Edexcel GCSE Religious Studies
Unit 2 - Matters of Life and Death
Key Words

Sanctity of Life: the belief that life is holy and comes from God.

Abortion: the removal of a foetus from the womb before it can survive.

Quality of Life: the idea that life must feel like it is worth living.

Euthanasia: bringing about a premature but painless and gentle death.

Voluntary Euthanasia: ending life painlessly when someone in great pain requests death.

Non-Voluntary Euthanasia: ending someone’s life painlessly in their best interest when they are incapable of requesting death themselves.

Assisted Suicide: helping a seriously ill person to commit suicide.

Near-Death Experience: when someone about to die has an out of body experience.

Paranormal: unexplained things which are thought to have spiritual causes e.g. ghosts, mediums.

Reincarnation: when souls, after death, are reborn in a new body.

Resurrection: when after death, the body stays in the grave until the end of the world when it is raised.

Immortality of the Soul: the idea that the soul lives on after death.
Sanctity of Life (SoL): ‘Life is precious because God gave it, therefore only God has the right to take it.’

The Bible says, ‘God created Humans in His own image.’
Genesis 1:27

The Bible also says, ‘The Lord God formed man and breathed life into him.’
Genesis 2:7

Revision tip: including Bible verses as evidence helps secure HIGHER grades.
‘The Sanctity of Life’

‘Humans are made like God, so whoever sheds the blood of a man, by man will his blood be shed.’
➢ Genesis 9:6

‘You created every part of me, you knit me together in my mother’s womb.’
➢ Psalm 139:13
(also Jeremiah 1:5)

‘Do not commit murder.’
➢ Exodus 20:13

‘Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you. You do not belong to yourselves but to God.’
➢ 1 Corinthians 6:19

Top Tip: Quotes from the Bible are often seen as the best kind of evidence to show Christian belief.
The Sanctity of Life has implications in many areas.

- **Suicide:** We belong to God, life isn’t ours to take.
- **Abortion:** God creates life whilst it’s in the womb.
- **Capital Punishment:** It is for God to take a life not us.
- **Euthanasia:** We must preserve not destroy life.
- **War:** Can taking life ever be justified?
Life: When Does It Begin?

Conception: When the sperm meets the egg resulting in pregnancy.

Viable: When the baby is able to survive outside of the womb. Around week 24 of the pregnancy.

Heart Beat: When the heart starts to beat around week 9 of the pregnancy.

Birth: When the baby is born. Usually 40 weeks into pregnancy.
The Law and Abortion

The 1967 ‘Abortion Act’ states

**TWO** doctors must agree that **ONE** of the following is true:

- The mother’s **life** is at risk.
- The mother’s **physical** or **mental health** may be at risk.
- The wellbeing of an **existing** child may be at risk with the arrival of an **additional** child.
- There is a **substantial risk** the child may be born seriously **handicapped**.

The 1990 Act states abortsions cannot take place after 24 weeks unless the mother’s life is at risk.
Abortion: Whose Rights?

Pro-Choice (pro-abortion)

The belief that the woman should be the person to decide as it is her body.

- A woman should not be forced to go through with an unwanted pregnancy.
- Stopping abortions would make women turn to illegal ‘back street’ clinics.

Pro-Life (anti-abortion)

In favour of protecting the life of the foetus. The belief that life begins at conception.

- The foetus is a living growing thing. To destroy it is the same as killing it.
- True ‘choice’ would consider the choice the baby and father might make.
For (under certain circumstances)

The Sanctity of Life can be broken in justifiable circumstances such as war. Why not a justifiable abortion?

If a girl is raped she would be reminded of it every time she looks at the face of her child.

Jesus taught us to love our neighbour. Abortion may be the most loving thing to do in certain circumstances.

Against (under any circumstances)

Every person has a natural ‘right to life’. Taking away that life is to deny that right and the potential of that human life.

Life begins at conception, not birth or sometime in between.

Life is holy and belongs to God, only God has the right to end a pregnancy.

E.g. Methodist & Quakers

E.g. Catholics & Evangelicals

Christian views on Abortion
The word ‘Euthanasia’ comes from two Greek words:

‘Eu’ (meaning ‘good’) + ‘Thanatos’ (meaning ‘death’) = ‘A Good Death’

Or ‘The act of bringing about an easy and painless death.’

It is mainly seen as a release for those suffering with an incurable and/or degenerative disease, or for those who are in a ‘Permanent Vegetative State’ (PVS).
Within the UK there is currently no law that directly deals with euthanasia. However, the act of taking a life is dealt with under murder laws, and the 1961 Suicide Act states ‘A person who aids, abets, counsels or procures the suicide of another is liable to imprisonment for up to 14 years.’

**Voluntary Euthanasia**
- Voluntary euthanasia is carried out at the request, and with the full knowledge and consent, of the person who dies.

**Non-Voluntary Euthanasia**
- Non-voluntary euthanasia is ending the life of a person in their best interest when they are incapable of giving permission themselves.

**Assisted Suicide**
- Assisted suicide is where an individual provides the means for a terminally ill person to take their own life (e.g. Tablets/overdose).
Active Euthanasia:
Active euthanasia is a direct act of a doctor or other to end the life of an individual. e.g. giving a patient an overdose of painkillers such as morphine.

Passive Euthanasia:
Passive euthanasia is where treatment that would help a person live longer is stopped with the idea of ending the life. e.g. not using life support.

Some doctors may give painkillers to ease suffering knowing that the dosage needed would eventually lead to death. This is known as ‘Double Effect’ and is the only form of euthanasia the Catholic Church will agree to.

Under certain conditions, euthanasia is legal in The Netherlands, Switzerland and parts of Australia.
Arguments For Euthanasia

- Helping a person to end their suffering is the most loving thing to do.
- God has given us the ability to think for ourselves; we should therefore be able to choose.
- People should be allowed to die with dignity.
- People don’t want to be a burden.
- Keeping someone alive artificially with medicine and machines could go against God’s wishes by preventing their death.

Arguments Against Euthanasia

- Life comes from God. Only God has the right to give and take life, i.e. the ‘Sanctity of Life.’
- Suffering sometimes helps people feel closer to God and understand what Christ went through.
- Allowing euthanasia could be open to abuse e.g. murder disguised as euthanasia.
- There are alternatives such as palliative care available.
- There is nothing dignified about taking a person’s life.
**Precedent:** Legalising euthanasia in some circumstances sets what is called a ‘precedent’ for the future. In other words; to allow one now makes it hard to disallow others in the future.

**Right to Life:** Diane Pretty argued that with the ‘right to life’ came a right to reject life. The High Court in London said that the right to life was not the same as the right to die.

**Medical Society:** All doctors agree to attempt to save life at all costs, this is called the ‘Hippocratic Oath’. The British Medical Association (BMA) opposes the legalisation of euthanasia.

**Medical Implications:** Allowing euthanasia now for current medical conditions could create problems in the future after advances in medical science.

**Quality of Life:** People argue that having no quality of life is an argument for euthanasia. However, this argument relies on a personal idea on what ‘quality of life’ actually means.
A Christian doctor, Dame Cicely Saunders, started the first modern hospice, St Christopher’s, in 1967.

Patients can go to a hospice for short-term **breaks** as well as long-term **care**.

Hospices offer **palliative care**; that is treatment of the **symptoms** of an illness e.g. pain, **not** the illness itself.

A place where **terminally ill** people can live out the remainder of their life and be looked after in **comfort** and with **dignity**.

**Counselling** and support is available for **patients** and their **families**. Family support often continues afterwards.
Case Study 1: Robert & Jennifer Stokes

In 2003 Robert Stokes, 59, and his wife Jennifer Stokes, 53, flew to Zurich in Switzerland. They stayed in an apartment owned by a Swiss voluntary euthanasia organisation called Dignitas. At the request of Mr and Mrs Stokes, Dignitas supplied them with a lethal amount of a poison called Pentobarbital Sodium. On April 1st 2003 Mr and Mrs Stokes took the poison and as a result they both died. This kind of euthanasia is usually reserved for those with terminal illnesses, however, neither Mr or Mrs Stokes were suffering a terminal illness. Mr Stokes suffered from epilepsy and depression; Mrs Stokes suffered from a bad back and had bouts of depression. Mr and Mrs Stokes had their solicitor inform their family of their decision to die only after they were confirmed dead. Mr and Mrs Stokes believed that neither of them had a decent quality of life and neither wished to live without the other.
Case Study 2: Diane Pretty

In 1999 Diane Pretty was diagnosed with the illness Motor Neurone Disease (MND), an incurable disorder causing progressive weakening of the muscles. Death occurs through suffocation when the muscles that help breathing are paralysed. Diane Pretty lost almost all use of her limbs and was confined to a wheelchair. Due to weakening facial muscles, her speech was no longer understandable except by her immediate friends and family who became interpreters.

Diane Pretty, 43, had been married to her husband, Brian, for 23 years. Mrs Pretty wanted to be able to end her life before the disease did. As she was physically unable to commit suicide, Mrs Pretty asked the courts to promise that her husband would not face criminal charges if he helped her commit suicide. Mrs Pretty lost her fight with the courts and died of MND on May 11th 2002.
Christians believe in life after death for many reasons. The belief in the immortality of the soul leads them to ask ‘In what form will that be?’ It is the form that divides opinion.

The Bible talks about life after death, and the early Christian leaders including St Paul taught about life after death.

The church has always accepted and taught the belief in life after death even if opinions differ as to what form it takes.

Life after death gives a meaning and a purpose to the life we live now.

Jesus rose from the dead and he taught his followers that they would have ‘everlasting life.’ John 3:16
A Person Dies

The person's **body/Soul** remains in the grave until the 'Last Day'

Or

The person’s **spirit** goes directly to face God

God’s Judgement

**If the person is a Christian but is imperfect** due to unconfessed sin not yet forgiven

**Purgatory**: A place where sins of Christians can eventually be forgiven before heaven

**Catholics Believe**

**If the person is a Christian who has confessed** their sins and so been **forgiven** for them

**Heaven**: To be in the presence of God for eternity

**Most Christians believe**

**If the person is not a Christian**

**Benevolent God** saves **all** people

**Some Liberal Christians Believe**

**Pluralist God** saves all **religious** people

**Just God** saves all **good** people

Christian opinion is divided at this point.
Secular Views on Life After Death

Many people have non-religious reasons for believing in life after death.

**Near-Death Experiences**

- People claim to have near-death experiences when they are classed as clinically dead for a short period then revived. They often describe feelings of peace; out of body experiences; seeing a bright light; and even meeting deceased relatives.

**Paranormal Activities**

- Beliefs in ghosts and Ouija boards give some people reasons to believe that the spirits, or souls, of the dead live on. Mediums claim evidence for life after death by contacting people’s dead relatives and telling them things only their relatives could know.

**Reincarnation**

- Many people believe that after death the soul is re-born into a new body. The idea is found in many ancient mythological and pagan beliefs. People believe the memories of past lives can pass into a person’s current life offering evidence for life after death.
The issue of Euthanasia was tackled in the BBC film ‘A Short Stay in Switzerland’.

Julie Walters plays Dr Anne Turner, a retired doctor suffering from Supranuclear Palsy, a degenerative and debilitating illness. Dr Turner believed her quality of life was deteriorating to such a level she no longer wished to live with her condition. With the help of her three grown-up children she travelled to the Dignitas clinic in Zurich, Switzerland, where doctors gave her drugs to end her life.

GCSE questions in this section will focus on how an issue is dealt with and if religious people and their beliefs were treated fairly.

The film deals with the issue of assisted suicide and shows the moral dilemma faced by friends and family of Dr Turner. Although the viewer may feel sympathy for Dr Turner and her family the film is not biased one way or the other. The film makers clearly show assisted suicide is illegal in the UK but present the debate on legalising it fairly, with thoughts and opinions aired on both sides.
One particular scene in the film involves a religious friend of Dr Turner expressing her concern over suicide. Whilst her opinions are expressed passionately, she is not portrayed by the film makers unfairly as a fundamentalist, and both the woman and her religious views are treated respectfully.

Clare: I ask you this with some trepidation, may I pray for you.
Anne: Of course; yes. If it helps you.
Clare: I want it to help you.
Anne: You do I'm sure, and if it does, I'll be the first to let you know. But, we each have our own way of doing things - we will, as ever, beg to differ and respect that.

Dr Turner's friend, Clare, also offers to pray for Anne in order to offer her some spiritual comfort. Anne Turner is not religious and whilst she is happy for her friend to pray for her, she is clear it will not have the same meaning for her as it does for Clare. In showing this the film makers have again tackled a religious topic whilst respecting the spiritual beliefs of a religious character within the film.