

# The sanctity of human beings – young and old



We have learned how babies grow and develop in their mother’s womb before birth. Science and religion agree that every human being is unique and different.

Observe the person sitting next to you in class. Take a few minutes and list the differences between the two of you.

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Review the list. Have you just thought of physical differences that you can see, or have you also included the different likes and dislikes, or the different talents that you have?

Science can explain **how** all these differences come about. Our faith though explains **why** we are different.

Read St Paul’s message to the Christians of Corinth:

*Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.*

*For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, “Because I am not a hand, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not keep it from being a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, “Because I am not an eye, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not keep it from being a part of the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. There would not be a body if it were all only one part! As it is, there are many parts but one body.*

*All of you are Christ’s body, and each one is a part of it.*  
**1 Corinthians 12: 12-27**

What message do you think St Paul is trying to convey in this letter to the Christians in Corinth?

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St Paul is emphasising the belief that Christians have always had: namely that each individual human being is created by God, is unique, and God has a special plan for them.

God's care for us extends to our earliest time, in the womb:

*You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because you are to be feared; all you do is strange and wonderful. I know it with all my heart. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew that I was there – you saw me before I was born. Psalm 139: 13-16*

So God's relationship with us begins in the womb. God tells Noah in the Old Testament that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God and that murder is a terrible sin. Christians therefore see each human life as sacred and talk about the sanctity of each human life from their very start at fertilisation.

However, this belief in the sanctity of each human life is not restricted to Christians. It is widely held.

- Doctors in Ancient Greece 500 years before Christ took the Hippocratic Oath when they qualified pledging to protect their patients and not to give them any “deadly drug”.
- Muslims believe in the sanctity of every human life. Their holy book Al Qu'ran says: “Whosoever has spared the life of a soul, it is as though he has spared the life of all people. Whosoever has killed a soul, it is as though he has murdered all of mankind.” *Qur'an 5:32*
- Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and other major religions also teach that each human life is sacred.

Throughout history, the sanctity of every human being whatever their age has been rejected by evil people, as the powerful exploited others more weak and vulnerable than themselves.

Exploitation of the weak by the strong takes place in all countries, including ours. How as members of a civilised society do we uphold the sanctity of each and every human life?

Think about the people and area you know: family, friends, school, church, mosque, synagogue and temple, town or village.

Circle all the statements below that you think show how we value human life as sacred, made in the image of God.

- We provide food and other emergency supplies to people in need in other countries when crops fail.
- We enjoy ourselves at our friend's parties.
- We laugh at our favourite television programmes.
- We have a police force and courts to arrest and punish people who attack, injury or kill other people.
- In the school playground if we see bullying we try to stop it or tell a teacher.
- We provide help to make sure that people who are disabled are able to live a full life.
- We spend our pocket money on sweets and other stuff we enjoy.
- We have doctors and hospitals to cure people who are ill.
- Expectant mothers are given extra help because of their unborn baby.

Everything on the list is good in its way, but hopefully you could spot how the belief in the sanctity of human life affects the way we all treat other people.

