

# IMAGO DEI



## WORD BANK

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

**Sanctity of life**: The Christian belief that life is precious or sacred because it has been given by God.

**Dignity** - Being worthy of honour or respect

**Destiny** - The events that will happen to someone

## Source of Wisdom and Authority

*'Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end...'*  
(Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258)

*'Then God said, Let us make mankind in our own image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; Male and female he created them.'* (Genesis 1:26-27).

*'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat from it you will certainly die.'* (Genesis 2:16-17)

*'Her dignity is that of her creation, seeing that she is in the image of God.'* (The Dialogue of Divine Providence)

*'In that same mirror of the goodness of God, the soul knows her own indignity, which is the consequence of her own fault.'* (The Dialogue of Divine Providence)

*'You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her.'* (The Dialogue of Divine Providence)



## Why is human life special?

The fact that humans appear to be the only creatures capable of using reason to make moral decisions, has led many people, whether they are religious or not, to believe that human life has more value than other kinds of life and is precious. For those with no religious faith, life is special because it is the only life we have.

For Christians, human life has special value because they believe that each person is unique because God made them and there is no one quite like them.

Sadly we know this when those we love die, because they leave a space that can't be filled by anyone else. We might have another sister, son or friend but they can't ever replace the person that we have lost. **All Christian denominations believe that human life is special and a gift from God.** The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred (holy) and the everyone has a right to life which should be protected and valued at every stage.

## The creation of humans in both Genesis accounts is different to the way that we are told that other living things are created for three main reasons:

### NUMBER 1:

Humans are special. In Genesis 1, it states that humans were not just created by God but in his image.

*'Then God said, Let us make mankind in our own image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; Male and female he created them.'* (Genesis 1:26-27).

### NUMBER 2:

In Genesis 2, God creates Adam from the earth and breathes life into him so that he can live.

These accounts demonstrate that the creation of humans was unlike the rest of creation because they were made in a unique way and most importantly in the image of God. The Latin term for 'in the image of God' is imago Dei. Catholics believe that since only humans have been made in God's image, they, therefore, have a special DIGNITY which should be recognised in everyone that they meet whatever their gender, colour, status or belief.

### NUMBER 3:

Humans have an immortal SOUL which has come from God and will go back to God, so their DESTINY is to share eternal joy with God in heaven.

Humans have freedom to make moral choices. In Genesis 2, it says:  
*'And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat from it you will certainly die.'* (Genesis 2:16-17)

## Catechism of the Catholic Church

Both of the Creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 describe how God planned and made the world. Everything that exists does so because God created it, including plants and animals and his final creation, humans, who were his most important.

**'Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end...'**

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258)



This means that God is involved in the process of conception...whether an egg is fertilised or not lies in his hands! It also means that God is the sole being who can end human life.

## Non-religious views about the value of human life

Most human beings are in agreement that human life is special and worthy of protection.

**'The child, by reason of its physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguard and care, including appropriate legal protection before as well as after birth.'**

(United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

## Fundamentalist Christian views

For religious believers, human life is considered to be sacred or holy because it has come from God. This idea is known as the sanctity of life. Since all life originates from God and is precious, it should be valued and protected, not destroyed.

## LIFE IS SACRED BECAUSE...

✓ **ORIGIN:** Life is a gift from God ~ it originates from Him so is holy.

✓ **DIGNITY:** Humans are made in God's image and have immortal souls (immortal means they will never 'die').

✓ **DESTINY:** The goal of this life is eternal joy with God in heaven.

## Knowledge Check



1. Define the key concept: Imago Dei
2. Define the term: Sanctity of life
3. What does the following quote mean: *'Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end...'*  
(Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258)
4. According to the book of Genesis, why are humans different to any other living beings that were created?
5. Give three reasons why life is sacred
6. What is the name of Catherine of Siena's text about imago dei?
7. What does Catherine of Siena mean when she says that looking at God is like looking in a mirror?
8. What are the three main messages that come from *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*?

## Choose a Task



1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

### CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

## Exam Question



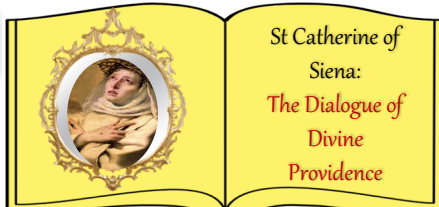
*b) Describe Catholic belief on the teaching of imago Dei [5]*

*c) Explain from two different religions/religious traditions belief in humanity as created imago Dei [8]*

## St Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue of Divine Providence

In her Dialogue, she said that when we know we are made in the Image of God (IMAGO DEI), it gives our soul a great dignity and we should be thankful to God for this.

St Catherine said that **looking at God is like looking in a mirror**. A mirror shows up our imperfections clearly ~ they are the first thing we see! Looking on the perfection of God highlights our soul's imperfections to us clearly. We are clearly stained, compared to His purity. Catherine ends her Dialogue by proclaiming her surprise and delight that God loved humans so much that he made them with dignity, worth and the possibility to experience His great goodness.



There are **three** important messages that come from St Catherine's writing:

Her most famous work is called *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* and is a conversation between God and a soul trying to make *her* way to God. The soul is referred to as 'her'. This is a Latin tradition.

## Humans originate from God

In the same way that children originate from their parents or your reflection in the mirror originates from you:  
**'Her dignity is that of her creation, seeing that she is in the image of God.'** (The Dialogue of Divine Providence)

## Love

St Catherine reflects that the reason that humans have been made with such dignity in the image of God is because he loves them immeasurably. He created them out of love.

**'You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her.'**



## Conscience

When we look in a mirror we see our face, the good and the bad; freckles, spots, wrinkles! Since humans have God's truth in their lives, they have an inner conscience that tells them when their actions are right or wrong, just like looking in a mirror:



**'In that same mirror of the goodness of God, the soul knows her own indignity, which is the consequence of her own fault.'**