

Year 6 (Age 9-10)

General Theme: Ethics Faith and Reason

Module 1 (1st term) Faith and Reason

Module 2 (2nd term) Faith and Moral Values

Module 3 (3rd term) Reason and Moral Values

General Introduction

The three modules of the Year 6 programme are intended continue with the programme in Yr 5 on 'Living with Difference' by taking the pupils deeper into the three different religions identified as being the most significant for Maltese history and society, namely Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The purpose of this programme is to help them understand the three religions and the aspects of their beliefs and doctrines as they are translated into their diverse moral outlooks in a basic way. The programme also introduces the pupils to secular humanism, which is also a reality in Maltese society grown stronger in recent decades. Secular humanism is, however, dealt with separately and left to the last, to Module 3, since the religions, as all of them religions of the book with much in common despite the fundamental differences between them, are taken together in Modules 1 and 2. Indeed the emphasis on the teacher's part, given that the programme continues with the subject of living with difference, is on what they share in common. Secular humanism, on the other hand, is a radically different outlook because it makes no reference to God or religion. The reason it is taken separately is not just this but also because it will be the hardest for pupils with a strong faith outlook to consider let alone to understand and tolerate. The ability to live with people with a secular outlook is, however, essential for them in a part of the world where this outlook is common, an accepted and respected reality (stronger in some Western/European societies than in others).

The thinking behind the Yr.6 programme is that since the main purpose of the programme is to educate pupils into a tolerant outlook towards others for the purpose of peaceful and collaborative co-existence discussed and promoted in the Yr.5 programme the pupils should have the basic information and understanding of the different outlooks that are featured in it. The differences between them were already described in the Yr.5 programme in very general terms as being historical and geographical. The object now, in Yr.6, is to take this observation further by actually describing the outlooks to the pupils so that they can understand for each what it is, what it stands for, and where it comes from. Given that the programme is an ethics programme what it is after ultimately is to explain the different outlooks in moral terms. This is not possible, however, without the context, the central elements and characteristics of the belief or religion being described. Evidently tolerance does not necessarily require understanding, but understanding is likely to make tolerance easier. For this to happen, however, the point that difference is not generally speaking due to the misinformed stubbornness of the other in resisting my truth (due to the other being evil or in bad faith) but to the fact that, for reasons of social culture and upbringing, s/he sees the truth different from me, must be emphasised by the teacher.

The emphasis on understanding conditions how the programme is conducted pedagogically where the teacher's chief concern is to present and make information

on the different outlooks available to the pupils. But this should not make the lessons straight lectures. Indeed the presentations must be as interactive, illustrative, and lively as possible. The teacher allows questioning for information and encourages discussion. It is important, however, that the teacher does not go too far beyond description and explanation, that s/he does not allow discussion to become too controversial or personal or to turn into a polemic, for instance. A polemic being when, instead of listening to the other as in a discussion, one wants only to assert one's point, one therefore talks through the other ignoring completely what s/he has to say. Polemic does not promote understanding nor does it promote tolerance, neither does the willingness to listen, never mind understanding, signify agreement with what one is hearing – this point needs to be made by the teacher also. Hence s/he firmly checks discussion when it gets out of hand, personal, or involves disparaging views and/or disrespectful remarks against the outlook being discussed or some element within in, and insists on respect of the outlook explored in all circumstances. Reasoned criticism and difficult questions, on the other hand, are not discouraged.

Assessment:

- (1) Personal research: (i) After (a) in the course-work (Method below) the pupils will be asked to do a small project on any one religion **not** included in the Module; (ii) After (d) they will be asked to do a project on what the three religions have in common; (iii) Finally, at the end of the Module, they will be asked to do a project on the differences between religious and secular outlooks.
- (2) Half-yearly test and annual exam to test the pupils' factual knowledge.

Module 1 (1st term) Faith and Reason

Introduction

This module and the next are intended to take the pupils into the main religious outlooks Christian, Moslem, and Jewish, presently found in Maltese society, before taking them into the thinking of secular humanists which is also present in the society in Module 3. This point that these outlooks have been chosen for this reason, because they are the most relevant ones for our society is emphasised by the teachers who also remind pupils that that there are other powerful and popular religions and religious movements in other parts of the world, particularly the East, and that many of these other religions are strong and also enjoy a significant presence, beside Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, in other European societies which, like Maltese society are multi-cultural and pluralist; mainly through emigration from former colonies (examples can be provided).

What the pupils will learn in this module about each of the religions it deals with is: (1) its general history; (2) its key beliefs, (3) its key texts; (4) its key traditions and celebrations; (5) its forms of worship; (6) its places of worship with their architecture, symbols, etc.). Because of its objectives the module is conducted mainly through the teacher's instruction supported with visual material. Each presentation by the teacher is followed with a discussion where pupils are invited to ask questions about the information presented to them. The subject of discussion is carefully limited to the information given in reply to questions. In question time s/he should ask pupils whose religion is discussed to help out with information of their own where this is relevant. The pupils are also encouraged to do their own further research work related to the

major purpose of the module which is basic factual information about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The method pursued by the teacher is to work the three religious outlooks together thus showing the deep similarities between them as well as the differences.

Objectives:

- To renew and deepen the discussion on the meaning and value of tolerance in pluralist societies.
- To educate the pupils' disposition towards being tolerant and respectful towards those of other religious outlooks than their own.
- To familiarize pupils with basic knowledge of, and the key beliefs, of the different religious outlooks identified in the module by giving them information about the different aspects of the religions.
- To continue to re-inforce the idea that the difference between the outlooks is an accident of historical and geographical circumstance (i.e. not anybody's fault or merit), as is their presence in Maltese society.
- To make the point that although there are important differences between the different religions there are also many similarities that are profound and on which they agree, and that this should enable them to be more tolerant of each other.
- To begin a discussion on the nature of and the relation between faith and reason, religion and science, which will continue into the third module, where they conflict and where they are reconciled.
- To introduce the pupils to systems of belief where moral authority is religious faith, to help them understand where that authority has its source, how it is structured and expressed (sacred texts and divine revelation, a priestly class who are also scholars, and through an interpretative tradition) within different religions, and to explain the difference of moral outlook in terms of which authority one recognises.

Teaching Strategy

Tools and Resources:

This module is conducted nearly entirely by teacher exposition and discussion, however the teacher's presentations need to be richly illustrated through audio-visual media and referred for further personal research by the pupils on the Internet.

Method:

- (a) The teacher introduces the Theme for the year and Module 1 with it by taking the pupils back to what was said in the Yr.5 programme about tolerance, inclusion, and so on. S/he reminds them of the connection between tolerance and open-mindedness and that neither need mean approval, nor need it lead to approval. Indeed one can even come to disapprove more strongly of something one already disapproves of when one understands it better. S/he also reminds them that **tolerance** was also represented as a key quality/value of a multicultural pluralist societies such as the Maltese in common with the rest of the European world. That this quality/value fundamental to a peaceful coexistence among people of different beliefs, faiths, cultures, traditions, and so on, in a pluralist. S/he points out that history and the present situation of the world show that where there is no tolerance there is **hatred**, extremism and war, often civil. Together with the pupils s/he explores deeper what tolerance means and what is tolerated; i.e. **the right to be different**. The teacher must emphasise that tolerance is not easy if we have strong beliefs, that instinctively we are often more inclined to reject rather than to accept its right to exist. That it requires the ability to perceive that a person may hold an outlook and behave in a manner one disapproves of as much in **good faith** as one holds ones own outlook – and that s/e deserves respect and tolerance for that reason as well as because s/e is a fellow human being. At the same time as the teacher makes the point that not everything or every outlook can or should be tolerated in a society s/he makes the point that societies vary in what they tolerate and the degree of tolerance, there are some where no diversity is permitted or manifested but Maltese society is permissive on European lines. But this does not mean that everything is tolerated; it also defends its central political and moral values, among them that of tolerance.
- (b) With this background s/he reminds them of what was said in the previous year also about the origin of our moral diversity, including in our society, as people of different faiths, beliefs, moral values, and norms of moral behaviour which diversity, s/he reminds them, is explained historically, in terms of the different histories of peoples, and geographically, by the part of the world they live in (this can be illustrated by the use of a map). S/he then takes them straight into the subject of the module reminding them of what was also said last year: that in Malta, for historical and geographical reasons, the most significant faiths are the Christian, Muslim, and Hebrew, with their varieties, and tells them that these faiths will be the subject of this and next term's (Term 2) module. S/he reminds them of other big religions that exist elsewhere Hinduism and Buddhism, for instance, which have many followers in the Far East in particular, and that these faiths were chosen mainly because they are the most influential in Malta and in our part of the world; in the Mediterranean region, in North Africa, and in Europe, where they have a long history. S/he points out that Maltese society also includes individuals with a **secular** (i.e. a non-religious) outlook many of whom describe themselves as **humanists**, a term

which will be explained later on in the year (in Module 3). S/he gives a brief historical account of the presence, and continued existence of the different religious outlooks in Maltese society, including that of the past conflict between the Christian and Moslem civilizations which played a significant part in Maltese history and of which there are still signs in the Maltese military environment.

- (c) The distinction between a religious and secularist outlook is often represented as one between **faith** and **reason**. The teacher puts this way of putting it up for discussion, allowing a free debate but helping pupils to the conclusion that that representation is false since religious people, people with faith, need not lack or abandon reason, while humanists have faith in other things than religion, often in science, or in humanity itself, or in some secular ideology. The difference between the two outlooks, in short, is not that one values reason and the other does not, that the one who values faith has no interest in reason, while the one who values reason has faith in nothing, but that both value and use reason differently; religious people, while they value reason and use it all the time put their reason under the authority of their faith on moral matters or matters that deeply affect their lives, while secularists both value reason and claim that it is its own authority, especially as it expresses itself in science. Indeed, the contrast between faith and reason is sometimes represented as one between religion and science. Pupils are invited to an open discussion on the status of science in today's world.
- (d) The teacher next gives the pupils a brief history of the religions included in the course beginning with the oldest, Judaism, then continuing with Christianity, and then Islam, followed with a brief account of where they are located in the world today – a map will help visually. S/he takes factual questions on his/her presentation and permits a brief discussion on the questions put. S/he then passes on to outline the similarities between them, the first being that they are all **monotheistic** (they all strongly affirm the existence of **One God**). The second is that though they all give their deity very similar characteristics they give it different names; **God** (Christians), **Jahweh** (Jews), and **Allah** (Moslems). All three describe the deity as the **Creator** of the world with all that is in it for the good of humanity. In all three religions the deity (represented as the Father of everything) is represented as having created humanity as well as the whole of the universe; a creation which is fundamentally good because He is **fundamentally good**, and wants us to be good also. All three describe the deity with other similar characteristics; as an **absolute being: timeless** (with no beginning or end), and **limitless** (beyond time and space) and therefore **absolute, omniscient** (knowing all things), **omnipresent** (present everywhere), and **all-powerful**. Muslim tradition teaches that Allah has ninety-nine different names that describe His character and nature. The teacher invites further questions on this presentation.

- (e) The teacher's explanation/discussion follows. The next similarity is that all three religions believe that human beings are special beings who He has created above the rest of creation – the Jewish and Christian religion represent **Man** as having been created in the image of God/Jahweh. All three religions believe that human beings were created by the Almighty Creator to love, honour, obey, and worship Him. Jews and Christians believe that the Almighty intervenes directly in the world and in the lives of human beings through miracles and according with His eternal plan. Christians believe that **Christ**, the founder of their faith, performed numerous miracles during His stay on earth, and that God can still permit such miracles occasionally. Islam, on the other hand, does not associate any miracles with the **Prophet Muhammad** its founder, though they believe that Allah Himself intervened twice miraculously in the life of the Prophet; at the time of his birth when a great star appeared in the sky, and at the time of his ascent into the heavens to appear before Allah. Christians similarly believe that a star appeared in the sky at Christ's birth, and that He arose from the dead three days after His crucifixion. They believe that Christ is the Son of God and the second member of the **Holy Trinity** together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Muslims, on the other hand, while they recognise Christ as a prophet, together with others in the Jewish Old Testament, recognise Muhammad as the last of the line of prophets Allah sent on earth, 'the Seal of the Prophets'; the one who has completed Allah's message to humanity delivered by his predecessors. Jews describe their faith as having been born with **Abraham**, the prophet of the Old Testament who is venerated in the other two religions also [**more**]. The pupils are invited by the teacher to do some additional research on the three figures.
- (f) The teacher points out next that all three religions have their sacred books and writings that are claimed to reveal the Divine will which they translate for believers into commandments about how they must behave and what they must do to live a good life; i.e. a life lived in accordance with His will. With Judaism the sacred books are contained in the **Tenakh**, the Holy Scriptures (the word 'scripture' meaning something written down). The books of the **Old Testament** in the **Bible** which is also the history of the Jewish people, and which were completed and put together by the Synod of Jamnia in 96CE. The Scriptures describe a **covenant** (a written agreement) between Jahweh, the all-powerful God, and the family of Abraham, the Jewish people, in terms of which Jahweh promised Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, that He would be faithful to his descendants who were His **chosen people** in return for which they would honour, serve and worship Him for all times and would obey His laws faithfully. Commentary by Jewish scholars, or **rabbis**, on the sacred books of the Tenakh were collected in the **Talmud** between the final destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and the end of the 5th century. The **Torah** is the most important part of the Tenakh containing the books of

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In Jewish tradition these five books were those given to **Moses** by Jahweh on the sacred mount, named Mount Sinai, and written down directly by Moses. The Torah contains 613 **mitzvots** (the laws or commandments that bind all Jews, among them the Ten Commandments Jahweh gave to Moses on the Mount) which cover all matters ranging from just laws and the rights of the people to personal and family hygiene. After the Torah the Talmud with the rabbis' teaching is regarded as the highest legal and moral authority in Judaism covering also such topics as agriculture, sacrifice, cleanliness and impurity, criminal and civil law.

- (g) The teacher next turns the class to the Muslim holy book which is the **Qur'an** (the name means 'that which is read or recited'). For believers, the Qur'an contains the many revelations Allah passed on to the **Prophet Muhammad** over many years from the time he was forty years old, through the mediation of the **Angel Jibril** who appeared to him at the time when he was meditating in a cave in **Hira**. Believers believe that what is written in the Qur'an are the very words of revelations as they were spoken to the Prophet by the Angel, and later transcribed by The Prophet's secretary **Zaid bin Thabit** to whom he dictated them intact as he had received them from the Angel. though they were not gathered together in a systematic and complete form until nearly twenty years after the Prophet's death. The Qur'an is not transcribed in the order as the revelations were made to the Prophet but in the order in which they were collected together later under the instructions of Kalif Uthman (644-656). The holy book is divided into 114 **surah** (chapters), the most familiar being the first, 'The Opening', the **Al-Fatihah** (the 'opening) which Muslim worshippers recite every time they pray to Allah. Because of its divine authority, the Qur'an cannot be criticised or changed in any way; it is the final, complete book on all matters regarding everything it pronounces itself on, guiding the faithful, obeyed at all times and treated with the utmost reverence and respect.
- (h) Christians recognise the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament of the Bible (divided into 39 books in all) as God's word delivered through His many prophets, but regard the birth of Christ as the turning point in human history, the arrival of the long-awaited Saviour of humanity in general, sent by His Father to redeem humanity from the **original sin** of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve and narrated in the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament. Christians believe that with the teachings of Christ, God entered a new covenant with His people (which is not the Jewish people alone but the whole human race), that Christ is both man and God, and that he was born of the **Virgin Mary** who is venerated in Christian traditions. That he died on the cross, was resurrected by His Father after three days, and after a further stay on Earth with His apostles returned into Heaven to His Father (an event

known as the **Ascension**) . The **New Testament** which follows Christ's teachings, with its 27 books beginning with the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John (which describe the life and mission of Christ and his teachings) and the **Acts of the Apostles** which describe the early history of the Christian Church and include the **Epistles** or letters of instruction on Christian living, sent to Christian communities by Christ's apostles (followers), mainly the Apostle Paul who died in 64 CE. While all Christians believe that the Bible contains the inspired words of God and the principles for living according with His word, some take a literal approach to it and believe in its literal truth, others believe it is not to be taken literally, that its narratives are like Christ's **parables** (which was the principle way through which Christ taught His followers), they need to be interpreted. The doctrines, or authoritative teachings, of the major Christian religions are found in their **catechisms**, which are intended to provide the faithful with guidance on the way they should conduct their spiritual and moral lives.

Module 2 (2nd term) Faith and Moral Values

Introduction

This module continues and completes the general, basic, exploration of the three religions begun in Module 1 and with the same objectives identified for that module. It moves, however, from general background knowledge and understanding to highlight those aspects of faith and of religious belief and doctrine that condition the moral values and outlook of believers. It begins by returning pupils to the discussion of the relationship between faith and reason begun in Module 1 in order to make the point again that faith and reason are not contrary but are lived in different ways according with what one believes and what is one's outlook on life. The discussion makes the important point that one needs not only to be educated in one's belief and outlook but in other beliefs and outlooks also, including the secular, which seems to share nothing in common with a religious outlook and is often regarded as its contrary – the basic argument being that one needs to understand the other if one needs to share one's life, one's society, (to co-exist) with him/her.

This point made, the next stage of the module is to introduce the pupils to the idea of **authority** – that all our beliefs and values refer to an authority which makes the law for us. In the case of faith and religion that authority is usually taken as unquestionable and requiring obedience. This point is made by drawing the pupils' attention to the fact that, with regards to the different religions, each one of them has its sacred texts (this is why they are collectively referred to as 'religions of the book'). That the sacred texts have their recognised authoritative readers and teachers, scholars and clerics with their different names and teaching traditions. And that this authority beside being religious and spiritual is also moral. In the case of Islam and Judaism, the sacred texts have a legal authority too, but this is no longer true of Christianity – the reason why will come out in Module 3. This is described through the continued account of the three religious outlooks – the point needs to be made that for believers

faith guides reason in the sense that one reasons in accordance with one's faith not the other way around, the opposite is true of the secularist.

Another important point to make in this module is that from the point of view of religious morality, ethics does not just concern one's relationship with other human beings but with God also, and indeed with other human beings as commanded by God. It therefore introduces a concept which is absent from secular morality, the concept of sin – of having committed an offence against God through some act of disobedience of His commands about how one should live one's life personally and in relation with others. On this matter all the different religions are prescriptive (i.e. set strict rules of behaviour for their followers) in different ways and to different extents. In Western societies with secular states the Christian religions distinguish between their authority on matters of faith and morality from the political authority of the state which makes the law. Neither does their religious and moral authority extend to what believers must eat, how animals must be killed, to matter of personal hygiene, fasting, and so on, that is appropriated by the other religions. They tend also to distinguish sharply between matters of ritual and moral matters.

Objectives:

- To continue to educate the pupils' disposition towards being tolerant and respectful towards those of other religious or non-religious outlooks than their own.
- To continue with the basic description of the different religious outlooks in the previous module by extending it to features of the outlooks that are ethically significant.
- To explore further the discussion about the relation between faith and reason begun in the previous module.
- To consolidate the previous module's emphasis on the similarities between the different faiths and religions, but also to identify the fundamental differences.
- To explore at more depth the notion of religious authority, how it expresses itself, and how, from a religious perspective, moral authority is nearly indistinguishable from the authority of faith and religion.
- To explore the nature of religious customs, ritual, worship, prayers within the religions, as well as the places of public or common worship and their bearing on the morality of the religion.
- To explore the nature of fasting, prayer, and spirituality within and between the religions and to show the bearing of these practices and outlooks on the believer's moral life and beliefs.

- To explore the relevance of the belief in God, in an after-life, and in sin (an offence against one's God) in determining moral or ethical behaviour in the three religions.

Teaching Strategy

Tools and Resources:

This module is also conducted nearly entirely by the teacher's exposition and by explanatory discussion, and again the presentations need to be illustrated through audio-visual media and referred for further personal research by the pupils on the Internet.

Method:

- (a) The teacher opens the second module by reminding the pupils briefly of the first module's introduction to the different faiths. They are asked to recall, identify and discuss the key similarities and differences between the three outlooks as a revision. The teacher then recalls them to the distinction that was made between faith and reason, and points out that the previous module showed how reason is put under different kinds of authority in the different religions, and points out that what this means is that equally religious people can reason differently about how we should conduct our lives, about morality, depending on their faith. S/he suggests that what is **contrary to reason** is not faith but **unreason** – the inability or refusal to reason – a faith which is irrational, which is not educated with reason, which is blind and uninstructed. S/he distinguishes between being instructed and educated **in the faith** or outlook that guides the way one reasons and lives, and being instructed and educated also in **other faiths**, where the object is to understand how those of other faiths reason and live and why. S/he then points out that for people of different faiths and beliefs to live peacefully together in the same society both kinds of education are needed, into one's own faith or belief and into that of others, including the secularist. S/he asks the pupils to discuss this claim, making the point that the object of the modules for this year, the previous, and the last, is mainly education into the belief of others.
- (b) The teacher returns to the first module also to remind the pupils of the influence the **sacred texts** of the different religions discussed there on the lives and beliefs of the faithful. S/he points out that the contents of these texts influence their moral lives and beliefs, what they consider good and right. S/he points out in short that in all cases the faithful refer their moral beliefs to the divine authority communicated through the sacred texts of their religion communicated to them by reading and through the teachings of those who have the authority to teach in the religion; the **Priest** in the Christian religions, the **Rabbi** in the Judaic, and the **Imam** in the Muslim. These religious figures lead the services of their religion in the places of worship, the **churches** for Christians, the **mosques** for Moslems, the **synagogues** for Jews. The first

point made here is that the places of worship and spirituality are also places where the community of the faithful meet in communion, i.e. as a community – with those with a religious outlook they are asked to discuss what their places of worship means to them. The teacher makes the point that these have different architectural styles and traditions which are not simply aesthetic but respond to different beliefs, rituals and traditions; the point is made visually with pictures internal and external which are discussed, and explained. The explanation also includes the **symbols** found and used in the places of worship and by believers also – these are discussed together with the architecture of the places of worship.

- (c) The teacher allows a short discussion of the different places of worship and prayer. Sunday, s/he then points out, is an obligatory day of church worship for Christian communities, where they attend a **liturgical** service (a service which follows a set written pattern set down in a **prayer book**), includes readings from the Holy Scriptures, the singing of hymns by the **congregation**, and creates spaces for private prayer. The main Christian churches in terms of their global following, are the **Roman Catholic**, the **Orthodox**, and the **Anglican**, but there are also several other smaller Christian denominations, churches and sects, besides – many of these hold more informal **non-liturgical** services consisting mainly of reading from the Bible. With the Roman Catholic faith which has a long and dominant history in Malta with by far the largest majority of Christians (the teacher provides a brief history of the Catholic faith in Malta) the central service is **Holy Mass** and the celebration of the **Holy Eucharist** is its central point. The celebration of the **Eucharist** is also central to the service in the Anglican Church, while the **Breaking of Bread** (as it is otherwise called) is central to the services of Non-Conformist Churches. In all these services worshippers share the symbols of bread and wine as a way of commemorating and sharing spiritually in Christ's death. All three of the main faiths **baptise** their members into the faith, even if the liturgy is different. For Roman Catholics baptism is the first of seven **sacraments**, the others being those of Communion, Confession, and Confirmation (which are, along with baptism, compulsory), Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction. Baptism, usually (but not necessarily) conferred on infants, is performed symbolically with water and signifies the child's release from **original sin** (the sin committed by Adam and Eve, the first created man and woman, according to the Bible) and its fellowship in the community of the faithful. All three religions allow converts, but this is very unusual with Judaism. Most Jews around the world belong to the orthodox faith which traces a person's Jewishness through the mother, therefore through birth – it is only if one's mother is Jewish that one is a Jew.
- (d) The teacher makes the point that all three religions acknowledge the importance of individual private as well as collective public worship and

prayer, and emphasise the importance of combining faith with action. Islam, in particular, teaches that faith without action is meaningless; that action brings faith into the world, and that one must **actively** live one's faith for it to have value. Islam's **Five Pillars of Faith** act as a daily guide for every Moslem throughout one's life: the first (the **Shahadah**) requires the constant declaration of one's faith in Allah, the One divinity, the second (the **Salah**) requires the faithful to pray five times a day according with prescribed rituals; the third (the **Zakah**) obliges them to give alms for the upkeep and welfare of the poor; the fourth (the **Sawm**) obliges them to fast at **Ramadan**; the fifth (the **Hajj**) obliges them to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, at least once in their life time. While the mosque is the focal point of Muslim worship and a meeting place for the community the building is not essential for prayer; Muslims regard wherever they worship together as a mosque (a word literally meaning a 'house of prayer'). Moslems have their 'holy day' also; all male Muslims are expected to attend Friday Prayers if they are not unwell or travelling. At this service the Imam leads the faithful through their prayers and delivers his sermon, a practice followed also in Christian churches. For Jews the **Shabbat** (the Holy Sabbath) is their special day of worship, which is also strictly kept as a day of complete rest from all kinds of work. Most Jews worship in the synagogue on this day where a service is read and readings from the Torah are conducted by the Rabbi. The most important ritual activities, however, take place in the home and involve a special ceremony of blessings (of wine, of the day, and of the wife and children by the father) called the **Kiddush**, a special Sabbath meal which begins the day with the breaking of bread, and a special ceremony at its end called **Havdalah**. The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends at nightfall on Saturday.

- (e) All three religions give an important place to **fasting** as well as to prayer and other forms of adoration. Jews fast and pray for 25 hours on the most solemn day of the year in the Jewish calendar, the **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement for sin and for forgiveness of each other). The Talmud requires complete abstinence from eating, drinking, washing, sexual intercourse, anointing with oil, and wearing sandals or leather shoes on that day. The Bible also instructs the Jews about which animals they can and cannot eat and how certain foods can be cooked (these rules given to them by Jahweh during their Exodus from Egypt are found in the book of **Leviticus**). The food Jews are allowed to eat is called **kosher**, and all kosher meat must be slaughtered according to a ritual called **shechita** then the animal is hung upside down until the blood drains completely from its body. The month's fasting at **Ramadan** in the Muslim religion (in the ninth month of the Muslim calendar) is obligatory for all except for the very old, those younger than twelve, those ill or travelling, and those pregnant or menstruating. Like the Jews Muslims also have rules about what they can and cannot eat and how. The food that it is lawful to eat is called **halal** while the eating of carrion meat, blood, pork, and

animals dedicated to other gods than Allah are strictly forbidden, as is wine and other alcoholic drinks except if threatened with starvation or dying of thirst. As in Judaism also Islam prescribes the way animals must be slaughtered, which must occur while Allah is praised, quickly and with a sharp blade not seen by the beast, which must be hung upside down to be drained of its blood. At Ramadan there is strict fasting throughout the day from sunrise to sunset when the eating of food, the drinking of liquids, smoking, and any form of sexual contact is forbidden. The observance of prescribed days of fasting was formerly strict also in many Christian religions but has lost its importance for most Christians today. Those who do fast still abstain from eating meat occasionally, usually during the period of **Lent** leading up to **Easter**, especially **Good Friday** (the day remembering Christ's death).

- (f) The general purpose of fasting in religions is to create the best condition for prayer, for the individual and the collective; in other words to be in a condition to communicate with their God without the distraction of physical needs or demands. As a form of self-denial it is also an important self-discipline intended to lead the worshipper to realise that material comforts and the needs of the body in general, are inferior to and unimportant compared with the needs of the spirit or soul. The rules about which meat it is permissible to eat and how are related to ongoing pursuit of spiritual and physical health required to live well in this life and to prepare one's soul for the next. In all religions human life is regarded as temporary, merely a short interlude, a preparation for a superior state of being than the material and worldly, namely the enjoyment of an eternal life and happiness to follow death to follow in the company of the Creator in **heaven** as one's **reward** for living a good life according with the Creator's wishes. The teacher makes the point that, for the believer, all these beliefs condition the way one lives one's life and what one's moral choices are. In all religions the condition of living in **sin**, where one has displeased, disobeyed, or in some way offended one's Creator, deprives one's of the right to that enjoyment and condemns one to eternal **punishment** in **hell**. For the believer, in short, the main way of living a morally good life is to obey and please one's Creator, to do what is right is to obey God's will as it is defined in one's religion, and thereby to win heaven. To act immorally is to offend against one's God (to commit sin) **and** against one's fellow human beings.

Module 3 (3rd term) Reason and Moral Values

Introduction

This module is predictably the most difficult one for pupils with a strong religious faith (because of the God-less nature of secular humanism), particularly for those with

a non-Western background since they will be largely unfamiliar with secular humanist thinking, which is its subject. The account of the history of secular humanism will also predictably be new to them. Both, the thinking and the history, need to be carefully described and explained to them for their understanding. This module, in fact, like the previous two, is largely an informational or factual one where the teacher's explanation and presentation play a very key part, and where questions and discussions will be conducted similarly. The very idea of a non-religious, secular, morality (a morality without God and sin) will be very alien (much more so than the morality of the other religions with which they will now, following Modules 1&2, identify much that is fundamental in common), and possibly even repugnant, to them. It will offend their religious sentiments more than the other religions because they will regard it as blasphemous. Hence their emotional response to it will probably be hostile; almost certainly more hostile than towards the other religions explained and discussed in the previous two modules.

The same point needs to be made about secular humanism as about the different religions, namely there are historical/geographical explanations for its emergence and evolution as an outlook, that it is as ancient as the religions, and that it co-exists openly and peacefully with Christianity and Judaism because they have adapted themselves to it. This may be because the inspiration for many secular humanist moral values is Judeo-Christian while Judeo-Christianity has adapted itself to secular humanism. This being the case secular humanists also share moral values that Judeo-Christianity share with Islam. The teacher makes the point that, for this reason, notwithstanding their differences there are several values both hold in common. Through the description of secular humanism the pupils are introduced to ethical individualism, which is typical of modern societies, and to the notion of moral autonomy which was introduced by the Enlightenment; the idea which is contrary to the religious that as one acquires the maturity of adulthood one becomes the source of moral authority on oneself and one takes moral responsibility for one's own beliefs and action through the activity of one's private conscience aided by an informed and educated reason but requiring nothing more beside. The religious and secular approaches to science are discussed in this module also.

Objectives:

- To continue to educate the pupils' disposition towards being tolerant and respectful this time not towards those of other religious faiths but towards those who have no God and no religious outlook.
- To provide the pupils with a very basic account of secular humanism, of its history and evolution from Ancient times until today, and of modern humanism's beliefs, values, and outlook on the world and on human life.
- To introduce the individualist moral culture which defines secular humanism and which is so influential in the Western world today, which speaks the language of autonomy; of making oneself responsible for the moral laws one makes for oneself.

- To introduce, but only to **introduce**, the notion of conscience which, for the secular humanist is its own moral authority, guided by one's unaided reason.
- To introduce the humanist attitude towards humanity which (because of its Stoic and Christian influences) it regards as a single, universal, moral community where everyone is owed the same consideration and respect.
- To sensitize the pupils to the different ways in which humanists and religious believers regard science, which is not based on faith but on factual knowledge and explanation.
- To put the argument that although believers and secularists have a very different understanding of the world and of the source of moral authority there are several attitudes towards the world they share, and several basic values also; their opposition to cheating, lying murder, and so on – and that it should be these, the common values they share, that they are interested in rather than where they come from.

Teaching Strategy

Resources

Method:

- (a) The teacher returns to the point made in the conclusion of the previous module that the ethical behaviour of believers is dictated to them to different extents, by their religious belief and by the rules and commandments prescribed for them by their religion. S/he reminds them of the belief in the existence of God and in an after-life following death where one is rewarded or punished for how one lived one's earthly life, of the notion of sin (of offending God) which bears fundamentally on the moral beliefs and lives of believers, of faith in the moral authority of one's religion as determining one's moral behaviour. S/he points out that these same beliefs distinguish the religious believer of whatever faith from the **secular humanist**. This other moral perspective is, in fact, introduced to the pupils by the teacher at this point – the word 'secular' is explained to the pupils, and then 'humanist' after. The teacher presents **secular humanism** as a phenomenon of the Western world and of its history which s/he outlines briefly beginning with the **Ancient Greeks**, with the **Sophist** (explain Sophist) **Protagoras** whose statement that 'Humans are the measure of all things – of things that are, that they are, of things that are not, that they are not.' This is the core humanist belief that has remained unchanged over the centuries. It asserts that whatever is true or false is purely a matter of human belief and judgment, that morality is merely a matter of custom and rejects that there are any divinely revealed objective truths or moral commandments that human being are obliged to follow. Indeed, another

Ancient Greek humanist, the historian **Herodotus**, noticed from his travels and other experiences that different human societies adored different gods and had different ways of representing them, observed different religious and legal customs, obeyed different moral rules based on the society's traditions and customs, and believed that theirs was the only true religion. Herodotus shared Protagoras's conclusion that what is true is what human beings choose to believe or to make true, that human beings choose to believe or make different truths, and that there is no way of knowing who is right (i.e. they are sceptical of the idea of an objective truth).

- (b) In short humanists tend to describe moral belief as merely a matter of obedience to customary rules and traditions, and to hold against this customary morality a higher morality in which one makes one's moral rules for oneself unaided by anything other than one's reason, a moral outlook called **individualism**. On the other hand humanists also tend to take a **universal** human dimension to morality, to treat human beings as the same everywhere and to regard moral concerns as **human** concerns generally. Again in short, to regard human beings as members of the same single moral community without distinctions of race, colour, sex, or religion, with the same right over and the same obligations towards each other (a perception which is reflected in the notion of **human rights**). Following this brief introduction to its meaning the teacher introduces the pupils to the basic history of humanist thought in the Western world as it has appeared and reappeared in different ways and under different guises. In the modern world it became an intellectual and cultural force with the advent of the **Renaissance** in 15th and 16th century Europe with its revival of Ancient Greek classical culture and civilization. Breaking with the Middle Ages the Renaissance marked a newly found confidence in humanity finding expression in the art and architecture of the period, albeit that their subjects continued to include the themes of faith and religion; the Roman Catholic Church being one of its great sponsors, the other being the rich secular rulers and new commercial classes in Europe. The confidence grew from the growth of human progress and power in all fields following achievements in science and engineering technology. **Leonardo da Vinci**, the universal man, is the ideal humanist of the period – the teacher should mention others but invite the pupils to do some research of their own on Leonardo. The **Enlightenment** followed in the 17th and 18th century. The Enlightenment glorified human progress and put its faith in reason, in scientific knowledge, and in education, to obtain it, rather than in faith and religion. Indeed the Enlightenment was referred to itself as the 'Age of Reason' symbolised by the **Encyclopaedia** first published in 18th century Paris.
- (c) The point the teacher makes is that the humanists of the period were not necessarily people without religion, many, perhaps most, of them (nearly all in the Renaissance) believed in the Christian God, but humanism marked a revolt

against religious authority and the beginning of a move in Europe which began in the early Renaissance with the advent of the **Protestant Reformation** in 1517, not only to revolt against the authority of the **Pope** and the Roman Catholic Church, but to turn religion and morality more and more into a personal matter. With **Martin Luther** was born the important idea that one's individual inner **conscience** could come into conflict with the teachings and authority of faith and religion, and that one should, in such circumstances, obey the dictates of one's conscience. This representation of morality as a tension between individual belief (conscience) and the authority of the community based on custom and tradition (faith) defines the moral culture of modern Europe, though Luther himself believed that human beings are dependent on the merits of Christ and the miracle of faith for their salvation and that their conscience should be under the **authority** of the Scriptures. The Enlightenment, however, **secularized** it, i.e. put aside its religious connections and put the individual conscience under a different moral authority or **law**, that of **universal Reason** instead, represented as a law of nature.

- (d) What the teacher needs to bring to the fore about humanism from this explanation is that it has come to reject the idea that moral behaviour must be obedient to religious authority, to faith, or to the dogmas of religion, and replaced it with the idea that individuals should be subject to the authority of their conscience, of their own reasoning. But while Enlightenment humanists believed that one's moral reasoning should subject itself to the authority of a universal law of Reason many in more recent times and today are sceptical of such a law and see it as an empty left-over of religious thinking – they believe that a well-informed and educated conscience is enough. S/he points out that in either case this idea of individual moral authority is captured by the notion of individual **autonomy** whereby it is the responsibility of the individual him or herself to decide what is reasonable moral behaviour. The teacher takes questions on this outlook and allows some discussion of it. S/he then turns to the humanist attitude towards religion, and (b) the religious attitude towards science. Secular Humanists can be **atheist** (non-believers in the existence of God, especially as a supernatural **being**), or **agnostic** (considering the matter of God's existence open because it cannot be proved nor disproved either way), and they tend to believe in the authority of science to explain the world and its origins rather than revelation. They do not usually believe in an after-life after death and in heaven or hell, either, so that the notion of sin is not a part of their moral thinking. Science challenges the accounts of the creation found in the holy books in several ways; the origin of the human species, the beginning, age, and nature of the universe, the predominance of humanity in it, the view that the Earth is at its centre, the explanation of different events in its history. Religious believers tend to reply to these challenges in two ways; (a) by insisting that science is wrong where it conflicts with the Sacred Books and that the literal explanations of the sacred books are right; (b) by distinguishing

science from religion as entirely different but complementary things (while science helps us understand the world empirically, factually, religion helps us understand it spiritually, while the Sacred Books are not meant to be taken literally but as aids to our understanding. (b) explains the existence of scientists who are also religious believers. Jews and Christians share the Biblical account of the creation in Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 and of the beginning and evolution of the human race in it – orthodox believers (sometimes called **creationists**) literally. Islam also teaches that Allah created the earth and the heavens in six days. Muslims have no problem with science where it does not conflict with the Qur'an, where it does the Qur'an, as the revealed 'Will of Allah' which cannot be disputed takes preference.

- (e) The point the teacher makes at this stage is that notwithstanding the differences on the matters of faith, reason, and religion, between religious believers and secular humanists this does not mean that they do not share many moral insights and values together. This is because, with reference to the Western world, both Christian and Humanist thought are the product of a common history. To the extent that Christianity shares its moral values with the other the moral traditions Humanists share their values with them also. The teacher takes as his/her example the fact that religious believers and secular humanists alike acknowledge the responsibility of humanity for the stewardship of the world, of its physical and natural environment, including of the animals and other forms of life in it. The issue of the responsibility of stewardship has come to the fore in recent decades with the realisation that the destruction of nature and the pollution of the environment has put the future of the planet and of humanity itself in doubt. Christian religions recognise this situation and teach a moral duty to support efforts to preserve nature and save the environment. Islam similarly recognises the custodial role of humanity over the rest of creation, and requires human beings to ensure that the whole of creation is kept in a state of health in order to assure adequate supplies of food for all. The Prophet Muhammad himself set the example of the care that must be given to all Allah's creatures, there are examples in the **Hadith** of how he avoided waste, was kind to animals, and respected the earth. In the Muslim faith everyone will have to answer to Allah for how they have treated the planet on the Day of Judgment, for humanists we will need to answer to future generations inhabiting it who have the same right to enjoy it as we have. And the same importance of looking after the world is found in the Jewish Holy books, especially the Torah. Judaism also teaches that the earth belongs to God, and that He entrusted human beings with its responsible stewardship. Secular humanists, on the other hand, believe that our moral obligation to care for the earth, for the physical natural environment, and for the life in it, is one we owe not to a divine Creator but to our fellow human beings with whom we share it (even those who are not yet living, or future generations), and who have the same right to enjoy it as we have.

- (f) The teacher summarizes. S/he explains that secular humanists believe that it is possible to live a good life in this world and to do what is morally right without any reference to any religion or to supernatural or divine revelation. While like religious believers they believe that human beings have a moral responsibility to do what is good and right they also believe that the moral obligation to do what is good and right is owed only to other human beings. Hence there is no sacred book of humanism or any book of moral rules secular humanists need to consult, or indeed any specific or particular moral theory to which they subscribe – moral choice and responsibility is taken by each on oneself. Though they believe that religion is unnecessary to live a good life, to do what is right, and to explain the world, and themselves rely solely on their reason, they are tolerant of religious beliefs and faiths since they are willing to accept that there are many different ways to live a good life and do what is right, and many different motives also. On the other hand, unlike religious believers, most contemporary secular humanists (drawing mainly on the evidence of science which they tend to value) do not tend to regard humanity as privileged over the rest of nature and this conditions them also to respect the physical and natural environment also. S/he closes by taking questions and inviting a free open discussion on whether a religious and a humanist moral outlook can co-exist together in the same society in a climate of mutual tolerance and respect.
- (g) Finally, the teacher concludes this module and the whole programme for Yr. 6 by contextualizing the discussion in the social and political context of European/Western societies like the Maltese. S/he points out that, unlike in several other societies in the world, Moslem societies in particular, where politics and morality are under the authority of religion and of religious leaders, in modern Western societies things are very different. As a result of their secularist/humanist history there is a net distinction in these societies between politics and religion, the state is entirely secular (it has no religious or ideological denomination), i.e. it is a liberal state. There is a net distinction between law and morality the latter being regarded for the most part as a personal and **private** matter, a matter of how one chooses to live one's life. This is very different from Islamic states where the laws are the laws of **Sharia** (the teacher explains what this is) which are derived from the Qur'an, and which they observe and enforce with different degrees of strictness. Western secular states do not force any religion or morality on citizens, they recognise the right of each to one's personal belief, hence the existence in the same societies of people with different outlooks, religious and moral – this is what is meant by a pluralistic society. Hence many of the things that are punishable by Sharia law are regarded as not being the state's business in European/Western societies. Although there are laws to protect such things as public decency and order there are also laws that protect people's rights to freedom to be and to think differently not just in private but in public also; for

instance the right to express one's sexuality without persecution or discrimination, a right which is protected by law. Finally, the teacher points out that Western societies embrace laws intended to render the way crimes are punished as **humane** as possible; in Europe capital punishment, torture, and mutilation are strongly objected to and condemned, and convicted criminals are regarded as having rights to humane treatment, including the right to humane conditions in prison and the right to be reformed. At the end of this account the teacher returns the pupils to the discussion that concluded (f) and asks them for their thoughts about co-existence in this kind of society.