



Creation: primary teachers' guide

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Introduction

This guide, produced by Westminster Abbey, contains key information on Christian beliefs about Creation, to support the delivery of Religious Education within your classroom.

Westminster Abbey has a distinctive role within the Church of England, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, and it stands outside the normal jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. It is instead a 'Royal Peculiar', which was a status granted in 1560 by Elizabeth I, under which the Dean and Chapter are directly answerable to the Sovereign. A monastery from 960 until the Reformation, the Abbey still deeply values insights from the Rule of St Benedict and its inheritance, not least St Benedict's injunction to be a 'school of the Lord's service.'

This resource discusses Creation in broad terms based on Christian teachings. All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

The seven days of Creation

The beginning of the first book of the Old Testament of the Bible (Genesis 1-3) explains to Christians how the heavens and the earth were created, with a day-by-day explanation. There is a poetic style to the telling of the Creation story. This is particularly seen as Genesis 1 uses the literary device of repetition of the phrase "And God saw that it was good". You may find it helpful to read the full passage out loud.

On the first day, God created light.

"God saw that light was good; and God separated it the light from the darkness." (Genesis 1:4)

On the second day, God created the sky.

"So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome." (Genesis 1:7)

On the third day, God created land, seas, plants and trees.

"And God said, Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." (Genesis 1:9)



On the fourth day, God created the Sun, Moon and the stars.

“God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars”. (Genesis 1:16)

On the fifth day, God created creatures that live in the sea and creatures that fly.

“So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.” (Genesis 1:21)

On the sixth day, God created animals that live on land and humans.

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

On the seventh day, God finished his work, rested and blessed the seventh day. The seventh day is known as the Sabbath. It is a day of rest, recreation and worship, echoing the day of rest that God took after creating the world.

“So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in Creation.” (Genesis 2:3)

It is important to note that Genesis is firstly Hebrew scripture. This story is holy for both Jews and Christians. Christianity and Judaism share a scriptural explanation about how the world was created and the belief that humans beings are created in the image and likeness of God (also known as Imago Dei).

The role of humans

The Bible teaches that humans have an important part to play in caring for the earth that has been created and willed by God.

In Genesis 1, the voice of God explicitly outlines the role that humans have on the earth in relation to other creatures.

“Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26)

Dominion means to rule over nature, which in one literal interpretation might suggest that humans have the right to use nature for their own benefit. However, many Christians interpret this verse as God giving them stewardship of the wider natural world. As God created the earth, Christians believe that it belongs to Him, so instead they take on a steward, or caretaker role. Humans are part of the natural world, rather than separated from it or simply above it. For this reason, many Christians are committed to care for the environment.

On the sixth day, God created humans in His image and likeness, making humanity distinctive and ‘the crown of Creation’. Christians therefore believe that humans have certain characteristics including a conscience and the ability to love, which mark them out as unique in the created order. The divine image and likeness rests within the human soul. Made in His image, Christians also believe that this



gives humans the capacity for a special relationship with God. Christians believe that Jesus is the Second Adam, through whom humanity is able to share this unique relationship.

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The first humans – Adam and Eve

Genesis 2 introduces a second Creation story. This includes more details about the creation of humans. Here, Christians are introduced to Adam and Eve, who live in the Garden of Eden. They are also introduced to the tree from which Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat; ultimately their disobedience leading to the Fall, and therefore to original sin.

First, Adam was created by God and placed in the Garden of Eden. The action of God breathing life into Adam is seen by Christians as the creation of the soul; a non-physical, spiritual concept that connects them with God that lives on after a human dies. The soul is where the image of God resides and it is the soul which allows humans to have distinctive characteristics such as a conscience.

“The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7)

Then, God explains that Adam can eat from any tree except one.

“You may eat freely of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Genesis 2:17)

Genesis 2 concludes with the creation of Eve, symbolically made out of one of Adam’s ribs, to provide company and help for Adam.

“And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:22)

God as Creator

In Genesis 1-3, Christians are introduced to the concept of God as creator. Along with the belief that God created everything in the world, these verses also teach Christians that:

God is all-powerful (omnipotent)

Christians learn that everything from sky to land, from animals and fish to human beings, was created by God out of nothing (or ex nihilo). Previously, “the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep.” (Genesis 1:2)

God is infinitely good (omnibenevolent)

At the end of the sixth day, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good”. (Genesis 1:31)

God created human beings with the purpose of sharing the earth with them



As well as giving humans dominion (Genesis 1:26), after God creates humankind He “blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’” (Genesis 1:28). This narrative also reveals God as the Father.

At this point in the scripture, Genesis teaches Christians that Creation is complete and God takes delight in the world

Christians learn that “the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.” (Genesis 2:1), which led to God resting on the seventh day.

In St Paul’s letter to the Romans in the New Testament, Christians also learn that God’s creative nature is eternally loving

“Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.” (Romans 1:20)

Interpretations of the Creation Story

Some Christians interpret the Creation story literally, meaning that they believe the events happened exactly as they were written in the Bible. However most Christians either see the Creation story as inspirational or metaphorical, believing that the Bible was inspired by God but written by people who may use different words or phrases to express what happened, making it more open to interpretation. The writers of Genesis were not attempting to write what we think of as modern science, but instead were trying to express the truth about an intricate and beautiful creation, willed and loved by its creator, in poetry.

When explaining that some Christians interpret the Creation story in an inspirational or metaphorical way, it is essential to emphasise that Christians still believe it to be true. The Bible was compiled across many centuries from a variety of oral and literary traditions, and events described within the linguistic, geographical and scientific knowledge of that era. As a sacred text, the use of symbolism does not undermine the truth of what it teaches Christians about God and the world He created. Instead, metaphor and symbolic language communicate truth in a different way.

Inspirational or metaphorical interpretations of the Creation story encourage Christians to believe in God and scriptural revelation, whilst fully accepting modern scientific discoveries and research. In terms of the Big Bang, Christians can believe that God was the cause of it and simultaneously interpret Genesis 1-3 as an explanation of what God is like and why human beings matter to Him. Equally a more metaphorical interpretation means that Christians can believe that God created the world and creatures in it but not in the six-day timeline described. Instead it can be understood that the “day” might be a translated of a period of time, which could reflect the process of evolution.

Science and religion need each other. Westminster Abbey celebrates the achievements of scientists most prominently in the north east corner of the nave, where some of the most eminent names in biology, physics, chemistry and astronomy are remembered. These include the graves of Sir Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, and most recently the ashes of Professor Stephen Hawking. These scientists are celebrated and memorialised at Westminster Abbey for their scientific work regardless of



their personal beliefs. However, we believe very strongly in the interdependence between theology and science. Science and religion are friends, not enemies, both in search of the truth. Science may tell us 'what'; Christians believe that their religion tells them 'why.'

Finding out more

You may also wish to look at our other [Christian beliefs teaching resources](#).

For further reading, we'd recommend the following:

Alister McGrath *Born to Wonder* and *The Dawkins Delusion*

John Polkinghorne *Science and Creation*