Song of Hannah, a song of praise and thanksgiving for Yahweh's intervention on her behalf. The song celebrates Yahweh's victories, his knowledge and strength, his interventions on behalf of the poor and the faithful, his triumph over his adversaries. The reference to the anointed king in v.10 foreshadows the institution of the monarchy with which Samuel will be closely connected. The hymn is recalled in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1).

### **Is 52:13-53:12: Suffering Servant**

Is 52:13-53:12, is the fourth of a series of servant songs (Is 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9) found in Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40-55). This book is written by a disciple of Isaiah to give hope and consolation to the Jewish exiles in Babylon and to assure them of their imminent liberation. The poem, which is full of intense emotion, is a remarkable passage which speaks of the servant's humiliation and exaltation. It suggests more clearly than anywhere in the OT the atoning power of an individual's suffering. It consists of a report (53:1-11a) which is framed by utterances of God (52:13-15; 53:11b-12). There are echoes of a suffering Jeremiah (Jer. 15:17) and Job (19:13-19) in the song, and its language and imagery recall the psalms of lament. The identity of the servant is not clear. It is taken by some to refer to an individual, by others to refer to Israel.

The song begins with God speaking of the exaltation of the utterly humiliated servant to the amazement of many nations and kings (52:13-15). It continues with a report on the servant's suffering (53:1-10) and exaltation (53:10-11a). Despised and reckoned as nothing (v.3), he bears the sufferings of others (v.4). His fate, thought to be God's doing, is in reality caused by others (4-6). Not only that but he carries their burdens, their illness, their rebellion and iniquities. They are reconciled through his vicarious suffering. Throughout his sufferings he remains silent. Ultimately he dies and receives a shameful burial (vv.8-9). But, paradoxically, he is restored to 'life' as God turns to him and intervenes on his behalf (vv.10-11a). The song concludes with God's assurance of the servant's rehabilitation. It was he who bore the sin of many; it is he who intercedes for them (53:11b-12). He will be rewarded. God acted through him to bring salvation to many.

The image of the suffering servant is taken up again in the NT (see Mk. 10:45 and Is 53:10; Lk. 22:37 and 53:12; Acts 8:32-35 and Is. 53:7-8).

## **4.2 The New Testament**

### **Mk 9:2-13: Transfiguration**

The transfiguration story in Mark's gospel is preceded by Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah (8:27-30); Jesus' prediction of his passion, death and resurrection (8:31); Peter's protest and Jesus' rebuke (8:32-33); and Jesus' insistence that suffering is part of being his disciple (8:34). It is followed by the cure of the epileptic and another prediction of his passion, death and resurrection (9:31-32). The disciples' lack of understanding of Jesus' identity is also highlighted (8:32; 9:19, 32). The story, which is full of the language of symbol, also recalls the scene in Gethsemane and is linked to it by the presence of the same three witnesses (cf. 9:2; 14:33).

The story tells how Jesus brought three disciples with him up the mountain, recalling Mt. Sinai – the place of God's revelation to Moses. There he is 'transfigured', and his clothes become dazzling white (a reference to divine glory). Elijah and Moses who appear with him, are seen as representative of the law and the prophets, faithful servants of God who suffered because – of their obedience to his word – figures who also point towards Jesus' ultimate glorification. Peter, still groping for the truth (cf. 8:32), addresses Jesus as rabbi and speaks of making three booths (huts of plaited branches) as a way of honouring them or of prolonging their presence. The cloud, which envelops the three figures, symbolises the presence of God. From it comes the voice of God identifying Jesus as his beloved son and calling for him to be listened to. The story concludes with Jesus and the disciples on their own.

On the way down the mountain the three disciples are bound to secrecy until after Jesus' resurrection. The command for secrecy helps to explain the tension between the lack of understanding among his contemporaries of Jesus' identity and their later faith. Mark's community is thus assured of the truth of what they believe.

Jewish expectation of the return of Elijah is raised by the disciples. Jesus' enigmatic reply is that Elijah has indeed come in the person of John the Baptist. And, as John was treated, so the Son of man would be. John is not the Messiah but his death foreshadows that of Jesus himself (9:12).

The Transfiguration story provides a heavenly confirmation of Jesus' identity and his teaching about his suffering, death and resurrection. It calls on the disciples (and readers) to heed his words.

### **Lk 6:20-49: The Sermon on the Plain**

Luke's Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49) is parallel to the Sermon on the Mount of Mt 5:1-7:27 but is less than a third of its length. It too is linked to a mountain, being delivered on the plain below the



mountain where Jesus had spent the night in prayer (6:12, 17) before choosing the twelve apostles (6:13-16). It is followed, as in Matthew's gospel, by the healing of the centurion's son. Addressed directly to the disciples (6:20), it is delivered in the hearing of the crowds who had brought their sick to him to be healed (see 6:17-19; 7:1). The audience is representative of 'all Israel'.

The Sermon opens, as does Mt 5:1-7:27, with beatitudes (Lk. 6:20-23) and closes with the parable of the house and the storm (6:46-49). Both sermons are placed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as inaugural discourses, and the material in them is assigned for the most part to Q (see Q above). The 'woes' of Lk. 6:24-26 are not paralleled in Matthew's Sermon. The similarities and differences between the two 'Sermons', both in the order of events and in the content of the material, supports the theory of a written source for the sermon.

Despite its comparative brevity, the Sermon is rich in content. It opens with four beatitudes – declarations of a person's 'blessedness' in the present, in view of a future intervention of God (eschatological beatitude). Jesus declares blessed the poor, that is, those who are needy, dependent on others. He also declares blessed those who are hungry and mourning 'now' – both of which represent different kinds of poverty – and assures them of future consolation. The fourth beatitude declares blessed the disciples who are facing persecution of various kinds 'on account of the Son of Man'. They, too, are assured of an eschatological reward. The beatitudes are followed by four corresponding woes (6:24-26), threatening in nature and usually referring to an eschatological reversal of fortune. These are pronounced against the rich, the sated, those who laugh now and those well-spoken of. Their present 'blissful' situations will be reversed (see Luke's warnings against the dangers of wealth in 12:16-21; 16:19-31).

The woes lead directly to the next part of Jesus' sermon, which begins with his teaching on loving one's enemy (6:27-35). Here he radicalises the law of Lev 19:18, redefining 'neighbour' in the broadest terms possible, so that it covers friend and 'foe' alike. It is such a love that must dominate the life of the disciple.

The disciple must also imitate the mercy of the Father (v.36), a quality referred to repeatedly in the OT. One imitates God's mercy through not judging or criticising, but being forgiving and generous. The disciple should be a good guide, who is self-critical, aware of his or her own faults, and capable of producing good. The parable of the house and the storm brings the sermon to a close, with a call to put the word of God into action (6:46-49).

## Jn. 1:1-18: The Prologue

Jn 1:1-18, the prologue to John's gospel, may be compared to an overture in a symphony in which the main themes are given. Themes which are prominent in the gospel are introduced here (e.g. the word, life, light, darkness, glory, witness, truth, faith). The prologue is united around one basic theme – the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate word. The hymn is the fruit of a profound theological reflection on Jesus, which highlights his mission as revealer. Having presented him as such in the prologue, the evangelist goes on to deal with the content of Jesus' revelation in the gospel. The influence of songs in praise of wisdom is evident (Prov. 8:22-31, Sir 1:1-10; Sir. 24:1-3), both in theme and in vocabulary. Inspired by these songs, the author composes a hymn praising the person and the revelatory salvific work of the Word of God.

The prologue may be divided into three parts: 1-5, 6-14 and 15-18. In the first part, the Word (Logos) is the pre-existent, eternal divine Word, in a close dynamic relationship with God. He is God's agent in creation, the source of light and life for humanity. A light that was not accepted, but that darkness could not overcome. The second part begins with the witness of John the Baptist (vv.6-8). It is he who prepares the way, who bears witness to the light (vv.7b, 8b) so that all might believe. But the world did not accept or acknowledge the light. His own people did not accept him (see Jn. 3:11, 32; 5:43; 12:37-43). But to those who did accept him he gave the gift of divine sonship (vv.12-13). The Word became flesh (v.14) – took on human form – and his 'flesh' becomes the locus of revelation, the place where the word of God has made itself visible, so that humankind may contemplate his glory full of the grace of truth. The third part begins again with John's witness to the Word, to his pre-existence, to the gift of truth that came through him. In Jesus Christ the eschatological revelation is complete and definitive. Jesus, the only begotten Son, reveals the mysteries of divine life because he lives in continual relationship with the Father.



## Resources

- Murphy, R.E, Brown, R.E, Fitzmyer, J.A, eds. (1990) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* London: Chapman
- Freedman, David Noel (1992) *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* New York: Doubleday
- Freedman, D.N. & Myers, A. eds. (2000) *Eerdmans Dictionary of The Bible* Rapids: Eerdmans
- Freyne, Sean (2002) *Texts, Contexts and Cultures* Dublin: Veritas



# SECTION I

## Religion: The Irish Experience

### Part one: Patterns of change

Study of the changing pattern of religious belief in Ireland, set in a European context, should lead to an appreciation and respect for the variety of religious traditions and secular movements which exist in Ireland today.

An investigation of recent Irish research will ground the discussion and afford the possibility of comparison with local patterns. Tuohy, D. and Cairns, P. (2000) *Youth 2K: Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture* Dublin: Marino Institute of Education, documents the type of meaning systems young people have in Ireland today, highlighting their religious and spiritual culture. Greeley, A. and Ward, C. (2000), 'How 'Secularised' Is the Ireland We Live In?' *Doctrine and Life* 50 pp.581-617, reports on the authors' research in Ireland, conducted in conjunction with the International Social Survey Programme and administered in 25 other countries. They conclude that the Irish continue to believe in God, in life after death, and attend weekly worship at the highest rates in Europe. While the youngest age group (born in the 1970s) is more likely to reject God and religious affiliation, the overwhelming majority of this age group, they find, do not share that rejection.



### Syllabus links

Section C: World religions.



### Student activity

- The emphasis on patterns of belief at local level among young people suggests that the teacher might encourage students to conduct their own research locally among their peers, replicating some of the

questions asked in national and international research projects.

- Respect for the variety of religious traditions would be reinforced by students interacting with local faith communities – those of a variety of Christian denominations – and, where possible, those of other major world religions, becoming familiar with their places of worship, and interviewing religious leaders and lay members about their understanding of living life religiously.



### Resources

Cassidy, E. ed. (2002) *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs* Dublin: Veritas. A number of the articles in this book investigate the reality of secularisation in Ireland and compare belief patterns with other European countries.

Finnegan, J. (1997) 'Postmodern Spiritualities and the Return to Magic: A Theological Reflection' *Milltown Studies* 39 pp.5-26.

*LOGOS: Communities of Faith in Ireland Today* (Dublin: Mater Dei Institute of Education, 2002) is a CD Rom using Irish examples only of four major world religions, to open students to the diversity of belief, worship and lifestyle in contemporary Ireland.

A visit to the Central Statistics Office website ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)) would also be useful in seeing changing patterns of religious affiliation expressed in various census results.

See [www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com) for a global picture of affiliation to religious groups.

## Part two: Pre-Christian Ireland

### 2.1 Local evidence



#### Resources

County libraries, historical societies and tourist information offices will be able to supply information about pre-Christian sites in a given locality.

Teachers can also discover the names of important sites and information about them in Ó Ríordáin, S. P. (1979 Fifth edition) *Antiquities of the Irish Countryside*. See especially pp. 56-94 and check the 'Index of Places.'

Another excellent resource book is Harbison, P. (1988) *Pre-Christian Ireland. From the First Settlers to the Early Celts* London: Thames & Hudson



#### Student activity

Examples of the kind of work students might undertake include

- discovery and documentation of a stone circle, a dolmen, a standing stone, or a holy well in their locality
- a visit to a site associated with pre-Christian religious practices or beliefs
- finding out which Irish rivers are named after goddesses.

### 2.2 National evidence

The best known Irish monument from prehistoric times is the megalithic passage-tomb at Newgrange. For a description, interpretation and photographs, see Harbison, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, pp. 73-81.

This great monument was built about 3000 BC, but it was taken over by Celts, and it is Celtic gods and goddesses who are associated with it in Irish mythology.

See, for example, the entry 'Aonghus' in Ó hÓgáin, D. (1991) *Myth, Legend and Romance* Prentice Hall Press: NewYork/London pp. 38-40. See also the Junior Certificate History textbooks, e.g. Healy, G. (1998) *Travelling Through Time* Dublin: Folens, 1998 pp. 16-17; Quinn R. & O'Leary, D. (2002) *Door to the Past* Dublin: Folens pp.17-19; [www.knowth.com](http://www.knowth.com)

As a result of their study, students should be aware that

- the builders of Newgrange probably worshipped the sun
- the Newgrange monument was a burial site at which rituals in honour of the dead took place. This indicates a belief in the afterlife. Honouring the dead ancestors and seeking the power they possess was part of the pre-Celtic religion of Ireland
- the engravings and designs on the stones at Newgrange probably had a religious meaning. However, we do not always know what that meaning was.



#### Focusing activity

Use the Internet to learn about some ancient sites, e.g., Newgrange; Lough Gur, Co. Limerick; Knockainey (Cnoc Áine), Co Limerick (associated with the goddess Áine); Drombeg, Co. Cork.



#### Syllabus links

Section A: The search for meaning and values – Part 2.2.



#### Resources

<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/newgrange.html>

[www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

[www.mythicalireland.com](http://www.mythicalireland.com)

*In Search of Ancient Ireland* a series of documentary videos produced by Littlebird Productions.

#### Literary evidence from myths and sagas

The account of the Battle of Moytirra tells of several deities of the Tuatha Dé Danann (the Daghdha, Nuadhu, Breas, Lugh), Mór-Ríoghan (Morrigan) who was goddess of war, the mythical physician Dian Céacht, and Balar of the evil Eye.

See the entry 'Mythological Cycle' in D. Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, Legend and Romance*, pp.312-315. Abbreviated english version of the 'The Battle of Moytura (Moytirra)' in Dillon, Myles (1994, paperback 1997) *Early Irish Literature* Dublin: Four Courts Press pp. 58-60.

In the mythological tale 'Altrom Tige Dá Medar', 'The

Nurture of the Houses of the Two Milk-Vessels,' we read of Manannán, king over all the kings of the Tuatha Dé Danann who lived in fairy mounds and in hills. Manannán endowed the Tuatha Dé Danann with various gifts: they were invisible to humans; they were protected against old age; the pigs they killed for food survived and could be killed again and again. We encounter Oengus, son of the god Daghdha, and Elcmar the magician. Oengus gained possession of Brú na Bóinne (Newgrange). He fostered Curcóg, daughter of Manannán, and Eithne, the most beautiful girl among the Tuatha Dé Danann. A visitor to the Brú insulted Eithne, who felt so hurt, that she could take no food except the milk of one of Manannán's cows that gave special milk all year round. Manannán diagnosed that she was no longer of the Tuatha Dé Danann. She lost the gift of invisibility, met one of Patrick's clerics, and became a Christian.

See the entry 'Eithne' in Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, Legend and Romance* p.175. Abbreviated English version of 'Altrom Tige Dá Medar' in Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* pp. 68-72.

From mythological stories such as 'Battle of Moytirra' and 'Altrom Tige Dá Medar' students learn that our pre-Christian ancestors acknowledged a multiplicity of deities, male and female, who were involved in human affairs:

- Daghdha was a god of fertility and plenty
- Mór-Ríoghan was a goddess of war
- Lugh was master of all the arts
- Dian Céacht had supernatural healing powers
- the Tuatha Dé Danann, people of the Otherworld, could come into the human world and communicate with humans.



### Resources

For a useful encyclopaedia on mythology, folklore and legend see:  
[www.pantheon.org/mythica.html](http://www.pantheon.org/mythica.html)

## Part three: Christianity in Ireland

### 3.1 The coming of Patrick

The writings of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (d. 397), and those of Jerome (d. 420) and Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, (d. 430) were destined to have permanent authority in the whole western Church. Leo the Great, who was Pope from 440-461, developed a theology of the Papacy which gave the Bishop of Rome pre-eminence among all the Bishops. Bishops, assisted by priests and deacons, administered their own dioceses. By about 400, the Church of Gaul had a fully organised structure, with bishops in many important towns, e.g. Marseilles, Bordeaux, Lyons.

Rural parishes were being established.

Monasticism, which had developed in the Eastern Church, came to the West. Martin of Tours founded the first monastery in Gaul c. 360. John Cassian (d. 435), a monk trained in Palestine and Egypt, established two monasteries at Marseilles, one for men and another for women. Cassian's writings and his form of monastic life greatly influenced Celtic monasticism of later centuries.

By the mid fifth century, Christianity was the religion of most of the urban elite in the Roman Empire, but paganism still survived in many rural areas. Virginity and the monastic ideal were highly valued. The cult of the martyrs and saints grew, and pilgrimages to their shrines were popular.

By the year 400, the Church in Britain was firmly established and ruled by Bishops who were assisted by priests and deacons.

However, there must have been many Christians who did not live up to the high moral standards of their Church. There were those, for example, who failed to keep the Church's marriage laws, those who observed the pagan festivals as well as their own, those who practised magic and consulted soothsayers.



### Resources

De Paor, L. (1993; paperback 1996) *Saint Patrick's World*

Hanson, R. P. C. 'The Mission of Saint Patrick' in Mackey, J. P. ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* pp. 22-44.

### Inculturation

When sending missionaries to England, Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) laid down the principle that they should not abolish pre-Christian practices, when these could be adapted to the Christian message and given a new meaning. 'No one,' he said, 'can doubt the impossibility of changing everything at once in rude and untrained minds.' Patrick, and his fellow missionaries, seem to have followed this principle over a hundred years earlier.

- The great Celtic seasonal festivals of Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtine and Lughnasa were adapted to suit the Church calendar.
- The Celts believed that rivers and springs possessed supernatural properties. In the light of the Christian symbolism of water, (e.g. in Baptism), this belief was adapted to the new faith, and the result is that many springs that may once have been places of pagan ritual have survived as 'holy wells' down to our own time.





## Resources

Loan, P. (1980) *The Holy Wells of Ireland*  
 Ó Duinn, S. (2000) *Where Three Streams Meet*  
 Dublin: Columba pp. 231-259, 283-387, 308-312.



## Student activity

- Students might interview older people about a local holy well and customs associated with it.
- Having considered inculturation in ancient Christian Ireland, students might be asked to discuss the question: Do Christian churches today take inculturation seriously?

### Characteristics of Irish Christianity

Some modern proponents of ‘Celtic Spirituality’ portray the Irish Church of the period from about 500-900 as going its own way, free from the influence of Rome, and independent of Episcopal and diocesan authorities. That this image is overstated is demonstrated by the fact that the many writings that survive from the Irish Church of that period express the beliefs that were part of the heritage of the universal church. Furthermore, the Irish Christians followed the same Church laws and the same liturgy as their co-religionists in continental Europe. There were, of course, certain variations to suit local circumstances, just as there would have been in any local Church in Gaul or in Italy. The following distinguishing characteristics of the Irish church may, however, be noted:

- The method of calculating the date of Easter.
- The monasteries held a very important place in the Irish Church, and they sometimes rivalled the diocesan system Patrick has introduced. But it would be wrong to say that the abbots of great monasteries had jurisdiction over local churches and that the main duty of the bishops was simply to administer the sacraments of Ordination and Confirmation. Irish Canon Law texts, as well as other texts from eighth-century Ireland, place the bishop at the centre of the Irish church community.
- The so-called ‘Penitentials,’ that is, short handbooks which laid out the penances that should be imposed for different kinds of sins, are one of the most distinctive features of the churches of Wales and Ireland. These ‘Penitentials’ shaped the practice of individual confession of sins before a confessor in the western Church. The earliest ‘Penitentials’ were Welsh, but several Irish examples were very influential on the continent.



## Resources

Walsh and Bradley, (1993 second edition) *A History of the Irish Church* Dublin: Columba.  
 Corish, P. J. (1972) ‘The Christian Mission’ in *A History of Irish Catholicism* Vol. I., part 3



## Student activity

Students might be asked to find out why the Celtic churches differed with Rome on the question of the date of Easter. What event led to the Celtic churches accepting the Roman dating?

### 3.2 Religion, spirituality and land

#### The sacredness of the land

The land was a sacred inheritance that could not be alienated. Accordingly, the land belonged to the *derbfine*, the extended family, that is, all those who were descended from a common great-grandfather. Although the land was owned by the extended family, individuals had their own farms which they could hand on to their sons. However, they could not dispose of the land to people outside the *derbfine*, the kin group, without the agreement of the rest of that group.

#### The cultic marriage of the Rí

The rite by which a king was inaugurated in ancient Ireland symbolised his marriage to the tribal goddess, who personified the fertility and power of the land. The inaugural rite was known as ‘ban-fheis,’ literally ‘sleeping with a woman;’ see the modern Irish word ‘bainis,’ ‘wedding’. *The Annals of Connacht* for the year 1310, referring to the inauguration of Féilim Ó Conchobhair as king of Connacht, said that he ‘had married the Province of Connacht.’ The sacred marriage of the new king with the goddess of the land ensured the success of his reign and the prosperity of his kingdom.

See Ó Duinn, *Where Three Streams Meet* pp. 43-45.

Mac Cana, P. (1970) *Celtic Mythology* London: Hamlyn pp. 117-121; (reprint London: Chancellor, 1996), pp. 114-121.

#### The sacredness of the land in Judaism

Lev. 25:23 lays down two basic principles:

- 1 All the land belongs to God.
- 2 Since the people of Israel are not owners of the land, but tenants in God’s land, no one has a right to sell land in perpetuity.

God has given the land to Abraham and to his

descendants (Gen. 15:7). Even if they are exiled God will bring them back to the land he had promised to the ancestors (Exod. 6:8; Jer. 29:10-24). The rich land God gave to his people is called 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (Deut. 26:9). It is God who gives fertility to the land, not nature gods like Baal (Hos. 2:8).



### Syllabus links

Section F, Justice. Part 3.2.



### Student activity

- The teacher might lead the students in a discussion about the term 'the Holy Land'. Can the students appreciate the attachment of modern Israelis to the 'Land of Israel'? What about the plight of the Palestinians?
- Students might be asked to discuss the question 'Is there a similarity between the Jewish appreciation of the land and the ancient Irish understanding of the land?'

### Land ownership and confiscation

One of the results of the seventeenth century plantations was that much of the land was taken from the Catholic Irish and from some of the Catholic Old English and given to Protestant settlers from England and Scotland.

In 1641, before the Cromwellian plantations, Catholics owned 59% of the land of Ireland. In 1660 this was reduced to 22%, and to 10% in 1700.

A sectarian mentality developed in the country. Catholicism came to be identified with patriotism, and Protestantism was seen as the religion of the foreigners who had taken possession of the land.

Some of the settlers who came to Ulster were from England, but many more came from the lowlands of Scotland. Most of the Scottish settlers were Presbyterians.



### Resources

For an account of the Plantation of Ulster (1609) and the Cromwellian plantation (1652-1656) see the following:  
 Healy, G. *Travelling Through Time* pp. 165-173;  
 R. Quinn and D. O'Leary, *Door to the Past* pp. 170-179;  
 A. Clarke, 'The Colonisation of Ulster and the Rebellion of 1641 (1603-1660)' in T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin eds. (1967, reprinted several times)  
*The Course of Irish History* Cork: Mercier pp. 189-203.



### Student activity

- While discussing the term 'the sacredness of the land' students might be asked to relate this to the Irish 'Land War' (1879-82). See Moody and Martin eds., *The Course of Irish History* pp. 274 – 293. [www.usna.edu/EnglishDept/ilv/landwars.htm](http://www.usna.edu/EnglishDept/ilv/landwars.htm)
- Invite students to read or view John B. Keane's play '*The Field*' (also available on film) and discuss the theme of 'the sacredness of the land'.

### 3.3 Religion, spirituality and monasticism

#### The hermit tradition

A hermit, also known as an anchorite, is one who lives in solitude in order to live a deeper spiritual life. The word 'hermit' is derived from the Greek *erémia*, 'desert.' The Latin word for 'desert' is *desertum*, and from this comes the Irish 'dísert,' 'hermitage.' From the beginning of the fourth century hermits lived in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine. It is probable that the idea of living as a hermit came to Ireland from Egypt via Gaul and Britain. The Irish placename 'Dísert,' 'Dysert,' and placenames of which 'Dísert' is a component, for example, *Dísert Diarmata*, Castledermot, bear witness to the existence of hermits and hermitages in ancient Ireland. Monks in Ireland usually lived in community, but it seems that some monasteries did have a *dísert* nearby, where individual monks could live as hermits. Hermits who were renowned for their sanctity often attracted disciples. One of the features of the Celí Dé reform, which will be studied later, was the growth in the hermit or anchorite movement.

#### Monastic Ireland

For an overview of early monastic life in Ireland and for a short account of Irish monks abroad see:

Healy, G. *Travelling Through Time* pp. 30-38

Brockie, G. & Walsh, R. (1989) *Focus 1 on the Past* Dublin: Gill & MacMillan pp. 167-186.

O'Dwyer, P. (1995) *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* Dublin: Columba p. 20 -lists several 6th cent monasteries.

Walsh and Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church* pp. 58-59 outline the daily life of a monk.

O'Dwyer, pp. 26-27, draws on the monastic rules of St Columbanus to give an idea of what life was like in Columban monasteries. The rules of many other monasteries were influenced by those of Columbanus. For a more complete picture of Irish monastic life see Ryan, J. (1972) *The Monastic Institute in A History of Irish Catholicism* Vol. I., part 2; gen. ed. P. J. Corish Dublin: Gill & MacMillan pp. 49-63.



### Student activity

As a practical exercise, the students could find out about the ruins of a monastery from the period 600-900, such as Clonmacnoise, Glendalough, Monasterboice or Gougane Barra. A visit to such a ruin might be arranged. A useful website giving information on monastic sites in Ireland can be found at [www.goireland.com](http://www.goireland.com)  
See also [www.mythicalireland.com](http://www.mythicalireland.com)

### Centres of learning, worship and healing

For a short account of monastic learning in ancient Ireland see Walsh and Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church* pp. 59-61. See further K. Hughes, 'The Golden Age of Early Christian Ireland' in Moody and Martin eds., *The Course of Irish History* pp. 76-90.

The best known fruits of ancient Irish monastic scholarship are the biblical manuscripts known as the *Cathach*, the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow.

The guest-house, in Latin *hospitium* (note the link with the word 'hospital'), where travellers, the poor and the sick were received, was one of the most important buildings of the monastic settlement. Brigid of Kildare is noted for her care of the poor and the hungry, and her concern for the sick is shown by the miracles she is said to have performed for a man who was blind and for a girl who was dumb. Colum Cille, who was famous as a scribe of biblical texts and as a teacher of scripture, also worked miracles in favour of the sick.



### Student activity

The teacher might initiate a discussion on the question 'Do our modern social and health care systems eliminate the need for anything like the monastic 'guest-house'?'

### Irish founders of monasteries in Europe

From the sixth century onwards Irish monks left their native land and went into exile. Going into exile was for many of them an act of radical asceticism, a form of voluntary penance. But having left their homeland they were also ready to get involved in preaching the Gospel among the unbelievers. From the end of the eighth century many scholarly monks left Ireland to pursue their learned activity away from the threat of Viking disturbances. Among the best known of those who left their homeland are Colum Cille and Columbanus. For an account of their lives see Walsh and Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church* pp. 73-82 and 93-104; see p.107 for the story of St.

Gall, who had been a companion of Columbanus. See also T. Ó Fiach, 'Irish Monks on the Continent,' in Mackey, J. P. ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* pp. 101-139.

### 3.4 Religion, spirituality and reforms

#### Celí Dé

From the eighth century onwards a certain laxity had crept into Irish monasteries. The *Annals* inform us that in the eighth century Abbots were murdered, churches burned, and wars took place between monasteries. The purpose of the *Celí Dé* movement was to eliminate the abuses that had crept into the monasteries.

For an account of this movement see P. O'Dwyer, 'Celtic Monks and Culdee Reform,' in Mackey J. P. ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* pp. 140-171; idem, *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* pp. 44-57.

#### Twelfth century reform

The changes that took place in the Church in Ireland in the twelfth century, were part of the so-called 'Gregorian Reform' of the western Church. Gregory VII, who was Pope from 1073-1085, spearheaded a reform that was continued by his successors. One of the results of the reform in Ireland was the organisation of dioceses throughout the country.

Another result was the arrival of new religious Orders. The first Cistercian monastery was founded in Mellifont in 1142, and by 1200 twenty-one daughter houses were associated with this monastery. Sometime after 1140 the Augustinian Canons came to Ireland, and by 1170 they had over sixty houses in the country. The Dominicans arrived in 1224, the Franciscans about 1230. The Carmelites and the Augustinians came in the second half of the century. These friars became deeply involved in the pastoral ministry and they helped to revitalise the faith of the people. See O'Dwyer, *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* pp. 104,108.



### Student activity

The students could find out if any of the orders mentioned above still have a community in their locality, or if there are ruins of one of their monasteries in their area. They might either visit the monastery or arrange for a member of the community to visit the class.

#### Sixteenth and seventeenth century reforms

Like the church in Britain, and indeed in the rest of Europe, the Irish church was in decline in the period before 1500. Observance in the monasteries was lax, priests failed to preach the Gospel, and religious

practice among the people left much to be desired. The obligation of Sunday Mass, for example, was often neglected and the marriage laws were ignored by many. However, by about 1500 the Augustinians, the Dominicans and the Franciscans were promoting a reform within their own Orders. When Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth I set about establishing the religion of the Reformation in Ireland the members of the reformed Orders preached to the people in their own language and confirmed them in their traditional faith. The preachers of the new religion were at a serious disadvantage in that they could not preach to the Irish in their vernacular. When, as a result of the plantations, large communities of Protestants were settled in the country the vast majority of the Irish remained in their traditional faith. See P. O'Dwyer, *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* pp.155-163.175-188.

### Contemporary reform movements

According to an old axiom, the Church is always in need of reform. Within the Catholic Church renewal has been brought about by Vatican II, and the development of small basic communities as well as new ecclesial communities. Vatican II proposed the early Christian community as a model for Christian living today. It sought to rediscover the gospel and to highlight the community and missionary aspects of the Church.

In parts of South America, Africa, and Asia, small, basic communities have grown with people meeting together locally to see how the Gospel has relevance to their lived experience.

In the past 50 years, new ecclesial worldwide movements such as Focolare, L'Arche, Cursillio, Charismatic Renewal, and Sant'Egidio have also appeared. These movements are primarily made up of lay people who have rediscovered their baptism and the role of lay people in the Church. Each has a specific focus that is like a 'window onto the Gospel' bringing renewal to the Church (e.g. charismatic renewal focuses on prayer and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; Sant'Egidio focuses on friendship with the poor, prayer and dialogue; Focolare focuses on Jesus' last will and testament, his prayer for unity; L'Arche focuses on living in community and sharing in vulnerability with those who have a disability; Cursillio focuses on short courses of renewal to rediscover baptism).

The charismatic renewal has also had a significant influence within the mainline Protestant churches. It has also led to the creation of new churches. New communities have also come to life such as the Christian Renewal Centre, Rostrevor and the Lamb of God community. The ecumenical movement itself has brought a current of renewal to the churches. Communities such as the Iona community in Scotland and the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland are examples of this.

Most of the Christian denominations initiate internal reform movements at Synods and in other assemblies. The World Council of Churches, which came into being in Amsterdam in 1948, has given new direction and new dynamism to the social teaching of the Christian Churches. Since 1948 International Assemblies of the WCC have taken place at intervals, e.g. Delhi in 1961, Nairobi in 1975 and Seoul in 1990.



### Syllabus links

Section B: Christianity: origins and contemporary expressions. Part 1.1



### Resources

Many of the movements mentioned have websites students could consult.

For example see:

L'Arche at [www.larche.ie](http://www.larche.ie)

Charismatic Renewal at [www.Ccr-ireland.org](http://www.Ccr-ireland.org)

Focolare at [www.focolare.org](http://www.focolare.org)

Sant'Egidio at [www.santegidio.org](http://www.santegidio.org)

To investigate the process of liturgical reform engaged in since the 1980s by the Anglican community worldwide see [www.anglicancommunion.org/liturgy/ialcreview.html](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/liturgy/ialcreview.html)

The World Council of Churches has an excellent website. [www.wcc-coe.org](http://www.wcc-coe.org)

## 3.5 Religion and the ideas of the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries. Its promoters were guided by the conviction that reason is the ultimate norm by which all things must be judged, and that all human problems can be solved by the application of scientific principles. They rejected both the conventional religion of their day and the concept of hereditary monarchical government which left all the power in the hands of an elite class. See G. Healy, *Travelling Through Time* p. 185. Irish Catholic priests who studied in Paris were influenced by the Paris Enlightenment and Ulster Presbyterians who studied in universities in Scotland were also exposed to Enlightenment ideas. Basing himself on Enlightenment principles, William Molyneux (1656-98), a Dublin scientist and political writer, defended Ireland's right to freedom. His claim was that no society has a right to dominate another. In 1785 the Royal Irish Academy was founded for the promotion of 'literature, science and antiquities.' The year 1778 saw the foundation of 'The Belfast Reading Society.' In



1792 this name was changed to 'The Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge.' No one was to be excluded from the society by reason of politics or religion, and the discussions were to be limited to topics that promoted the cultivation of 'arts, natural philosophy and literature.' See the entry 'Enlightenment' in McCormac, W.J. (2001) ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Irish Culture* Oxford: Blackwell pp.198-200 and Connolly S. J. ed. (1998) *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* Oxford: University Press pp.176-177.

### Paul Cullen

In 1820 Paul Cullen went to Rome to study for the priesthood, and he remained there until he returned to Ireland in 1849 to become Archbishop of Armagh. From 1852-1878 he was Archbishop of Dublin. He was greatly influenced by his years in Rome, and as Archbishop, and as Ireland's first Cardinal, he made a determined effort to bring the Irish church, its discipline, its liturgy and its devotional life into line with Roman practices. See Corish, P. (1985, reprint 1986) *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey* Dublin: Gill & MacMillan pp. 194-225).

### 3.6 Religion in contemporary Ireland

The historical overview of the Irish experience of religion central to this section provides the possibility of opening students to a new and deeper understanding of the place of religion in contemporary Ireland. The research conducted both by Greeley and Ward mentioned above (1.1) and by Desmond O'Donnell, reported in his article, 'Young Educated Adults: A Survey' *Doctrine and Life* 52 (2002), pp.3-79, suggests great complexity within religious affiliation in Ireland today.

The influence of the Christian churches, while hardly secure, particularly among young people, remains constant. O'Donnell notes that authentic belief in God and relationship with God expressed in prayer is strong among young adults (p.73). Greeley and Ward argue that among those born in the 1970's, there is a lower level of religious practice, a distrust of institutional church organisation and difficulty with traditional sexual ethics. But basic religious belief has changed little, confidence in local clergy is evident, and a sense of closeness to the Church continues to be professed (pp.593-594).

At an institutional level, the Christian churches continue to contribute to the development in Irish society through education (resourcing schools), justice (Trócaire, Christian Aid, CORI, see Section F) and health care (hospitals, hospices and care of the elderly).

The place of religion in the Irish constitution can best be understood in light of the experience of religion in Ireland down through the centuries, as studied throughout this section. The preamble is explicit in recognising God, in the form of the Trinity, while

Article 44 upholds the free practice of religion. Provisions honouring the position of the Roman Catholic Church and recognising the other major religions of the time in Irish society were removed by a referendum of the people in 1972.

A definition of pluralism, and indicators of some of the effects it can have in society are discussed in Section D (Morality) 3.1. Genuine pluralism does not just accept but respects the various religions present within a particular society. It does not suggest toleration only of the lowest common denominator but embraces fully the traditions of the various religious and secular movements. See Murphy, S. (2003) 'Cultures, Pluralism and Religious Faith' *Studies* 92 pp.34-41.

In studying ecumenism in Ireland today, the Irish School of Ecumenics is an important first port of call at [www.tcd.ie/ise/](http://www.tcd.ie/ise/) Access to a selection of websites focused on ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue and to sites associated with major communities of faith in Ireland today can be gained through links provided at [www.materdei.ie/logos](http://www.materdei.ie/logos) See *Relationships between Communities of Faith* under the title 'Teaching and Learning Resources'. See also the pamphlet *Ecumenical Relations in Ireland* produced by the Irish Council of Churches (available from the Irish Council of Churches, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT 9 6 AZ).



### Resources

The following reference books will be helpful in navigating through Parts 2 and Part 3 in particular.

Ó Duinn, S. (2000) *Where Three Streams Meet. Celtic Spirituality* Dublin: Columba.

This book is a rich source of information about the pre-Christian religious concepts in Ireland and about the Christian adaptation of some pre-Christian rituals and customs.

Raftery, B. (1994; paperback 1997) *Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age*. London: Thames & Hudson.

An authoritative work. The teacher will find the table of contents and the Index very helpful.

Bradley, T. & Walsh J. R (1993 second edition) *A History of the Irish Church 400-700 AD* Dublin: Columba. A very useful resource.

O'Dwyer, P. (1995) *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* Dublin: Columba



# SECTION J

## Religion and Science

### Part one: The scientific and theological enterprises

There is within the human heart an irrepressible and unrestricted desire to know and to love. This desire is awakened by questions like 'How?', 'Where?', 'When?' and 'Why?'. These questions are provoked by the great variety of experiences that human beings undergo: experiences of good and evil, joy and tragedy, suffering and death, love and betrayal. It is natural for human beings to wonder about existence and their place in the cosmos. There is a clear overlap and connection between Part 1 of 'Religion and Science' and Section A of the syllabus 'The Search for Meaning and Values'.

In broad outline, science seeks to answer the 'how' question and religion addresses 'why' questions. Science analyses and interprets the data of the natural world, whereas religion interprets the data of human experience and history from within a community of faith.

Ultimate questions include: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why do I exist rather than not exist? Is there anything beyond death? What is the ground for and source of order, beauty and intelligibility in the universe? Do evil and injustice have the final word in this life? Why bother to search for the truth?

Questions common to science and religion include questions about origins/beginnings (cosmology and the doctrine of creation) and conclusions/endings (destiny of the natural world and eschatology). Science and religion also continually struggle against the temptation towards fundamentalism. In science this temptation manifests itself in 'scientism' which claims that only science can provide reliable knowledge and in religion this temptation is found in 'literalism', a view which neglects the different levels of meaning within religious texts.

The 'God of the gaps' arises when faith inserts God into situations of life which seem to have no human explanation at a particular time and then subsequently science offers an explanation and God has to be extracted. For example, in times past thunder was

explained as an expression of God's anger, whereas now thunder can be explained by meteorology.

Other images include:

- a The permanent co-presence, or omnipresence, of God to the world (e.g. Karl Rahner). The value of this image of God is that it does not interfere with developments or discoveries of science and at the same allows religion to talk about the presence of God in the world.
- b God as incomprehensible and unknowable (Aquinas). This image acts as a reminder of the need in religion and science for humility. In religion there is always more to what is known about God through revelation and in science there are limits to what can be known.



### Resources

There are a number of centres around the world dedicated to an exploration of the relationship that exists between science and religion including

- the Centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences, Berkeley, California ([www.ctns.org](http://www.ctns.org))
- the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology ([www.esssat.org](http://www.esssat.org))
- the Templeton Foundation in the US ([www.templeton.org](http://www.templeton.org))
- the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, Oxford, UK ([www.users.ox.ac.uk/~theo0038](http://www.users.ox.ac.uk/~theo0038))
- Christians in Science ([www.cis.org.uk](http://www.cis.org.uk))
- Institute on Religion in an age of Science at ([www.iras.org](http://www.iras.org))
- Zygon Centre for Religion and Science ([www.zygoncentre.org](http://www.zygoncentre.org))

'Science, like theology, needs to be seen as an activity of a community of motivated believers, holding core assumptions and testing out new possibilities' (Southgate, Christopher and others (1999) *God, Humanity and the Cosmos: A textbook in Science and Religion* T & T Clarke Limited/Trinity Press International p.22). Both operate out of a community of enquiry that is committed to the pursuit of truth from their particular perspectives, methodologies and objectives. Each community of enquiry is governed by the accumulated wisdom of the past in the present (tradition) which is always in process of refinement and development. The ultimate 'object' of enquiry is radically different in both instances: in science it is the natural world and in religion it is God in and beyond the world.

'Objective' investigation claims to approach its subject matter in a detached, value-free manner, and is often associated with science. 'Subjective' investigation addresses its subject matter out of a prior commitment and value-laden position and is often associated with religion. In reality, however, both science and religion have both 'objective' and 'subjective' elements in their approaches. It is next to impossible to divorce the objective from the subjective. There is no bird's eye view of science or religion outside personal experience, the laboratory and the oratory, history and culture.

The method of science follows a process of observation, hypothesis, experimentation and verification, interpretation, and theory. The method of religion follows a commitment to some form of revelation and faith as found in sacred texts and rituals, embodied in a living tradition, and connected with contemporary human experience and practices.

A key factor in understanding religion and science is that they are both informed by theories of interpretation and these theories of interpretation are shaped by their respective communities of enquiry, their social location and historical context

Science and religion employ the language of models, metaphors and paradigms. To this extent, they rely on the art of interpretation and the exercise of the creative imagination. There is always more than one understanding and one explanation of the world we live in and the existence of these different layers of understanding and explanation accounts for some of the differences between science and religion. Religion seeks to understand the world through symbols, metaphors and analogy, whereas science understands the world through empirical points of evidence and verification; both rely in varying degrees on a world-view (a story), some form of faith, imagination and rational enquiry.



## Resources

Barbour, Ian (2000) *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners?* London: SPCK Ch 1: 7-39.

Polkinghorne, John (2000) *Traffic in Truth: Exchanges between Science and Theology* Canterbury Press

Tracy, David (1999/2) 'Beyond Foundationalism and Relativism: Hermeneutics and the New Ecumenism', Greinacher, N & Mette, N. eds. *Concilium, The New Europe: Challenge for Christians*



## Student activity

- Compare and contrast the articles by David McConnell 'Science and post-Christian Ireland' and Gabriel Daly 'Science, Religion and Scientism' in *The Irish Review* (Summer 2001).
- Organise a debate in class on the following topic - *Religion and science will never agree.*

## Part two: The relationship between religion and science

### Overview

The scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, marked by the increasing secularisation of knowledge, constructed a world-view that was often at odds with the medieval synthesis based on religion and philosophy.

The combination of Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine provided the overall vision of the medieval world which Galileo inherited.

There is a need for a proper historical perspective to counter the popular perception that religion and science are in perpetual conflict, science being the ultimate winner. Historical relationships were much more complex than popular perception, e.g. Galileo and the Church, Darwin and evolution.

Galileo pioneered the scientific method which brought together observation and experimentation with mathematical theory, giving rise to what he called 'thought experiments'. This led to conflict between new theories based on observation and the old theories based on appeals to authority and tradition (e.g. Copernicus versus Aristotle).

Galileo spoke of two books: the book of the Bible and the book of nature. The Bible teaches how one goes to heaven, not how the heavens go.



## Student activity

- Re-enact Galileo's trial in class with role cards for the main characters.



## Resources

Brecht, Bertolt *The life of Galileo*  
London: Methuen and Co.

Poole, Michael (1995) *Beliefs and Values in Science Education* Buckingham: OUP

McGrath, Alister (1999) *Science and Religion: an Introduction* Oxford: Blackwell

Sobel, Dava (1999) *Galileo's Daughter*  
Fourth Slate Ltd. Excerpts from this book are available on [www.channel4.com](http://www.channel4.com) Just type in Galileo using site search engine.

Science as a human activity is not done in a vacuum. It is affected by the wider cultural context, by social, moral and spiritual questions. Beliefs and moral values are part of the scientific enterprise.

History teaches that there is no such thing as the relationship between religion and science. Both have always been interrelated with fluid lines and shifting boundaries. This can be illustrated by the cross-traffic between the science and the beliefs of its practitioners. For example, Newton and Descartes had a place for God in their world-view.

History teaches the limitations as well as the strengths of each discipline and the importance of focusing on their proper objects. History raises questions in the philosophy of science: what kinds of question is science competent to answer?

An appreciation of the limitations as well as the strengths of science leads to an appreciation that

- scientific ideas change through time and scientific theories can be overturned and replaced
- science may raise questions which it is not competent to answer. For example, questions about ultimate origins, moral values and the meaning of life.

History helps to appreciate the limitations as well as the strengths of religion:

- the confusion of science and religion in the Middle Ages
- the importation of religious ideas to support scientific constructs, e.g. Newton

- hermeneutical questions: many difficulties resolved when the literary genre of ancient texts is taken into account, e.g. Book of Genesis.

The first scientists (Galileo, Kepler, Descartes, and Newton) were Christian believers, who were motivated by religious duty to discover the wonder of God's creation and saw their science as being compatible with their religious faith.



## Student activity

- Visits:

Dunsink – Working observatory.

Armagh Planetarium- panoramic view of interstellar space.

The Birr Telescope –once a very powerful telescope. (See: [www.birrcastleireland.com](http://www.birrcastleireland.com))

Schull Planetarium, Schull, Co. Cork.

- Compare Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection and the religious argument of creation from design.

## 2.4 Science and religion in dialogue



## Focusing activity

What are the signs of an ecological crisis in your neighbourhood?

The religious doctrine of Creation (in Judaism, Christianity and Islam) supplies the theological context for many contemporary questions concerning the interplay of religion and science today, for example evolution, cosmology, bioethics and ecology.

Creation: the belief that God is the origin, ground and goal of the universe, having a real relationship with the world God has made.

### Key concepts

Creatio ex nihilo: out of nothing, preserves the sovereign freedom of God who, out of love, wills to create something other than God's self. Emphasises the transcendence of God and the gap between Creator and creation.

Creatio continua: the absolute dependence of the universe on God. Focuses on God's continuing and conserving presence which sustains the world in existence. Emphasises the presence of God and the close relation between creation and the Creator.

## The ecological crisis

The ecological crisis refers to the breakdown in the network of relationships between the person in the human community, the human community in the earth community and the earth community in the cosmos.

Origins of the ecological crisis:

- 1 The enchantment of technology. The mechanical world-view and the disenchantment of nature resulted in unrestrained technological control and mastery of the environment. Humans have become alienated from nature which is exploited by them. The Cartesian split between subject and object becomes complete.
- 2 Deism and an inadequate theology of creation. God is external to nature; nature functions without God's continuing presence according to deterministic laws.

A theological split emerges between nature and grace. Nature no longer speaks of God:

- 'a natureless view of God and a godless view of nature'
- an inadequate interpretation of the Book of Genesis 1:26-27, as justifying the human exploitation of the world's resources.

Respect for the earth comes about through a solid theology of creation. A closer reading of Genesis suggests humans are stewards of God's gift of creation and are entrusted with responsibility for the environment. Christian theology encourages an ethic of stewardship as opposed to an ethic of domination.

## Islam and creation

*Tawid* (Oneness) as 'being one' or 'making one' is central to Islamic understanding of the universe. The aim of Islamic science is to show the unity and interrelatedness of everything, so that in reflecting on the unity of the cosmos people will be led to the Divine Principle of Unity. Both the Qur'an and the natural world speak of the power of the Almighty and the divine Unity.

The role of *Khalifah* (viceregent): the duty of each person to care for and manage the earth and its



## Student activity

- Organise a class discussion around the question: Is religion a help or a hindrance to the ecological debate?
- Interview the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about ecological issues (e.g., air and water quality) in your neighbourhood and report back to your class. See: [www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)



## Syllabus links

Section F: Issues of justice and peace – Part 3.



## Resources

Breuilly, E. and Palmer, M. eds. (1992) *Christianity and Ecology* London: Cassell

Khalid, F. and O'Brien, J. eds. (1992) *Islam and Ecology* London: Cassell

McDonagh, S. (1986) *To Care for the Earth* London: Chapman

Carroll, D. (1998) *Land* Dublin: Trócaire, Veritas and CAFOD

The Earth Charter, available at: [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)

resources on behalf of the Creator.

## Part three: Current issues for



## Focusing activity

Create an image of the Milky Way Galaxy by sprinkling salt on a black surface. It is possible to grasp the immensity of the Milky Way galaxy by considering a grain of salt to represent one of the billions of stars. The earth is but one entity within billions of galaxies.

A photograph of the galaxy can be found in the *Really Big Universe: Discover a Galaxy of Amazing Fact* (1998) London: Funfax Ltd.

## religion and science: origins

### 3.1 The debate about origins

Why origins? To understand our present identity and our place in the great scheme of things.

There is a universal need for a foundational story/narrative to relate who we are, where we have come from, and provide a vision that binds society together in terms of a larger meaning and purpose.

Current debate: The new story of an evolutionary and expanding universe from contemporary cosmology. The Anthropic principle: the universe is 'finely tuned' to support the emergence of life and this raises questions of accident or design in the universe.

Cosmology is the physics of the origin and structure of the universe as a whole.

Two ancient cosmologies:



- 1 The Babylonian Epic: the cosmos unfolds through conflict among the gods.

Humans are slaves to the gods. Contrast this with the Book of Genesis.

- 2 Greek cosmologies: matter is eternal, geocentric universe, planets move in perfect circular motion, moved by God as the Unmoved Mover.

Two modern cosmologies:

- 1 Big Bang/Flaring Forth: the current scientific theory about cosmic origins, the simultaneous emergence of space and time in a 'hot bang' singularity 15 billion years ago resulting in a rapidly expanding and cooling universe. Contrast this with the Steady State Theory.
- 2 Creationist cosmology: a religious anti-evolutionary view of origins based on a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis: everything was fixed by God from the beginning in a relatively young universe. The Bible is approached as a book of science.

#### Key to the interplay between scientific cosmologies and the Christian view:

Creation is about agency, the act of an agent, God causing things to be, to exist rather than not to exist (the why question).

'Big Bang' and other theories are about the mechanisms, the process by which the world came to be (the how question).



#### Syllabus links

Section A: The search for meaning and values – Part 2.2



#### Student activity

Look at the Genesis accounts of creation and discuss the relevance of its message for today.



#### Resources

Hawking, Stephen, (1995) *A Brief History of Time: From Big Bang to Black Holes* Bantam Press

Toolan, David, (2003) *At Home in the Cosmos* Orbis

[www.mythicjourneys.org](http://www.mythicjourneys.org) See creation myths from around the world.

### 3.2 The new physics and religion (Higher level students)

#### Overview:

The breakdown of the Newtonian paradigm of a deterministic universe:

- i Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and the quantum world: probability
- ii Relativity and the rediscovery of time: time is inextricably linked to space.
- iii The process of chance and necessity: chaos theory.

The Heisenberg principle of uncertainty is a key aspect of quantum mechanics; it holds it is impossible to measure at the same time both the velocity and the position of a sub-atomic particle.

#### Theological implications:

A world of indeterminacy is not incompatible with religion or Christian faith. It allows for human freedom and an open future, and is open to divine providential agency and eschatological completion. In an unfinished world, God is at the heart of the evolutionary process empowering it from within. God's love as a self-emptying love (*kenosis*), allows the world to be itself, to be open to novelty and surprises that we find in the cosmic story. 'God did not produce a ready made world...(God) created a world able to make itself' (J. Polkinghorne).



#### Resources

Swimme, B. and Berry, T. (1992) *The Universe Story: From the Flaring forth to the Ecozoic Era* San Francisco: Harper

Stannard, R. (1996) *Science and Wonders: Conversations About Science and Belief* London: Faber and Faber Book (of the BBC Radio 4 series)

Morgan, J. (2000) *Born with a Bang: The Universe tells our Cosmic story* Book 1, Nevada: Dawn Publications (48 pages—brief and colourful)

Video: *Whispers of Creation* BBC Horizon Programme 1994 (50 minutes)

*Creation*, BBC: Everyman Programme, 1985, (45 minutes)

*Creationists versus evolutionists: The Blind Watchmaker*, BBC Horizon 1987, (50 minutes)

Music: *Melodies of the Universe: Songs and chants*, by Jan Novotka, CD and booklet available from EarthRise, Inc., 1151 Loomis Ave., Scranton, PA 18504. Tel:570 347-2431.





## Student activity

Create a timeline using 150 feet of thick twine based on the 'timeline' in Swimm, B., and Berry, T. (1992) *The Universe Story: From the primordial Falring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* San Francisco: Harper Collins pp.269-278. This will give a sense of how humans and the earth are latecomers in the evolution of the cosmos.

## Part four: Current issues for religion and science: Life and death.

### 4.1 Fundamental issues

The scientific imperative suggests 'If we can do it, then we must do it'. Ethics (philosophical and theological) raises the 'ought we do it' question. The following questions may help generate discussion and could be applied to each of the special topics:

- The scope of human stewardship. Are there limits to human stewardship of creation? How are these limits set? By appeal to reason, human rights, religion, 'God's law', the 'common good', 'nature'?
- Is science at the service of the human person in community or an end in itself?
- The 'means and ends' debate: Do good ends justify any means?
- How do we measure 'progress': human flourishing, technological advances, contribution to individual happiness, promotion of the 'common good'?
- What do we mean by 'natural' and 'unnatural'? Have these concepts ethical implications?
- What does it mean to be a 'person'? Are human rights intrinsic to human persons or dependent on achievement, health, wealth, race, civil authorities? The Christian understanding of '*imago Dei*' (image of God) and its implications for equality of persons, human worth and human creativity.

### 4.2 Specific topics (Higher level students)

#### Artificially created life

Ethical concerns surrounding IVF and other reproductive technologies are well documented (e.g. Warnock Report) and are reflected in the law in most countries. Ireland, as yet, does not have any legislation governing this area. A central ethical issue is the status given to the fertilized ovum. This is a much disputed question worldwide that has generated much discussion on other interrelated topics: when does one become a bearer of human rights (fertilization, implantation, primitive streak, birth etc?); what does it mean to be a person and when does personhood begin? The stance adopted

here has implications for a range of issues in this area: discarding and/ or freezing 'surplus' fertilized ova, the creation of fertilized ova for experimentation or research purposes. Other significant ethical issues raised here include: the nature of human parenthood, surrogacy and the rights of the child, menopause and the significance of 'natural' limits, differing models of human stewardship (human procreation versus human reproduction).

#### Genetically modified life

#### Questions to be considered

Gene therapy and genetic enhancement. The Human Genome project. Am I more than my genes? Genetic determinism and human freedom (Richard Dawkins). Reasons for genetic enhancement. Is my genetic code sacrosanct? Who should have access to genetic information: employers, banks, governments?

#### Cloning

- Why clone?
- The difference between 'therapeutic' and 'reproductive' cloning.
- The question of cloning, personhood and individuality: does cloning deny individuality and uniqueness?
- Is life a 'gift' or a 'product' of human intervention?

#### The prolonging of life

The obligation to prolong life: absolute or relative?

The traditional 'ordinary'/'extraordinary' distinction and its roots in the Christian tradition. Death from a Resurrection perspective. The removal of life sustaining interventions: who decides and what criteria? The recent debates on the provision of nutrition/ hydration to the permanently unconscious (Ward of Court & Tony Bland Cases).

#### The ending of life

Human autonomy and the euthanasia debate. The right to self-determination and the right to choose the time and means of death. The 'quality of life' versus 'sanctity of life' debate. Questions of human stewardship and human freedom: exercised within parameters or open-ended? Euthanasia and the ethos of society: culture of life v. culture of death?



## Student activity

Issue tracking: invite students to track a current ethical debate in the media. The letters pages of the newspapers can often be a useful way of tracking different arguments and perspectives on an issue.



## Resources

Kuhse, Helga & Singer, Peter eds. (1999)  
*Bioethics: An Anthology* Blackwell

Bishops Committee for Bioethics (2000,  
revised 2003) *Assisted Human Reproduction:  
Fact and Ethical Issues* Dublin: Veritas

Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown  
University. [www.georgetown.edu/research/kie/](http://www.georgetown.edu/research/kie/)  
(See their High School Bioethics Curriculum  
Project).

The Hastings Center.  
[www.thehastingscenter.org/](http://www.thehastingscenter.org/)

The New Scientist magazine:  
[www.NewScientist.com/hottopics](http://www.NewScientist.com/hottopics)

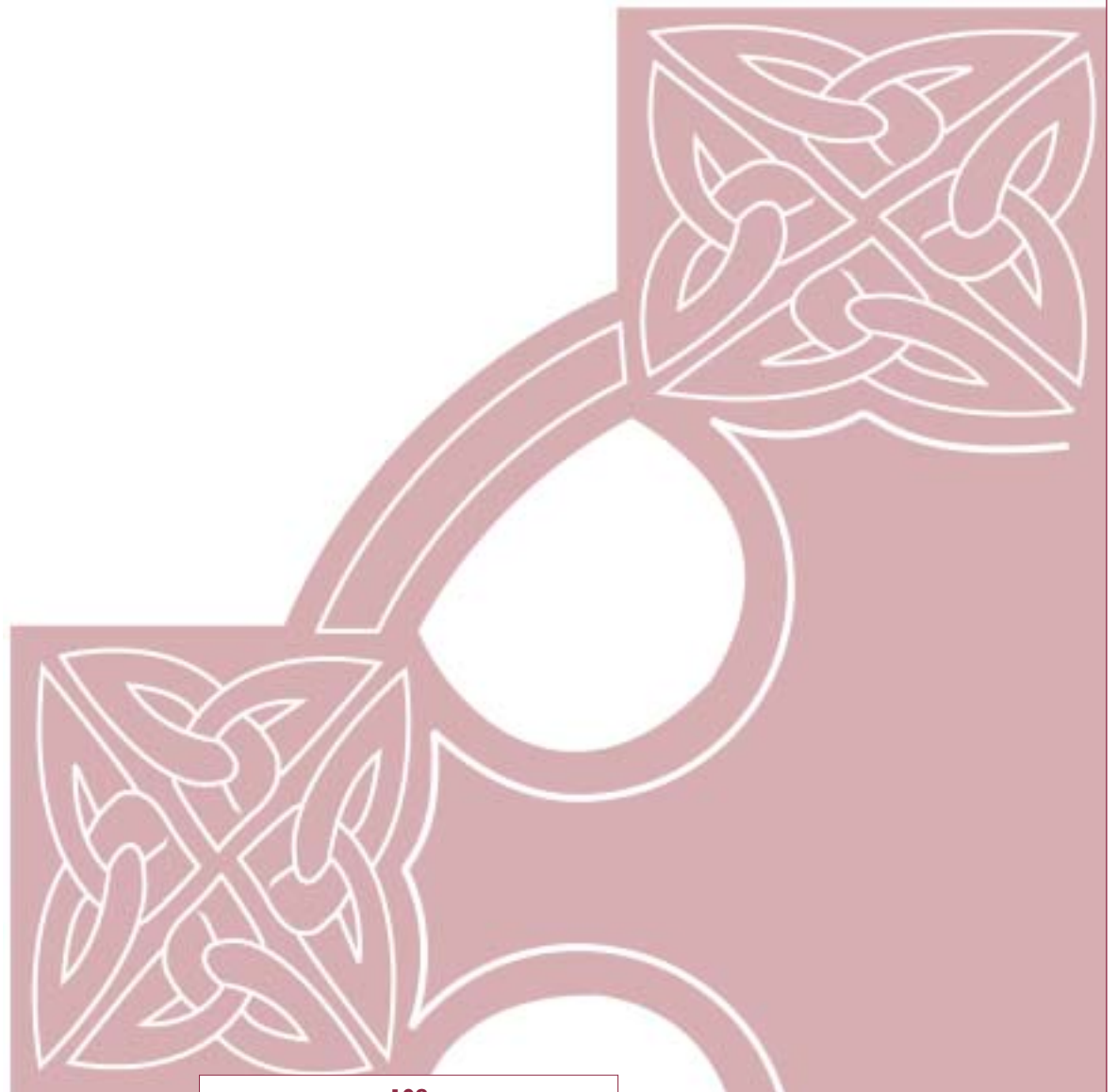
Video: *Lifestory: The Double Helix* BBC  
Horizon Programme, 1987 (105 minutes).  
Dramatised account of the discovery of the  
double helix, the model of DNA.

Video: *Genetic Genies*, BBC Heart of the  
Matter programme, 1995 (45 minutes).



## PART 3

# TEACHING APPROACHES AND PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TEACHERS





# SHARED PRAXIS - A WAY TOWARDS EDUCATING FOR SPIRITUAL WISDOM

An essay by T.H.Groome

Religious education as an 'exam subject' in the Irish secondary school curriculum has great potential. While raising academic rigor and standards, it will lend a breath of religious consciousness that is crucial to the common good of a 'globalised' world, and will give people the informed resources and habits to think critically for themselves in matters religious. At the same time, some have expressed the valid concern that religious education will now become 'only' an academic subject, taught objectively and without any formative influence on students' lives.

Post-modern authors view the dichotomy between learning and life, between teaching a subject and educating the person, as false and even dangerous to human well-being. They argue, I believe rightly, that all knowledge is shaped by its particular context and is never an objective 'view from nowhere,' that all knowing is value-laden instead of value-free, that everything we know should enhance human potential and responsibility. Of course, the postmodernists did not invent this union of theory and practice, of knowledge and life; it's as old as Plato and Aristotle. It calls for religious education that 'teaches religion' in ways that give students access to spiritual wisdom for their own and through them for other people's lives in the world.

I'm convinced that it is possible to teach any great religious tradition a) with academic rigour and critical appreciation, b) without indoctrination or confessional expectation, c) and yet in ways that enhance people's well-being in that they *learn from it* for their lives rather than merely *about it* for their heads. Religious education, at its best, engages and shapes people's lives and lends students access to sources of spiritual wisdom for their own journey. However, there is nothing inevitable about this achievement; so much depends on the teacher's intention and on the pedagogy she/he employs.

## Learning from religion for spiritual wisdom

No education is value-free. Therefore all teachers teach to shape and influence lives. Teachers of any kind know that they cannot teach 'a subject' without influencing who students become.

All teachers teach so that students at least *learn about* something. But teachers are not simply content to leave it at that. This is certainly not the defining intent of religion teachers. Religion teachers

teach not simply so that students learn about religion and religions but that they *learn from* them for their lives.

Teaching so that students learn from religion for their lives suggests that religious educators approach all the great religions as traditions of spiritual wisdom. They should give students access to them as life-giving resources for their own spiritual journeys and for living with integrity and responsibility in the world. In other words, don't approach any religion as value-free information to be deposited in people's heads so that they know about the data of a particular tradition. Rather, present it for what it is: a tradition of spiritual wisdom that can help students to realise themselves as spiritual beings with responsibility for their own and others' welfare. What else are the great religions of the world but traditions of spiritual wisdom for life?

The great religions arose from the ways that various peoples have lived out their diverse experiences of the Transcendent. As peoples have experienced a divine/human covenant, they have developed plural systems of belief, of ethic, and of worship, of creed, code, and cult, as their lived response. All such efforts at being religious reflect hard-won and time-tested spiritual wisdom, in other words, life-giving ways of responding to the human experience of transcendence.

By its very nature, then, study of any great religion demands more than understanding its data, important as that is, but reaching beyond understanding to make judgments and decisions about it, to appropriate its wisdom in life giving ways for self and others. Reaching beyond understanding toward personal judgment and decision is the cognitive dynamic that prompts students beyond *learning about*, to *learning from*, a religious tradition.

## A pedagogy for spiritual wisdom

By way of teaching process, we need a pedagogy that is likely to personally engage students, and that teaches them religion(s) in ways that highlight spiritual wisdom, inviting them to appropriate it to their own lives and contexts. We should bring students to study religion(s) with academic rigor and their own critical reflection, and do so in ways that educate them as persons; all this without a semblance of indoctrination.

For many years now, I've proposed a pedagogy with such possibilities, calling it a 'shared praxis approach.' Essentially, a shared praxis approach is a teaching dynamic that critically correlates 'life' with 'the spiritual wisdom of religion(s).' It enables students to bring their lives to study a faith tradition, and to appropriate its spiritual wisdom to their own lives.

Shared praxis unfolds as a communal process of conversation that engages participants as active learners and contributors to the curriculum. It can be structured as a focusing activity and then five pedagogical 'movements'—so named because they are enormously flexible in sequence and combination. If a particular tradition is being studied beyond religious phenomena in general, that tradition will qualify the process, so that it becomes a 'shared Christian or Buddhist or Jewish or whatever-praxis approach.'

A shared praxis approach can be crafted in myriad ways across a great variety of time frames and contexts. Its 'movements' rarely unfold sequentially, but often combine, reoccur, go back and forth, much like the movements of a symphony or dance. In fact, it is not the movements per se that matter, but the pedagogical commitments that undergird them – to foster engagement and conversation by participants, to elicit their own expression and critical reflection around themes of life interest, to lend access to religious tradition(s), studying both their scholarly data and their spiritual wisdom, and to encourage students to discern and decide what they might learn from such wisdom for their own lives.

Their flexibility notwithstanding, the movements can help teachers to intentionally craft, resource, and facilitate such a process, suggesting what to ask and say at different times. So, by its own logic, a shared praxis approach usually begins with a focusing act that introduces the topic in an engaging way, raising a life-centred theme that is generative for these participants. It then invites students to express the 'data' from their own lives and contexts as they experience this generative theme (Movement 1). It then encourages their own critical reflection on their 'present praxis,' engaging reason, memory and imagination in personal reflection and social analysis (Movement 2).

In response to their reflection on praxis, the teacher gives students access to the story and vision of a faith tradition, both helping them to learn its data (its story), and to access the spiritual wisdom that they may find here (its vision). Regardless of the age level being taught, this instruction should reflect the best of scholarship, and what students might learn from it for their lives (Movement 3).

Moving back toward students' own lives, the teacher poses the kinds of questions and activities that encourage them to reflect on and probe the tradition, to recognise its possibilities in their own contexts. Here the intent is that students come to see for themselves what this spiritual tradition might mean for their lives, to personally appropriate and make its wisdom their own, according to their own discernment (Movement 4). This dynamic of personal appropriation by the student helps prevent the teacher from proselytising for a particular outcome; it gives a real freedom for students to 'see for themselves' whatever they see, and to say so.

Finally, the pedagogy should invite to some kind of decision – cognitive, affective, or behavioural – encouraging students to take this spiritual wisdom into their lives, allowing it to enhance their very 'being' as both noun and verb, who they are and how they live.

Note that such a pedagogy encourages both critical study and personal formation, it is likely to *form* as well as *inform* students. It can honour the intent of religious education to promote scholarship and free inquiry – holding its own as an 'exam subject' – and, yet it honours the nature of religion, giving access to the life-giving wisdom it may have for people's lives. It can do so without indoctrination or requiring confessional allegiance on the part of students or teachers. Indeed, they might choose a particular religious identity, and be all the better grounded in it, but such a decision is not required by the pedagogy.

### Examples

You are teaching **Section E of the syllabus: Religion and gender**, and specifically, Parts 2 and 3 on Gender and Christianity and Women's Stories. You might open the topic by a story, example, video, statistic or whatever gets students to focus on issues of gender as 'real' for them. The key is to engage participants with it as a 'generative theme' – something of real interest and import to their lives.

Movement 1, then, would invite students to notice and express for themselves their own and their society's sense of gender roles, the instances of partnership and of hierarchical ordering and, the moral values and disvalues that are operative in society around this theme. In other words, they describe how they think things are around this issue, both their own experiences and attitudes, and what 'goes on' in society – at least from their perspective.

Movement 2 would encourage a more in-depth analysis, looking at the influences that shape their own sense of gender roles and their society's gender practices. Given the syllabus, they would pay particular attention to the influence that Christianity has had, and continues to have on both their own and society's attitudes and practices.

Movement 3 will layout the story and vision of Christianity on the theme of gender. Here the teacher will draw upon contemporary scholarship that points to both a positive and negative legacy from Christian faith in this regard. Undoubtedly, Christian scriptures and traditions have been used to legitimate gender inequality and sexist cultural mores. The teacher should teach an honest and critical review of such negative influences.

On the other hand, scholars also point to the emancipatory aspects of Christian faith. For example, the Hebrew scriptures teach that both sexes equally reflect 'the divine image and likeness' (Genesis 1:27), and are made for authentic partnership (Genesis 2:18). From the New Testament, note how Jesus had a deep commitment to gender equality (give examples, like his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4), he welcomed women and men as disciples, fully including both in his community. Women were the first witnesses to what Christians believe to be Jesus' resurrection. Likewise, though suffused with the patriarchy of its historical context, Christian tradition opposed prostitution and the enslavement of women, generally favouring their dignity and rights as persons.

In teaching about the contribution of women as spiritual writers, religious leaders and social reformers, there is great scope for students to take ownership of their own learning and pursue their own interests through directed research and group work.

Moving back toward their own lives, Movement 4 should invite students' personal appropriation and discernment. Movement 4 asks the student, in one way or another, What are you coming to 'see for yourself,' to recognise, to make your own? In a sense, students are invited to put Movements 1 and 2 in conversation with Movement 3. Possible questions would be: What do you agree with or disagree with or add? What do you recognize for yourself? What are you learning from this for your own life and for our present situation as a culture, as a society?

Movement 5 students them to a decision of some kind whether cognitive, affective, or behavioral. So, the activities here should encourage students to take their own informed position on this issue, or to recognise and own their feelings about it, or perhaps to make a practical and wise decision for their everyday lives.

Or, take the first part of **Section H of the syllabus, The Bible: Literature and sacred text**. The focusing act might 'steal' a little from M3, with the teacher giving students a brief review of this amazing book that has caused both war and peace, love and hate, fear and hope, division and solidarity, for at least two thousand years. In other words, get their interest going to learn more about and from the Bible, regardless of their own faith confession.

Movement 1 would invite students to express their general attitudes toward the Bible and the typical attitudes in their context and culture. Here, the teacher might ask where, when, and how they encounter this text; who has ever tried to read it, how did they fare, was its meaning obvious; why or why not? Movement 2 would invite them to probe deeper into present Bible praxis and where it comes from, e.g. 'Why do you think it's been around so long? What have been some of its 'fruits', good and bad, over time? Why do you think it can be both dangerous and life-giving? What do you think it takes to read it well and to mine its wisdom? Why do you think it has become at least a classic in literature? Why do some people and communities carry regard it as a sacred text, and what does this mean? Why do Catholics think of this as a Protestant book? And so on.

Movement 3 moves more obviously to teach what needs to be taught in this section about the Bible, responding to the conversation thus far (much of M3 can also be done during the conversation of M2), introducing students directly to the text, some of the story behind it, and the wisdom possibilities it has had over time and continues to have for our time. It would also make students aware of, and encourage respect for, the sacred texts of other peoples. It would present all such texts that have stood the test of time and shown their potential to be life-giving, as sources of spiritual wisdom for people today. However, they are not inevitably so, but must be interpreted with care and caution.

Movement 4 returns to students' emerging attitudes and recognitions, encouraging respect for the Bible as both a living classic and sacred text. Movement 5 brings them back to 'Where are we now with the Bible?' It should encourage their own informed opinions about it, their sense of its value and possibilities for life, at least for people who take it seriously as a source of spiritual wisdom. They might even make a decision to try reading it!

Let me reiterate that this approach should be used gently, and held loosely by the teacher; the process is meant for the students, not the students for the process. Yet it can help teachers to engage, facilitate, and resource a teaching/learning dynamic that enables students to bring their lives to study religious traditions, and to bring the wisdom of religious traditions to enrich their lives. We likely can't ask for any more, nor should we settle for any less, of religion as an exam subject in Irish secondary schools.

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# TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

All educators can find themselves dealing with controversial issues in the classroom. Issues of justice and morality, of belief and practice, and of life and its meaning, are at the heart of religious education. Therefore, for the religious educator, controversial issues are encountered almost daily. These issues are controversial because there is no one fixed or universally held point of view. A controversial issue is defined as an area of academic inquiry about which people can hold sincere conflicting points of view. There are often diverse religious as well as secular perspectives on such issues.

Exposing students to controversial issues in their studies enables them to develop their capacity for ethical and moral reasoning and become critically reflective thinkers.

When issues are controversial they are likely to challenge students' values, beliefs, and world-views. This can be very threatening and may even cause distress to some students. Therefore, when controversial issues are addressed in the classroom, teachers need special skills to ensure a positive outcome.

An important aim in teaching about such controversial material is to achieve a classroom atmosphere in which students engage in interesting and informed dialogues, free to express their opinions and relate their experiences, yet remaining respectful of other students and other opinions.

Achieving a balance of freedom within structure is not easy, and discomfort can result if the balance between the two is lost. This can arise from a too tightly-controlled classroom in which students are afraid to speak, or a too loosely-controlled classroom in which unchecked or uninformed personal opinion monopolises class time. This section offers some guidelines for facilitating discussion to achieve this balance.

## Tips for teaching controversial issues

The following tips are aimed at helping teachers keep control of the situation while maintaining open enquiry and dialogue.

### 1 Make your classroom a safe place in which to ask questions and discuss ideas

Before students can ask questions or discuss controversial issues, they need to feel that the classroom is a safe place in which to ask questions or

disagree with classmates without being put down for it. Ground rules for discussion should be established early in the year and reinforced regularly – not just for discussions about controversial issues, but for all discussions.

#### A sample set of ground rules might include:

- everyone is shown respect
- everyone is given an opportunity to speak in the group
- everyone is listened to – no interruptions
- no put-downs
- everyone's right to their opinion is respected
- everyone is expected to back up their opinion
- everyone has the freedom to change their opinion based on reflective discussion
- no generalisations, e.g. 'all refugees are... all Muslims are...'

[Adapted from *Challenging Perspectives: Cultural Diversity and Equality in Ireland and the Wider World (A resource for CSPE)* 2002, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit.]

## 2 Appeal to students' better nature

In introducing a social and moral issue that has the potential to become controversial, teachers can remind students of the importance of respect and tolerance. They might also make a humanitarian appeal to students to remember that prejudiced remarks made in class may offend or embarrass their classmates. Most students do not want intentionally to hurt others, and, with this reminder, they may strive to couch their comments in less inflammatory language.

## 3 Find out what students know and think about an issue before beginning an inquiry

Find out what they know about an issue, what they think they know but aren't sure about, where their information comes from, and what questions they



are likely to have. Their responses can come from direct questioning, brainstorming, group discussions, and journal-writing.

#### 4 Expose students to multiple perspectives

Avoid classroom discussions until students have had an opportunity to research and explore an issue from a variety of perspectives. Remember, exposure to different points of view on a controversial issue is necessary, but insufficient on its own. Students may listen, view, or read only to support what they already think, or to find flaws, omissions, misinformation.

A key habit of mind the teacher seeks to develop through these processes is 'critical openness'. A disposition to be open-minded to others' views and the ability to subject them to critical study. A willingness to suspend judgment and the ability, ultimately, to reach reasoned conclusions that are open to change.

#### 5 Promote dialogue and active listening

Students usually need help in understanding the differences between dialogue and debate. Dialogue aims for understanding, enlargement of view, complicating one's thinking, an openness to change. Dialogue requires real listening. It also requires humility.

*How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I am closed to, and even offended by, the contribution of others?*

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

An excellent way to promote listening is by asking students to re-state the perspective of others. Have them paraphrase what they hear another student saying to gain this skill.

#### 6 Use active learning methodologies

Students learn best when actively engaged in the learning. In teaching controversial issues it is important to provide opportunities for various kinds of group discussions, such as pairs, conversation circles, panels, fishbowls. In addition, active learning methodologies can be useful in building empathy (e.g. role-play) and in challenging strongly held prejudices (e.g. a simulation game).

#### 7 Promote critical thinking

Promote skills of critical evaluation and encourage students to interrogate information, its origins and possible biases. Ask critical question to help students to understand the origins of their ideas and attitudes.

#### An example of critical questioning: Section D: Morality

In this section of the syllabus a number of controversial issues may arise, for example, issues of medical ethics, of relationships and sexuality, violence and war, crime and punishment. It would be useful to help students to critically reflect on their own attitudes, experience and understanding before entering into these issues.

Questions which might be useful include:

- What is your current understanding of cloning/capital punishment/etc.?
- Why do you think/feel that way?
- Where have your perceptions and understanding come from?
- How reliable is this information?
- Where have your images come from?
- What might be the role of the media in influencing how you see this situation?
- What about other influences – friends, family, religion?
- Can you imagine an alternative way of seeing this issue? What might it be like?

*When dealing with controversial issues, teachers should adopt strategies that teach students how to recognise bias, how to evaluate evidence put before them and how to look for alternative interpretations, viewpoints and sources of evidence, above all to give good reason for everything they say and do, and to expect good reason to be given by others.*

Bailey, Richard (1998) *Teaching Values and Citizenship across the Curriculum* Dept. of Education and Employment, UK



## The teacher's role

### Examine yourself

What do you, the teacher, think and feel about an issue? Why? Would you tell students at the outset what your views are so that they can allow for possible biases? Or should you not tell them, but guard against any inclinations to manipulate and propagandise?

### Be responsive to students' feelings and values

Through such techniques as those outlined above, students' feelings and values are likely to be revealed. Examining a controversial issue is not a bloodless exercise'. Just as the teacher's role is not to tell students what to think, but to help them learn how to think, so too his/her role is not to tell students what feelings and values to have, but to promote an atmosphere in which they can express them without fear, make them explicit to themselves, and consider their validity.

### Model respect and fairness

Show respect for all students and their right to express their views. Show balance in representing opposing positions accurately and fairly. The teacher cannot pretend to be neutral and has a right to express an opinion too. But it is important to state one's own opinion in a way that respects others and does not serve to close down the discussion.

### Correct misinformation

One important role for the teacher during a discussion on a controversial issue is to gently correct misinformation. Keep this information simple and to the point. Avoid entering into confrontation or adopting an argumentative stance with a student or group of students.

### Emphasise that conflicts are opportunities

Most controversial issues can generate conflict, and a discussion about controversial issues is a good time to remind students that conflicts are opportunities for learning and growth.

### Show your humanity

Admit doubts, difficulties, and weaknesses in your own position. Allow the students to question your position too.

### Establish a means of closure

Ensure that the discussion is brought to closure with due sensitivity to the feelings that may have been aroused.

## Constructive controversy – a method for exploring controversial issues

by David and Roger Johnson

### Summary

In this highly structured, cooperative format for exploring controversial issues, students research and present a point of view on an issue, then switch sides and argue for the opposite point of view. Finally, the group tries to come to a consensus on the issues and writes a group report describing the issue and their combined thinking about it.

### Advantages

The highly structured nature of 'constructive controversy' makes it useful for students who respond well to structured situations. The process requires students to make use of collaborative skills, and perspective taking and consensus are built into the procedure.

### Disadvantages

Some teachers find that 'constructive controversy' comes too close to the old debate model. Its major drawback is that issues must be carefully chosen so that there are at least two positions. That in itself is not a problem, but finding material that represents those positions and is appropriate for students' use can be very difficult. The model requires a great deal of work on the part of the teacher to ensure its success.

# USING CRITICAL QUESTIONING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Questions are important tools for the teacher in the learning process. A well-constructed question can enthuse a class group and generate a spirit of enquiry and investigation. It can provide students with a focus for reflection, a theme for group discussion or the basis for a written task. In the two approaches to topics from Section H: The Bible: literature and sacred text, the questions exemplify good practice in asking questions in post-primary settings. However, they also show that questions are tools for the student. Teachers often report that students rarely ask questions, and that when they do, they tend to be procedural – questions about how much to write, which copy to use, and what page to find the task! Developing the ability to ask good questions makes an important contribution to the overall aims of religious education for Leaving Certificate, and to the overall aims of senior cycle education.

A critical question has a number of particular features that set it apart from other types of question. These include

- **the application of differentiation**  
Asking a critical question calls for skills of differentiation to be used; information, concepts and ideas must be sorted or classified, the important must be isolated from the trivial, the relevant from the irrelevant.
- **a response that requires judgement**  
Responding to a critical question requires a 'judgement call' in making a response. Critical

questions rarely give rise to black and white or simple answers.

- **a demand on personal resources**  
Responding to a critical question involves drawing on personal or communal value systems and/or on prior knowledge or skills.
- **the identification of further questions**  
A well-constructed critical question can give rise to further questions and to the identification of problems or tensions within the issue under consideration.

The use of critical questions in religious education is generally associated with the teaching of religious perspectives on social issues. It is a valuable strategy for such themes. However, good critical questions can also be used in other aspects of a religious education programme. The example below shows how critical questions can also be the basis for approaching other aspects of the course.

## Questioning – an approach for teachers

The suggestions presented here relate to part of H 1.1. Two objectives are relevant to this topic:

- to have an understanding that the Bible has been and continues to be a classic text for western civilisation
- to respect the Bible as a living, classic and sacred text.

Topic	Description of content	Outcomes
1.1 The Bible as living classic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of classic texts from a variety of sources.</li> <li>• Testing the Bible as classic.</li> </ul>	<p>As a result of studying this section, students should be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify characteristics of a classic text (one which is recognised over to time to be of high quality and of established value to a wide audience)</li> <li>• recognise the Bible as such a text.</li> </ul>

These aims, together with the outcomes presented in the table in the syllabus, will be used in the design of relevant assessment tasks. In the series of lessons presented here, the assessment is both formative and summative. In order to highlight the importance of questions in the design of this sequence of teaching and learning, a commentary on each question is offered.

**Before the lesson or series of lessons:**

Ask the students to bring a classic to class from the following selection. Do not offer a definition or description of a classic as guidance; offer only the instruction. Make it clear however that impractical items/moments may be reported rather than presented! Assure the students that they will not have to explain their choices.

	The classic list	
A fashion classic	A sporting classic	A TV classic
A music classic	A design classic	A literary classic

**Initial activity**

The initial activity comprises the presentation of the classic items/reports of items. The aim for the activity is introduced by the teacher – to try to find out what a classic is.

Each student simply names the item, or gives an account of it if it is not possible to present it in class. Those presenting a report must write a keyword on a piece of paper or draw an outline of the object. If space allows, the items can be placed in the centre of the room or on a large table. Otherwise, they can be placed on the desk in front of each student.

As a follow up, each item/piece of paper is re-assigned to another person who becomes its new owner for the purposes of the lesson. The question for each person is:

**Q. Why should what you have count as a classic?**

*This question asks the student to interrogate the unfamiliar in a low stakes context. Getting a wrong answer does not have serious consequences for the student. Students may have to rely on each other for assistance. The teacher is unlikely to know the correct answer in some cases.*

During the course of this activity the teacher can record the relevant observations. Alternatively, the students themselves can be asked to identify when a point relevant to the aim of the activity is mentioned and a member of the class group can take notes.

**Further optional activity**

When a list of classic characteristics has been created, the teacher may want to extend the activity further to allow for classification of the items into good examples of a classic, and examples about which the class is less certain. The supporting question would be:

**Q. From what we have discovered about classics, is there anything that you would pick out as a really good example of a classic?**

*This question is a good example of an application question, but it requires some discrimination on the part of the students and a testing of what might be a new concept. It would be an excellent reinforcing question for Ordinary Level students.*

**Focusing activity**

The teacher introduces a refinement to the consideration of classic as a category: the focus for the rest of the lesson (or for homework) will be on written texts. The teacher identifies the aim for this activity: to investigate/establish some examples of classic texts. Some class groups may be able to source examples without guidance; most will require examples for investigation and interrogation. Five examples are suggested below, along with a sample checklist for classic status.

Some teachers may not wish to introduce a biblical text at this stage and would prefer to introduce the Bible in the next lesson, set apart from secular texts. However, such an embedded approach avoids the need to ‘bridge’ from consideration of the secular to a consideration of the sacred. Would the inclusion of the biblical text support the outcome that relates to recognising the Bible as classic? Teacher judgement would be needed here. If this was the strategy adopted, then a few more well-known texts might be added to the list. Note, in this chart, the first three relate to the outcomes for 1.1; the others can be drawn from the students earlier work. The two here are only suggestions. A conversation with the English teacher could add to the list from the range of texts being studied by the class group.

Most teachers and students are familiar with a whole class discussion followed by a checklist activity like this one. This is a useful approach to processing, but can allow for one or two voices to dominate, and for a whole-class conclusion to be reached without challenging or involving all the students. An alternative processing strategy uses pair work. Students are asked to look at each others list, identify where the lists don’t match and discuss the reasons for the difference. The pairs do not have to reach a consensus, but where differences occur, they have to be ready to present them to the class with

**Sample checklist**

	Has stood the test of time	Appeals to a lot of people	Has value or importance for a lot of people	Lots of people know about it	It means something to people
Jack and Jill (nursery rhyme)					
Corinthians 13 Love is patient, etc.					
The Wizard of Oz (movie)					
Cinderella (fairy story)					
Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (children’s book)					

the reasons for the differences. This exercise serves two purposes. Firstly, it supports the outcome relating to classic texts. But it also establishes that ‘classic’ can be a contested concept. The whole class discussion takes place, but avoids a simple account of the checklist. The discussion focuses on different perspectives. The question for such a discussion would be:

**Q. Why were there differences in people’s views?**

*This is a deceptive question. It appears straightforward, but is actually quite challenging. It asks students to consider how people interact with text. Students have to establish relationships between different kinds of readers and different kinds of texts.*

**Assessment activity**

The engagement with complex questions during the lesson(s) above will give the teacher a good idea of how well the students have grasped the concepts involved. If the teacher is confident that the class is ready to move on, a relatively simple assessment strategy can be adopted based on a short written exercise:

Something becomes a classic if:

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You should mention four points in your answer to this question.

Using three of the points you mentioned, say why the Bible is a good example of a classic.

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In providing feedback on this exercise, remind the students of the question they were asked. Using two or three oral examples from the class, ask each student to check their own work – Do you have four points in their first answer and three in the second? Ask the students to mark the work where they think there is a gap and to jot down beside their work anything that they have learnt in the course of the discussion about the work. When the teacher sees the work and the student comment, she/he can ‘agree’ with the student observation or point to ‘missed’ errors. Such an approach is particularly supportive of Ordinary Level students.

If a teacher considers that students are still uncertain about the concepts, a more extensive assessment strategy might be used, involving the designing of an advertising campaign for the Bible as a classic. The campaign might have a number of elements, and students could focus on one

- a billboard
- a slogan
- a text messaging campaign
- a flyer
- a TV advertisement.



# TEACHING FOR DIVERSITY

Population classified by religion for relevant censuses 1991 and 2002

Year	Total persons	Roman Catholic	Church of Ireland	Presbyterian	Methodist	Jewish	Other stated religions	No religion	Not stated
1991	3,525,719	3,228,327	89,187	13,199	5,037	1,581	38,743	66,270	83,375
2002	3,917,203	3,462,606	115,611	20,582	10,033	1,790	89,223	138,264	79,094

Source: CSO

## Cultural and religious diversity in Ireland – a new phenomenon?

In recent years the increased visibility of cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland has heightened interest and debate in issues surrounding diversity and pluralism. It would not be accurate to suggest that Ireland only recently experienced diversity. Significant minority ethnic and religious groups have long been part of Irish society. However, the recently published census reports shows a significant rise in the number of people claiming affiliation to either minority faith traditions or no religion at all. This poses a great challenge and opportunity for the future.

The growing religious diversity that is illustrated above is mirrored by a growing cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland too. In recent years, work permits have been granted to people from 138 different countries to work and live in this country. In addition, a growing number of asylum seekers and refugees have sought refuge in Ireland, bringing with them a rich diversity of religious beliefs, values, lifestyles and cultures.

## Religious education – fostering respect for diversity

Religious education is well placed to foster respect for diversity and has a key role to play in the preparation of students in a multi-faith and multicultural society.

One of the aims of religious education at Leaving Certificate level is ‘to appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life’ (syllabus p. 5). It goes on to say

*Religious education should ensure that students are exposed to a broad range of religious traditions and to the non-religious interpretation of life. It has a particular role to play in the curriculum in the promotion of tolerance and mutual*

*understanding. It seeks to develop in students the skills needed to engage in meaningful dialogue with those of other and of no religious traditions.*

Teaching religious education in an increasingly diverse society presents educators with opportunities and challenges. It offers many opportunities to broaden and expand students’ horizons and at the same time it may present teachers and students alike with the challenge of exploring their own perceptions and confronting their prejudices regarding people with different faiths, values and practices.

Diversity in our classrooms can be seen as a problem, or as something positive that can enrich the learning experience. If we value diversity, then we respect and appreciate the identity of all students and their different experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. We also respect and include those who do not profess any faith or belong to any religious tradition.

## Summary checklist for appreciation of diversity within the classroom

- The diversity of students’ experience, cultural backgrounds and faiths is acknowledged and visible in the classroom.
- Cultural and religious diversity is seen as a positive asset.
- Students are encouraged to use their differences as a learning tool.
- There is recognition of the common elements in human experience, such as the quest for meaning, use of symbols, attempts to answer the ‘big questions’, the pursuit of goodness, justice and truth, etc.
- Values of respect, justice and human rights are explicitly highlighted.
- Bias and stereotypes are challenged.

- Skills of listening, dialogue and conflict resolution are fostered.
- Resources and readings which reflect a diversity of perspectives are included.
- Special events are celebrated in the calendars of a diversity of cultures/religions.

At the heart of effectively teaching about and for diversity is the critical analysis of the teaching and learning process. This begins with a careful examination of three dimensions of teaching:

- 1 the teacher
- 2 the learning interaction
- 3 the student.

### The teacher

As teachers, we need to engage in an on-going process of self-reflection about our attitudes, beliefs and how these have been shaped by our individual experiences. A self-assessment technique that may be useful for both teachers and students alike is to consider a variety of situations they have encountered across their lives (e.g. family, neighbourhood, town, primary school, post primary school, holidays) and rate the extent of diversity experienced within each of these areas (e.g. high, medium, or low). This might involve asking questions such as: 'How frequently have I encountered people of other faiths and/or other cultures in my home/neighbourhood/school, etc? Have I ever had an opportunity to get to know someone from a different faith tradition or culture?' Through this self-reflection process we can become more aware of the impact of our social and cultural backgrounds on our values and attitudes and so recognise our comfort level in dealing with cross-cultural situations. Teaching for and about diversity may require that teachers reconsider their own training and reflect on how it may have prepared them to teach in a rapidly changing mono-cultural society.

### The learning interaction

The content of our classes (themes and issues), the course materials (including texts and assignments), and the sources of knowledge (theorists and authorities) can communicate a variety of unintended messages to our students. While respecting the ethos of an individual school, it is important to provide opportunities for students to appreciate the value of other faiths. Indeed, even within one faith tradition it should be pointed out that there are many different expressions of that tradition. Similarly, teachers should be aware of the sources of authority and readings offered for student reflection. Classroom experiences can be greatly

enriched by the inclusion of a diversity of sources and authorities of knowledge. Our teaching methods should involve a stretching process (challenging students, offering new and different perspectives, expanding their intellectual comfort zone) and a matching process (connecting with students' experience, learning styles and cultural/religious backgrounds). It should also include a critical perspective, which includes an awareness of the role of perspective and prejudice in informing all our understandings.

### The student

Understanding the increased social, cultural and religious diversity of our students helps us to appreciate how students from different backgrounds experience the classroom environment. Although all students face adjustment dilemmas in post primary school, students from minority groups may be more vulnerable to stereotypical comments, thoughtless assumptions, and casual jokes. A survey of students' experience of transition from primary to post primary education has found that "students from non-national and Traveller backgrounds report more transition difficulties than other students." p.283. *Moving Up: The experience of first year students in post primary education.* (2004) ESRI/NCCA. The whole school has a role to play in creating a culture where diversity is valued and all students are equally respected. In this regard schools might find it useful to study the Guidelines on Intercultural Education. (NCCA/Department of Education and Science, 2005)

### A practical example: Section G: Worship, prayer and ritual

Addressing the theme of worship, prayer and ritual may at first seem difficult if one is teaching students of all faiths and none. However, when one considers the aims of this section, it is clear that all students can complete this section of the course in a way that is appropriate to the aims and objectives of the syllabus and respectful of the students' different experiences. The aims are:

- 1 To develop an awareness of the spiritual dimension of human life.
- 2 To explore some of the expressions of this spiritual dimension in a variety of cultures and contexts.
- 3 To examine some of the patterns of ritual and worship found in religions, with particular reference to the Christian traditions.
- 4 To analyse and evaluate the impact of those patterns on Irish society and culture.
- 5 To encourage an openness to personal spiritual development.

Teachers must keep in mind that students' assessment will be based on the above objectives and on the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes listed at the start of each syllabus section. While students will draw on their own experience in an examination, their personal faith commitment and/or affiliation to a particular religious grouping will not be subject to assessment.

In teaching this section of the course, teachers might wish to expose students to different forms of ritual or prayer. In doing so, it is important to emphasise that students should be free to participate in, observe or reflect upon the experience to the degree that is appropriate. Some students may fully participate, others may observe, and all can reflect on the significance of the ritual as an expression of the spiritual dimension of life (in accordance with the aims stated above). When teachers are exposing students to a ritual from a faith tradition with which they are not familiar it is important to pay respect not only to the student (who should be enabled to observe or participate to the degree that is appropriate), but also to the religious tradition and its form of worship. Hence, sensitivity to appropriate dress, decorum, and good behaviour is part of the learning too.

Sample questions for preparing students to observe/participate in a ritual with which they are not familiar

- Has anyone in the class ever had an experience of participating in or observing this kind of ritual before?
- What would you expect to see?
- What is the ritual celebrating?
- What is the origin of the ritual?
- What questions do you want to ask now in order to prepare for the visit?
- What questions will you ask the religious leader/representative who will meet with the class?
- How can we show respect when participating in or observing this ritual?

Sample questions to help students in reflecting on their experience afterwards

- What did you observe?
- What did you notice about the space – what features could you identify that made the space sacred?
- What kinds of words and actions were used by the people at prayer?

- How important were symbols? What symbols were used?
- What was your experience of the ritual? Did it match with your expectations? Why/why not?
- What did you learn?
- What do you think is the meaning and importance of the ritual for followers of this faith tradition today?

### Diversity at a glance

If the world contained 1000 people it would include:

- 584 Asians
- 124 Africans
- 95 Europeans
- 84 Latin Americans
- 55 Russians and people from former Soviet republics
- 52 North Americans
- 6 people of the Pacific.

There would be

- 329 Christians (among them 187 Catholics, 84 Protestants, 31 Orthodox)
- 178 Muslims
- 167 'Non religious'
- 60 Buddhists
- 45 Atheists
- 32 Hindus
- 3 Jews
- 86 other religions.

Source: *80:20 Development in an Unequal World* (2002)

Useful websites:

[www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org)

[www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org)

[www.cleo.ucsm.ac.uk/content/profpolicies/assessment/assessment\\_sheets/re/re.htm](http://www.cleo.ucsm.ac.uk/content/profpolicies/assessment/assessment_sheets/re/re.htm)

# INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious education in the Leaving Certificate requires students to explore questions of meaning and value, the nature of morality, the development and diversity of belief, the principles of a just society, and the implications of scientific progress. Students who pursue this course of study must assume the roles of critical questioners, information seekers, analysers, evaluators, problem solvers, decision makers, communicators, and producers of knowledge and understanding.

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) in religious education can enable, support and enhance the development of the roles outlined above. The extent to which ICT can be used in religious education will depend on a number of factors which vary between classes, teachers and schools. These factors include the usefulness of ICT to the development of students' learning in the area of religious education being taught, the availability of resources (including hardware and software) and the ICT literacy levels of both teachers and students.

*ICT literacy is the interest, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital technology and communication tools to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information, construct new knowledge, and communicate with others in order to participate effectively in society.<sup>1</sup>*

## Benefits to students of using ICT in religious education

There are many ways in which ICT can support the development of students' knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes in religious education.

### These include:

- *developing students' information processing skills* by finding things out from a variety of sources, selecting and synthesising information to meet specific needs and developing an ability to question the accuracy, bias and authority of different sources of information<sup>2</sup>
- *exchanging and sharing information* with peers, organisations and experts in a particular field

- *asking and answering questions* on religious, social, ethical or moral issues and understanding, analysing and evaluating different interpretations, arguments and conclusions
- *developing ideas using ICT tools* to plan, amend, refine and enhance work reflecting critically on its quality, accuracy and presentation as it progresses.

## Benefits to teachers of using ICT in religious education

As well as the benefit students accrue from using ICT, there are also many benefits for teachers including

- *enhancement of subject expertise and peer support* through shared research, communication and collaboration with other subject specialists and experts. Research using the Internet can support preparation for teaching all aspects of the religious education syllabus (see Unit 8 for sample websites).
- *production of multimedia resources*. ICT can facilitate access to a range of tools that can be used in the planning, development and production of multimedia classroom resources.
- *facilitating a wider variety of teaching methodologies*. For example, ICT may be used to facilitate collaborative group-work, independent learning and whole class interaction.
- *assessment, recording, reporting*. Students may develop an electronically generated portfolio of work which may be used as part of in-school assessment. There are also a wide range of ICT-based tools available to support teachers in record keeping, analysis of data and reporting.

## Why use ICT in religious education?

Questions regarding what, how and when to learn with ICT requires a clear understanding of how ICT

- can support curriculum and assessment
- fits with existing pedagogical practice.

The primary purpose of ICT in curriculum and assessment is to support, enhance and transform teaching and learning. The following learner-centred

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2003), Annex B: Assessing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy in PISA 2006. Report of the ICT Expert Panel.

<sup>2</sup> When making use of the Internet in the classroom it is important that the teacher visits the web sites in advance to ensure that the material is suitable for students, for their class level and for the topic being explored. See Principles for Learning with ICT, Curriculum, Assessment and ICT in the Irish context: A discussion paper. NCCA, 2004.



teacher-supported principles for learning with ICT are recommended. These principles emphasise the active and reflective nature of teaching and learning.

### Principles for learning with ICT

ICT promotes learning and adds value to curriculum and assessment when it supports:

#### Students' active involvement in their own learning

Students learn complex subject matter best when they are engaged in the process of constructing meaning from information and from their own experience to meet their own goals. Students can use ICT in enquiry-based learning to build on their own existing knowledge and experience and to follow their own pathways to learning based on their educational needs.

ICT can facilitate such learning in religious education in many ways. For example, under Section F of the syllabus, *Issues of justice and peace*, students are introduced to the principles and skills of social analysis.

In doing a social analysis of discrimination in Ireland, students might use

- a word processor to record the values and beliefs they bring to the task
- a word processor to document and summarise the key facts they have found on the issue
- a spreadsheet to develop and analyse a survey which will gather and represent information on the current situation regarding discrimination in Ireland
- a word processor, desktop publishing (DTP), presentation package or video to present their findings
- concept mapping software (generates spider type diagrams) in conjunction with a data projector (ICT tool which facilitates magnifying what is on a computer screen to full display size) to brainstorm and document ideas on what possible actions may be taken to improve negative situations identified in the research
- a word processor, desktop publishing (DTP), presentation package or video to present their recommendations on what actions may be taken.

#### The development of students' higher order thinking skills

To be successful adaptable learners, students need to develop and use a variety of critical thinking, problem solving, and reasoning strategies.

ICT can facilitate the development and use of such skills in religious education. For example, students can undertake refined web searches to access, filter and interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary online sources.

In collaboration with their teacher and peers, students can develop and use appropriate criteria to evaluate the accuracy, usefulness and bias of information. Students should recognise bias, motive and point of view and the effect of these on the accuracy, relevance and appropriateness of information.

Students may then decide the best method of collating and presenting their results, selecting from a wide variety of ICT tools including word processing, DTP, multimedia authoring, video editing, web design, etc., keeping in mind the purpose of their activity and their audience.

#### Student learning in authentic environments

Students' learning is influenced by their own environment, including the cultural context, resources, technology, and teaching approaches and methodologies. Teachers are continuously engaged in managing and adapting the interactions between these factors to suit the needs of the individuals within the class.

ICT can add value to a learning situation when it is used to create experiences that are more similar to the kinds of learning that take place in daily life. For example, when studying Section C of the syllabus, *World religions*, students may communicate online through email, discussion forums, chat rooms, web cams and video conferencing with students from different cultures and religious backgrounds and so share experiences, ask questions and seek information/clarification.

ICT may also provide students with access to 'experts' not geographically proximate to the school through email, video conferencing and discussion forums to support and enrich many aspects of the religious education syllabus.

#### Student interest and engagement in learning

Motivation is central to learning. ICT can enhance students' motivation. Engaging learning environments are evident where students are actively involved in completing interesting, relevant tasks and creating artefacts using real tools such as digital stills and video cameras, audio devices, etc. Students working as part of a team to produce a multimedia project will be motivated to put in the effort required to produce an item that is valued by their peers, and worthy of being brought to a certain audience.



ICT can facilitate such learning in religious education in many ways. For example, in section D of the syllabus, *Moral decision-making*, possible scenarios may be presented to students where decisions must be made and where there may be a conflict between personal values and peer group/community/societal values. Students working in groups may be given the task of role-playing these scenarios. The role-plays may be captured using digital video and played back to the class. There are many advantages of using digital video including

- the role-play may be planned, enacted and videoed either during or outside class time
- the video clip may be used over and over again for a variety of purposes including: replaying the role-play to focus on certain points, body language, students' level of participation, communication skills, key arguments, etc.
- the use of a digital camera for role-play provides opportunities for the development of communication, cooperation and team building skills
- students generally enjoy and are motivated by using technology
- students maintain a record of their work.

A digital stills camera is also a very useful resource for capturing a specific moment or situation. A still image of the role-play ('freeze frame') may be taken and shown to students to stimulate discussion about what is going on in the picture, how people are feeling/thinking, what might happen next and what are the possible outcomes?

### **Differentiated learning for all students**

Learning is most effective when the nature of individual difference, in terms of physical, intellectual, emotional, language and social development, is taken into account. Teachers may use ICT to cater for a range of individual differences and a range of learning styles. The ready availability of multi-modal learning opportunities through ICT, where students can learn using a combination of graphic, visual, aural, and text based resources, can support different learning styles, particularly students who may have difficulties when learning is mediated through one of these channels alone.

ICT can support the teacher in creating optimum conditions to support each individual student's development. ICT facilitates the creation of individualised tasks. ICT facilitates students working at their own pace and in independent and self-directed learning environments. Electronic media allows students to draft, reflect, acquire feedback, and redraft their work over and over again much more easily than in non-electronic formats.

### **Collaborative learning**

Learning is greatly influenced by our social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others. Collaboration is viewed as important in developing students' abilities to evaluate and justify their opinions, to gather and share knowledge with others, and to transform their existing understanding. Within the classroom itself, students are frequently engaged in co-operative group work. ICT can support and enhance such activities and expand opportunities for collaboration beyond the classroom.

Students may now collaborate and communicate with their peers in classrooms around the world and with 'famous people' and 'experts' in different fields through the Internet, email, video conferencing, electronic bulletin boards and other forms of electronic communications. Students can work on collaborative projects with peers in other countries, contributing to the development of their cultural awareness and a sense of global citizenship.

### **Assessment of and for learning.**

Assessment provides important information to students, teachers and parents throughout the learning process. Students are motivated and challenged to learn when they understand the goals of learning, and when they themselves are part of setting their own goals. Assessment is accepted as a regular part of the cycle of teaching and learning. ICT can support the assessment of religious education in a number of ways.

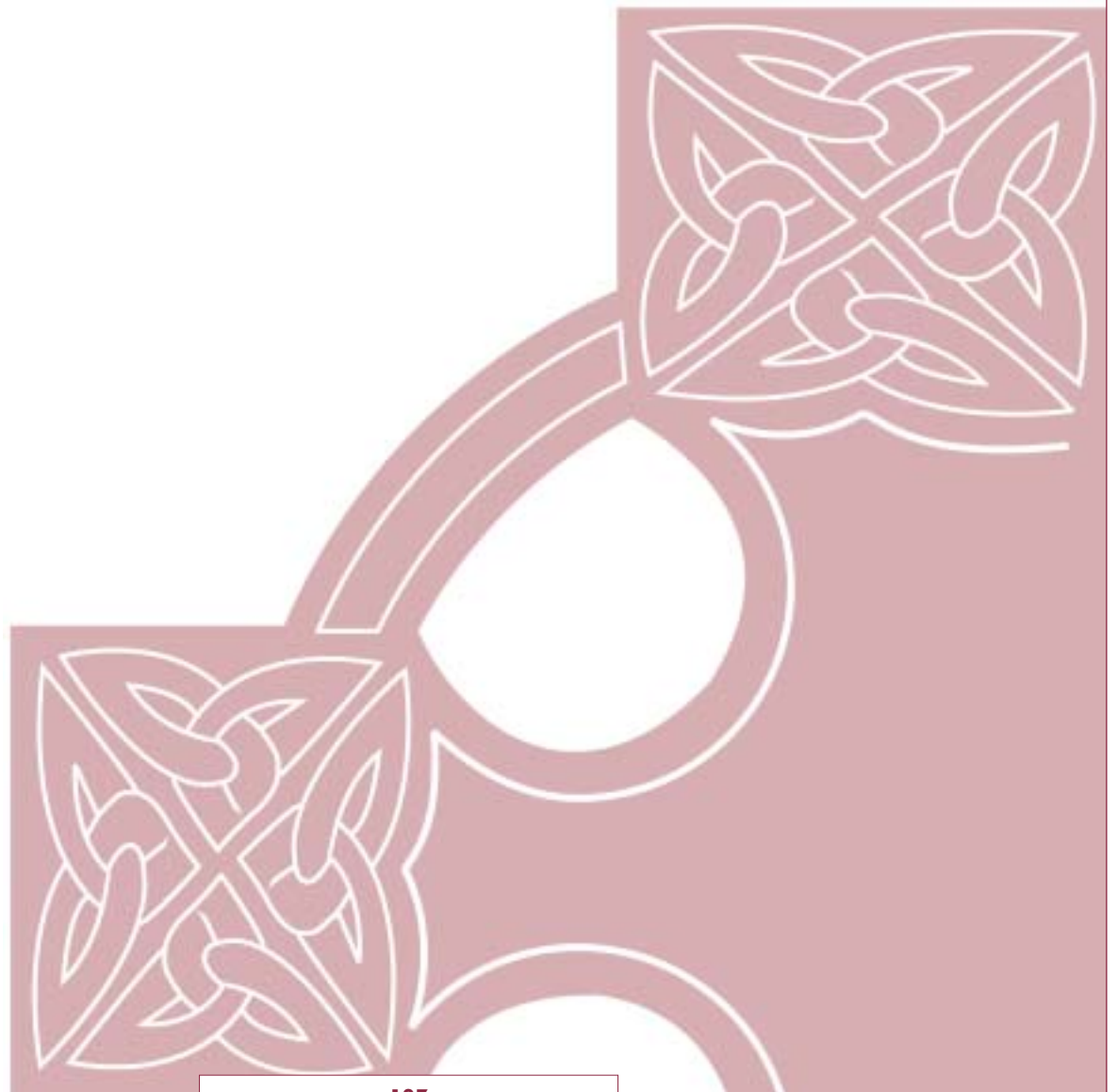
For example

- **Coursework**  
Students may use ICT in the preparation, development and presentation of different stages of research on their coursework topic. Students may develop and maintain their work in electronic format. This may be used formatively; allowing students to reflect on their stage of development in a task; acquire feedback from teachers and peers and revise their work accordingly. This improves students' ability to self-appraise; enhances motivation and promotes self-directed learning.
- **In house assessment**  
E-portfolios may also be used for in-house assessment purposes where the accumulation of students' work or a selection of students' work is chosen (by the student in collaboration with the teacher) and presented for assessment and a grade, level or mark is assigned.



# PART 4

# ASSESSMENT



**1 The rationale for assessment**

Assessment in education is about gathering, interpreting and using information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and can be used in a variety of ways, such as to test and certify achievement (e.g. Junior and Leaving Certificate), to determine the appropriate route for students to take through a differentiated curriculum or to identify specific areas of difficulty (or strength) for a given student.

Teachers use a variety of assessment tools to gather information about students' learning. Asking questions, giving written tests at the end of units of study, setting and correcting homework assignments are all forms of assessment with which teachers are familiar. Teachers use the results of this assessment

to inform students on their progress, to report to parents and to plan future classroom activities.

**2 Assessment of learning and assessment for learning**

Recent advances in our knowledge of how learning takes place and how learners make their way through classroom activities have led to new understandings of the importance of assessment in the promotion of learning. These new perspectives are having an impact across the curriculum as the focus in assessment activity begins to move from an emphasis on the assessment of learning to include assessment for learning-providing feedback to learners on how to improve their learning.

The main features of assessment of learning and assessment for learning are set out below

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING	ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING
happens after the learning takes place	an integral part of the learning process
information is gathered by the teacher	information is shared with the learner
information is usually transformed into marks or grades	information is available on the quality of learning
comparison with the performance of others	comparison with aims and objectives is important
looks back on past learning	looks forward to the next stage of learning

It is important, however, to avoid seeing assessment of learning and assessment for learning as opposing or contradictory practices. While the assessment of learning will always have a place in education and in classroom and school practice, the development of assessment for learning offers new opportunities for teachers.

**3 Key principles**

Assessment for learning is about using assessment in the classroom as a tool to improve students' learning, and is characterised by

- sharing learning goals with students
- helping students to recognise the standards they are aiming for
- involving students in assessing their own learning
- providing feedback, which helps students to recognise what they must do to close any gaps in their knowledge or understanding

- communicating confidence that every student can improve
- adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment.

(See NCCA website at [www.ncca.ie/juniorcycle](http://www.ncca.ie/juniorcycle))

**4 Assessment of religious education in the Leaving Certificate examination: What will be assessed?**

The assessment of religious education in the Leaving Certificate examination is based on the objectives relating to knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes within each section of the course. While students can draw on their own experience in the examination, their personal faith commitment and/or affiliation to a particular religious grouping will not be subject to assessment for national certification. The chart that follows outlines the framework for assessment.

<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>ATTITUDES</b>
Key terms, definitions, descriptions and distinctions	Understanding of the variety of religious and non-religious interpretations of life	Analysis, application and synthesis	Genuine engagement with the subject
Accuracy and adequacy of information	Key concepts and their application in a variety of contexts	Comparison and contrast	Appreciation of and respect for the richness of religious traditions
Depth of knowledge appropriate to level (higher/ordinary)	Understanding of the links between belief and practice, especially as expressed in morality	Discerning evidence of religious belief	Appreciation of and respect for the non-religious interpretation of life
Evidence of research/study	Awareness of the interplay between the physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, moral and social aspects of human experience	Identification of causes and consequences	Openness to individual and collective search for meaning
Indicating the inter-relatedness of different topics on the course	Awareness of the variety of ways in which religious beliefs are expressed	Appropriate use of and critical reflection on texts and resources	Openness to dialogue and the search for mutual understanding

### **5 Modes of assessment**

For Leaving Certificate religious education, the assessment procedure has two elements – coursework and a terminal examination paper. Marks for coursework and the examination paper are combined to constitute the final grade awarded.

400 marks are awarded in total. Coursework accounts for 20% of the total mark.

#### **The examination paper**

The Ordinary Level paper is allocated 2 hours. The Higher Level paper is allocated 2.5 hours.

The examination paper will include a range of questions including, short questions, paragraph style questions and essay questions.

Note: See sample examination paper issued by the State Examinations Commission.

### **6 Differentiation between Higher Level and Ordinary Level**

The syllabus is offered at two levels: Ordinary and Higher.

The syllabus distinguishes Ordinary Level from Higher Level by the following:

- 1 Range of topics: The Higher Level incorporates the Ordinary Level. At Higher Level an extended range of topics is required. These are printed in black text throughout the syllabus.
- 2 Depth of treatment: Higher Level students will also be expected to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding of the concepts and content of the course as well as a greater capacity to engage critically with the topics.



# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS FOR USE IN THE ASSESSMENT OF LEAVING CERTIFICATE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**The following is a list of the most commonly used terms and their meaning in the context of student assessment. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list.**

- 1 **Assess** implies the student balancing different perspectives and showing skills of judgement and evaluation.
- 2 **Compare** implies presenting two perspectives or positions and showing the similarities and/or differences.
- 3 **Contrast** implies presenting two different perspectives or positions and showing the differences.
- 4 **Describe** implies that the student must state in words, or sometimes diagrams, the important points of the topic.
- 5 **Discuss** implies that the student will examine different perspectives or opinions on a topic and then come to their own conclusion/viewpoint.
- 6 **Explain** implies more than a list of facts/thoughts/theories. The reasons accounting for these facts/thoughts/theories must also be provided.
- 7 **Investigate** implies the student examining a thought or a theory and providing supporting evidence for their conclusions.
- 8 **Outline** implies the student setting out the main points of information on a topic.
- 9 **Profile** implies the student tracing the development of a thought, a theory, a person or events.
- 10 **Reflect** implies a statement of the student's experience in the context in which the question is asked.
- 11 **Research** implies that the student will find suitable information, sort, record, analyse and draw conclusions.
- 12 **Trace** implies a chronological approach to the development of a thought, theory, event, etc.

# SAMPLE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The following questions might be used as an aid in setting homework or in devising in-school assessment. Those questions for Higher Level are typed in bold.

## SECTION A: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND VALUES

### Part one: The search for meaning

#### Section 1.1: The contemporary context

- 1 Musicians, artists, writers and youth culture often explore the human search for meaning. Give two examples from music, art, literature or youth culture and explain how each shows the human search for meaning.
- 2 'I still haven't found what I'm looking for'.  
(Bono)  
What are people looking for in life?  
Explain how the human search for meaning can be blocked?  
In your answer identify two factors in contemporary society that can block the search for meaning.

#### Section 1.2: The tradition of search

- 1 Imagine that any one of the following were alive today and came to speak to your class – Aristotle, Plato, Socrates. Write out the speech that he would make. Include any key issues today that you think he might talk about.
- 2 **(a) Who were the sophists? Explain some of the key ideas held by the sophists of ancient Greece.**  
  
**(b) How did they influence the development of philosophy?**

### Part two: The response to the search for meaning

#### Section 2.2: The tradition of response

- 1 The building of the pyramids of Egypt are an example of religious behaviour in an ancient society. Give two more examples which provide evidence of religious behaviour in ancient society.
- 2 Give an example from contemporary culture of a song which shows the sense of the sacred? In answering this question you should quote some lines from the song to illustrate your answer.

### Part three: Concepts of God

#### Section 3.1: The gods of the ancients

Pick one of the following – Judaism, Christianity or Islam and describe the concept of God in that tradition.

#### Section 3.2: The concept of revelation

In the Islamic tradition Mohammed experienced divine revelation in his encounter with the Angel Gabriel in the cave. Pick a religious tradition and give another example of divine revelation from that tradition. Explain the importance of that revelation in the tradition

#### Section 3.3: Naming God, past and present

Summarize the proof(s) for the existence of God as offered by Anselm, or Aquinas or another theologian you have studied.

### Part four: Religion and the emergence of values

#### Section 4.1: Religion as a source of communal values

Discuss how a person's idea of God might influence their relationships in the world.

#### Section 4.2: Secular sources of religious values

- 1 Explain the difference between secular and religious values.
- 2 All societies have values. Some values are secular and some religious. Of the following list which are secular, which are religious and which are both. Explain why in each case.

*Underage drinking is wrong.*

*Life is sacred.*

*Speeding on the roads is wrong.*

*People have a right to a decent wage.*

*Competition in business is a good thing*

## SECTION B: CHRISTIANITY: ORIGINS AND CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS

**Part one: The return to origins****1.1 The pattern of return**

- 1 (a) Describe what you understand by the phrase 'returning to origins'.
- (b) Why do people make an effort to return to origins?
- (c) Give an example from secular or religious institutions of how returning to origins might have affected the group/organisation.
- 2 *I saw Christ today  
At a street corner stand,  
In the rags of a beggar he stood  
He held ballads in his hand.*

*Street Corner Christ* by Patrick Kavanagh

- (a) What kind of image of Jesus does the poet Patrick Kavanagh display in these lines?
- (b) Give another example of an image of Jesus from contemporary music, film, art or literature and explain what has inspired this image and how it relates to contemporary culture and society.

**Part two: The vision of Jesus in context****2.3 The teachings of Jesus and their impact on the community**

- 1 Outline four characteristics of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus.
- 2 Jesus spoke in parables about God's kingdom. Pick one example from the preaching of Jesus and explain how it shows an aspect of Jesus' understanding of the kingdom.
- 3 Pick any two of the following statements of Jesus and comment on its relevance to modern society:
  - (a) 'Blessed are the peace-makers'
  - (b) 'Love your enemies'
  - (c) 'Sell your possessions, give to the poor and come follow me'
  - (d) 'If somebody strikes you on the right cheek, turn also to him the other'.
- 4 **Matthew has collected the teaching of Jesus in the Beatitudes (chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel). Write an essay highlighting what you think are the central moral insights of this teaching.**

**Part three: The message in context****3.1 Conflict with the establishment**

- 1 Jesus challenged some key values of the Roman world in his teaching, like wealth, honour, shame, peace, power. Choose one of those values and indicate how Jesus' attitude differed from that of the Romans.
- 2 Jesus frequently refers to the political and religious groups of his time. Pick one and describe his relationship with them. What do you think were the real differences between Jesus and your chosen group?

**3.2 The death and resurrection of Jesus**

- 1 In the Gospels, it is recorded that Jesus was accused of subverting the people. Do you think this was the reason for his arrest and death?
- 2 Imagine you are a journalist living at the time of Jesus. Write a short account for your newspaper describing how Jesus was sentenced and put to death.

**Part five: The Christian message today****5.1 Interpreting the message today**

Select *one* of the following to show how *one* Christian denomination carries on the mission of Jesus:

- a Give an example of a contemporary Christian response to violence or intolerance or sectarianism.
- b Give an example of a contemporary Christian effort to create a just and inclusive society.
- c Give an example of a contemporary Christian vision regarding the use of the earth's resources.
- d Give an example of a Christian response to dying and death.
- e Give an example of the structures and authority of a Christian community.

**5.2 Trends in Christianity**

- 1 **Outline two key achievements and two difficulties in the search for Christian unity.**

Or

- 2 **Explain the ways in which two rites of Christian worship remember Jesus.**

## SECTION C: WORLD RELIGIONS

**Part one: The phenomenon of religion**

A recent international survey on religious practices concluded that the Irish continue to believe in God, in life after death and attend weekly worship at the highest rates in Europe.

- a In your experience, are these findings accurate for young people today. Say why or why not.
- b Name another religious trend in Ireland today.

**Part two: A close look at the major living traditions****List A**

Christianity  
Judaism

**List B**

Islam  
Buddhism  
Hinduism

**2.1 A vision of salvation**

- 1 Compare the vision of salvation or liberation or enlightenment as proposed in the two traditions you have chosen to study (one from list A and one from list B).
- 2 Summarise the idea of the human person present in each of the two traditions you have studied.
- 3 **Using examples from each tradition, describe the relationship between the transcendent (God) and the human in each of the two traditions you have chosen to study.**

**2.2 The community of believers**

How do each of the two traditions you have chosen to study understand the role and place of community?

**2.3 A celebrating tradition**

Select two key elements of the human life cycle (e.g. birth, adulthood, commitment, illness, death, etc.) and show how your two chosen traditions celebrate each element.

**2.4 Challenges to the tradition**

- 1 What challenges are faced by the traditions you have chosen to study?  
Refer, whenever possible, to the Irish context.
2. **Pick two key movements or developments that have taken place in the last 50 years in each of the traditions you have chosen to study. What challenges do these developments present to members of the community of believers in each tradition?**

**2.5 Inter-faith dialogue**

- a What is meant by 'inter-faith dialogue'?
- b Describe the origin of this dialogue and its purpose in relation to two major world religions you have studied.
- c **Assess its current state.**

**Part three: New religious movements**

**The naming of religious movements as 'cults' or 'sects' is often resisted by followers of certain movements. Discuss why they might not wish to be labelled in this way.**

**3.2 Some new religious movements**

**The phrase 'new religious movement' can refer to a wide spectrum of religious movements. They are 'new' in that they present themselves as alternatives to official institutional religion. They are 'religious' in that they claim to offer a religious vision of the world, and to respond to the fundamental questions of life.**

Give one example of a new religious movement and describe

- a its foundations
- b major beliefs
- c the lifestyle, customs and practices of its members.

## SECTION D: MORAL DECISION-MAKING

**Part two: Morality and religion**

- 1 Outline the basic ethical code of one religious tradition you have studied other than Christianity.
- 2 Jesus of Nazareth spent his adult life sharing a vision for ethical living. You have been asked to write an article for a teenage magazine in which you are to describe these ethical teachings. Write the article suitable for your age group and include in it the following ideas:
  - a. Jesus' moral vision,
  - b. Jesus' understanding of right relationship
  - c. Jesus' understanding of the law of love.
- 3 **Define the following:**
  - a. **personal sin**
  - b. **social sin**

**War and drug-taking are two issues where both personal and social sin come into play. Discuss how personal sin and social sin play a part in one of these issues.**

**Part four: Moral development**

- 1 'A good decision should involve...'  
How would you finish this statement and what would you go on to say. Write a speech on the process of moral decision-making that a morally mature person would follow. You may use a current moral issue that you have studied to illustrate your answer. At the end of your speech, write one sentence in which you define what, in your understanding, characterises a morally mature person.
- 2 Trace the moral development of a person using the work of one theorist that you have studied. In your answer, refer to the different stages in a person's moral development.
- 3
  - a. List four influences on a person's moral development.
  - b. With regard to each of those you picked, state how they might influence the making of a moral decision.
- 4 **Write about an ethical issue of your choice under the following headings**
  - a. **conscience**
  - b. **civil law**
  - c. **religious authority.**



## SECTION E: RELIGION AND GENDER

**Part one: Gender, society and religion**

- 1 ‘All major world religions regard men and women with equal respect.’ Discuss this statement.
- 2 Present a comparison of the roles of men and women in *two* major world religions. (Choose from the following Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism.)

**Part two: Gender and Christianity**

- 1 Pick two women or men in the Hebrew scriptures and summarise their importance in the story of salvation.
- 2 Give an account of two gendered images of God in the Hebrew scriptures.
- 3 ‘When God is male then the male is God.’ Do you agree with this statement? Write a short essay discussing this view.
- 4 Pick an encounter between Jesus and a woman in the gospels.
  - a. Re-tell the story in your own words.
  - b. Explain the importance of this encounter both in the context of the time of Jesus and for today’s world.
- 5 The early Christian community has been described as ‘a discipleship of equals’. Would you agree with this? Write a short essay outlining your opinion on this statement based on your reading of either Acts *or* the letters of St. Paul.
- 6 Write a short account of how Mary is presented in the gospels.
- 7 (a) Give a summary of how Mary is portrayed in one Christian tradition.
- 8 (b) Suggest one way that the role of Mary is linked to the role of men and women in that tradition.

**Part three: Women’s stories**

- 1 Write an essay outlining the main characteristics and challenges presented by feminist theologies.
- 2 Women have played a key role in the spiritual tradition, in the development of religious orders and communities, as social reformers and as religious writers. Pick one such woman and describe
  - a. the key events or actions of her life.
  - b. the contribution she made to her own cultural context and religious tradition.
  - c. the continuing impact or legacy of her life.

**Higher Level: same question using two women – to compare and contrast.**

## SECTION F: ISSUES OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

**Part one: Reflecting on context**

- 1 Describe the steps involved in doing a social analysis of any problem or issue.
- 2 Give two causes of hunger in the world and in your answer explain how economic, political, cultural or social structures contribute to this situation.

*or*

Identify one group who experience poverty in Ireland today and explain why you think they are in poverty. Your answer should mention two structural causes of poverty in Ireland.

*or*

Choose one example of discrimination in Ireland today and describe how that discrimination works. Your answer should mention two structural causes of discrimination.

- 1 **Pick one social problem in Ireland today and explain how the following factors affect the situation– resources, power, key relationships.**

*or*

- 2 **Write an essay comparing *two* causes of poverty in Ireland and in the developing world.**

**Part two: The concept of justice and peace**

- 1 Choose one of the following:
  - The Judeo-Christian vision of Justice
  - The Zakat of Islam
  - The four Varnas of Hinduism
  - The eight-fold path of Buddhism

Outline the key ideas of justice and peace in *one* of the above.

- 2 List the key principles of the just war theory as developed by St. Augustine.

**Part three: The religious imperative to act for justice and peace**

- 1 a. Explain what is meant by the 'greening of religion'.  
b. Give three factors that brought about this 'greening' process.
- 2 **Outline the key ideas of one writer on religion and the environment.**
- 3 **The biblical concept of Jubilee (Lev. 25) was a very radical mechanism for giving a fresh start to the poor. Discuss.**
- 4 **Explain the concepts of stewardship and dominion in the Genesis creation texts. Give an example of how one of these concepts might apply to a current environmental problem.**

## SECTION G: WORSHIP, PRAYER AND RITUAL

**Part one: Symbol, ritual and sacrament**

- 1 Name two different types of ritual and give an example of each.
- 2 **It is claimed that symbols have power. Explain, with one example from each, the power of symbols in contemporary secular society and in contemporary religion.**
- 3 **Give an example of secular ritual in contemporary culture and explain its importance for those who participate.**

**Part two: Prayer**

- 1 Discuss the reasons why reflection is important in the life of a young person.
- 2 Give two examples- from different religious traditions – of sacred space, and list the features that identify the space as sacred.
- 3 Select a formal prayer from one of the following - the Buddhist, Judaic, Hindu or Islamic tradition. Compare and contrast it with Christian prayer.

**Part three: Meditation and contemplation**

1. a. Explain the term 'meditation'.  
b. Explain the importance of meditation in one major religious tradition.
2. **Compare and contrast the Buddhist and Christian traditions of meditation.**

## SECTION H: THE BIBLE: LITERATURE AND SACRED TEXT

**Part one: The Bible as living classic and sacred text**

- 1 Explain why we can say the Bible is a classic text.
- 2 Give *one* example of how the Bible has influenced either a constitution or a declaration of independence.  
*or*  
Give *one* example of how the Bible has influenced a piece of art or a piece of music.
- 4 How was the canon formed and give an example of a piece of literature omitted from the canon.
- 5 **Describe one way that the Bible has influenced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**
- 6 **Explain how redaction criticism has had an influence on biblical interpretation.**

**Part two: Text and community**

- 1 Give two examples that show how the oral tradition has been preserved in the Gospels.
- 2 St Luke wrote his Gospel for Gentiles. Explain how this audience influenced his gospel.
- 3 Explain the stages of development of the Bible from oral tradition to written tradition.
- 4 Explain the 'synoptic problem'.
- 5 **The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels. Give one similarity between any of the three Synoptics and give one area of variation between any of the three Synoptics.**
- 6 **St Mark was the first to write his gospel. However he did have a written source 'Q' on which to base his work. Explain the importance of Q as in influence on Mark's gospel.**

**Part three: The literature of the Bible**

- 1 Outline the structure of a parable, using an example of a parable you have studied.
- 2 Pick a parable you have studied and say
  - a. What was the message of this parable for the original audience?
  - b. What message might this parable offer for an audience today?
- 3 **The book of Job is an example of the Bible as story. What makes Job's story so compelling?**
- 4 **Outline how the Psalms are a unique style of poetry.**
- 5 **The Bible is made up of many literary genres. Explain.**

**Part four: Biblical texts**

- 1 Choose *one* of the following texts:
  - Ex 20:1-21 The Ten Commandments
  - 1Sam 2: 1-10 Hannah's Song of Thanks
  - Is 52: 13-53:12 Israel Restored.

Write a paragraph on the origin, genre/type and meaning of this passage.
- 2 Chose one of the following New Testament texts:
  - Mk 9: 2-13 The Transfiguration
  - Lk 6: 20-49 The Sermon on the Mount
  - Jn 1: 1-18 The Prologue.

Analyse this text referring to the following headings:

  - a. origin
  - b. authorship/source
  - c. genre
  - d. meaning
  - e. what it says about God and the relationship between God and God's people.

**SECTION I: RELIGION: THE IRISH EXPERIENCE****Part one: Patterns of change**

- 1 Outline three ways that young people's practice of religious belief in Ireland today differs from that of their grandparents.
- 2 Identify the main trends in religious belief and practice in contemporary Europe.

**Part two: Pre-Christian Ireland**

- 1
  - a. Name one place in your locality that shows evidence of religious belief in Ireland before Patrick.
  - b. Briefly describe the religious belief and/or practices that are believed to have taken place in this place.
  - c. Describe one devotional practice today that has its origin in pre-Christian times.

*or*

- 2
  - a. Name one pre-Christian place of national importance.
  - b. Briefly describe the religious belief and/or practices that are believed to have taken place in this place.
  - c. Give one example from an Irish myth or saga that gives an insight into pre-Christian religious belief and/or practices.



## SECTION J: RELIGION AND SCIENCE

**Part one : The scientific and theological enterprises**

- 1 Scientists and theologians both grapple with the 'big questions'. List 3 questions which might be common to both religion and science.
- 2 a. What does it mean to believe in 'God of the gaps'?  
b. How useful, do you think this image of God might be in the modern world.  
c. Present one alternative image of God and how briefly explain how this image might relate to science.
- 3 *'Science, like theology, needs to be seen as an activity of a community of motivated believers, holding core assumptions and testing out new possibilities'*

**Discuss this statement making particular reference to the importance of community in scientific enterprises.**

**Part two: The relationship between religion and science**

- 1 'Science is never done in a vacuum. It is always influenced by the world around it.' Briefly describe the world from which Galileo's ideas were born.

*or*

Briefly describe the main theories of Galileo.

- 2 a. Explain your understanding of 'ecological crisis' in the world today.  
b. Give a scientific perspective on this crisis  
c. Give a theologian's perspective on the crisis.
- 3 **Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection offered an alternative explanation to the religious argument from design. Explain why this caused such controversy with particular reference to the reaction of one major world religion.**

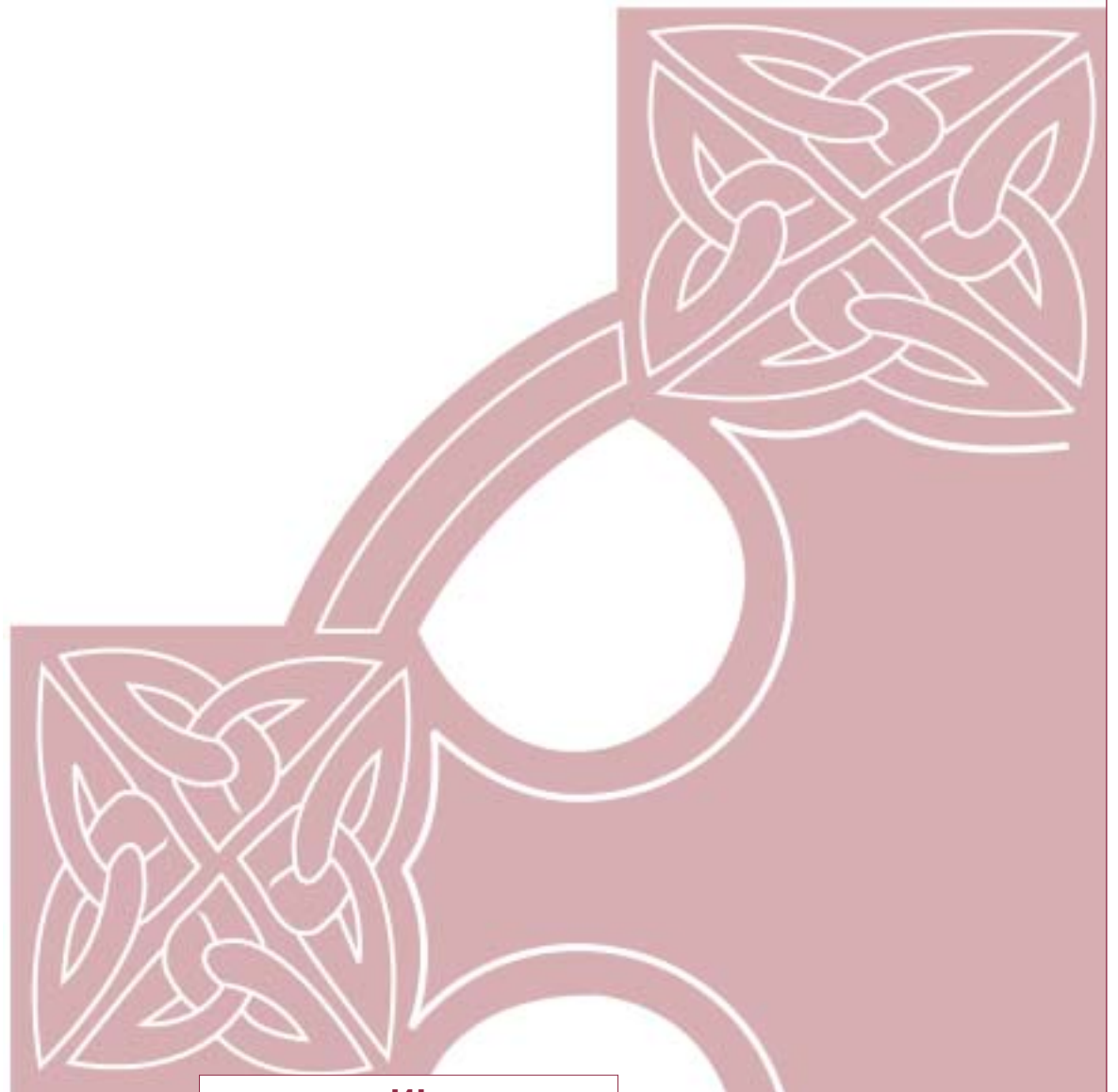
**Parts three and four: Current issues for religion and science – origins/life and death**

- 1 Compare a scientific and religious understanding of the moment of death. How might they be the same? How might they differ?
- 2 **Choose one of the following issues:**
  - **cloning**
  - **genetically modified life**
  - **the prolonging of life**
  - **the ending of life**

**Explain why religion and science may have differing views on this issue.**

# PART 5

## COURSEWORK



# COURSEWORK

The inclusion of coursework as an element of the assessment procedure for religious education in the Leaving Certificate examination arises from the nature of the subject. The development of skills of research, critical thinking, analysis and reflection are key objectives in the teaching of religious education at senior level. Coursework is designed to allow students opportunities to develop these skills further through detailed investigation of a chosen topic. Therefore coursework is an integral part of the Leaving Certificate religious education syllabus. Coursework links directly with the overall aims of the syllabus. While the coursework can support all the aims of the syllabus, it has particular relevance to the third aim:

*To identify how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live and continue to have an impact on personal lifestyle, inter-personal relationships and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts.*

Each year, two sections from part three of the syllabus are designated for coursework and a list of titles are issued by the State Examinations Commission. These sections of the syllabus will not appear on the examination paper. 20% of the total mark will be assigned to the coursework. Students must submit ONE piece of work.

## 1 Aims of coursework for Leaving Certificate religious education:

- to allow students an opportunity for personal engagement on an issue of interest or concern
- to develop students' knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes as outlined in the objectives of the section designated for coursework
- to provide an opportunity for students to engage in extended research, analysis and reflection on a chosen topic.
- to develop skills of research, analysis, evaluation, critical thinking, communication and reflection

## 2 The teacher's role in coursework

- Look at the coursework titles and see where they link to the syllabus. Pay particular attention to the objectives of the relevant sections of the syllabus as well as the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes and learning outcomes. It is these that will be assessed through the coursework.
- Identify how these titles might enable students to engage in research, critical reflection and analysis.

- Identify what you need to teach in order to facilitate the choice of course work titles.
- Teach those parts of the syllabus that you consider necessary. Remember that there may be overlap between coursework titles and another section of the syllabus that you have already taught or are planning to teach.
- The teacher may then
  - a Give students a full choice from the titles listed
  - b Give students a limited choice from the titles listed
  - c Suggest one topic be taken by the whole class. In taking this approach it is important to ensure that different approaches are taken to the topic.

In undertaking coursework, students may work individually, in groups or undertake an investigation as a whole class. However, each student must complete and submit an individual coursework booklet for assessment.

It should be kept in mind that students may choose a coursework title different than that of the class.

Possible kinds of approaches that might be taken in coursework include:

- description of an event or experience which students participated in
- a profile of the contribution of a person in a religious tradition
- trace the historical development of an organisation, a key idea, an issue or a school of thought that has influenced religious thinking
- set out contrasting approaches to an issue of theological concern and then come to one's own informed position
- a case study
- a survey: the coursework booklet would outline the aim of the research, the methodology used, and give a summary of the key findings/conclusions
- an interview or series of interviews: the coursework booklet would present the reasons for conducting the interviews, a summary of the views expressed with some relevant quotes and draw conclusions
- other.

### 3 What is the student expected to produce?

The coursework booklet is divided into of two components:

**Part A:** a summary of the students’ investigation of the title.

**Part B:** the student’s personal reflection on the learning, skills and experience gained through undertaking coursework.

Part B will be based on some of the following questions

- why this title was of interest to me
- questions that arose through doing the coursework on this title
- different perspectives I encountered on this title
- conclusions I have drawn from doing coursework on this title
- what has been the most valuable part of doing the coursework?

### 4 Format

Under the current regulations students must submit a hand-written coursebook. In the case where a student cannot write, an audio cassette or typewritten journal will be accepted. It is advisable to check with the State Examinations Commission concerning any future changes regarding the presentation of coursework.

### 5 Key skills to be developed through coursework

- Skills of research, including using computers, libraries, surveys or the media.
- Ability to select, analyse and evaluate information for a given purpose.
- Skills of critical thinking, including the ability to question the authority of different sources of information and the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Skills of communication: the ability to sort and edit information and make it one’s own, and the ability to present ideas concisely and cogently.
- Skills of reflection: the ability to reflect on one’s own learning and the effect of that learning on one’s ideas, attitudes and experience.
- The ability to interpret, contrast and evaluate different opinions/approaches to a topic (higher level students).

- The ability to develop counter-arguments (higher level students).

### 6 Criteria for assessment of Ordinary Level and Higher Level coursework

- 1 The Higher Level student will be expected to use a greater range of sources of information in competing the research component of the coursework.
- 2 The Higher Level student will be expected to show a greater depth of understanding of the title and approach it from a variety of perspectives.
- 3 The Higher Level student will be expected to show a greater capacity to reflect personally and critically on the learnings gained through coursework.

### 7 Assessment of coursework

Two sections from sections E, F, G, H, I and J are designated for coursework each year. Students must complete the coursework component of the examination. 20% of the total mark will be awarded on the basis of coursework.

Marks for coursework	
Ordinary Level	Higher Level
Part A - 10%	Part A – 10%
Part B – 10%	Part B – 10%
Length of coursework	
Ordinary Level	Higher Level
Minimum - 1,000 words	Minimum - 1,200 words
Maximum -1,500 words	Maximum -1,500 words

# SAMPLE TITLES FOR LEAVING CERTIFICATE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COURSEWORK

## Section E: Religion and gender

The changing roles of men and women through the ages in the development of a religious tradition.

The impact and contribution of one woman to the development of a religious tradition.

## Section F: Issues of justice and peace

Select **one** of the following and do a case study exploring the problem in terms of the way things are and why they are so:

- world hunger
- poverty in Ireland
- discrimination in Ireland.

‘Care of the earth is a concern for all major world religions.’ Explore this in relation to one environmental issue today.

## Section G: Worship, prayer and ritual

‘Ritual has always been used to mark moments of significance in human life.’ Explore this statement.

The origin and function of traditional prayers in **two** of the following world religions:

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism.

## Section H: The Bible: Literature and sacred text

The influence of the Bible on the life of **one** individual or group in the Christian tradition

Select a biblical text and explore how understanding the variety of literary genres found in the Bible is important for the interpretation and application of this text.

## Section I: Religion: the Irish experience

The pattern of religious belief in your community compared with the pattern of belief in Ireland as a whole.

Ireland has many archaeological sites with evidence of religious belief. Research **one** of these sites and describe the religious beliefs and or practices associated with it at the time of foundation and today.

## Section J: Religion and science

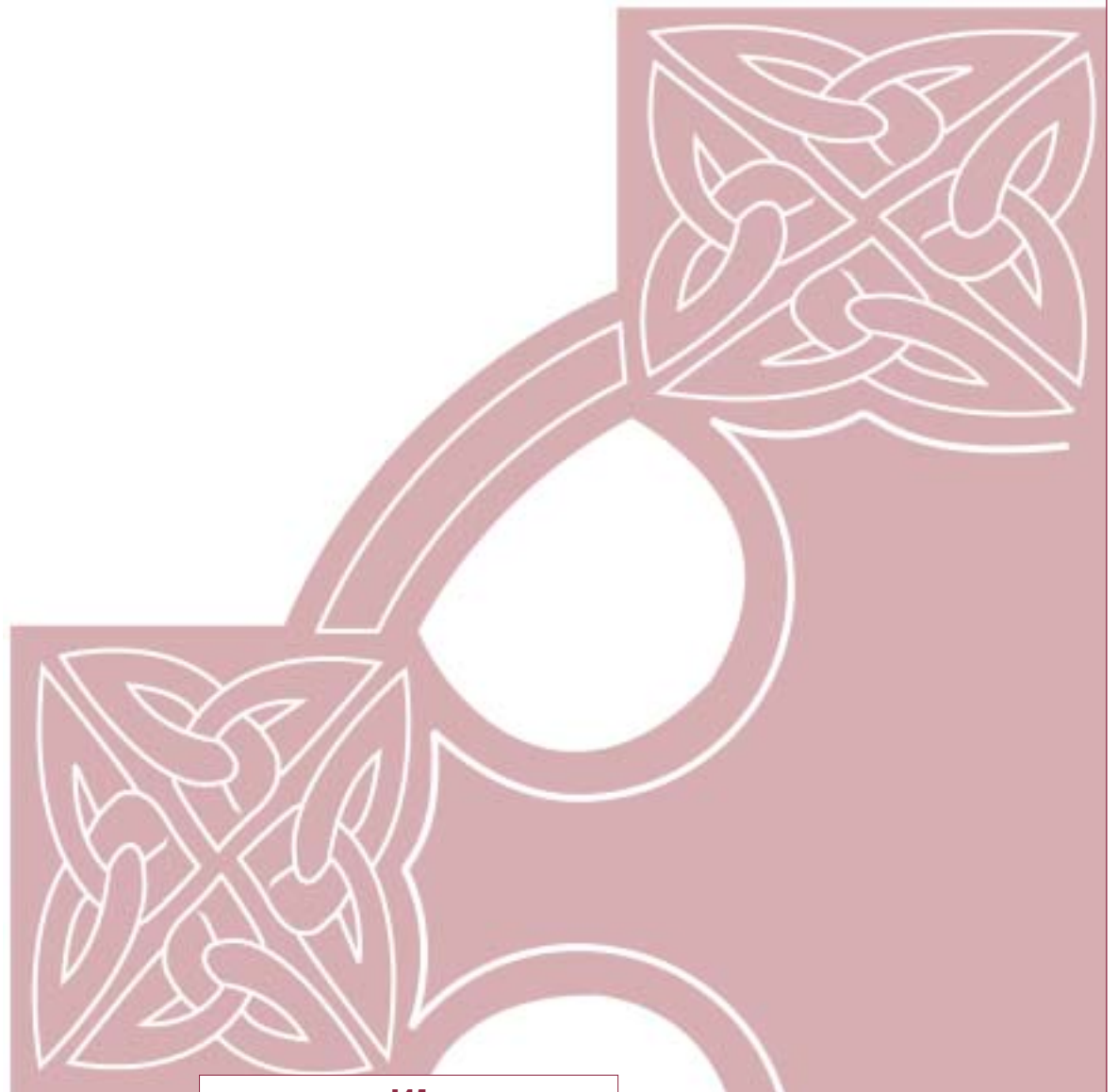
‘Both science and religion have objective and subjective elements in their approaches.’ Explore how this can be seen in the scientific and religious approaches to an issue of your choice.

Questions about the beginning and ending of life can involve dialogue between religious and scientific viewpoints. Profile how there can be dialogue between religion and science in relation to **one** of these questions.



# PART 6

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBSITES



A select bibliography for each section of the syllabus follows:

**SECTION A**

Cassidy, E. (2003) *The Search for Meaning and Values Into the Classroom Series* Dublin: Veritas

Delius, C. ed. (2000) *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Cologne: Konemann

Gaarder, J. (1995) *Sophie's World* London: Phoenix House

**SECTION B**

Freyne, Sean (2002) *Texts, Contexts and Cultures* London: Collins

Lane, Dermot (1975) *The Reality of Jesus* Dublin: Veritas

Liechty, Joseph & Clegg, Cecilia (2001) *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* Dublin: Columba Press

Norris, T. (2004) *Christianity: Origins and Contemporary Expressions* Into the Classroom Series Dublin: Veritas

Pelikan, Jaroslav (2000) *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* Yale University Press

**SECTION C**

Barnes, P. (2003) *World Religion*, Into the Classroom Series Dublin: Veritas

Beck, M. et al ed. (1997) *Exploring Religion* Australia: Oxford University Press

Brodd, J. and Wilt, M. (1998) *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery* Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press

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Hickman, C. & Meredith S. (2001) *The Usborne Internet-Linked Encyclopaedia of World Religions* London: Usborne Publishing Ltd.

Smith, Houston (1991) *The World Religions* Harper Collins.

**SECTION D**

Boyle, N. (1994) *The Challenge of God* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

Brown, C. (1998) *Crash Course on Christian Ethics* London: Hodder and Stoughton

Hannon, P. (forthcoming 2004) *Moral Decision Making*, Into the Classroom Series Dublin: Veritas

Hogan, Linda (2001) *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition*, Darton, Longman and Todd

Mc Namara, V. (1988) *The Truth in Love: Reflections on Christian Morality*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan

**SECTION E**

Cullen, S. (2004) *Religion and Gender*, Into the Classroom Series Dublin: Veritas

Wendle Moltmann, E. *Women in the New Testament*

Schussler Fiorenza, E. *In Memory of Her* New York, SCM Press

Reuther, R. *Sexism and God-Talk* London, SCM Press

**SECTION F**

Holland, J. and Henriot, P. (1980, revised edition 1993) *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* Washington DC: Orbis Books

Himes, Kenneth (2001) *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching* New Jersey: Paulist

McDonagh, Sean (1990) *The Greening of the Church* London: Chapman

See also a range of materials from the World Council of Churches.

**SECTION G**

Collins, P. (2000) *Prayer in Practice*  
Dublin: Columba Press

De Mello, Anthony (1986) *Wellspring: A Book of  
Spiritual Exercises* Garden

City, N.Y Image Books

Drumm, M. (1998) *Passage to Pasch*  
Dublin: Columba Press

O'Donnell, C.(2004) *Worship, Prayer and  
Ritual* Into the Classroom Series Dublin:  
Veritas

**SECTION J**

Barbour, Ian (2002) *When Science Meets  
Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners?*  
London: SPCK

Southgate, Christopher et al, (1999) *God,  
Humanity and the Cosmos: A Textbook in  
Science and Religion*  
Pennsylvania: Trinity International Press

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*Bridging Science and Religion*  
London: SCM Press

McCarthy F. and McCann, J. (2003) *Religion  
and Science* Into the Classroom Series Dublin:  
Veritas

**SECTION H**

Boadt, L. (1984) *Reading the Old Testament:  
An Introduction* New York: Paulist Press

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Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

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Veritas

**SECTION I**

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O'Duinn, S. *Where Three Streams Meet*

Walsh J.R. & Bradley, T. *A History of the Irish  
Church*

O'Dwyer, P. *Towards a History of Irish  
Spirituality*

Harbison, P. *Pre-Christian Ireland: From the  
First Settlers to the Early Celts*  
London: Thames and Hudson

Walsh, J. (2003) *Religion: the Irish Experience*  
Into the Classroom Series Dublin: Veritas

# A SELECT LIST OF WEBSITES

## General education

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning> - check out the religion and ethics section and world religions.

<http://www.educationguardian.co.uk>

<http://www.eblast.com> - encyclopaedia and links to web.

<http://school.discovery.com/>

<http://www.teachnet.ie> - check out the projects for religious education, both primary and postprimary

## Religious education

<http://www.galwayeducationcentre.ie> - a support service for Junior and Leaving Certificate religious education.

<http://www.antobar.ie> - a religious education resources site compiled by An Tobar, Marino College, Dublin.

<http://www.logos.ie> - web resources for Junior Certificate religious education.

<http://www.religiousresources.org> - a comprehensive listing of religious resources on the web.

<http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/gcsere/index.html> - The GCSE R.E. site with good resources on world religions, Mark's Gospel and Christian perspectives on life and living

<http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/> - The Religious Education Exchange Service founded by the Church of England provides good materials on world religions and on ethical and moral issues.

<http://www.theresite.org.uk> - an extensive range of resources relevant to religious education

<http://www.education.cant.ac.uk/renet> The website of RE Net with useful website links and resources

[http://cleo.ucsm.ac.uk/content/profpolicies/assessment/assessment\\_sheets/re/re.htm](http://cleo.ucsm.ac.uk/content/profpolicies/assessment/assessment_sheets/re/re.htm) - useful guideline questions for preparing students to visit a sacred place

<http://www.osb.org/liturgy/> - a good site on liturgy

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org> - all the mayor religious events and dates

<http://www.adherents.com> - up-to-date statistics about numbers and distribution of major religions.

<http://www.religioustolerance.org> - a site aimed at promoting religious tolerance, freedom and diversity.

<http://www.faithcentral.net.nz/inclass/history.htm> - a good site on Church history.

<http://www.mythicjourneys.org/big/myth/> - creation myths from around the world.

<http://www.silk.net/RelEd/lessonplans3.htm> - resources for Roman Catholic schools in the US.

<http://www.faithcentral.net.nz> - resources for Roman Catholic schools in New Zealand.

<http://www.refit.ucsm.ac.uk> - case studies showing how Information Technology can be used as a tool in R.E.

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion> - the section on sacred writings and stories contains a very comprehensive list of sacred texts that are downloadable.

<http://www.religion-online.org> - a collection of essays and books on topics of theology by reputable scholars.

**Churches and religious organisations**

<http://www.ireland.anglican.org>

<http://www.presbyterianireland.org>

<http://www.irishmethodist.org>

<http://www.ipag.com/quakers>

<http://www.catholicireland.net>

<http://cori.ie>

**Justice and human rights**

[www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

[www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)

[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

[www.oneworld.net](http://www.oneworld.net)

[www.developmenteducation.ie](http://www.developmenteducation.ie)

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

[www.bbc.co.uk/education/humanrights/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/humanrights/)

[www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net](http://www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net)





# APPENDIX 1

## PLANNING FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR SENIOR CYCLE



# PLANNING FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR SENIOR CYCLE

This optional framework for senior cycle religious education offers teachers who are not preparing students for the Leaving Certificate examination in religious education a structure within which to plan a programme of religious education for senior cycle.

There is a strong relationship between this framework and the syllabuses for Junior and Leaving Certificate religious education. Such a relationship should make for easier management of the optional examination subject in the senior cycle timetable. It also allows for a follow-through for those students who have taken the Junior Certificate course but have not chosen to take the Leaving Certificate course.

Because of this relationship, some sections are common to both the Leaving Certificate syllabus and the senior cycle curriculum. However, this framework offers considerably less detailed specification than the Leaving Certificate course. It is shorter, and offers more choice and scope for creativity for teachers and schools.

It is designed as a two-year framework, but can be extended to cover a three-year senior cycle if transition year is to be included.

Each section is presented in two parts. The first part sets out the topics to be covered in the section and the expected learning outcomes. The second part offers a range of possible *explorations* of each theme. It is intended that students would complete at least one of these explorations, but a teacher/school may decide to offer opportunities for students to pursue all explorations of a particular section.

The explorations have been carefully designed to offer opportunities and support for a variety of learner styles and methodologies including:

- group work
- project work
- self-directed learning
- investigations
- visits and speakers
- cross-curricular linkages
- the use of ICT, particularly the use of the internet.

This framework has been designed with particular sensitivity to the variety of contexts in which it may be used – religious, social, school ethos, etc. In exposing students to a broad range of religious issues, religious traditions and ways of understanding the human search for meaning, the framework can help contribute to the spiritual and moral development of students from all faiths and none. It can also help develop a healthy respect for the beliefs of others and an openness to dialogue in search of mutual understanding.

The use of exploration options at the end of each section will help schools to use the framework in a flexible manner and tailor it to suit both the particular ethos of a school and to the particular interests of students.

## **A curriculum framework for senior cycle religious education: an overview**

The framework is presented in eight parts and it is recommended that students study at least two sections each year. The selection and sequencing of the sections can be varied to suit teacher and student interests. However, it might be useful to use Section A as an introduction to the whole programme of work.

### **Summary of contents**

Section A - The Search for meaning

Section B – Christianity

Section C – Religious faiths in Ireland today

Section D – Morality in action

Section E – God-talk

Section F – A living faith – doing justice

Section G – Celebrating faith

Section H – Story

## **The assessment of religious education at senior cycle**

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It provides students with feedback on the progress of their own learning. It provides the teachers with information that will inform the planning and design of the next phase of learning. It provides parents with information on their child's progress at school. The first of these functions is particularly important. There is increasing evidence to suggest that the quality of the feedback presented to students may be a key factor in motivation and engagement. At senior cycle level, students can participate meaningfully in self-assessment and can be made aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as learners.

The framework for religious education for senior cycle has been designed to support both summative and formative forms of assessment. The outcomes can be used to generate written tests which teachers may wish to offer to students from time to time, especially at those times when similar assessments are provided for other subjects at senior cycle. The outcomes can also be used as a guide for the setting and assessment of homework.

The explorations in each section have been designed to give particular support for portfolio assessment which can be both formative and summative and which can provide, not only a rich source of information on the students progress in religious education, but a tangible record of achievement over the two or three years of senior cycle. Schools, or consortia of schools, may wish to provide a pro-forma religious education portfolio, which would add to the status of the portfolio itself and the process by which it was compiled.

<p><b>Section A</b></p> <p><b>The search for meaning</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To explore the human need to question and to identify the great questions.</li> <li>2 To explore some of the ancient and contemporary answers to the great questions.</li> <li>3 To identify the pattern of religious faith in response(s) to the great questions.</li> <li>4 To examine the place of religious faith in contemporary society.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>Searching</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contemporary expressions of the search for meaning.</li> <li>• The great questions concerning the goal and purpose of life, the meaning of good and evil and the experience of suffering.</li> <li>• Avoiding the search – the experience of indifference.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give some examples of the search for meaning in contemporary culture.</li> <li>• Describe the great questions and reflect on students’ own engagement with these.</li> <li>• Explain and give examples of indifference to the search for meaning.</li> <li>• Give examples of ways of escaping the search for meaning.</li> <li>• Read the testimony of someone’s search for meaning or invite someone to tell their story first-hand.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Thinking about searching – philosophy as a search for wisdom.</p> <p>B The search for meaning in art, music and film.</p> <p>C Reflecting on the search for meaning (types of prayer – using body, music, meditation, etc).</p>		
<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p><b>Symbol</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different kinds of symbols.</li> <li>• The importance of the symbolic in the secular and in the sacred world.</li> <li>• The power of the symbolic.</li> <li>• New symbols for a new age.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe different types of symbols.</li> <li>• Give examples of how symbols are used in religious and in the secular world.</li> <li>• Show the power of the symbolic to motivate, influence or inspire.</li> <li>• Identify new symbols and any relationship they might have to more ancient symbols.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Myth-making – investigate human beings as myth-makers past and present.</p> <p>B Cosmologies – the stories of the universe. Explore two modern cosmologies – e.g. big bang and the creationist cosmology.</p> <p>C Encountering symbols – visit places (both religious and secular) where symbols are important.</p>		



Topic 3	Content	Outcomes
<p><b>Religious faith – a response to life’s search for meaning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The meaning of suffering and evil as understood by a religious perspective.</li> <li>• Examples of people whose lives are influenced by their faith.</li> <li>• Spirituality – one’s way of life.</li> <li>• Contemporary expressions of a new spirituality.</li> <li>• The role of religious faith in Ireland today.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present a summary of perspectives on suffering and evil from two religious perspectives.</li> <li>• Show the power of religious faith in the life of a particular person or group of people.</li> <li>• Describe some features of contemporary spirituality.</li> <li>• Give examples of how religion continues to impact on the lives of people in Ireland.</li> </ul>

### Exploration options

- A Why do good people suffer? Investigate different answers to this question through literature. (For example, Elie Wiesel, *Night*)
- B People of faith – people of hope. Investigate persons or organisations motivated by faith and hope.
- C Survey patterns of belief amongst young people and compare with national trends.

<p><b>Section B</b></p> <p><b>Christianity</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To explore the historical context into which Jesus was born.</li> <li>2 To develop an understanding of the message and vision of Jesus in the context of his time.</li> <li>3 To examine the early Christian movement – its identity and vision.</li> <li>4 To investigate contemporary and historical attempts to return to the original vision.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>Jesus – his life and times</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The political, social and religious systems in Palestine at the time of Jesus.</li> <li>• Historical evidence for Jesus.</li> <li>• Different expectations of the Messiah at the time of Jesus.</li> <li>• Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God.</li> <li>• Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of God.</li> <li>• Jesus’ message in conflict with the establishment.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the political, social and religious systems in Palestine at the time of Jesus.</li> <li>• Give two historical sources for evidence of Jesus.</li> <li>• Explain different expectations of the Messiah at the time of Jesus – Priestly, Davidic, and Prophetic.</li> <li>• Describe the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus.</li> <li>• Outline the characteristics of the Kingdom as preached by Jesus.</li> <li>• Discuss why Jesus was seen as a threat to the establishment.</li> <li>• Explain why Jesus was put on trial.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Jesus a man of his time and place – an exploration of the Jewish context into which Jesus was born.</p> <p>B An exploration of Palestine then and now.</p> <p>C Exploration of the theme of ‘waiting’ (in music, film and student’s own lives).</p> <p>D The trial.                  Re-enact the trial of Jesus.                  Investigate different concepts of justice and law today.                  Research and discuss cases of miscarriage of justice in contemporary times.</p>		

<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p><b>The early Christian movement</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The death and resurrection of Jesus – a challenge to his followers.</li> <li>• The first Christian communities as seen through the writings of Paul.</li> <li>• Belief, behaviour and lifestyle of the early Christian communities.</li> <li>• Tensions within the community and with the wider world.</li> <li>• How did the community move from Palestine to Rome – key moments along the way.</li> <li>• Archaeological evidence of the first Christian communities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the response of Jesus’ followers to his suffering and death.</li> <li>• Explain the impact of the resurrection on the disciples.</li> <li>• Give an account of the beliefs, behaviour and lifestyle of the early Christian communities, using Paul’s writings.</li> <li>• Outline some sources of tension within the Christian community (e.g. inclusion of non-circumcised) and outside.</li> <li>• Give an account of key moments in the spread of Christianity from Palestine to Rome.</li> <li>• Give two examples of archaeological evidence of the first Christian communities.</li> </ul>
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**Exploration options**

- A Investigate non-biblical sources of Jesus’ death.
- B Research different religious understandings of resurrection and the after-life.
- C Explore the dynamics of Church-State relations – then and now.
- D Re-enact a moment of conflict within the early Christian community. Discuss it from different perspectives.

<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p>Returning to origins</p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Returning to origins as a pattern in religious and secular institutions.</li> <li>• The purpose and effect of rediscovering the founding vision.</li> <li>• Returning to origins as a pattern in Christianity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide examples of the contemporary trend to return to origins.</li> <li>• Explain the purpose of return and its effect.</li> <li>• Discuss at least two attempts at restoring the original vision of Christianity – e.g. Monastic movement of the 12th century, Luther, the Evangelical Movement in early 19th century Protestantism, the Second Vatican Council, Liberation Theology.</li> </ul>
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**Exploration options**

- A Explore in some detail one example of attempting to return to origins in Christianity.
- B Prepare a debate in class on the topic ‘Christianity has lost its way and needs to go back to its original vision’.
- C Interview an older person about the changes they have seen during their lives in a particular religious tradition.

<p><b>Section C</b></p> <p><b>Religious faiths in Ireland today</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To encourage respect and appreciation for the richness of religious traditions in Ireland today.</li> <li>2. To explore at least two major living religious traditions and to compare and contrast elements of these.</li> <li>3. To examine the emergence of new religious movements in Ireland today.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>Religion – a rich tapestry of beliefs</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious traditions in Ireland.</li> <li>• Religious trends in Ireland.</li> <li>• Living with diversity – opportunity or threat?</li> <li>• Interfaith dialogue.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research the number of different religious traditions in Ireland today and their origins.</li> <li>• Describe major religious trends in Ireland today.</li> <li>• Define what is meant by interfaith dialogue and discuss the nature and purpose of such dialogue.</li> </ul>

**Exploration options**

- A Debate the topic - ‘Religious diversity in Ireland will strengthen the faith of all’.
- B Survey your local area to find out what religious traditions are in evidence.
- C Use the internet to research the current state of interfaith dialogue. (See resource list for web addresses.)

<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p><b>A closer look at two major living traditions</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <p>Select two of the following – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• its origins, founder and location</li> <li>• its vision of salvation/liberation</li> <li>• its image of the human person</li> <li>• the way ‘Community’ is organised by each tradition</li> <li>• the role of ritual and celebration in each tradition</li> <li>• the place of women and men within each tradition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the internet to research the origins, founder and location of two major world religions.</li> <li>• Compare and contrast the vision of salvation/liberation proposed by each tradition.</li> <li>• Describe the understanding of the “human person” as presented by each tradition.</li> <li>• Give an account of how the community is organised at local and global levels.</li> <li>• Describe how the tradition celebrates key moments in life or seasons.</li> <li>• Present a comparison of the role of men and women in two world religions.</li> </ul>
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**Exploration options**

- A Invite a speaker to talk about his/her experience of living the faith.
- B Organise a class visit to a place of worship in consultation with the relevant religious leader.
- C Organise a web search to find out more about the major world religions. (See resource list for web addresses.)

<p><b>Topic 3</b></p> <p><b>New religious movements</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a cult?</li> <li>• What is a sect?</li> <li>• The relationship between traditional religions and new religious movements.</li> <li>• A study of one new religious movement including its foundation, major beliefs and lifestyle of members.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define ‘cult’ and give examples.</li> <li>• Define ‘sect’ and give examples.</li> <li>• Discuss why definitions are often contested.</li> <li>• Research one new religious movement that is active in Ireland today.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Organise a debate on the topic ‘One person’s cult is another’s religion. All religions begin life as cults or sects’.</p> <p>B New religious movements – threat or opportunity?</p> <p>C Discuss the characteristics of new religious movements that appeal to young people. Discuss how other faiths can learn from this.</p>
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<p><b>Section D</b></p> <p><b>Morality in action</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand the stages of moral development.</li> <li>To introduce students to a process for moral decision-making and consider the implication of these for personal decision-making.</li> <li>To understand the elements and context of moral decisions.</li> <li>To critically reflect on a range of moral issues from a religious perspective.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>Becoming moral</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why be moral?</li> <li>Historical perspectives on morality.</li> <li>Stages of moral development.</li> <li>Influences on moral principles: peers, family, media, culture, religion, etc.</li> <li>Conscience – how is it developed? What is an informed conscience? The role of religion in informing conscience?</li> <li>Personal and structural sin.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal reflection on key influences on personal moral principles &amp; decisions.</li> <li>Give examples which show morality as a natural phenomenon.</li> <li>Give examples and explain how our understanding of moral issues is evolving through history, e.g. slavery, child labour, death penalty.</li> <li>List the stages of moral development as outlined by one theorist.</li> <li>Define conscience and explain its role in decision-making.</li> <li>Define personal and structural sin.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Use newspaper and other media to trace a current moral debate.</p> <p>B Use newspaper and other media to find current examples of personal and structural sin. Also find examples of human beings acting in a way that is agreed to be ‘good’ or ‘moral’.</p> <p>C Trace the development of understanding on one moral issue over time, e.g. slavery, corporal punishment, child labour.</p>		
<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p>Morality and religious belief</p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the difference between the religious and moral person.</li> <li>Jesus ethical vision of ‘right relationship’.</li> <li>The influence of Jesus Jewish background on his moral vision – e.g. the golden rule.</li> <li>The Christian understanding of sin and reconciliation.</li> <li>The ethical vision of another faith tradition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State similarities and differences between a religious and a moral person.</li> <li>Give an account of Jesus’ understanding of ‘right relationship’.</li> <li>Discuss with examples how Jesus Jewish background influenced his moral vision.</li> <li>Discuss with examples how sin has personal, social and structural implications.</li> <li>Summarise the ethical vision of one major religion other than Christianity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Compare the golden rule as it appears in different religious traditions.</p> <p>B Explore how care for the earth is incorporated into the moral vision of one major religion.</p>		

<p><b>Topic 3</b></p> <p><b>Moral dilemmas</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process of moral decision-making.</li> <li>• Examples of moral decision-making in action.</li> <li>• The role of religion in moral decision-making.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest a process for mature moral decision-making in a moral dilemma.</li> <li>• Give examples of above taking two of the following:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- political or economic dilemma</li> <li>- interpersonal or sexual dilemma</li> <li>- an issue of medical and scientific ethics.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Explain the role of a religious perspective in moral decision-making.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A In small groups discuss how a moral decision-making process might be used in solving a number of different moral dilemmas.</p> <p>B View a contemporary film that addresses the theme of moral decision-making and discuss the different perspectives depicted in the film and what influenced them.</p> <p>C Keep a journal to identify own values and influences on personal decision-making.</p>		

<p><b>Section E</b></p> <p><b>God-talk</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To examine present image of God and compare to childhood image.</li> <li>2 To examine images of God in art/music/literature and contemporary culture.</li> <li>3 To examine images of God in two major religions.</li> <li>4 To explore images of God in scripture/sacred texts.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>My image of God</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My image of God.</li> <li>• Images of God in art/music/literature and contemporary culture.</li> <li>• ‘God of the gaps’.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critically reflect on own image of God.</li> <li>• Give examples of various images of God in art/music/literature and contemporary culture.</li> <li>• Be able to offer a critique of the ‘God of the gaps’.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Explore images of God in art, music or literature.</p> <p>B Explore different accounts of the origins of the universe from science and religion.</p> <p>C Compare childhood images of God with adolescent images.</p>		
<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p><b>Images of God in sacred text</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gendered images of God in sacred texts.</li> <li>• The relationship between images of God in sacred texts and the place of men and women in their traditions and worship.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research various images of God in sacred text.</li> <li>• Discuss the possible relationship between gendered images of God and the role of women and men in the tradition and worship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Explore a contemporary issue of justice and how different images of God might influence one’s understanding of that issue.</p> <p>B Trace the role and contribution of women in one Church tradition.</p> <p>C Organise a debate on the topic ‘When God is male then the male is God’.</p>		

<p><b>Topic 3</b></p> <p><b>God ‘in the bits’n pieces of the everyday.’</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implications of images of God for life.</li> <li>• Signs and rituals– special moments of God’s presence.</li> <li>• Non-Christian rituals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the relationship between one’s image of God and one’s view of life and relationships with others.</li> <li>• Outline a Christian understanding of sacraments</li> <li>• Give an example of a non-Christian ritual and explain its significance for followers of that tradition.</li> </ul>
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**Exploration options**

A Invite students to keep a journal noting times when they recognise the ‘more’ in the midst of the everyday.

Create a space for students to tell stories from their experience of these times.

B Invite students to participate in/observe both Christian and non-Christian ritual.

<p><b>Section F</b></p> <p><b>A living faith – doing justice</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To introduce the basic principles and methods of social analysis.</li> <li>2 To identify and analyse the links between religious belief and commitment, and action for justice and peace.</li> <li>3 To explore a range of justice issues from a religious perspective.</li> <li>4 To engage in action for justice as an expression of faith in action.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>Social analysis</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on one’s own situation and context in the light of questions of power, resources, meaning, values and relationships.</li> <li>• Identify key economic, political, cultural and social structures.</li> <li>• Explore how structures function to maintain the ‘status quo’.</li> <li>• Social analysis – a tool in religious and secular teaching.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Identify the most significant economic, political, cultural and social structures within own situation that influence             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the allocation of resources</li> <li>• the sources and types of power</li> <li>• key personal and interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• the meaning and value accorded to people and their situation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2 Be able to discuss how structural factors function to maintain specific inequalities e.g. poverty, gender, discrimination.</li> <li>3. Outline how a community of faith uses social analysis in addressing a contemporary justice issue.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A In small groups investigate different issues of discrimination today and their causes.</p> <p>B Media watch – look at reports in local and national newspapers to see how issues relating to poverty are reported.</p> <p>C Take a document issued by a community of faith and study how it uses social analysis.</p>		
<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p><b>Justice – at the heart of it all</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different secular understandings of ‘justice’.</li> <li>• Understandings of justice from different faith communities.</li> <li>• The Judeo-Christian vision of justice.</li> <li>• Jesus and justice.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to compare a secular understanding of justice with a religious understanding of justice.</li> <li>• Outline key features of the Judeo-Christian vision of justice.</li> <li>• Outline key characteristics of Jesus’ vision of God’s Kingdom.</li> <li>• Give examples of Jesus taking a stand for justice in his own context and relate it to an issue today.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Role-play a situation where Jesus took a stand for justice. Then discuss contemporary situations that might relate to this story.</p> <p>B Explore the relationship between justice and peace through case studies.</p> <p>C Research the lives of people who are working for justice.</p>		



Topic 3	Content	Outcomes
<p><b>Justice in action</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The link between justice and peace.</li> <li>• Is war ever justified?</li> <li>• Why are people hungry?</li> <li>• Human rights – God-given? (exploration of issues of racism, sexism, etc)</li> <li>• Care for the earth.</li> <li>• Organisations who work for justice from a religious vision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain and illustrate the relationship between justice and peace.</li> <li>• Summarise and critique the just war theory.</li> <li>• Explain the causes of world hunger and suggest a religious response.</li> <li>• Explain the link between human dignity and human rights in religious thinking.</li> <li>• Explain how racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination are contrary to religious living.</li> <li>• Explain how care for the earth is linked to religious faith.</li> </ul>

**Exploration options**

- A Using case studies discuss the statement ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere’. Martin Luther King Jr.
- B Organise a class visitor from an organisation working for justice and as follow-up decide on an action for justice that students can take.
- C Using the internet, books, films, etc. research the life of a person whom you admire because of their work for justice, peace or care for the earth.

<p><b>Section G</b> <b>Celebrating faith</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop an awareness of how prayer, ritual and worship have always been a part of the human response to life.</li> <li>To explore some of the expressions of prayer, ritual and meditation in a variety of cultures and religious traditions.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b> <b>The world of ritual</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human beings as ritual makers.</li> <li>Secular ritual in contemporary culture.</li> <li>Religious ritual in contemporary culture.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain the meaning of ritual.</li> <li>Name significant times and events in a variety of cultures which generate rituals.</li> <li>Name different types of rituals and give an example of each.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Survey the role of ritual in students own lives.</p> <p>B Research past and present places of ritual (e.g. go on a virtual tour of Newgrange).</p> <p>C Explore different means of expressing ritual – dance, drama, art.</p>		
<p><b>Topic 2</b> <b>Prayer</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploring prayer as a need to communicate with God.</li> <li>The nature and function of prayer.</li> <li>Examples of prayer from different religious traditions.</li> <li>Sacred spaces.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss why prayer is important in human life.</li> <li>Present examples of different kinds of prayer – petition, praise and thanksgiving, penitence, etc.</li> <li>Give examples of formal prayer from two religious traditions.</li> <li>Give examples from different religious traditions of sacred spaces and say what makes them sacred.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Celtic spirituality – why and how it has relevance today.</p> <p>B Prayer and politics - Can prayer be used as a political tool? Examine ‘god-talk’ in political discourse.</p> <p>C Allow opportunities for students to participate in/observe different types of prayer.</p>		

<p><b>Topic 3</b></p> <p><b>Meditation and contemplation</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The human need for reflection in a busy world.</li> <li>• The place of meditation in two major world religions.</li> <li>• The use of sacred and inspirational texts in meditation.</li> <li>• The use of mantra in meditation.</li> <li>• Origins and development of some contemplative traditions.</li> <li>• Some modern expressions of this tradition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss why reflection is important in the life of a young person.</li> <li>• Explain the term ‘meditation’ and describe its use in two world religions.</li> <li>• Experience how sacred texts and mantra are used in meditation.</li> <li>• Give an account of the origins of one contemplative tradition and its development.</li> <li>• Discuss how the contemplative tradition continues to have appeal.</li> </ul>
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**Exploration options**

- A Invite different people to talk to the class about ways of reflection/prayer.
- B Read selections from different authors from the contemplative tradition.
- C Create a sacred space/quiet space where students can experience stillness and reflection.

<p><b>Section H</b></p> <p><b>Story</b></p>	<p><b>AIMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To understand the power of story to communicate a truth on many levels.</li> <li>2 To explore the meaning of ‘truth’ in the Bible or another sacred text.</li> <li>3 To explore the transformative power of story past and present.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Topic 1</b></p> <p><b>Story</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who tells the stories?</li> <li>• What kinds of story dominate our culture?</li> <li>• Stories that carry meaning and have transformative power. Examples from contemporary culture. Examples from the sacred texts.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give examples of different kinds of story today</li> <li>• Describe features of a ‘classic’.</li> <li>• Share a story from your own experience that has meaning.</li> <li>• Show examples of the power of sacred text as story to motivate and inspire.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Find examples of contemporary story as parable, myth, ideology, satire, etc.</p> <p>B Form a book club in which everyone reads a “classic” and reports to the class.</p> <p>C Research case-studies that illustrate the importance of story in people’s lives.</p>		
<p><b>Topic 2</b></p> <p><b>What is truth?</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The meaning of truth in a world of relativism.</li> <li>• If it’s not “true” does it exist?</li> <li>• Truth and sacred texts.</li> <li>• Interpreting sacred texts with adult eyes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to define key concepts.</li> <li>• Understand difference between a scientific and religious understanding of ‘truth’.</li> <li>• Be able to give examples from own experience of different kinds of ‘truth’.</li> <li>• Be able to give examples from sacred texts of different kinds of truth.</li> <li>• Be able to summarise a contemporary approach to reading a sacred text.</li> <li>• Be able to read a sample of sacred/biblical texts with ‘adult eyes’.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Compare scientific notions of truth and concepts of truth found in poetry, music, religion.</p> <p>B Invite students in groups to read a selection of sacred texts and uncover the different layers of ‘truth’.</p> <p>C Invite a Scripture scholar to talk to the class about modern approaches to reading sacred texts.</p>		

<p><b>Topic 3</b></p> <p><b>God's unfolding story</b></p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God's story in many forms –the meaning of revelation in religious traditions.</li> <li>• Where is God speaking today?</li> <li>• All part of God's story? The student's story</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give examples from two major religious traditions of stories of God's revelation.</li> <li>• Explore different contemporary stories of God's revelation.</li> <li>• Be able to discuss how a religious interpretation of life can influence a person.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Exploration options</b></p> <p>A Review the newspapers over a week and identify all the stories that are of religious concern.</p> <p>B Look at different interpretations of God's revelation in contemporary writing, music, drama or film.</p> <p>C Keep a journal to make note of the places and times where a person might see/experience God's presence in own life or the life of others.</p>
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