

GSCE

FE

Essential

Revision Guide

Paper two

Christian beliefs, teachings and practices

The Nature of God

Omnibenevolence

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' John 3:16



Omnipotence

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back. . . and turned it into dry land.

Exodus 14:21

Key terms

The Fall: The first sin committed by Adam and Eve

Monotheist: someone who believes in one God

Omnipotent: all powerful

Omnibenevolent: all loving

Omniscient: all knowing

Omnipresent: everywhere

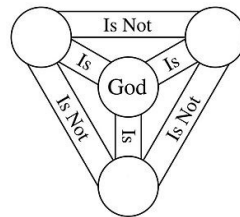
Original sin: the idea that everyone is born sinful

Transcendent: outside of space and time

The Trinity

Christianity is a monotheistic faith, but Christians believe that God is made up of three persons:

- The Father: omnipotent, omniscient
- The Son: God incarnate
- The Holy Spirit: the presence of God on earth who guides and comforts Christians.



Trinity Quote

'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

Creation

There are two biblical accounts of creation and they are found in Genesis chapter one and Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis 1: 6 day creation story. God creates the world out of nothing by commanding each feature, *'let there be light.'* At the end of each day, God looks at his creation and sees that *'it is good'* Humans were created on day 6 and are created *'in the image of God.'*

Genesis 2: God creates Adam out of the dust of the earth and then created Eve out of Adam's rib to be a 'companion' for him.

All Christians share the belief that God is the creator of the universe. They do, however interpret these passages differently.

Literalists: believe that every detail of Genesis is absolutely true.

Conservative Christians: may interpret 'day' as a much longer period of time.

Liberal Christians: may understand the accounts in a metaphorical sense. The important message is that it was God who was behind the origins of the universe,

The Fall

Genesis 3 describes how Adam and Eve are tempted by the devil who appears in the form of a snake. God has told them that they may eat from any of the trees except from the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' They take the fruit, their relationship with God is broken and are then punished by God; it is at this point that death enters the world.



The role of the Trinity in creation

In the beginning. . . the spirit of God was hovering over the waters ' Genesis 1:1-2

Christian believe that this is a clear indication that the Holy Spirit was present before the creation of the universe.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.' John 1:1-5

Most Christians believe that 'the Word' refers to Jesus and that Jesus was there at the beginning of creation.



Why does God allow evil?

Augustine's theodicy

Augustine argued that evil exists as a result of human free will given to us by God. Sin came into the world as a result of the fall, and with sin comes suffering. Moral evil can be explained by the bad choices people make that bring suffering to others. Augustine argued that his theodicy also explains natural evil as the fall brought disharmony to the natural world; earthquakes, diseases and other forms of natural evil are a result of this.

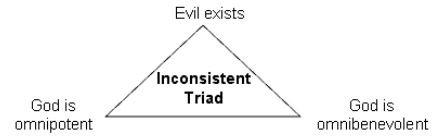


The Devil

Other Christians explain evil in the world in terms of the Devil. The devil was a fallen angel called Lucifer. He first appears in the Bible in the form of the snake in the Adam and Eve story, tempting Eve into taking the forbidden fruit. The devil also appears in the book of Job as well as appearing to tempt Jesus when he is in the wilderness. Christians believe that the devil 'roams the earth looking for people to devour' and they understand this to mean that he is constantly trying to lead people away from God and that suffering is a part of this.

The Problem of Evil

This is a logical problem put forward by many philosophers over the centuries. David Hume and JL Mackie have presented this as an 'inconsistent triad' which shows that the existence of God is incompatible with evil. If God were omnipotent he would be able to stop evil and if he were omnibenevolent he would want to stop evil.



Irenaeus' theodicy

Irenaeus was a 2nd century monk, who presented an alternative theodicy. He argued that God gave us free will and we need to use this to become like God. God allows evil as a 'soul-making' tool. He explains that suffering enables us to become better people so that we can develop and become like him. He says that without witnessing poverty we cannot truly be generous; without fear, we cannot learn to be courageous. God has given us free will

Job

The book of Job in the Old Testament gives Christians an insight into why God allows evil. The book describes Job as a good man who is loyal to God. Satan argues that Job is only good because God has blessed him with wealth, a large family and flocks. God allows Satan to take these things away from Job as a test to see if he turns his back on God. He loses his children, servants and flocks and becomes ill. Job asks big questions about God, but in the end declares that God's ways are beyond human understanding. He retains his faith in God even though he doesn't understand why God has allowed his suffering.

The person of Jesus

Incarnation

Christians believe that Jesus is God in human form. They believe that Mary became pregnant as a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus.' Luke 1:29

The following could all be considered evidence that Jesus was divine:

- The virgin birth
- The voice of God heard at his baptism *'this is my son, with whom I am well pleased.'*
- Jesus ability to perform miracles.
- The transfiguration (when he shone with glorious light)
- The resurrection..



The Last Supper

On the night before his death, Jesus shares a Passover meal with his disciples. He tells his disciples that the bread and wine that they are eating are his body and blood. He then predicts his death on the cross and says that through this human sins will be forgiven.

Crucifixion

Jesus followers believed him to be the Messiah, a special leader that they were waiting for who was going to save the Jewish nation. The Jewish authorities accused him of treason and this led to his death on the cross. This brutal punishment was designed to ensure that a criminal died in agony. Christians believe that Jesus suffered like any other human would on the cross as he was fully man as well as being God. This is significant as it means that God understands human suffering. Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross in order to bring salvation to those who follow him. They believe that in dying, Jesus paid the price for human sin so that those who ask for forgiveness, repent and follow him can be reunited with God and receive eternal life. This is known as atonement.



Resurrection

The resurrection refers to Jesus coming back to life three days after the crucifixion and it is central to Christian belief. It is the greatest of the miracles and for Christians is evidence that Jesus is God and that he has conquered death. He appeared first to the women who had gone to visit the tomb. He also appeared to his disciples.



Ascension

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Luke 24:50-53)

For Christians this is significant as Jesus' life on earth didn't end in death. This is further evidence that Jesus is God and that he has conquered death.

Salvation

Christians believe that everyone is born with the original sin and that this separates them from God. Jesus' death on the cross atoned for human sin and allowed the chance for salvation so that they can live with God in heaven forever. Christians have different ideas about exactly how they achieve salvation.

Roman Catholics

Believe that they achieve salvation by taking part in the sacraments. Baptism wipes them clean of sin and that by confessing their sins (sacrament of penance) they are freed from their sins.

Protestants

Believe that their salvation is achieved by having faith in Jesus and repenting of their sins. It is not by works (a result of the good things that they do in life) that they are saved.

The Afterlife

Judgement

Christians believe that they will be judged by God at the end of time when Jesus returns in the 'second coming'. This is described by Jesus in the parable of the 'Sheep and the Goats' as well as the parable of the 'Rich man and Lazarus.' These parables show that judgement will be based on faith and good actions rather than wealth or status.

Purgatory

Roman Catholics also believe in purgatory, a place for those who are not ready to gain entry to heaven. In purgatory they are cleansed of their sins in order to get into heaven on Judgement Day.

Heaven

There are many references to heaven in the bible, but not many descriptions of it. Some Christians believe that it is an actual place, while others believe it has a more spiritual meaning. Christians believe that it is the spiritual part of the person (the soul) that joins God in paradise when they die whilst others believe that their physical body will be resurrected.

'The dead will be raised imperishable'

Christians believe that in heaven, they will spend an eternity with God, with no suffering or pain.

Hell

Christian opinions about hell also differ. Some believe that it is a physical place where people burn eternally whilst others believe it is more of a spiritual reality where there is complete separation from God.

Worship

Worship is a way of expressing praise and adoration to God. This can be done in many different forms. When Christians come together to worship it is known as 'corporate' or congregational' worship. Worship in most churches will include prayers, sung worship, Bible readings and a sermon.



Key Quote

Where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there with them. (Matthew 18:20)

Liturgical worship

This is when worship follows a set structure which is the same every time. It is often formal in style and centres around the Eucharist. The Roman Catholic and Anglican churches use liturgical worship for their services.



Informal worship

This is more spontaneous and often less formal than liturgical worship. It doesn't have a set structure and they focus on the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to act. Evangelical churches are often informal and non-liturgical in their style. They place an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit which can cause people to cry, laugh or speak in tongues (an unknown language). People are encouraged to express themselves in singing and dancing.



Individual worship

In addition to worshipping in a congregation, Christians believe it is important to spend time personally worshipping God. They believe that their faith is based on a personal relationship with God and they therefore want to develop this. They do this through personal prayer and Bible study.

Key Quote

'Go to your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is in Heaven.' Matthew 6:6

Quaker Worship

Quaker services are based around the sense of being in the presence of God and the working of the Holy Spirit. It is because of this that they do not consist of any set prayers or liturgy. Instead they sit in silence and wait for the Holy Spirit to prompt them. They then may feel moved to speak to the congregation. This form of worship helps them to feel closer to God.

Set Prayers: These are prayers that have been written and are recited by Christians. The Lord's prayer is an example of this. Many Christians find set prayers useful in guiding them in how to pray.

Extemporaneous Prayers: These are spontaneous prayers. Many Christians prefer these to set prayers as they feel that they can be more honest with God. They also believe that the Holy Spirit helps them to know what to pray.

Informal prayers: These are set prayers, written in a less formal and more contemporary style so that worshippers feel that they can relate to them more.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers that the Father seeks. (John 4:23)

Christians believe that this means that however you choose to worship, the most important thing is that it is genuine and not superficial.

The Importance of prayer

Prayer is how Christians communicate with God. They believe that they can do this at any time and in any way, it is often deeply personal. Some common forms of prayer are:

Adoration: in praise of God

Confession: saying sorry for sins

Thanksgiving: Giving thanks for what God has done.

Supplication: Asking for something

The Lord's prayer was the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and is made up of these 4 types of prayer.

The Sacraments

Infant baptism

The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church baptise babies in order to welcome them into the Christian community. Parents and godparents make promises to bring the child up in the Christian faith. These children then have the opportunity to 'confirm' these promises for themselves in a confirmation service when they are old enough to choose their faith for themselves. The priest will pour water over the babies head as a symbolic action to show that they are being cleansed of sin. Many Christians believe that the original sin is removed during baptism.



Key Quote

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded of you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus clearly instructs his followers to baptise people.

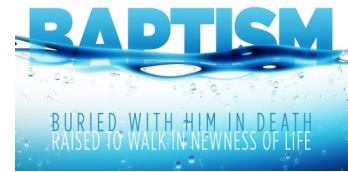
The Catholic Church

They believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus. This is known as transubstantiation.



Believer's baptism

Other denominations, such as the Baptist church don't believe in infant baptism. They believe that baptism is a public declaration of personal faith and children can't do this. They point to the fact that Jesus himself was baptised as an adult. Usually in a 'believer's baptism' the person is fully immersed in the water as a sign of dying to sin and rising to new life. They often share the story of their faith (testimony) and make promises to follow Jesus and to turn their back on evil.



The Eucharist

This is also known as Holy Communion or Mass. The word 'Eucharist' means thanksgiving and Christians believe that this sacrament is an act of thanksgiving for the life and death of Jesus. At the Last Supper, Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples, telling them that these were his body and blood, shed for them. He then told them to '*do this, as often as you eat it, in remembrance of me*'. Eucharist services as an example of liturgical worship.

Protestant churches

They believe that Jesus is present spiritually rather than literally in the sharing of communion.

Other churches

Such as the Baptist church believe that sharing the Eucharist is an act of remembrance. Christ is not present in the bread or wine.

A sacrament is an 'outward sign of an inward blessing.' This means that the actions and words involved in the sacrament, represent something deeper that God is doing. The seven sacraments are:

Baptism: initiation into the church

Confirmation: remaking of infant baptismal vows

Eucharist: Sharing bread and wine

Penance: confession of sins too a priest (Catholic church)

Anointing of the sick: carried out when a Catholic is very ill.

Holy orders: being ordained

Marriage: the spiritual union of the couple and God.