1.11 The meaning of stewardship

Christians are commanded by God to have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:28) but also to care for it. This latter command is found in Genesis 2:15 where it says: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.’ The phrase ‘till it and keep it’ leads to the idea of **stewardship**. Humans have a responsibility to take care of the whole earth, and not exploit it for their own ends.

**Objective**
- Understand the concept of stewardship.
- Give examples of how Catholics can be good stewards at local, national and global levels.

**Key terms**
- **stewardship**: the idea that believers have a duty to look after the environment on behalf of God.
- **interdependence**: relying or depending on each other, as a change to one thing affects other things as well.

Pope Francis talks about the challenges of stewardship when he says:

> If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. **A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.**

*Laudato Si* 78

Christians must accept their **interdependence** with the rest of creation if they are to make meaningful efforts not only to change their own attitudes and actions, but to inspire other people to contribute to protecting the world as well.

There are many practical steps that Catholics can take to change their own lifestyles and challenge the attitudes of other people. Here are just a few examples.

At a local level, Catholics can:
- try to reduce the amount of unnecessary rubbish they produce in their homes

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

*1 Peter 4:10 (NRSV)*

God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church 340*
• recycle more waste
• use public transport, or walk or cycle more often
• take part in local environmental campaigns or projects.

At a national level, Catholics can:
• put pressure on politicians to support laws that protect the environment and endangered species
• support and buy products from environment-friendly businesses
• put pressure on companies to ensure that environment-friendly policies are followed, such as replanting trees whenever they are cut down to make products.

At a global level, Catholics can:
• put pressure on governments to support and implement the policies accepted at meetings such as Rio + 20 (a conference organised by the United Nations in 2012, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to work out how to tackle environmental issues)
• boycott or help to expose multinational companies that threaten the environment through their drive to make a profit.

Many people feel that there is no point in taking any individual action to help save the environment, as the actions of one person cannot make much of a difference. However, the whole world is made up of single individuals, and as long as individuals are working towards the same goals, progress will be made.

As the bishops of Southern Africa have stated: ‘Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation’. All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.

Pope Francis quoting the bishops of South Africa, *Laudato Si* 14

An environment-friendly church

In 2011, the Catholic church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and St Peter the Apostle in Hampshire, England, was opened. It includes a rain-water harvesting system and solar panels that help to heat and light the church. In this very practical way, the church is showing how carbon footprints can be reduced.

Activities

1. Explain what is meant by the term stewardship in reference to creation.
2. ‘For Catholics, supporting global action on the environment is more important than supporting local and national efforts.’ Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Catholic beliefs and teachings in your answer.

Discussion activity

Discuss whether it is possible to impose environment-friendly policies on everybody. Refer to Catholic teachings in the discussion.

Extension activity

Research what happened at Rio + 20. Find out what the outcomes of the conference were, and its effects on world attitudes and actions. Evaluate how useful Rio + 20 was.

Study tip

It is often easier to examine stewardship through practical examples, rather than just talking about it in the abstract.

Summary

You should now understand why the concept of stewardship is important to Catholics, and be able to give examples of how Catholics can be good stewards.
The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is a statement of faith that presents what Catholics believe:

\[\text{I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.}\]

This creed teaches the following about each Person of the Trinity:

God the Father

- God the Father is the almighty creator of all things, and the source of all life.

God the Son

- Christ is the ‘only begotten Son of God’. This means that the Son shares in the same nature as the Father in a unique way. God the Son was ‘born before all ages’. This means there was never a point when the Son did not exist.

- The Son is true God, ‘consubstantial with the Father’. This stresses the fact that there is no distinction in nature between the Father and the Son.

- The Son took on the limitations of human nature. ‘By the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary’ stresses the fact that God the Son, in Jesus, did not have an earthly father (but did have a human mother).

- God the Son became human out of love for people, to save humans from the eternal separation from God that is caused by sin. He suffered and died as a human being, fulfilling God’s promises in the Old Testament.
• Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where he takes his place as Son of God, as Judge and as Lord of all. Jesus did not become God at the resurrection. He had always been God but he limited himself to a human nature while on earth.

God the Holy Spirit
• The Spirit or breath of God gives life to all things.
• The Spirit comes from both the Father and the Son, uniting them in love.
• The Spirit is equal in majesty, power and worship to the Father and the Son.
• The Spirit inspires people to let them know the will of God.

Genesis 1:1–3
Belief in the Triune nature of God has given Christians a deeper insight into the first verses of the Bible:

**In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.**

*Genesis 1:1–3 (NRSV)*

This passage shows God to be the creator, but it also reveals how the Trinity shared in the act of creation:
• The word ‘God’ is referring to the Father. The Father is the creator, but he is not alone in his creative act.
• The Hebrew word *ru’ach* is here translated as ‘a wind from God’, but it could also be translated as ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’. The presence of the Holy Spirit was involved in the act of creation.
• God created by his word. God the Son is the Word of God, the creative power coming forth from the Father, but distinct from the Father and the Spirit.

God the Father, through God the Son (the Word of God), creates the universe through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Activities**

1. Explain what the Nicene Creed teaches about each of the Persons of the Trinity.
2. ‘The words of the Nicene Creed cannot help Christians to fully understand the nature of God.’ Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Catholic beliefs and teachings in your answer.

**Summary**

You should now understand what the Nicene Creed teaches about each Person of the Trinity, and understand how the Triune God created the universe.
The hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the Second Vatican Council

Objectives

- Know the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.
- Understand how the Second Vatican Council made changes to the Church.

Key terms

- **Second Vatican Council**: a series of important gatherings of all the Catholic bishops between 1962 and 1965, which updated many Catholic teachings
- **hierarchy**: a ranking system that gives structure to the Church
- **Pope**: the Head of the Catholic Church, the successor to St Peter
- **bishops**: high-ranking clergymen who have the power to confirm and ordain
- **ordained**: made a priest

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has a **hierarchy**: a ranking system that brings about unity and recognises people's authority and responsibility. At the top of the Catholic hierarchy is the **Pope** (the Bishop of Rome). He is the successor of St Peter, who was chosen by Jesus to be the leader of the apostles. The promise to Peter (whose name means 'rock') was:

> 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

*Matthew 16:18–19 (NRSV)*

The powers that Jesus gave to Peter have been passed down in an unbroken line to the present pope.

Below the Pope, in order of importance, are:

- **Cardinals**, who are appointed by the Pope. It is the task of the cardinals to elect the new pope when the previous pope dies or retires.
- **Bishops**, who are the successors to the apostles. Bishops are the heads of the local churches; they are responsible for an area called a diocese. Senior bishops, who have more responsibility, are called archbishops.
- **Priests**, who are **ordained** to administer the sacraments and to preach the word of God. Most priests look after a small area of the Church called a parish.
- **Deacons**, who are ordained to preach the word of God and to assist the priest. They can administer baptism, lead the celebration of marriage and perform funerals.
- **Lay people**, who are non-ordained members of the Church. They share in the priestly office of Christ through their baptism.

Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers, who are endowed with sacred power, serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God … may arrive at salvation.

*Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers, who are endowed with sacred power, serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God … may arrive at salvation.*

The college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff [the Pope], the successor of Peter, as its head.

*Lumen Gentium* 18, 22

Pope Francis and Cardinals attending a Mass
The Second Vatican Council

All authority in the Church lies with the Pope. However, the Pope sometimes wants to consult other members of the hierarchy and can do this both formally and informally. When the Pope wants to consult formally with all the bishops over issues that affect the whole Church, he might call a Council.

The last Council was the Second Vatican Council, summoned by Pope John XXIII, which met between 1962 and 1965. Pope John called the bishops together to ‘open the windows of the Church’. He felt that the Church had become cut off from the world and was too closed in on itself. The bishops made major changes to the everyday administration of the Church, including the forms of worship. They also reasserted the eternal truths held by the Church, but sometimes in a form of language that was easier for people to understand and appreciate.

The Council documents

Many of the documents that the more conservative bishops had drawn up for the approval of the Council were rejected immediately. Pope John ordered that the documents be removed and that new ones be produced that reflected a more modern approach to the Church and the world.

Pope John died in June 1963, but his successor Paul VI continued with the Council.

The Council produced four major documents:

- **Dei Verbum (The Word of God).** This dealt with the importance and the interpretation of scripture. The Council accepted that the books of the Bible were written at a particular time in different ways, and with different messages. It is people’s duty to take the messages from scripture seriously as they come from God, but Catholics should not read the Bible in a literal way.

- **Lumen Gentium (On the Church).** This dealt with the nature of the Church, the role of each of its members and the idea that the Church is the Kingdom of God on earth. The words *Lumen Gentium* mean ‘The Light of the Peoples’. The First Vatican Council had focused on the role of the Pope as infallible. *Lumen Gentium* stressed how all other members of the Church also have important roles to play. It emphasised the idea of the pilgrim Church moving forward, rather than being an immovable fortress that has to withstand the attacks of modern society.

- **Sacrosanctum Concilium (On the Sacred Liturgy).** This dealt with the way the liturgy and services needed to be changed to allow people to take a full part in the worship of God. This document called for a major revision of all forms of worship. This included allowing all Catholics to hear Mass in their own language, and to include aspects of their own culture in worship.

- **Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World).** This dealt with issues relating to family life, the development of culture, political and economic life, and peace and harmony between nations. The words ‘Gaudium et Spes’ mean ‘joy and hope’. The Church now sees itself as the guide to all people living in the modern world, responsible for and responsive to the challenges that modern technology, politics and economics offer. The Church is not separated from the world, but works in and through people’s lives.

Activities

1. Explain the Church’s hierarchy.
2. ‘All Catholics are equal.’ Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Catholic beliefs and teachings in your answer.

Discussion activity

Discuss whether you think the Church needs a pope.

Study tip

To understand the idea of a hierarchy, think about the structure within your own school or the local football team. Some people are needed at the top to make decisions on behalf of everybody else.
8.9 The festivals of Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha

The origins of Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha

It is said that when Muhammad arrived in Madinah, he noticed that some people were celebrating two specific days with entertainment and festivities. When he asked about this he was told that before Islam came to their city, they had celebrated two grand carnivals each year. Muhammad replied that God had appointed two other days that are better to celebrate, the days of Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha.

Id-ul-Fitr

Why is Id-ul-Fitr important?

Id-ul-Fitr (also written as Eid-ul-Fitr) means the ‘festival of breaking of the fast’. It has several other names including the Sugar Feast, the Sweet Festival or Lesser Eid. The festival marks the end of the month of Ramadan. Muslims are not only celebrating the end of a whole month of fasting, but are thanking God for the strength and help he has given them to fast for a month. Muslims also give thanks to God for providing his guidance and wisdom in the Qur’an, the first revelation of which was made during the month of Ramadan.

How is Id-ul-Fitr celebrated?

Id-ul-Fitr may be celebrated for one, two or three days. Muslims gather together in mosques or large outdoor areas to say special prayers. The imam’s sermon usually reminds Muslims that they should forgive and forget any differences or disputes that have occurred during the year, and focus instead on helping the poor.

Everyone wears their best clothes or new clothes for the occasion, and homes are decorated. Special foods are eaten and processions take place through the streets. There is a festive atmosphere, and cards and presents are exchanged.

Although Id-ul-Fitr is not a recognised national public holiday in Britain, in areas where many Muslims live they may be granted the day off to attend morning prayers and enjoy the festival. Many also go to their local cemetery to remember family members who have died and to pray for them.

Id-ul-Adha

Why is Id-ul-Adha important?

Id-ul-Adha (also written as Eid-ul-Adha) is the festival of sacrifice or Greater Eid. It is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah, and lasts for four days.

Women decorate their hands with henna for Id-ul-Fitr
Chapter 8  Islam: practices

Summary

You should now be able to explain the origins and meanings of Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha, and describe how these festivals are celebrated.

Activities

1. Give two other names for the festival of Id-ul-Fitr.
2. What are Muslims celebrating during Id-ul-Fitr?
3. Explain how Id-ul-Adha is celebrated in Britain today.
4. Why do you think that many Muslims in the UK prefer to make the sacrifice of giving money rather than meat to the poor?

Study tip

Remember that Muslims are not only celebrating but also making a sacrifice, as Ibrahim did, by giving meat or money to their neighbours, friends and the poor.

Extension activity

Use the internet to find out more about the celebration of Id-ul-Adha by pilgrims on Hajj. Record any similarities or differences that you find between the celebrations that take place during Hajj and those that take place elsewhere.

Links

Hajj is described in detail on pages 200–203.

Celebrating Id-ul-Fitr

Sumaiya, from Luton in England, recounts her experience of Id-ul-Fitr: ‘Preparations for Id-ul-Fitr begin the night before with the women decorating their hands and feet with henna. Baklava and special biscuits, called finger biscuits, are also made.

In the morning the men go to the mosque to attend a special Id prayer and the women will usually stay at home to put on new outfits. Throughout the day different family members visit each other and guests will be given drinks, biscuits and baklava, and the children are usually given toys as gifts.’

This festival remembers and honours the prophet Ibrahim, who was willing to sacrifice his son Ishmael on God’s command. The Qur’an 37:100–112 records how Ibrahim had a recurring dream in which God told him to sacrifice his son. Ibrahim loved his son dearly, but decided he must obey God’s command, provided his son agreed with him. Ibrahim informed his son and his son replied that he must do what God had told him.

However, as Ibrahim was about to carry out the sacrifice, God prevented it and gave Ibrahim a ram to sacrifice instead. He had passed the test of being willing to carry out God’s commands.

How is Id-ul-Adha celebrated?

This festival forms part of Hajj, but is celebrated by Muslims all over the world. In Britain, it is a time of celebration when people visit family and friends, and enjoy festive meals. It begins with prayers in the mosque, where the imam preaches a sermon about sacrifice and reminds those who attend why the festival is celebrated.

During Id-ul-Adha animals are slaughtered to remember Ibrahim’s sacrifice. On Hajj many pilgrims sacrifice an animal, but this is not allowed in Britain. Instead some British Muslims buy an animal from their local slaughterhouse. This animal will have been killed in a certain way, following Islamic law. The family usually keeps a third of the meat, gives another third to relatives, friends and neighbours, and the remaining third is given to the poor. However, many in Britain prefer to give money instead of meat to support those in need.

Cards and presents are given and community celebrations are often organised. Those living on their own receive invitations to share meals with their neighbours. Those in hospital receive lots of visitors as every effort is made to ensure that no one is left out.
10.2 Interior features of a synagogue

- **The prayer hall**
  The prayer hall of a synagogue is usually rectangular in shape, often with seats on three sides facing inwards towards the bimah. The fourth side includes the focal point of the synagogue – the holy Ark (Aron Hakodesh). The prayer hall will contain a seat for the rabbi and a pulpit from where sermons are delivered. Most halls also have a seat for the chazzan (a trained singer) who leads the prayers.

  Patterns, Jewish symbols or extracts from the scriptures may be used as decoration, but pictures of the prophets or other human beings are not, as that would break the second commandment not to have idols.

- **The Ark (Aron Hakodesh)**
  The Ark (Aron Hakodesh) is regarded as the holiest place in the synagogue. This is because it is where the sacred Torah scrolls are kept and because it represents the original Ark of the Covenant. Jews believe that the original Ark was created to hold the stone tablets which contained the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses at Mount Sinai. This Ark was eventually taken to Jerusalem and placed in the Temple built by King Solomon, and was the focus of Jewish worship. In many synagogues Jews are reminded of this because above the Ark there are two stone tablets on which the start of each of the Ten Commandments is written.

  The Ark is situated at the front of the synagogue, usually set into the wall facing Jerusalem (the eastern wall in British synagogues). This means that when worshippers face the Ark, they are facing towards the city where the Temple once stood. The Aron Hakodesh is usually reached by climbing up steps, as a reminder to worshippers that God is above his people and that the sacred Torah is above humanity.

**Activities**

1. Name three features that can be found in the prayer hall of a synagogue.
2. Explain the importance of the Aron Hakodesh (Ark) in the synagogue.
3. Explain why the ner tamid is kept burning at all times.
4. Describe the bimah and explain its purpose in worship.
5. Explain how features in the synagogue’s prayer hall are reminders of the Temple in Jerusalem.
The Ark itself is an ornamental container or cupboard that houses the handwritten Torah parchment scrolls (Sefer Torah). It is only opened during special prayers and when removing the Torah to read during services. The remainder of the time it is covered with a curtain called the Parochet. This symbolises the curtain that was in the Temple in Jerusalem.

“[He] brought the ark inside the Tabernacle. Then he put up the curtain for screening, and screened off the Ark of the Pact – just as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

Exodus 40:21

Every action involving the Ark is full of ceremony and it is considered an honour to be the person who climbs the steps, opens the doors and parts the inner curtain so that the Torah scroll may be removed.

■ The ever-burning light (ner tamid)

Each synagogue has a light that is kept burning at all times. It is placed in front of, and slightly above the Ark, and is called the ner tamid (eternal flame or ever-burning light). It symbolises God’s presence and so is never put out. It is also a reminder of the menorah that was lit every night in the Temple in Jerusalem. Originally synagogues used an oil lamp, but now most use electric lights with an emergency power source in the event of an electricity cut.

■ The reading platform (bimah)

The bimah is a raised platform situated in most synagogues in the very centre. It is used when reading from the Torah and often by the person leading services. When the Torah scrolls are being read, the bimah is the focus of worship, and the raised platform makes it easier for the congregation to hear what is being said. To some it is a reminder that the altar was the central feature of the courtyard of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Discussion activity

In pairs or a small group discuss and evaluate the following statement: ‘The ner tamid is the most important feature of a synagogue.’ Give reasons for and against this statement.

Study tip

Make sure you are familiar with the Jewish terms used to describe the features in a synagogue, and are able to use them appropriately when answering questions.

Research activity

Look up Exodus 25:10–22 to find details of the original Ark of the Covenant.

Extension activity

Find out about the connection between the ner tamid and the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

Summary

You should now be able to describe the interior features of a synagogue, and explain their function and importance.
Catholic teaching on equality

The foundation for Catholic teachings about the equality of women and men comes from the Bible. God made both man and woman in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:27):

"The human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; **both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree**, both are created *in God's image*. This image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being, is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents, to their descendants."

*Mulleris Dignitatem 6*

The belief in the equality of women and men is stated constantly in Church teachings. However, the Church also stresses that equality is not the same as uniformity.

"In the ‘unity of the two’, man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist ‘side by side’ or ‘together’, but they are also called to exist mutually ‘one for the other’.*

*Mulleris Dignitatem 7*

The Church believes that women and men cannot be the same and yet be mutually supportive. There are differences between men and women that are obvious in their physical traits but which also occur in many aspects of their psychology, responses and actions. The fact that men and women are not identical is a very positive factor as it enables each of them to reinforce the other, and to value the gifts and qualities that are more prominent in the other.

The Church teaches that women and men have different roles in life, which each individual plays out in their own way. When a man and a woman unite, they create a natural bond that strengthens and completes them as individuals and as a couple. This is highlighted in the physical union of sex but it also applies throughout their whole relationship.

"The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different."

*Mulleris Dignitatem 10*
Man and woman were made ‘for each other’ – not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be “helpmate” to the other, for they are equal as persons … and complementary as masculine and feminine. 

_Catechism of the Catholic Church_ 372

The Catholic Church believes that the differences between men and women must be respected, as these differences are essential to a healthy appreciation of all that life has to offer. The Church does not place men higher than women or women higher than men; it stresses that women and men have different yet complementary roles to perform. Men and women are to be valued for what they are and for what they contribute to the family and to the world. Both are irreplaceable.

God endowed men and women with identical dignity as persons. Both men and women are human beings created in God’s image and children of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ. It is just as unchristian as it is inhumane to discriminate unjustly against someone because he is male or female. **Equal dignity and equal rights, nevertheless, do not mean uniformity.** The sort of egalitarianism that ignores the specific character of a man or a woman contradicts God’s plan of creation.

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**Contrasting views**

While few people would argue against the Catholic Church’s teaching that men and women are equally important, many would argue that this does not mean men and women should have different, predefined roles. For example, the Catholic Church does not allow women to be priests, and believes the mother should be allowed to fulfil her role in the family of looking after the home and children.

Many people in Britain today would view this as sexist, as they believe that treating women as equals means allowing them equal opportunities. Some would argue that men and women are equally capable of fulfilling the same roles; others might argue that even though women and men overall may be suited to particular roles, this does not mean that individuals should be expected to fulfil particular roles or denied the opportunity to fulfil others.

**Activities**

1. Explain what the Catholic Church teaches about the equality of men and women.
2. ‘The Catholic Church is trying to cover up its sexist attitude with meaningless explanations.’ Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Christian beliefs and teachings in your answer.

**Research activity**

Research one situation where women have demanded equal rights to men, such as the right to equal pay or the right to vote. How do you think Catholic teaching would apply in this situation?

**Study tip**

Think about how men and women are treated. Does this suggest they are equal or identical?
Contrasting views on fighting poverty

The duty to take action on poverty

The Catholic Church teaches that Christians should always be aware that they are part of the Body of Christ on earth, and that they have a duty to help care for the whole Body. When one part is hurt, the other parts should take action to support it. Similarly, Christians who have more money are expected to support those who are not as well off.

For Christians, there is no point in claiming to love your neighbour at the same time as ignoring people in need. James 2:15–17 and 1 John 4:20 are two passages in the New Testament that stress this point.

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

James 2:15–17 (NRSV)

The Church teaches that love is not shown in words but in deeds. It is therefore important for individual Christians to take actions to help reduce poverty. This might either involve directly helping those in poverty, or trying to tackle the root causes of poverty.

Directly helping the poor

One way to help overcome poverty is by giving money and aid to the poor, either directly (for example to homeless people on the streets) or through charities that support the poor (such as the Salvation Army).

Some Christians refer to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37), in which Jesus praised the man who came to the help of the person who had been beaten up on the road. They believe that by giving money and support to those living in poverty, they are following Jesus’ example and are likewise being Good Samaritans.

Some argue that it is important to show compassion and kindness towards the poor through providing direct help, and that trying to give them access to their basic human rights is a responsibility that should be shared by everyone. Some acknowledge that poverty is often a result of unfortunate circumstances and bad luck, and know that if they ended up in a similar situation they would also want and need other people’s help.

Most people who live in poverty desperately wish to become self-sufficient but lack the initial means to do so. Charities such as the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) and the Salvation Army help by providing money, support and aid to the poor to help them escape poverty.

Objectives

- Understand why Christians believe it is important to take action against poverty.
- Understand different opinions about how best to solve poverty.

Study tip

A good parallel here might be to think about how the other players in a football team have to work harder in a match to compensate for a friend who is playing while injured.

Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

1 John 4:20 (NRSV)
■ Tackling the root causes of poverty

Some argue that providing the poor with limited basic needs – such as spare change to homeless people on the street, or sacks of grain to farmers in Africa – only helps to keep them in the poverty trap, and makes them reliant upon whoever is giving out the aid. It does not solve the problems causing their poverty, or do enough to help them to get out of poverty.

Poverty is a complex global problem that has many causes, from how society is structured to environmental issues such as drought. Some people think it is more important to direct their energies towards solving these underlying causes of poverty, as this is the only way to completely put an end to it. While some might argue that poverty is a problem that can only really be solved by governments and organisations with power, there are ways that individuals can help. For example:

- There are many multinational companies who abuse their power by paying poor wages so they can make a profit. If people boycott these companies and make their reasons known to others, this could force the companies to change their policies and pay fair wages. Once people have a fair wage, there is less likelihood of them being stuck in poverty.
- Organisations such as Fairtrade ensure that workers receive a fair amount of the profits from the sale of their goods. If a greater number of people paid a little bit extra for Fairtrade products, this would help more people in the developing world to become self-sufficient.

■ The responsibility to help those in poverty

Who is responsible for poverty: those who live in poverty themselves, or the social systems that have caused their poverty? Some would argue that most people are in poverty through unfortunate circumstances that are a result of how society works, therefore it is society’s responsibility to help them. Others think that more responsibility should be placed on the individuals in poverty, either not to get into poverty in the first place or to make more of an effort to improve their situation.

To take just one example: a homeless person on the streets has an alcohol addiction. Is this purely the fault of the homeless person, who should take the responsibility to stop drinking in order to spend his money on more important requirements? Or is the addiction the result of his desperate situation, making it unfair to expect him to solve his addiction before society has helped him out of his poverty?

Activities

1. Explain why Christians think it is important to take action against poverty.
2. “The poor have a responsibility to get themselves out of poverty.” Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Catholic beliefs and teachings in your answer.