

Religious Studies

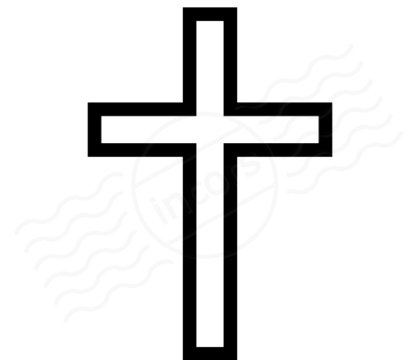
GCSE

Learning notes

Contents

2	Topic list
3-23	Beliefs, teachings and practices of Christianity notes
24-27	BTPC Example questions and exam information

Note: this pack largely focuses on the knowledge of Christian beliefs and practices which you must have. Your evaluation of these beliefs and practices is essential. You should therefore be applying evaluation as you work through these notes. Think: why is this important? who is it important to? is this wrong? who would say so? what do I think? what does this mean for those who believe/practice and those who don't? and so on...



Christianity: Beliefs and teachings & practices

TOPICS

Topic	Secure?
Nature of God	
Concept of God as a Trinity of persons	
Biblical accounts of creation	
The problem of evil and suffering	
Jesus Christ	
Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension	
The concept of salvation	
Eschatological beliefs and teachings	
Worship	
Sacraments	
Prayer	
The role and importance of pilgrimage and celebrations to Christians	
The role of the church in the local community and living practices	
Mission	
The role of the church in the wider world.	

Beliefs, teachings and practices of Christianity notes

Sources of wisdom and authority

- In your longer answers, you are expected to make reference to sources of wisdom and authority. A range of sources tick the box here - Biblical quotations, general Biblical themes, Church teaching, '...ologies' and '...isms' (e.g. Liberation Theology or Femenism), the words/actions of a key Christian figure. The examiners are looking for you to pin down what you are saying and give it more academic clout - know where it might come from, from where it was grown, what support it has...
- You also need to think about the significance or importance of the particular teaching you provide and the source of wisdom/authority it belongs to. Most broadly, you should consider what brings authority to a teaching / person. Pontius Pilate's question to Jesus 'what is truth?' is apt here.
 - Does truth bring authority? How do you know it is true? What is needed to prove truth?
 - Does support bring authority? The majority of people think this way so...
 - Does God bring authority? How is God revealed?
 - Does a positive outcome bring authority? 'this diet really works, just look at the results...'

BELIEFS

Nature of God

- You need to know what Christians mean by 'God'. What is this being's nature? What is he like?
- Think about how this God can be described? Indeed, can he be described?
- Huge emphasis in Christianity on monotheism (the belief in there being only one God). Christianity, remember, is grown out of Judaism, where monotheism took on particular importance, standing out against the many polytheistic beliefs at the time.
- Anselm defined God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived.' This means he is the greatest possible being. Can you see from this why he cannot be one amongst many? You may wish to link in your understanding of the causation argument here.
- God is not a creator, he is **the** Creator (note: the capital will often be used to emphasise his uniqueness and supremacy).
- Based on this idea of the greatest possible being and supported by Biblical writings, Christians hold God to be benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, transcendent, immanent, personal, forgiving, a judge. Make sure you know what each of these means and are able to justify their belief in each one. If he is the greatest possible being there is nothing he cannot do; therefore he can be both immanent and transcendent. Does this make sense? Can God do / be the illogical?
- Try to analyse each one critically, unpacking and thinking about the implications. E.g. God's eternity fits nicely with his omniscience - he can know what for us is future because he is beyond time (atemporal) - time is something God created. His knowledge is perfect and unchanging; he cannot be wrong and does not need to predict. But what does this mean for our freedom? God knows exactly what I will do tomorrow - am I free to choose to do otherwise and work against his knowledge? If God doesn't allow us to be free what does this say about his omnibenevolence, especially if he is to judge us for how we have behaved... Think about how you can make sense of such problems; or perhaps you think they can be used as arguments against God's existence...
- Make a list of good quotations/teachings which you can use to highlight these attributes of God. Here's one for you: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the one to use for forgiveness.
- All Christians broadly agree on these attributes of God, but there are some subtle differences in emphasis. More liberal Churches (many examples in the Church of England) will emphasise God as all-loving over his role as a judge. Protestants will draw most of their understanding of God from the Bible, whilst Roman Catholics will arrive at these ideas through philosophical thinking (usually on the part of Priests) as well. Roman Catholics believe that God can be accessed/understood to a point (and part of worship is studying the nature of God), but he is ultimately a mystery that cannot be fully understood by humans. Protestants will see our own attempts to understand God as futile and arrogant - he is a mystery; any understanding we may have is given to us through God's grace in the Bible.

God as a Trinity of persons

- For Christians, God is both one (monotheism) and three.
- This is a confusing Doctrine (Church teaching); many will justify it with the belief that God is a mystery beyond our understanding.
- The three distinct forms of God are: Father (Creator), Son (Redeemer), Holy Spirit (Sustainer).
- God is not described as 'The Trinity' in the Bible.
- The Bible does give images of / make clear references to God as each of the three forms.
- The form of God as Father/Creator is seen in the creation stories. Many examples are found throughout the Bible of God as an authority figure. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to God as Father (good example - The Lord's Prayer) - highlighting a separation between himself and the Father form of God.
- Jesus is the Son. In John's Gospel he is referred to as 'The Word'. It says: 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' It also says: 'the word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.' The Son is the human form of God (God incarnate (key word - Incarnation)) who lived on earth as a human like us (personal), revealing God to us and dying to save us from our sins and restore our relationship with God (atonement).
- The Holy Spirit is the form of God as the invisible, sustaining force maintaining all creation and inspiring us to know and draw closer to God. Protestants place great emphasis upon being 'moved by the spirit' in worship. Genesis refers to 'the Spirit of God hovering over the waters' as creation began. In the Adam and Eve creation story it is written that 'God breathed life into Adam'; this changed him from a human body to a living human being - many Christians see this as a reference to the work of The Spirit and to the imparting of the human soul.
- The Christian Creed (statement of belief) outlines the three persons of the Trinity very clearly and makes it clear that this belief is central to the Christian faith and sets the essential cornerstones of the plan of God. Look up the Nicene Creed, identify and remember some key quotations.
- Almost all Christians believe in God as a Trinity of persons. Having these three forms works well alongside some of the contradictory attributes we've already looked at. However, some Christians believe that this doctrine undermines the monotheistic nature of the Christian faith. Unitarians are an example of a Christian denomination who reject the Trinity.
- Do you think it necessary that Christians believe in the Trinity? What was Jesus if he wasn't God? Is this a problem?

Biblical accounts of Creation and The Fall

- There are two accounts of Creation in *Genesis* (first book of the Bible). In the first you have the seven-day story. God creates stage by stage, finishing by creating human beings and then resting. In this story God commands and it happens. The story states that God made 'mankind in his image.' (This quotation is often used to support Christian teachings about the sanctity of human life). Mankind is given a purpose/job - to rule over other living things. The story also emphasises and repeats that God 'saw that it was good'. In the second story, man is created at the start, and is 'formed' from the dust of the ground. Woman (Eve) is created from man's rib as a 'helper' for Adam. This creation story continues into the story of the fall.
- These creation stories can be read literally or symbolically. Evangelical Christians (Biblical literalists) read them literally; such Christians are sometimes called Creationists. Creationists will tend to reject or have an alternative explanation for evidence supporting evolution. How compatible do you think the stories are with science? Do you understand the apparent age theory and Mc Grath's belief that 'day' does not denote a 24hr period of time?
- The opening of John's Gospel (New Testament) also gives an account of Creation. Jesus is referred to here as 'The Word' and is presented as being involved in creation at the beginning. Perhaps here the connection between creation and salvation (or creation coming to its fullness) is set out. Jesus is set out as the Creator ('through him all things were made'), it says he provides 'light' and introduces the idea of darkness which 'cannot overcome the light', and it gives an account of Jesus being rejected by his creation ('his creation did not know him'). It says 'we have seen his glory'. This story suggests there is more to creation than a one-off event. It touches on creation, sin (the Fall), the death of Christ, and so sets the scene for the salvation of mankind. It is very symbolic in style.
- After Adam and Eve are created they are commanded not to eat of the fruit in the middle of the garden, if they do they will die. The serpent tells them that this is not true and the fruit will allow them to be like God 'knowing good and evil.' After eating they hid from God and knew that they were naked; they became aware of sin and felt shame. God cursed man, woman and serpent and banished them from the garden. Man and God became separated - The Fall - the perfect relationship between man and God was over. Many Christians believe in 'original sin' - that because of this event all humans now inherit a sinful nature and are not as they should be. All humans are cut off from God because of this. A more symbolic reading would hold that it was not one man and woman who damaged everyone else at the beginning of humanity, but rather the pair are symbols of us all as we each break our relationship with God. Think about whether there's any truth in this, how responsible we as individuals are/should be for our sin and how much power we have to change things.
- With the image of the command of God and alternative persuasion of the serpent, strong links can be made here with S. Paul's teaching about 'two laws at work' (Romans) - more on this later.
- Print these accounts of creation out and become more familiar with their key features. Think about literal and symbolic interpretations.

The problem of evil and suffering and a loving a righteous God

- Moral evil - pain and suffering caused by humans.
- Natural evil - pain and suffering which occurs as part of nature and has nothing to do with humans.
- Why would a loving God allow this to happen? Inconsistent triad (do you know what this means and how to use it?).
- Many (like Stephen Fry) see this problem (problem of evil) as one of the strongest arguments against the existence of God.
- Moral evil is perhaps easier than natural evil to resolve. People are free, free to do good and free to do bad. You can't be a bit free. If God stepped in every so often to stop the worst suffering the world would be unintelligible (do you know what this means?). God doesn't want us to do bad things and cause suffering (indeed he teaches us goodness as far as he can) but he lovingly values our freedom (through which we may come to goodness) more than our safety. This can be underlined by the story of the Fall. If you were given the choice what would you prefer: freedom or safety from harm?
- Don't forget that God is omniscient as well. He knows all of the evil things that will happen at the hands of humans. Why did he not make it so that Hitler just never existed?
- Natural evil - a number of responses; you need to know the two most famous Theodicies (means a justification for God allowing there to be evil).
- Irenaean Theodicy - soul-making theodicy. God allows there to be suffering because through it we may learn to develop spiritually. Imagine we could never suffer - would we hug those in need, give to charity, create cures to illnesses, share? The Irenaean theodicy holds that we are not yet fully formed. We should be looking to where the suffering is leading to see its positive purpose. Heaven is a big part of this theodicy. Problem - some suffer so much more than others. Does there really need to be so much suffering? What about those who suffer and die young and don't get any chance to develop spiritually through their suffering? Seems very unfair.
- Augustinian Theodicy - Augustine held that evil was not a thing in itself by a lack (or privation) of goodness, in the way that darkness can be viewed as the absence of light. In viewing it this way, you can say there is no evil in God's creation, only good. In a broken world however (post-fall) there are examples of there not being as much good as there should be (it's not dark, it's just not as light as it could be). It is the goodness which is seen (and often seen to be in a reduced form) in creation and this provokes the question 'why is there good?' God has allowed us to break creation, but it is still his creation so lots of goodness can still be seen in it and he establishes the promise of a renewed creation where goodness is fully restored for those who choose to pursue his goodness. Again, heaven is a key part of this theodicy. Problem - can we really explain away evil by saying it is a lack of goodness? Also, Augustine's theodicy seems to rely heavily on a literal reading of Genesis.
- Worth thinking about... How often do people turn to God and find their faith strengthened in times of crisis and suffering?
- Be ready to mention the story of Job (pronounced 'Jobe'). Job suffered terribly, a test of his faith in God.

Jesus Christ

- Christians believe that Jesus set an important example which he wanted them to follow. He was baptised, he forgave people, he mixed with outcasts and sinners, he prayed, he was prepared to make a sacrifice, was totally faithful to God even when he felt abandoned...
- Jesus' life is recorded in the four Gospels.
- It's important to note how strongly the human side of Jesus comes across in a lot of the Gospel writings.
- Christians believe that Jesus was more than just a good example and inspiring teacher, they believe he had a divine nature (was God) - one of his titles is 'Son of God'. They believe he was born through a miracle (Mary was a virgin). They also believe he performed miracles and many Christians will follow the example he set here by trying to address the needs of those who are sick and poor in society through charity work and prayer.
- Christians see Jesus as a king, reflected in another of his titles 'The Messiah'. This means 'anointed one'; Kings and Queens are anointed to mark their being divinely tasked with their role. The Jews had been waiting for a Messiah/King to take control and take them to victory against their enemies (the Romans). He didn't seem to bring this victory as expected. Those who believe he was the Messiah (Christians) believe that his kingship and understanding of power is very different to what was expected (spiritual rather than political), and this is central to the Christian faith. You may say his crown was a crown of thorns, his throne was a cross etc. Think about it - what is it to be powerful?
- Christians believe that Jesus is their saviour. Through his death the price of sin is paid and the relationship between mankind and God can be restored. He is given titles such as 'Saviour' and 'Redeemer', and is sometimes referred to as 'The Lamb of God'. In the Jewish religion lambs (symbol of innocence) were ritually slaughtered as a means of cancelling out sin.
- Arguably, Jesus' most important teachings were given in his Sermon on the Mount (find this in Matthew's Gospel). He starts his teaching with the Beatitudes. Here you have a number of reassurances for those who suffer and seek God in the correct way now. He's offering hope to those who suffer and have a pure spirit. He is suggesting that they are close to God and will be rewarded for their faithfulness. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.' 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' At a time when being a Christian brought persecution and must have been easy to give up on, these words must have been a great comfort and a real morale boost. Jesus went on to teach that he was not changing the Law of Moses (central to the Jewish faith) but advancing and refreshing it. He wanted people to care about the law and God with a pure heart, rather than knowing all the details of written rules, feeling proud when they work in your favour and looking to catch others out who fail to meet the exacting standards. He says that adultery happens when a man just looks lustfully at another woman. It is not what you do but what you are thinking and would like to do that matters. No matter what your actions suggest, inside are you good? He teaches forgiveness and warns against grand religious shows performed to impress other people and raise your social status; he says that prayer and charity should happen in private. The term **pure heart** is a really good way of capturing this thinking. He also teaches those listening the words of the Lord's Prayer. He goes on to teach that truth wealth is a spiritual

treasure and worldly goods can stand in the way of this. He taught that we should not judge others, noting that those who do so often miss the 'log' in their own eye whilst trying to remove the 'speck' in another person's. He taught that it is difficult to be a Christian; he spoke of the 'narrow gateway'.

- Jesus preached of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Evangelical Christians, in particular, feel it important to spread this message as much as possible today, trying to persuade as many people as possible to accept Jesus as their saviour. This also follows his command 'go make disciples of all nations, baptising...' (Matt 28).
- Most Christians will hold it essential to believe in the divine nature of Jesus and all of the miracles associated with him. Without this he is just a teacher like many other inspirational teachers. Some more liberal Christians, though, find it difficult to accept the miracles in the light of the scientific understanding through which we now view the world. Some people, like John Hick, believe that Jesus should just be seen as an inspiration teacher of good moral lessons rather than a Messiah and Saviour for the sake of religious unity (he is a **Pluralist**); other religions will struggle to cooperate with Christians when Christians claim to have a divine figure through whom salvation comes.

The incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension

- Incarnation - (to enter body) Jesus' entry into the world ('the Word became flesh' - where's this from?) through the miracle of Mary's pregnancy. Christians hold that Jesus was born without sin and so not through human means. To be born in this way is consistent with him being divine (God).
- Crucifixion - Jesus' death on the cross is known as the crucifixion. This is a key symbol in Christianity. For Christians, by Jesus dying in this way he was able to understand human pain and suffering. Such a painful death makes all the more significant the enormous sacrifice they believe Jesus made for them. For the Christians at the time, it seemed evil had triumphed over good. This atmosphere is recreated in Churches today in their Good Friday services. The death, though, was purposeful, it was the necessary sacrifice to conquer death and sin.
- Resurrection - after the hope seemed to be lost Jesus' body was found to be missing from the tomb and he was later seen having been resurrected from death. This re-established hope that death is not the end and that goodness is stronger than death and sin. It is also why many Christians believe in the wider resurrection of the bodies of the faithful.
- Ascension - the NT records that forty days after the resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven. In doing this he is reunited with God and he hands his mission over to his disciples / the church.
- It may be said that Roman Catholics place too much emphasis on the death (in a way the Mass is a memorial of the crucifixion) which they see as the key event through which the price of sin was paid. To reflect on this is the way we begin to grapple with and overcome our sin. Protestant Churches may emphasise how the cross was not the end but a step on the way to resurrection and through this the salvation which Jesus alone gives us. KNOWING SUBTLE DIFFERENCES SUCH AS THIS WILL HELP GET YOU RAISE YOUR MARK.

The concept of salvation

- As you know, salvation is the Christian belief in the repair of the broken relationship between man and God (broken through sin).
- Salvation was brought about by God taking the form of Man (Jesus) and dying on the cross - a sacrifice which paid the price for sin.
- The term 'Atonement' is often used. This was familiar to the Jews who had a day of atonement, where a ritual sacrifice of a lamb would happen in the holy of holies (a place in the temple where God was most present and only the Priest was able to come into this closer presence on the day of atonement, once a year). This Jewish background helps in understanding salvation through the sacrifice of Christ.
- Jesus was the perfect, sinless sacrifice, able therefore to fully pay the price of human sin in a one off act which does not now need repeating. In the hymn 'There is a green hill' there is the line: 'there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, he only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.'
- Christians teach that Jesus salvation is for everyone who **repents** of their sin and enters into faith. Christianity rejects the idea of an in club or the sinners and the sinless. All are sinners and so unworthy of salvation, but through Jesus' sacrifice all are forgiven and made worthy of salvation.
- All Christians hold that salvation comes from God's grace (meaning an undeserved blessing from God). Protestants strongly emphasise this; whilst Roman Catholics hold it to be the driving force of salvation they also emphasise the importance of 'salvation through works' - this means that we should be trying to improve ourselves to overcome our struggle with sin. Protestants hold that we do not have the power to do this - sin is only removed through God's grace which has its root in the sacrifice of Christ.
- Those wishing to obtain the higher marks should read Paul's letter to the Romans 7:7-25 carefully, looking to understand what he means by the law of sin and the law of man. Two laws, he says, are at work - one spiritual and one unspiritual. What he wants to do is follow God (spiritual) but he constantly finds himself following the alternative. He speaks of a body of death and who shall save him. He makes it clear that his salvation comes from Jesus Christ who it seems takes away the deathly consequences of his unspiritual life in sin. This can be read as a teaching that having faith that God will fix it is how it becomes fixed. God's grace saves not man's futile attempts to improve - a passage Protestants will be particularly aware of.
- Redemption is another word often used. It is the process of buying something back or paying off a debt.
- You need to be working on the arguments between those who believe that faith and those who believe that works save us.

Eschatological beliefs and teachings

- 'Eschatology' means studying the end of time / final things. The 'eschaton' is the final event - Apocalypse. It's more broadly the study of ideas around the afterlife / heaven / hell.
- The early Christians believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. The Second Coming of Jesus is known as the Eschaton. Jesus taught of this in the Bible 'truly, there are some here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.' (Matt). Ideas of what Jesus meant by this (literal/symbolic) quickly adapted when it seemed his imminent return had not happened. Ideas of life after death grew from here, and this first thinking was a very strong belief that salvation from persecution and a final victory over the enemies of Christ was to happen soon - if you like, the Messiah was now to fully establish himself.
- With many who deserved this reward dead, belief in resurrection became strong. When the Parousia happens the dead will be raised so that these faithful people (many who died for their faith) can partake in the Kingdom. Teaching of this resurrection of the dead is found in St Paul's writings: 'the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised' (1 Corinthians). Jesus resurrection also adds weight to this belief. There are a number of Christian artworks which depict the dead walking out of their graves to be judged by Christ, either sent to be with God and the angels or cast away for suffering in hell or destruction.
- Alongside belief in the Parousia and resurrection of the dead at a future point in time on earth, Christians tend to believe that in the intervening period the soul continues to survive and therefore there is an immediate spiritual afterlife soon after death. One day, though, all things will be complete and the body will be reunited with the soul. Other Christians believe that ideas of a physical resurrection should be discarded altogether - S. Paul wrote of there being 'sown a natural body, and raised a spiritual body.' Do you need a body to live / to be you? What do you think. The idea that life after death happens straight after death and we leave our bodies behind is supported by Jesus' words to the good thief: 'truly I tell you **today** you will be with me in paradise.' Roman Catholics tend to believe in **purgatory** - that the soul first goes to a place where it is 'purged' of its sins before it enters into the sinless place of heaven with God. Roman Catholics tend to pray for the dead to help them make progress through purgatory. Purgatory may be seen as a very inclusive and forgiving belief, whilst still recognising the need for punishment or consequence of sin (it isn't just written off straight away like it never happened).
- Christians believe that whatever the timing and nature of our existence in the afterlife, it serves to reward the good (heaven) and punish the bad (hell). Should God punish people? For eternity? A lot of anti-religious thinkers criticise religion for seemingly using heaven and hell as incentives. There are different ideas about what hell would be. Some of the most liberal thinkers suggest it to be separation from God or a state of mind which we may well be experiencing on earth - so something we impart and sustain upon ourselves rather than something God serves to us.
- The idea of heaven and hell being something we can experience now is called realised eschatology. The final event has been realised (in the first coming of Jesus); we are now able to enter into a heavenly existence where we know goodness and experience closeness to God. Eternity may be about grasping something perfect in the now rather than looking to survive forever and ever (which may actually be an image of hell!).

- Do some research - look up the various Biblical passages which support all of these beliefs and ideas.

PRACTICES

Worship

- All Christians worship. Worship is about reflecting on and expressing your beliefs and relationship with God. In many cases it also concerns reflecting and working on the faith journey of the individual believer.
- Christians believe communal worship is important to enable us to come closer to the presence of God: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I.' (words of Jesus, Matthew's Gospel). When this worship happens the event is called a service.
- It also provides encouragement in the Christian faith, which can sometimes be a difficult and lonely experience, though sharing with others.
- Different denominations worship in different ways; broadly speaking, they will fall into one of two camps: liturgical and non-liturgical.
- Liturgical worship is formal and involves set patterns and rituals. Roman Catholic worship tends to be liturgical. Often there will be a priest leading the service, who will say set words and the congregation will say set responses together. Roman Catholic worship will involve sacraments.
- The Eucharist (Roman Catholics tend to call this sacrament the Mass) is liturgical. It is the remembrance of Jesus' suffering and death and our dependence upon this. It is the key service for Roman Catholics. There will be hymns, Bible readings, choral music, prayers and a short sermon. Certain movements following set patterns are common - e.g. a person crossing themselves or genuflecting. The Priest is very much the leader in a Roman Catholic Mass, acting as a bridge between the rest of the congregation and God. The Priest will hear confessions before Mass and declare what must be done to secure forgiveness for sin. Roman Catholic worship is partly a means of improving ourselves and overcoming sin; the Priest is a key person in enabling us to do this - this is the case in all their Sacraments.
- Anglicans (Church of England) vary a little in their style of worship. Some worship in a very similar way to Roman Catholics, others are more closely associated with Protestant beliefs. The majority of Anglican services will be liturgical. Their Eucharist is likely to be very similar to the Roman Catholic mass; one key difference is that Roman Catholics believe in transubstantiation (that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus, and so the sacrifice is renewed on the Altar) whilst Anglicans view them as symbolic of his death which happened only once.
- Methodist services are a bit more relaxed, and the Eucharist or Holy Communion does not happen as frequently. With a pattern of hymns, prayers, sitting, standing and what is often a long sermon it is still liturgical in style.
- Quakers also have a routine in place and so their worship can be seen as liturgical, but the majority of the service is silent, interrupted when anyone can speak as they feel 'moved' to do so. This focus on being moved by the Spirit gives them a foot in the non-liturgical style of worship also.
- As just recognised, non-liturgical worship avoids being tied to a set series of events. Worship is about feeling the presence of God / being moved by the Spirit. Anyone has access to the potential of this (not only one person called a Priest). To enable this to happen there will be much more focus on Biblical study, which all will have time to think through themselves and possibly contribute to, and on singing, creating opportunities for the congregation to be

active. In the most **charismatic** service people, moved by the spirit, will dance and lift their hands in the glory of God.

- Most Christians will also devote some time each day to private worship, where they will pray and read and study the Bible.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of these different styles?

Sacraments

- Roman Catholics recognise and place great importance on seven sacraments.
- These sacraments are: Baptism, Holy Communion (Mass or Eucharist), Confirmation, Reconciliation, Marriage, Holy Orders (or Ordination), Anointing the sick with oil.
- Sacraments are often defined by saying 'an outward sign of an inward grace.' Roman Catholics believe that God blesses, strengthens and sanctifies you through each of the sacraments. To represent the working of God within each of the sacraments an 'outward' sign is performed - e.g. water is poured over the head in baptism, this demonstrates the occurrence of a spiritual washing away of sin. Priests tend to perform the sacraments in the Roman Catholic church, demonstrating their importance and ability to stimulate the workings of God in the lives of believers.
- Protestant Churches, including the Church of England, only recognise two sacraments - Baptism and Holy Communion, because they have a basis in the Bible. These acts tend to be concerned more with remembering and following the example and command of Jesus rather than bringing about spiritual transformation at the hands of a Priest. To put it simply and generalise, Protestants tend to leave God to be in charge and Roman Catholics believe that the efforts of human beings (particularly those with particular callings to holier lives (e.g. Priests)) should also be involved.
- The Eucharist is covered in the last section.
- Baptism is about the washing away of sin and following in the example and command of Jesus (Baptised himself by John). It is also considered the beginning of the Christian journey and membership of the church. Godparents are assigned to young children who promise to support them in their faith throughout their lives. Baptist churches will favour Believer's Baptism, where adults are Baptised in much larger pools (fully immersed) when they themselves freely choose to declare their faith and join the Church. Some speak of being 'born again' at Baptism; the believer dies in their old way of life and starts again with the baggage of their sin behind them.

Prayer

- Prayer is an attempt to communicate with God.
- Prayer is an important part of congregational worship.
- In congregational worship it may work in a set, formal and liturgical way (Roman Catholic Christians tend to do this) or it may be informal and spontaneous (Protestant Christians, who focus on being **moved by the Spirit** will tend to do this).
- It is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of these different types of prayer.
- You should know the Lord's Prayer. This prayer was taught by Jesus, so is considered important by all Christian. It can be seen as the perfect example of what prayer should be. It contains praise and adoration ('Hallowed be your name'), a request for the coming of God's will and his kingdom ('thy kingdom come, thy will be done'), a request for our needs to be provided for ('give us this day our daily bread'), a request for forgiveness ('forgive us our trespasses'), consideration of others ('as we forgive those who trespass against us') and a request for strength as we come up against temptations ('lead us not into temptation').
- Christians will also pray on their own. Many Christians will view this an important practice in order that they develop a close personal relationship with God. They can manage this their own way, contemplating exactly what God wants of them, dwelling deeply on his presence without any of the distractions which can sometimes be experienced in congregational worship.
- Christians remember how prayer brought about change in the Bible and many firmly believe that prayer has the power to transform lives and situations now. Some Christians wear wrist bands with the acronym 'PUSH' - pray until something happens.
- Roman Catholics will often worship privately using the Rosary.
- Prayers will involve some or all of the following: adoration (to declare and literally adore the holiness of God), confession (to confess our sins), supplications and intercession (asking for help; intercessions are requests for help for others), thanksgiving (giving thanks for the many blessings in life. Praying in the Spirit (mentioned already) is a standard practice within many Protestant Churches (particularly Pentecostals). Giving thanks before a meal (saying Grace) is also practiced by all Christians.
- Meditational prayers are also commonly practiced. This is when the believer enters a state of stillness and quite to concentrate upon God. Such periods of stillness bring Christians a sense of particular closeness to God. Many Christians view this as a time of listening to what God may be saying to them.
- Worth thinking about - do you think prayer makes any difference? Are unanswered prayers a waste of time?

The role and importance of pilgrimage

- Christians believe that we are all on a spiritual journey. Many will practice pilgrimage, where they literally go on a journey to capture the process of their wider journey to holiness and God, and to visit a place of significance for the Christian faith.
- Such places include Lourdes, Jerusalem, Walsingham and Rome.
- You should know the significance of each of these places for Christians.
- Do you think it is necessary to go on pilgrimage?

Celebrations

- Advent and Christmas are important celebrations for Christians. Advent is a period of preparation before the celebration of Christmas. Many Christians will fast and focus upon spiritually preparing themselves for Christmas during Advent. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus.
- Christians will often go to a special service at midnight on Christmas Eve to witness and celebrate the start of Christmas. For Roman Catholics this will be Midnight Mass.
- Several services will happen in Churches throughout Christmas day. Christmas carols are sung and an atmosphere of celebration pervades. Presents are exchanged following the story of the wise men bringing gifts to Jesus.
- Christmas is important because it captures hope and the move from darkness to light. It remembers and celebrates the incarnation, a new beginning and the act that makes it possible to have a restored relationship with God. Christ's coming into the world brought the start of his human mission, which enabled us to learn of God's will and brought forgiveness of our sins. Eternal life became possible through this. Christians also believe that Jesus will return again and see his first entry into the world as assurance of there being more to come. Christmas also gives Christians an opportunity to focus on the needs of the less fortunate. Many will become more involved in charity work at this time. The Christmas story, of course, presents Jesus as a homeless child. For many Christians the Christmas story and celebrations provide a reminder of the need for us to be actively involved in bringing about the peace, joy and love at the heart of the Christmas message.
- Lent, Holy Week and Easter are also significant and inter-connected celebrations for Christians. Lent is the period of preparation for Easter (40 days and nights); Christians will fast during this time. Christians mark the beginning of Lent with Ash Wednesday - on this day they attend a service where they are marked with an ash cross; words are said as they are ashed which remind them that 'from dust they came and unto dust will they return'. Lent echoes the period of fasting in the wilderness which Jesus undertook before he rode into Jerusalem such that many saw him as a king riding to victory. Christians looking back on the events of Jesus' life believe that Jesus undertook the difficult fast and went to be alone with God to prepare himself for the completion of his human mission. Jesus needed to find great strength; perhaps we do too as we seek to fulfil God's will for us.
- At the start of Holy week there is Palm Sunday - this remembers the event of Jesus riding into Jerusalem. Palm leaves were laid down to acknowledge Jesus as a returning king. Palm crosses are given out to Christians during the Palm Sunday service. Palm Sunday is an important time for Christians to reflect on their own faithfulness to Jesus. Many of Christ's followers who shouted 'hosanna' as he rode into Jerusalem turned out to be hypocrites. They will consider what it actually means to follow Jesus.
- On Maundy Thursday Christians remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples. They mark this with a service where the minister will wash the feet of the congregation, following the example set by Jesus (Christians will see this as an example of **servant ministry**); one of many examples of Jesus' importance and role being expressed in surprising ways. Christians are reminded of the need to be humble and prepared to serve others themselves. Christians will also celebrate the Eucharist, the Last Supper being the event where Jesus' instigated this act of worship. For Roman Catholics, the sacrament of the Eucharist/Mass is a reliving of the

sacrifice of Christ as flesh and blood; he did this for them; in the Mass therefore he becomes their spiritual food - through his death they live.

- Good Friday remembers Jesus' crucifixion and death. Services on this day will involve reflecting on the events of the crucifixion, with readings from the Gospel accounts of this story. Christians will consider how they have a role in the death of Christ and the way in which his death gives them a means of salvation.
- On Easter Sunday Christians remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. They will mark this with a Eucharist (the last time this happened was on Maundy Thursday). Celebrations will continue into the home. The new Easter or Pascal candle is lit and will be used throughout the year, symbolising Jesus as the light of the world; Easter is the event where the message of light destroying the darkness is vividly on display. Easter is vital for Christians because Jesus' resurrection confirms their hope that his death brought about their salvation and opened up a path back to God away from the darkness of sin; it confirms that he is God. It also provides them with hope for their own resurrection after death.

Rites of passage - important for both Christians and the local community

- Rites of passages are markings and celebrations of important stages in life. For Christians these have religious significance. Some rites of passage are sacraments and so involve the imparting of blessings from God.
- Baptism - usually infants are baptised. See section on sacraments for more information.
- Confirmation - Children who have been baptised as babies may choose to get confirmed when they reach an age when they can declare their faith for themselves. The candidate will attend confirmation classes for some weeks before the confirmation service to study the faith they are planning to fully sign up to. A Bishop will confirm the candidate and place hands on the head to symbolise the descent of the Holy Spirit enriching the faith of the candidate.
- Marriage - you should know the basic elements of the marriage service and be able to explain why marriage is important to Christians and the wider community who may get married in church without regular attendance otherwise. Make sure you know some Biblical quotations/themes relating to marriage.
- Funerals - again, you should know the basic elements of the funeral service and be able to explain why funerals are important for Christians and the wider community.
- Don't forget that the services mentioned above are only part of the picture. Much preparation and follow-up will be involved, with ministers and others involved with the faith visiting and meeting with those concerned to support and prepare them for the service and extend the effect of the service afterwards.
- The church will also provide Sunday School, youth clubs and have a great deal of involvement with local schools, all of which may be important supports for the local community and the family living within the community.

Mission

- In understanding mission, it's helpful to think of it as the Christian answer to the question 'what are we tasked to do?'
- Most of the time the Christian mission involves spreading the message of the Christian faith; many, though, will also (or instead) see their mission as involving transforming the world through charity work.
- Jesus told his followers to 'make disciples of all nations'. Evangelical Christians will see this as a command; they will attempt to convert non-Christians to Christianity. They will be 'exclusivists', believing that salvation only comes from faith in Jesus. They back up their position with Jesus' words 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.'
- Other, more liberal Christians may be 'inclusivists', holding it to be possible to be an 'anonymous Christian' (Rahner), meaning that it is possible to live as a Christian should (and so come to salvation) without actually formally declaring yourself to be a Christian. Such a Christian may view their mission as being about encouraging people to live in a good way without insisting that they should become a Christian. Further down the liberal spectrum you find 'pluralist' Christians (Hick is one example), who believe that there are many different ways to get to the same truth; Christianity is only one. People should be encouraged to develop their own traditions and beliefs, even when they seem to conflict with the message of Christianity.
- Evaluation thinking - is Christian mission appropriate in the 21st Century? How did Jesus model mission?
- There are examples of Christian Churches where innovative thinkers have been creative with what 'Church' actually means. There are many examples where 'Church' has adapted to place itself amongst and engage with the wider community; arguably mission has been most successful in such cases in recent years. One such example is 'Messy Church'.
- Many Christians (leaning towards to exclusivist end of the spectrum) care passionately about mission because they see it as their duty to be proud of their faith and further the mission of Jesus, remembering the sacrifice he made for the sake of this. They would be concerned about watering down the Christian faith by seeing it as one 'truth' amongst many; doing this, they would say, calls into question the extent to which Jesus' message is the 'truth'.

The Church in the wider world

- Ecumenism is the attempt to bring Christians of different denominations together in shared worship and mission.
- Supporters of ecumenism would say that Christians have more in common than they have differences, and exercising Christianity in the world today is difficult enough without doing so with disagreements and splits in the Church as a whole today.
- They will believe that Jesus sought to establish a single group of followers.
- Supporters of ecumenism may believe that certain Churches have lost their understanding of the essence of Church. They will note that the word Church comes from a Greek word which is a reference to the people, not the building. They will hold that this focus on the *people* who together make up the Church (with all their differences) to be the key to building more unity and strength in the faith.
- The World Council of Churches is a Christian organisation trying to build this unity. They campaign on key issues, which all Christians care about, including HIV and Aids, food security and sustainable agriculture, and climate change.
- Most Christian denominations are involved with ecumenism on an occasional basis, often having joint services on Ecumenical Sunday in January.
- There are a number of Ecumenical communities that seek to make ecumenism happen on a permanent basis within their space. These include Taizé in France and Iona in Scotland.

- The Christian Church has been the subject of persecution throughout history. However, more Christians have been murdered for their faith in the past century than at any other time in human history.
- Whilst the most serious form of persecution is murder, persecution can involve any attempt to treat another person or group with hostility and ill-treatment.
- Some Christians in the UK feel that they are subtly persecuted for their beliefs, which are often viewed with suspicion and ridicule in the media and general society. Atheism has risen strongly and some of its more famous supporters have arguably encouraged intolerance towards religion.
- Christian evangelism could be seen as a contributing factor to persecution of the Church. It may be said that many Christians are not tolerant of other's different beliefs, and much of the persecution experienced by the Church is simply a mirrored response.
- In some Countries, such as Iran, the spreading of Christianity is banned. Some Christians may feel they have a particular mission here, following the example of Jesus and the early Christians who themselves faced persecution, with extreme attempts to prevent the growth of the faith.
- Christian aid agencies such as Cafod and Christian Aid coordinate charity work in the world in the name of Christianity. This reflects the command that Jesus gave to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Jesus himself showed what love should mean and can do through his death on the cross. He also sought out the disadvantaged and oppressed in society and made them aware of the love of God. Making sacrifices to care for those in need is therefore an essential part of Christian practice. The teaching of the Sheep and the Goats - making it clear that belief should be put into practice - is at the heart of what these agencies are trying to do and why they exist.

Exam Information

The exam for this component is 1 hour. You will answer 2 questions, broken into 5 parts (a, b, c, d, e).

a, b & c – each worth 3 marks. AO1. Pay attention to trigger words / phrase to ensure you answer the questions correctly.

- e.g.
- Describe what is meant by the term...
 - Outline one...
 - Describe the role...
 - Give three reasons why...

d – worth 6 marks. Questions will look like this:

- Explain **why... important...**

Weighting – AO1 = 4 marks, AO2 = 2 marks. The AO2 here only goes as far as analysis; no need to consider disagreement (if you answer what the question is asking you will meet the skill requirements).

e – worth 15 marks. Weighting – AO1 = 3 marks, AO2 = 12 marks. Questions will start with a quotation. Will be an opinion / position within or in challenge of a Christian belief / teaching / practice. It will be controversial. Think of it as a motion for debate. You will be asked to ‘**discuss** this statement.’

A1English DJS – Analysis, Importance/Significance, Evaluation, Difference, Judgement, Sources of wisdom/authority.

Example questions

Nature of God

- A) Outline what Christians mean when they describe God as eternal.
- B) Give three reasons why Christians believe God is forgiving.
- C) Outline three Christian beliefs about the nature of God.
- D) Explain why belief in God as personal is important for most Christians.
- E) ‘The transcendence of God is a crucial belief for all Christians’ Discuss this statement.

Concept of God as a Trinity of Persons

- A) Outline what Christians mean when they describe God as a Trinity of persons.
- B) Describe the role of the Spirit.
- C) Describe the role of the Son.
- D) Explain why it is important that Christians believe in the Trinity.
- E) 'All Christians should have to view God as a Trinity of persons.' Discuss this statement.

Biblical accounts of creation

- A) Outline what the creation accounts teach about human beings.
- B) Describe how God is presented in the creation accounts.
- C) Outline three features of the creation account in John 1.
- D) Explain why the creation stories hold importance for Christians.
- E) 'The creation stories should be taken literally by all Christians.' Discuss this statement.

The problem of evil and suffering and a loving and righteous God

- A) Outline three key details in the story of The Fall.
- B) Outline what Christians mean by Original Sin.
- C) Outline how Christians justify the existence of evil in the world.
- D) Explain why the existence of evil in the world is important for some Christians.
- E) 'Evil and suffering show that God does not exist.' Discuss this statement.

Jesus Christ

- A) Outline three of Jesus' titles.
- B) Outline one message which Jesus taught.
- C) Outline what Christians mean when they call Jesus the Messiah.
- D) Explain why Jesus is an important figure for Christians.
- E) 'Jesus was a disappointing and unsuccessful figure.' Discuss this statement.

Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension

- A) Describe the event of the crucifixion.
- B) Outline what Christians mean by the term 'Incarnation'.
- C) Outline what Christians mean when they refer to the ascension
- D) Explain why the resurrection is an important event for Christians.
- E) 'The resurrection of Jesus is more important than any other belief for Christians.' Discuss this statement.

The Concept of Salvation

- A) Outline what Christians mean by salvation.
- B) Outline S. Paul's teachings about salvation from sin.
- C) Outline what Christians believe about the role of Christ in bringing about salvation.
- D) Explain why teachings about salvation are held to be so important in Christianity.
- E) 'Through Jesus all people are saved.' Discuss this statement.

Eschatological beliefs and teachings

- A) Outline the eschatological beliefs of the early church.
- B) Outline Christian beliefs about Parousia.
- C) Outline three Christian beliefs about what happens after death.
- D) Explain why life after death is an important teaching for Christians.
- E) 'Christians can be certain of a life in heaven.' Discuss this statement.

Worship

- A) Outline three of the reasons for Christian worship.
- B) Describe what charismatic worship involves for some Christians.
- C) Outline three different types of prayer.
- D) Explain why private prayer considered important by many Christians.
- E) 'Liturgical worship is the most helpful form of worship.' Discuss this statement.

Sacraments

- A) Describe what Christians mean by the term sacrament.
- B) Outline three of the sacraments recognised by Roman Catholics.
- C) Outline what Christians believe about baptism.
- D) Explain why the Eucharist is considered so important for many Christians.
- E) 'The sacraments should not have a key place in Christian worship.' Discuss this statement.

Prayer

- A) Outline three different types of prayer.
- B) Outline what Christians mean by 'praying in the spirit.'
- C) Outline Christian beliefs about confession.
- D) Explain why prayer is important for Christians.
- E) 'Prayer changes nothing.' Discuss this statement.

The role and importance of pilgrimage and celebrations to Christians

- A) Outline three places of Christian pilgrimage.
- B) Outline Christian beliefs about Lent.
- C) Outline what Christians are celebrating at Easter.
- D) Explain why Lent is an important period for Christians.
- E) 'Advent is more important than Christmas.' Discuss this statement.

The role of the church in the local community and living practices

- A) Outline three ways in which the Church has a role in the local community.
- B) Describe the Christian beliefs seen in a believer's baptism.
- C) Outline the Christian beliefs seen in a funeral.
- D) Explain why Christians believe a Church marriage to be important.
- E) 'The Church plays an important role within the local community.' Discuss this statement.

Mission

- A) Outline why Christians evangelise.
- B) Outline three different Christian beliefs about mission.
- C) Outline how Christians practice evangelism.
- D) Explain why evangelism is important for many Christians.
- E) 'Christians should not evangelise.' Discuss this statement.

The role of the church in the wider world

- A) Describe what is meant by the term 'ecumenical'.
- B) Describe how the Church may be being persecuted today.
- C) Outline the purpose of a Christian charity which plays a role in the wider world.
- D) Explain why ecumenism is important for many Christians.
- E) 'Ecumenical Christianity can't work.' Discuss this statement.