

GCSE Religious Studies

B603 Revision Sheet (Ethics 1)

Part 1- Religion and Medical Ethics

Section 1- Christian Attitudes to Abortion

A few words on the “Sanctity of Life”

- You will need to know the meaning of the term “**Sanctity of Life**”. This is the belief that life is holy or sacred and that it belongs to God. Christians apply this idea to different moral issues.

What is abortion?

- Abortion is the ending of a pregnancy through unnatural means before the birth of the baby.

Why do Christians have different attitudes towards abortion?

- Because there is no direct teaching about abortion in the Bible, although there are many references to the sanctity of life that a Christian could use to make a decision about abortion.
- Christians therefore have different opinions because they can interpret these references differently.



What do different groups of Christians believe about abortion?

- All Christians are unhappy with the idea of a woman having an abortion.
- Absolutist Christians such as Roman Catholics believe that life begins from conception, or when the egg and sperm meet.
- Roman Catholics believe that abortion is therefore absolutely wrong, except when the life of the mother is in danger- this is called **the doctrine of double-effect** and means an abortion can be carried out to save the mother
- Roman Catholics would not agree with abortion if the woman was pregnant as a result of rape
- Pope Paul VI said- “**Abortion has been considered to be murder since the first centuries of the Church, and nothing permits it to be considered otherwise.**”

- Roman Catholics would definitely not consider poverty as a good reason for an abortion!
- Mother Theresa (a very famous catholic) said- ***If you do make a mistake, don't destroy the life... because also to that child God says: I have called you by your name, I have carved you in the palm of my hand: you are mine.***
- Other more liberal Christians (such as some members of the Church of England), might believe that life begins at viability (or the stage at which the baby can survive independent of the mother).
- A foetus, just like a person, has been created by God- in Jeremiah's case for a special purpose. Jeremiah was a prophet of God and this quote seems to give a foetus an equal status to a person- ***The Lord said to me, "I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:4-5***
- Some Christians see abortion as the murder of another human being, and this is something which the Bible expressly forbids- ***"Do not commit murder." Exodus 20:13.***
- In ***Genesis*** there is a short story describing the pregnancy of a woman named Tamar. Tamar's pregnancy was discovered three months after conception, presumably because it was visible at that time. Because she was a widow, without a husband, she was assumed to be a prostitute. Her father-in-law Judah ordered that she be burned alive for her crime. If Tamar's twin foetuses had been considered to have any value whatsoever, her execution would have been delayed until after their birth. There was no condemnation on Judah for deciding to take this action. (Judah later changed his mind when he found out that he was responsible for Tamar's pregnancy!)



Section 2- Christian Attitudes to Fertility Treatment and Cloning

What is fertility treatment?

- Fertility treatment is used when people want to have children but are unable to have them in the usual way.
- This may be because either the mother or father is infertile, they are in a homosexual relationship, or they have passed the natural age for childbearing but still want to have children.
- Fertility treatment can take many different forms depending on the problem that is preventing conception from happening naturally.
- Sometimes a pregnancy can be created using a form of fertility treatment called **IVF** which is “in vitro” or “in glass” fertilisation- this produces what is known as **“test-tube babies.”**
- IVF involves the egg and the sperm being brought together outside of the woman’s body, in a test tube, and then if conception takes place and an embryo is formed, the embryo is carefully placed back inside the woman’s body in the hope that it will continue to grow.
- Another method of fertility treatment is **Artificial Insemination**. Sperm is collected and placed in the woman’s uterus artificially.
- Sometimes, this is the husband’s sperm (this is called **AIH** or Artificial Insemination by **Husband**), but if the husband is unable to produce healthy sperm, or if the woman does not have a male partner, sperm can be used that comes from an anonymous donor (this is called **AID** or Artificial Insemination by **Donor**).



What are the different Christian opinions of fertility treatment?

- Fertility treatment, just like abortion, is an area where not all Christians agree.
- There is no teaching in the Bible which refers explicitly to fertility treatment, because it is something that was not possible in the time when the Bible was written; doctors did not have the technology.
- If people had no children, then they often were very unhappy, but there was nothing that they could do about it.
- Liberal Christians such as most members of the Church of England believe that if couples can be helped, with medical treatment, to have the family that they have always wanted, the treatment should be encouraged.
- They think that giving fertility treatment would be the most loving way to behave and shows **agape** (love for everyone), and will bring about the creation of new human life which is a good thing.

- It is following the example of Jesus as a healer and is keeping the commandment **The Golden Rule**, given by Jesus about treating other people in the way that you would like to be treated yourself- **"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."**

Matthew 7:12



- Other Christians, however, are not sure that fertility treatment is always acceptable.
- That if people have no children, this is God's way of saying that he has different plans for them and people should accept God's plan for them.
- In the Bible, if someone cannot have children, then this is believed to be God's decision- **"Hannah had no children... because the Lord had closed her womb."** (*1 Samuel 1:2,6*)
- In order to increase the chances of a successful pregnancy, many clinics that offer IVF treatment often fertilise more than one egg to try and create just one embryo that will grow properly in the mother's uterus.
- This creates "spare" embryos and if it is believed that these embryos count as "persons" individually created and loved by God, then destroying them is the same as murder.
- Methods of treatment (such as AID) that involve eggs or sperm from anonymous donors are also against the beliefs of some Christians because it can be seen as introducing a third person into a relationship, when God meant it to be between just two- this is seen as a **"mechanical adultery"** by Roman Catholics and could cause problems for the child in later life.
- The Roman Catholic Church teaches that artificial insemination is acceptable as long as it does not introduce a third person to the relationship.
- Fertility treatment also makes it possible for women to have babies when they have passed the menopause, and it is possible for women in lesbian relationships to have children.
- Some Christians believe that this is wrong because it is unnatural- people should not interfere with the natural process of creating life because this was designed by God and should not be tampered with.

What is cloning?

- Cloning is the "copying" of an organism.
- Christians believe that human beings are created in the image of God and, therefore, are unique.
- Human life is something to be valued and not treated like a commodity to be bought and sold- this could happen if cloning is allowed to continue and be developed- people may soon be able to replicate themselves!

What are the Christian opinions of cloning?

- Some people have promoted human cloning for the purpose of creating replacement organs for people in need of transplants who cannot find a suitable donor- this is known as “**therapeutic cloning**”.
- The thinking is that to take one’s own DNA and create a duplicate organ composed of that DNA would greatly reduce the chances of organ rejection. While this may be true, the problem is that doing so cheapens human life.
- The process of cloning requires human embryos to be used. While cells can be generated to make new organs, it is necessary to kill several embryos to obtain the required DNA. In essence the cloning would “throw away” many human embryos as “waste material,” eliminating the chance for those embryos to grow into full maturity- many Christians would have a huge problem with this: “***Do not commit murder*** *Exodus 20:13*.”
- The Methodist Church believes that it is right for scientists to try to learn more about diseases and conditions such as infertility and it accepts that using “spare” embryos” for medical research is important, and believes that this experimentation should be allowed, but only in the early stages, up to fourteen days after fertilisation.
- The Methodist Church is keen to be involved in committees which discuss the morality of new medical investigations.



Section 3- Christian Attitudes to Euthanasia and Suicide

What is euthanasia?

- “Euthanasia” literally means “a gentle, easy death.”

What does the Bible have to say about euthanasia?

- Christians believe that life is a special gift from God, and this affects all their beliefs about the body and the care it should receive.
- As a gift, it should be treated with respect and dignity, since it is unique and sacred (the “sanctity of life”).
- Through his actions and teaching, Jesus made it clear that everyone is valuable in the eyes of God.
- This is a guiding principle for Christians today. Death is seen as a stage in life, not necessarily the end of life, and to end it prematurely is against God’s plan- **“Surely you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you! So if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple.” Corinthians 3: 16-17**

What do Christians say about euthanasia?

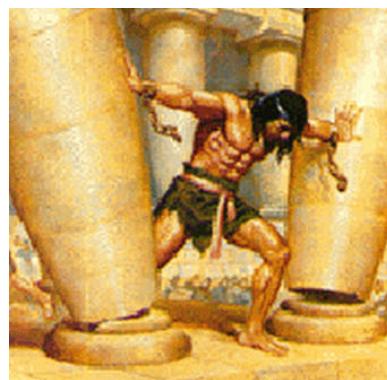
- Again, there are many different opinions on whether an individual has the right to end their own life, or whether people are merely “stewards” of their own lives and their life is really something that belongs to God.
- The Catholic view is that euthanasia is always wrong, it is never right to end someone’s life before it would naturally end.
- Instead, Catholics favour the Hospice Movement as an alternative to euthanasia.
- Hospices are shelters for the terminally ill where people can die in dignity. The founder of the Hospice Movement, a Christian called Dame Cicely Saunders said- **“Anything which says to the very ill or the very old that there is no longer anything that matters in life would be a deep impoverishment to the whole society.”**
- John Paul II, the previous Pope was also very much against the idea of euthanasia- **“Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God.”**



- In cases where a person is dying in extreme pain, Catholics may agree that the “**doctrine of double effect**” would come into play- relieving someone who has a terminal illness of their extreme pain may be a good and the most loving thing to do even if the outcome of giving a patient a large dose of a pain-killing drug has the side-effect of ending their life.

What do Christians think of suicide?

- Suicide is the ending of one's own life.
- There are many reasons why someone may choose to end their own life, for example because of mental illness, or worries over money or relationships.
- Most Christians believe that it is wrong for a person to make the choice to commit suicide, although at the same time they recognize that people who try to take their own lives have often gone beyond the stage where they are able to make sensible decisions.
- In a short passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul explains to the early Christians that they have a responsibility to look after their bodies because God lives in them- **“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s spirit lives in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16**
- Christians might use this passage in a discussion about suicide, to show that the body should be treated as a place where God lives- like a temple- and should be respected, not killed.
- On the other hand there is a story in the Bible where God seems to allow a person to end their own life.
- **In Judges** Samson the famous warrior had been taken prisoner and had been chained to the two middle pillars of a temple. He prayed to God for the strength to push them apart, thereby knowingly causing the collapse of the building, his own suicide and the death of people inside. The death toll exceeded the number of people that he had killed during the rest of his life -which was considerable. Samson had been blinded, and no longer wanted to live as a captive. And by causing his own death, he had a chance to destroy many of the enemy. This story seems to suggest that there are certain circumstances where God accepts suicide.



Section 4- Christian Beliefs about the Use of Animals in Medical Research

What do Christians believe about Animal rights?

- Many people feel very unhappy about the way that animals are reared, fed and slaughtered.
- They therefore become “vegetarians” and do not eat meat of any kind.
- Most people who do eat meat are beginning to ask questions about the way that the food industry treats animals. Can it be right to pen up animals and completely control their light, heat, ventilation, exercise and food intake as we do in factory farming?
- Over 250 million animals a year are used in research for medical and cosmetic purposes. Much of this research is carried out without an anaesthetic being used.
- People hunt and shoot animals for enjoyment. Fox- hunting and stag-hunting have been part of the English way of life for centuries.
- The Bible assumes that people will kill and eat animals. Amongst the many laws that God gave the Jews were those telling them how to kill and cook animals. This reflects the story of creation in the opening chapters of the Bible-
- ***“And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:28***
- No one has been quite sure over the centuries what the words “subdue” and “have dominion” were intended to mean.
- Later in the creation story, human beings are described as “stewards” of the earth and that suggests a rather different picture. A steward has delegated authority from his master to whom he is, in the end, answerable for his actions.
- “Subdue” and “dominion”, however, suggest power and that is certainly how people have understood their power in the past.
- Jesus called himself the “Good Shepherd”. It is very difficult to imagine God the Shepherd and Jesus, the Good Shepherd, approving of factory farming methods, cosmetic experiments being carried out on animals and hares and foxes being chased to a point of total exhaustion.



What is the Church teaching about animal rights?

- **Catholics** do not accept that animals have rights.
- Catholics focus on human duties towards animals. Animals, as our fellow creatures, should be a particular concern in our attitude towards creation. "**We owe them kindness.**" (*From the Catholic Catechism*)

Should Christians be vegetarians?

- Quakers were among the first vegetarians in the 19th century.
- Today many Quakers are vegetarian, but it is a matter of choice as it is for other Christians also.
- They have a larger proportion of vegetarians than other well-known denominations and at gathering of young Quakers the diet is almost exclusively vegetarian.

What other uses of animal are acceptable or unacceptable?

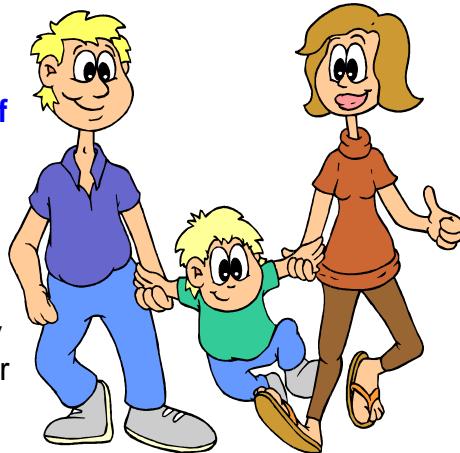
- The most controversial area of animal welfare for Christians is that of using animals for medical experiments.
- For over 100 years the Quaker Concern for Animals group has tried to influence other Quakers to resist using animals for medical research on ethical grounds.
- But Quaker doctors and researchers who use animals in experiments justify this on the grounds of the gain to human and animals in terms of knowledge.
- Official teaching of the Catholic Church tolerates the use of animals in medical and scientific experiments "**if it remains within reasonable limits**" and if this contributes to "**caring for or saving human lives.**"
- Catholics also believe that animals may be domesticated and used to help people in their work or leisure.
- Nearly all Christians are united in condemnation against using animals for researching cosmetics.



Part 2- Religion and Human Relationships

Section 1- The Roles of Men and Women in the Family

What are Christian views about the role of men and women in the family?



- Christians have different views about the roles that men and women should have within a family.
- Men and women, they say, are equally valuable to God, but they were created for different purposes.
- In the book of Genesis, the creation story tells how Adam was created first, and then Eve. Eve was made because God realized that it was not good for Adam to be on his own; he needed a companion- **The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable helper for him.” Genesis 2:18**
- Some Christians might say that this shows that women are meant to be helpers of men and are therefore inferior.
- In the Genesis story, Eve was the first person to sin, and she tempted Adam to copy her; so some Christians say that this shows women are weaker than men and more likely to do wrong. They might use this to argue that men should have the final say in the family if there are differences of opinion.
- In the New Testament, **1 Peter** (a letter written to a man named Peter) echoes these views- **“Wives... be submissive to your husbands... Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner.” 1 Peter 3:17**
- Most Christians believe that these views belong in the past, and say that they are not appropriate in modern society.
- They might argue that men and women were created equally and were both made in **“the image of God” (Genesis 1:27)**.
- Therefore there is no real difference between them and men and women should have equal responsibilities and opportunities.
- They might justify these beliefs by drawing attention to Biblical passages which say that Christianity means there are no important differences between men and women- **“There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28**

How should men and women behave in the church?

- Many Christians believe that everyone, men and women has a distinct role to play in the church; they call this the church family.
- Following Old Testament passages about the superiority of men, St Paul taught that women should be silent in the church- "**A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first and then Eve.**" *1 Timothy 2:11-13*
- Some Christians also suggest that because Jesus chose 12 men to be his disciples, he clearly intended men to take the leading role within the church.
- Roman Catholics believe that Jesus intended men to be the leaders of the church family and every Pope who has followed Peter has been male. Roman Catholics do not permit women to become priests.
- However, more liberal Christians look to the way which Jesus treated women in the Bible for guidance on the place of women in society.
- Jesus permitted women to be his followers and showed them respect.
- The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) shows Jesus encouraging a woman to sit at his feet in order to learn from him. This was not something women were usually allowed to do.
- After his resurrection Jesus also chose women to reveal himself to first-again showing that he held women in high regard.
- Therefore, less traditional denominations believe that men and women should have an equal role in the church family.
- The Church of England has allowed the ordination of women priests since 1994.



Section 2- Beliefs about Marriage

What do Christians believe about marriage?

- In the story of the Creation God makes Eve a partner for Adam. In this story the writers of the Bible have tried to show that they believed that it was God's intention from the very beginning that men and women should be joined together for life.
- The bond between a man and a woman creates new life when children are born, and in this way God's creation continues.
- The Bible makes it clear that marriage is to be taken very seriously and that men and women should stay faithful to their husbands and wives. One of the Ten Commandments is- "**You shall not commit adultery.**" **Exodus 20:14**
- The Church of England teaches that marriage is a gift from God, and in the Roman Catholic Church marriage is one of the seven sacraments, which means that it is one of the ways in which people can see a symbol of the bond God creates with people.
- In marriages, the love between a husband and wife shows something of the love of God. Christians believe that through marriage, they learn more about God, because God is love.

The Wedding Vows

I, N, take you, N,
To be my (husband/wife)
To have and to hold
From this day forward;
For better for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Till death do us part,
According to God's holy law;
And this is my solemn vow.

So what do Christians think about “civil” partnerships?

- A civil partnership is a relationship in which two people of the same sex make a legal commitment to each other which gives them the same rights in law as a married couple.
- **Roman Catholics** tend to frown this type of union and say that it is sinful for two people who are married to live together this way.
- Also, as marriage is for having children and this can't happen in a civil union, they are wrong.
- More liberal Christians (**Quakers**) say that God favours any form of partnership between two people as long as it is based on love and is monogamous.

What happens in a marriage ceremony?

- Christians believe that, ideally, marriage should be for life.
- In a Christian marriage ceremony, the priest or vicar begins by explaining that God created marriage, and that it symbolises the relationship between Christ and the Church.

- The bride and groom agree in front of the congregation that they are free and willing to marry each other, and then they make promises or vows. This shows that men and women should enter a Christian marriage of their own free choice, and not because someone has forced them into it.
- Christian marriages take place in churches and are performed by a priest, a representative of God in God's house to show that they are important commitments.
- The vows are the way in which the couple show their commitment to each other and express important Christian beliefs such as the idea that marriage should be for life and should be monogamous.
- After the vows have been said, the couple exchange rings- these represent the eternal nature of marriage.
- The bride wears a white dress, symbolising purity.



Section 2- Beliefs about Divorce and Re-marriage

What is divorce?

- A divorce is the ending of a marriage.

What do Christians think of divorce?

- The teaching in the Bible is not completely clear on the subject of divorce.
- In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches that a man is only allowed to divorce his wife if she has been unfaithful to him-
"But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."
Matthew 5:32
- In Mark's Gospel, divorce is not allowed at all under any circumstances- **"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery"** **Mark 10:11+12**
- **The Roman Catholic Church** teaches that married couples may live apart, if that is what they want to do, but they may not divorce.
- Catholics believe that marriage is a **sacrament**; it is a sign of something special and holy done by God, and it cannot be undone anymore than a baptism or taking part in a mass could be undone.
- **Roman Catholics**, therefore, cannot marry a new partner if their first husband or wife is still alive.
- But sometimes in serious situations, a marriage can be **annulled**, which means that it is agreed that the marriage bond never really existed, perhaps because one of the partners was forced into the marriage or did not understand what was happening.
- Members of the **Church of England** believe that if the couple sincerely believe that there is no possibility they will ever want to live together again, divorce can be allowed, and both partners are then free to marry other people.
- If either of them wants to marry a new partner in church after they have been divorced, then it is up to the vicar to decide whether they are taking Christian marriage seriously enough for this to be allowed.
- Some churches also run counselling services to help people who are thinking about separating or divorcing.



Section 4- Christian Beliefs about Sexual Relationships and Contraception

What are the Christian beliefs about sex?

- Many Christians believe that sex is only appropriate when it takes place between two people who are married to each other.
- This means that sex before marriage; homosexual relationships and affairs outside marriage are all considered to be wrong. They argue that the Bible teaches that the human body is a “**temple of the Holy Spirit**”.
- They might also say that God designed sex for a purpose- to create children and to strengthen the love between married couples. If sex is used only for pleasure and not for the reasons that God made it, then this behaviour spoils something that was supposed to be very special.
- Other Christians believe that these views are old-fashioned. They say that the main message of Christianity is love, and that sex is morally acceptable within any relationship that is committed and loving, whether or not the people involved are married to each other.
- Some Christians then, might accept sexual relationships between a committed homosexual couple, or between two people who are living together on a permanent basis, but they would still think it is wrong for people who have only just met to have sex or if they do not particularly care about each other or do not plan to stay together in a lasting relationship- this is **promiscuity**.

What do Christians think about “same-sex relationships”?

- Roman Catholics reject homosexual relationships as being deviant to what God wants people to practice. There are several passages in the Bible that condemn same-sex relationships- “**Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Neither the sexually immoral... nor homosexual offenders.**” 1
Corinthians 6:9
- In 2008 a Vatican official stated that “**Homosexuality is a disordered behaviour. The activity must be condemned,**” and the Pope told Catholics that homosexuality was a greater problem for the future of the world than climate change.
- However, more liberal Christians accept homosexual relationships as another form of loving relationship and permit same-sex couples to have a blessing ceremony after their civil ceremony if they wish.
- Members of the Church of England vary in their response. Some priests will agree to hold a blessing ceremony after a civil partnership and others will not.



What do Christians believe about contraception?

- Contraception is a method of avoiding pregnancy.
- The Roman Catholic Church teaches that artificial contraception is wrong.
- It is acceptable for Roman Catholics to use “natural methods” to plan their families, such as only making love at times of the month when a woman is at her least fertile, but it is not acceptable to use artificial methods such as the Pill or condoms.
- This is taught because Roman Catholics believe that the main reason why God created sex was so that children could be brought into the world, and they say that using artificial contraception goes against God’s plans.
- Some people, however, including some Church of England Christians, disagree with this teaching. They argue that it could sometimes be a good idea for people to use contraception, especially if they do not have enough money to support a large family.

