

GCSE Philosophy and Ethics – Christian Beliefs revision notes

Key concepts:

(A questions – you must have definition & example)

Omnipotent: The idea that God is all powerful, all mighty and unlimited.

Omnibenevolent: The idea that God is all-loving and infinitely good.

Trinity: The concept of God as three persons: son, Father and Holy Spirit

Incarnation: the idea that God became 'flesh' or human in the form of Jesus

Atonement: the belief that Jesus' death on the cross healed the 'rift' between humanity and God

Resurrection: the belief that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, conquering death.

Sacraments: An outward sign of an invisible and inward blessing by God ie. Baptism or communion

Evangelism: Preaching of the gospel to others with the intention of converting them to the Christian faith

The Nature of God

Christians believe in one God which makes Christianity a **monotheistic** religion. However they believe God is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent

Omnipotent: Many stories in the Old Testament reveal the power of God. For example, Moses parting the red sea "the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind, and turned it into dry land". The immensity of God's power is also seen in the creation story "God said 'Let there be light' and there was light".

Omnibenevolent: Christians believe that God is all loving which is seen in him paying the ultimate sacrifice in the form of his son Jesus Christ, to atone for humanities sins.

"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)

Evil and Suffering

Theodicies are arguments about why evil and suffering exist in the world if God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent. These include:

- Human beings have free will and so evil is moral evil.
- There is a force for evil in the world such as the Devil/Satan.
- Suffering is the result of the original sin.
- Suffering is a test.

The book of Job: teaches us that God does not cause although allows suffering and that sometimes this suffering may be down to the work of Satan. Furthermore, suffering may be a test to see how faithful we remain. The end of the story emphasises that although there is suffering in the world we must trust that God has a greater plan which we as mere human beings cannot possibly understand. God is greater than us as he is omniscient.

The Trinity

Christians believe in the 'oneness' of God but that he can also be represented as a Trinity. They believe that this is referred to in the Bible when it says:

'I and the Father are one' (Jesus in John 10:30)

*'In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'
(John1:1)*

The Trinity consists of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Father: omnipotent and omniscient part of God who is transcendent (outside of time and space). He is the creator of the world but also able to have a personal and caring relationship with believers.

Son: This is believed to be Jesus Christ who came to earth as God incarnate to teach people about God and to atone for their sins through his sacrifice on the cross.

Spirit: This is the force that was left behind when Jesus ascended to lead and guide Christians. It is an immanent (within the earth) form of the Holy Trinity often represented as a dove.

Creation

For Christians it is important to recognise that God is the creator. In Genesis 1 it states that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

He created, according to Genesis 1, in this order: Night and Day, The heavens, Land and Plants, The sun, moon and stars, Birds and fish, animals and mankind. On the seventh day he rested. After each item he created he said that 'it was good' which shows that he was pleased with his creation. It also claims that male and female were made together in the 'image of God'.

Genesis 2 explains the creation story slightly differently to Genesis 1. For example creation seems to be in a different order. The most important difference is the creation of mankind. Here it is given in more detail:

"Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken from the man" Gen 2:22

It is in Genesis 2 that we read the story of the Fall of mankind and consequently the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve which has huge repercussions for humanity today. This points to the point when the perfect relationship between God and man was broken.

Different Interpretations

The creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 can be read in both a literal and non-literal way. Some fundamentalist Christians believe the text to be word for word true as it is divinely given by God. This can be difficult to make work with scientific theories of creation.

Others are happy to read the texts in a more symbolic way which is easier to work with with theories such as the Big Bang and Evolution.

Jesus Christ: The incarnation

There is biblical evidence to suggest that Jesus was the incarnation of God.

“The Word (Jesus as God) became flesh and made his dwelling (home) among us” (John 1:14)

Further evidence includes:

The fact that he had a Virgin Birth as Mary was told *“So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”*

The evidence suggesting he performed miracles *“They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”*

His baptism: *“And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.””*

And his resurrection: *“The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.”*

Jesus Christ: The crucifixion

Jesus’ teachings brought him into conflict with the Jewish authorities. This is because they believed that he was committing blasphemy by claiming that he was the Messiah. The main points of the crucifixion story include:

- He was chosen by the crowds to be the one killed
- Two criminals were crucified with him
- He was mocked by others for being ‘the King of the Jews’
- He was made a crown of thorns
- He called out to God on the cross ‘Why have you forsaken me?’
- When he died the temple curtain tore in two.

Jesus Christ: Salvation and Atonement

For Christians, Jesus’ death on the cross is an act of **atonement** which was necessary because the **Original Sin** brought into the world by Adam and Eve had separated God from mankind. In the Old Testament **animal sacrifices** were used to make up for sins that had been committed. Jesus, instead was offered as a **sacrificial lamb** as the final offering to repair the relationship between God and mankind. This means that Christians can now have eternal life with God.

John the Baptist said to Jesus "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus Christ: The last supper

This refers to the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. Here he claimed that the Bread represents his body and the wine his blood. We see this represented in the Eucharist/Communion which takes place in churches today. This helps Christians to reflect upon the crucifixion of Jesus. It is at the last supper that Jesus predicts his death on a cross as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.

“He was despised and rejected by mankind...by his wounds we are healed” Isaiah 53: 3-9

For Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is essential to their faith. This is because it is only through the resurrection that Jesus conquered death and therefore Christians can one day be resurrected too and live for eternity with God in heaven.

Paul tells us that "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" 1
Corinthians 15:14

Ascension

Christians believe that after he rose from the dead Jesus later ascended (went up into) heaven. Some believe that this was a physical ascent and others claim that it is symbolic to show that Jesus' time on earth was over. It is significant because it marks the time when Jesus left earth in a physical way but the Holy Spirit was left behind to lead and guide Christians today.

Salvation

Humans believe that the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve has separated them from God. All people, as a consequence of this first sin are born into the world sinful as it is passed from generation to generation from Adam. There are some issues with this:

It seems unfair of God to punish others for someone else's sin – is this a fair God?

It is hard to explain biologically how sin is passed from one person to the next.

One way to deal with this issues is to belief that original sin is simply a useful way to understand that humans are prone to doing bad things and acting against God's law.

Christ's death allows for human sin to be atoned for and to allow Christians to live eternally with God after death. This is because Jesus was the sacrifice which paid the ransom for human sin.

However, different denominations have different ideas on how to act to receive salvation:

Catholics believe that Christians should take part in sacraments (significant religious events ie. baptism to wash away their sins)

Protestants believe that they must repent of their sins and have faith in Jesus to receive salvation.

The Afterlife

Eschatology refers to beliefs about the last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell. The idea of there being life after death is at the centre of Christianity based on the concept of Jesus was crucified, died and resurrected. This is important as it shows that death is not the end. Although the body dies the soul lives on.

Christians believe that this life is preparation for the afterlife.

The Nicene Creed (very important church document) states belief in resurrection.

'I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come'

Christians believe that there will be a judgement day when people will be judged by God for how they lived their lives. This is when Jesus will come to earth again in what is known as the 'second coming'.

The parable of the sheep and the goats demonstrates how God will separate those destined for heaven and eternity with God and those destined for hell and eternal separation from God.

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man shows how there is a clear divide between those who will be rewarded in heaven and those who will be punished in hell.

At the end of time it is believed that, although the soul may already be in heaven with God, the body too will be resurrected just as Jesus' body was. Paul says that the body will be 'raised in power' and this teaching is also contained in the Nicene Creed.

Heaven and Hell

There are lots of references in the Bible on heaven and hell but few descriptions. Therefore, Christians have different opinions. Some believe they are physical places while others suggest that they are simply symbols to represent either being with God eternally or being separated from God eternally.

Purgatory

This refers to the Catholic belief that many people who die cannot gain immediate entry to heaven but remain in purgatory to be cleansed of their sins. On judgement day, all those in purgatory will enter heaven. It is important to Catholics to pray for the souls of the dead and those in purgatory that they may enter heaven.