**Christian Beliefs**

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| Explain Christian beliefs about the nature of God as loving and just, the oneness of God including the Trinity |
| Explain the problem of evil and suffering |
| Explain different Christian beliefs about creation including beliefs about the word and spirit from Genesis and John |
| Explain different Christian beliefs about the afterlife including resurrection, life after death, judgement, heaven and hell |
| Explain Christian beliefs about the incarnation, life, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus |
| Explain Christian beliefs about sin, including original sin |
| Explain Christian beliefs about salvation and atonement |

**Key terms**

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| **Key Term** | **Definition** |
| Denomination | a distinct group within the Christian faith with its own organisation and traditions |
| Orthodox | a branch of Christianity, originally protestants were called by that name because they protested against some of the practices of the Catholic Church; there are many protestant denominations. |
| Catholic | a branch of Christianity, based in Rome and led by the pope |
| God | the supreme being |
| Omnipotent | a quality Christians believe that God has meaning almighty and all-powerful |
| Benevolent | a quality Christians believe that God has meaning all-loving |
| Justice | Bringing about what is right and fair or making up for a wrong that has been committed. |
| Trinity | a belief that there are three parts in the One God; the father, son and |
| Holy Spirit | The third person of the Trinity whom Christians believe is the inspiring presence of God in the world |
| Son of God | a title used for Jesus, the second person of the Trinity; denotes a special relationship between Jesus and God the Father |
| Creation | God bringing the Universe into being |
| the Word | this is a term using the bible at the start of John’s gospel and he is referring to God the son. ‘the Word’ = is God |
| Incarnation | When Jesus took human form for a time |
| Resurrection | Jesus rising from the dead on Easter day |
| Blasphemy | a religious offence including claiming to be God. This was one of the crimes used to justify the crucifixion of Jesus. |
| Crucifixion | A Roman method of execution where criminals are fixed to a cross |
| Ascension | The event, 40 days after the resurrection, when Jesus returned to God, the father. ‘He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the rather’. |
| Heaven | A state of eternal happiness in the presence of God; the place of eternal peace. |
| Afterlife | What Christians believe follows life on earth |
| Day of Judgment | a time when the world will end and every soul will be judged by God and rewarded or punished |

Introduction to Christianity

Christianity is the largest religion in the world and the state religion in Britain. Christians believe in one God and follow the teachings of the Bible. The bible is divided into two main parts - The **Old** and **New Testament:**

**THE OLD TESTAMENT:** Depending on the version, the Old Testament has at least 39 books, which include the Creation story and the **Ten Commandments.** These 39 books are the Jewish scripture - they are also considered sacred by Jews. **THE NEW TESTAMENT:** Is the specially Christian part of the Bible. Its 27 books including the **4 Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), which are accounts of Jesus’s life. The **Act of the Apostles** and the letters of St Paul describe the early years of Christianity.

The different branches of Christianity are called denomination. They share key beliefs, but interpret some points of the faith differently and worship in different ways. Roman Catholicsrespect authority of the Bible and Church tradition, plus the authority of the Pope and his teachings. The seven sacraments (which include the Eucharist) are an important part of their faith. **Protestants** base their beliefs and practices on the Bible, rather than Church traditions or the teachings of the Pope. In England and Wales, Protestant denominations that are not part of the ‘Anglican Communion’ are often called ‘Nonconformist’. These include: Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, The Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Salvation Army. Lastly, orthodox Christians. Are found mainly in Eastern Europe, Russia and Greece. They also have 7 sacraments and honour (but don’t worship) Icons - pictures of Saints.

What is God like?

Christians believe in ONE God. They believe he has the following characteristics…

-**Omnipotent**: all powerful (unlimited power)

-**Benevolent**: all-loving and good and uses his power to bring about good. The act of sending his son Jesus to earth was a loving one.

-**Just**: the perfect judge of human behaviour who will bring about what is right and fair or who will just make up for

The Trinity

Christians believe in ONE GOD but that God has 3 PARTS. This belief is called the Trinity. These three parts are…

**The Father** – creator, father, omnipotent, omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (all-present)

**The Son** – Jesus, became human for a time (incarnate). Jesus is referred to as ‘*the word’* in the bible.

**The Holy Spirit** – the unseen power of God working in the world, guiding and influencing people.

The Problem of Evil and Suffering – How can God be all-loving and allow EVIL in the world!?

The problem of evil and suffering challenges belief in these qualities of God because…

-If God is benevolent **why does God allow people to suffer**?

-If God is omnipotent, **why does God not prevent evil and suffering**, such as earthquakes and hurricanes?

-If God is just, **why does God allow injustice** to take place?

Beliefs about Creation

Christians believe that God created the world and everything in it. God the father chose the design and create life, the son and the holy spirit were there at creation. This shows Christians that the Trinity has always existed.

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Meaning** |
| “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” | All Christians believe that God created the world and everything in it. Some Christiasn believe that God made the world in literally 6 days and others have a more symbolic understanding. |
| “In the beginning there was the word and the word was with God” | In John’s gospel, everything was created through the Word, who was both with God and was God. The Word refers to Jesus who entered history as a human. |

Jesus: Incarnation, Crucifixion, Ascension and Resurrection

*Incarnation*: Christians believe that Jesus was God in human form (incarnation) and that he was the Son of God. “…she was found pregnant through the holy spirit” (Matthew 1:18). Jesus’ birth was special because Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant. This is explained in the gospel s of Matthew and Luke. The virgin conception is evidence for Christians that Jesus was the Son of God part of the Trinity. God showed his loving side by entering history as Jesus and performing miracles and teaching people how to follow the command ‘love thy neighbour’ (treat others as you would like to be treated)

*Crucifixion*: Jesus was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, by crucifixion (being nailed to a cross). He was accused of blasphemy (claiming to be God). Although Jesus was full God he was also fully human so suffered the pain of crucifixion. Christians believe is evidence that God understands human suffering. Jesus was quickly buried in a tomb after he died. The crucifixion is important because Christians believe Jesus died to absorb their sins (atonement) and as a result their sins will be forgiven. It also helps Christians understand that suffering is a part of life.

*Resurrection:* Christians believe that 3 days after Jesus was buried in the tomb he rose again (came back to life), this is known as the resurrection. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene and some of his other female followers. Over the next few days he appeared to his disciples. The resurrection is key as it shows Christians the power of good over evil and life after death. It also shows them that death is not to be feared as there is life after death.

*Ascension*: This refers to when Jesus returned to the Father in heaven. He asked his disciples to continue his work and then 40 days after his death ascended into heaven.

*“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father”* (The Apostles Creed)

Life After Death

Christians have differing views about what will happen to a person when they die.

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| Some Christians believe that a person’s soul is resurrected **soon after death.** | Other Christians believe the dead will be resurrected at **some time in the future**, when Jesus will return to judge everyone who has ever lived. |
| Catholic and Orthodox Christians believe in bodily resurrection. This means the resurrection is **both spiritual and physical:** the physical body lost at death is restored and transformed into a new, spiritual body. | Some Christians believe that resurrection **will just be spiritual,** not physical as well. |

*What impact does a belief in the resurrection have?*

-means life after death is real

-shows how much God loves them

-gives them hope for the future

The afterlife and judgement

Christians believe that the afterlife begins either at death OR the DAY OF JUDGEMENT. This is when Jesus returns to judge people. Judgement is based on how they have behaved on earth. The **Parable of the Sheep and Goats** describes how God will judge people. It also teaches Christians that by serving others they are also serving God. Before Jesus died he told his disciples that there was a place in heaven for them and made it clear that it you need to follow his teachings in order to enter heaven.

Heaven, Hell and Purgatory

Many Christians believe that God’s judgement will result in eternal reward or eternal punishment. Heaven is seen as eternal happiness with God and hell as suffering and life without God.

Catholics believe that some people may enter a middle ground state called purgatory, before they enter heaven. Knowledge of heaven, hell and purgatory is vague and unclear in the bible.

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| **Heaven**  -could be either a physical or spiritual place or state or freedom from pain, union with loved ones  -Angels, Jesus, garden paradise  -different views about WHO is allowed in heaven (righteous, baptised, only Christians) | **Hell**  -many people question whether an all-loving God would allow this.  -the opposite of heaven  -being cut off from God  -awaits someone who ignores God |

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Sin and Salvation

Sin is the only thing that separates humans and God. Original sin is the inbuilt tendency that humans have towards sin. This idea comes from Adam and Eve’s disobedience of God in Genesis. The way that Christians can be saved from sin to gain salvation is by following the teachings of God. Christians believe that all humans commit sins and are able to because God gave humans freewill (the ability to choose).

Salvation is a very important concept in Christianity and it means to be saved from sin and its consequences. Salvation repairs the damage from sin which has separated people from God. Christians believe that salvation comes about through doing good work and having faith in Jesus (grace).

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| **Quote/teaching** | **Explanation** |
| “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17 [NIV]. | Christians need to do more than just believe in God but following Jesus example and behave in a moral way. |

Exam Questions

Which one of the following is the idea that God became human in Jesus? (Atonement/ Incarnation/ Resurrection/ Creation) (1 mark)

Which one of the following is the idea that God is loving? (Omniscient/ Omnipotent/ Benevolent/ Immanent)

(1 mark)

Give two ways that Christians believe that salvation can come about. (2 marks)

Give two Christian beliefs about life after death. (2 marks)

Give two parts of the Trinity (2 marks)

Explain two ways in which belief in Jesus’ crucifixion influences Christians today. (4 marks)

Explain two ways in which the belief in creation by God influences Christians today. (4 marks)

Explain two ways in which a belief in the afterlife influences Christians today (4 marks)

Explain two Christian beliefs about creation. (5 marks)

Explain two Christian teachings about God. (5 marks)

Explain two Christian teachings about God the creator. (5 marks)

12 mark Qs – you need to evaluate and give arguments (both religious and non religious) for and against;

* ‘The stories of the incarnation prove that Jesus was the Son of God’
* ‘There is no such place as hell’
* ‘An all-loving God would not allow suffering in the world’
* ‘The best way to gain salvation is to obey Gods law’
* ‘The problem of evil and suffering proves that God does not exist’
* ‘The crucifixion is more important than the resurrection’

**Christian Practices**

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| Explain the meaning and important of worship for Christians |
| Explain the differences between liturgical, non-liturgical and private worship and why each is important |
| Explain the nature and use of prayer (informal, set and the lord’s prayer) and their importance to people and society |
| Explain the meaning of the sacraments of baptism, holy communion and reconciliation including differences in practice in different churches |
| Explain the role and importance of pilgrimage including the contrasting places Lourdes and Iona |
| Explain the role and importance of the festivals of Christmas and Easter |
| Explain the role and importance of mission and evangelism in the church |
| Explain the role of the church locally and worldwide (Christian Aid/ CAFOD/ Tearfund) |

**Key terms**

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| **Key Term** | **Definition** |
| Worship | An act of religious praise or devotion |
| Prayer | Communicating with God |
| Set prayers | Prayers written down and said more than once by more than one person |
| The Lord’s Prayer | the prayer Jesus told his disciples when they asked for a good example of how to pray |
| Liturgical Worship | A service that does follow a set structure or ritual |
| Non-liturgical Worship | A service that does **not** follow a set structure or ritual |
| Sacraments | A holy ritual that involves believer receiving a gift of grace from God. E.g. Baptism |
| Baptism | a ritual where a believer becomes a part of the church |
| Infant Baptism | For babies and young children |
| Holy Communion | (also known as the Eucharist) is a sacrament that uses bread and wine to celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus’ death and resurrection. |
| Pilgrimage | A special journey made by a religious believer to a holy site for religious reasons |
| Festival | A special day or period of time for religious believers |
| The Church | The holy people of God, also called the Body of Christ. |
| A Church | A building where Christians worship. |
| Blasphemy | a religious offence including claiming to be God. This was one of the crimes used to justify the crucifixion of Jesus. |
| Street Pastor | people who are trained to patrol the streets in urban areas helping the vulnerable |
| Mission | A vocation or calling to spread the message of Jesus. |
| Evangelism | Christians spreading the faith of by telling others about him. |
| Reconciliation | Restoring relationships that have been broken down |
| Persecution | Hostility and ill-treatment. |

Worship

Worship can take place in different forms. This can be in different forms, liturgical, non-liturgical and informal worship. Christians worship for a number of reasons…

-to praise God

-to ask for forgiveness

-to seek God’s help

*Liturgical worship* takes place in a church usually involving set prayers, bible passages and hymns. It is important because it gives a worldwide set order for a service that is familiar to everyone.

*Non-liturgical* worship also takes place in a church with bible passages and a sermon, however, there is no set order and often

*Informal worship* can be in a community or house where people often share food and sometimes there is dancing, clapping and speaking in tongues.

Prayer

Prayer is communication with God and is one of the most common forms of worship. Prayer is important because it enables Christians to reflect on their busy lives, develop a close relationship with God and accept that sometimes suffering is needed. The **Lord’s prayer** was given to Jesus’ disciples as a model of a good prayer. It is nearly always said at **Holy Communion** and the words remind Christians that God is the Father and to forgive others in order to be forgiven.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”

“forgiven us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us”

The Sacraments

There are 7 sacraments and some denominations observe only observe some of these. Catholics and Orthodox Christians recognise seven sacraments and others such as Quakers do not see any ritual or ceremony as a sacrament.

**Baptism**

A baptism is a ceremony where a person enters the Christian life and becomes a child of God. Some denominations choose to do this to children when they are born and this is known as *infant baptism*. Other Christians believe that a believer should be able to old enough to choose and therefore baptise those who are able to make that decision for themselves, this is call *believers* *baptism*.

**Holy Communion** (The Eucharist)

Holy Communion is the sacrament that uses bread and wine to celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection. It recalls the Last Supper of Jesus. Christians interpret the meanings of this sacrament in different ways but all agree that it brings them closer to God.

*Different meanings of holy communion*

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| Catholic, Orthodox and some Anglicans | The bread and wine become the body of and blood of Jesus. This means Jesus is fully present in the bread and wine. |
| Protestant Christians | Holy communion is a reminder of the last supper and the bread and wine are symbols of Jesus’ sacrifice. |

For many Christians Holy Communion is at the centre of their lives and worship. For individuals it brings them closer to God, for the community it brings people together and for the wider society it acts as a reminder to people to care for everyone because of Jesus’ sacrifice.

Pilgrimage

This spiritual journey Christians make is an opportunity for them to do a range of things…

-seek a cure for illness

-meet others of the same faith

-be forgiven of sin

-pray for something special

Places of pilgrimage

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| Lourdes (France) | Mary is said to have appeared to a young girls in a vision here and the water is believed to have healing properties. | Pilgrims go to Lourdes to bathe in the waters and ask for forgiveness and healing miracles. |
| Iona (Scotland) | St Columbia set up a monastic community here. The water is believed to have healing properties. | This is a quiet and people place where Christians can spend time reflecting, praying or meditating. They can also attend services at the abbey. |

Celebrating Festivals

Festivals help Christians to remember and celebrate major events in their religion.

*Christmas: t*his commemorates the incarnation of Jesus. The celebrations reflect their beliefs in different ways…

-lights represent Jesus as the light of the world

-nativity scenes show baby Jesus being born into poverty

-carol services and bible readings remind Christians about God’s promise of a saviour and the events of Jesus’ birth.

Easter: this is the most important Christian festival which celebrates Jesus rising from the dead. The important events throughout holy week (the week before Easter Sunday) are…

1. Good Friday – the day Jesus was crucified, special services called the ‘Station of the Cross’ are held

2. Saturday night – some churches hold special services to celebrate Christs resurrections

3. Easter Sunday – churches are filled with flowers and special hymns are sung whilst they celebrate the resurrection.

The Role of the Church in the Local Community

Individual churches and the Church as a whole help the local community in many ways…

-education people about Christianity (individual churches)

-meeting places for prayer and worship (individual churches)

-supports local projects such as food banks (the Church)

-campaigns for justice (the Church)

Examples of the Church helping in the community…

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| **The Trussel Trust** | **The Oasis Project** |
| A charity running over 400 food banks in the UK. These provide emergency food, help and support to people in crisis. Doctors, social workers and health visitors identify people in crisis in the UK. | A community hub run by Plymouth Methodist Mission circuit. This hub provides internet access, creative courses and a food bank. Help is given to those people suffering with ill health, poverty, abuse and other problems. |

Jesus taught that Christians should help people by showing agape (love) towards them. In the parable of *the sheep and the goats* Jesus explains what anything Christians do for each other they also do for him.

*Street Pastors*: this initiative was set up in 2003 by a charity and adult volunteers are trained to patrol the streets in urban areas responding to anti-social behaviour. They give out flip-flops and listen to people’s problems as well as helping them get home.

Mission and Evangelism

A mission is a calling to spread the faith, when a Christian believes they have a duty to tell others about the message of Jesus. Christians spread the faith through evangelism. Jesus gave the Great Commission to his disciples to spread the gospel and make disciples of all nations through baptism. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost gave the disciples the gift and courage needed to carry out the Great Commission. All Christians have a duty to spread the faith but some choose to become missionaries or evangelists (people who promote Christianity, for example by going to foreign countries and preaching or doing charity work). The aim of missionary work and evangelism are to persuade people to accept Jesus as their Saviour, and to extend the Church to all nations. Alpha is an example of evangelism in Britain, it is a course aimed as an introduction to those who are interested in the Christian faith.

The Growth of the Church

Up to 1/3 of the world’s population claims to be Christian and the Church expects new Christians to help spread the faith as part of their commitment to Jesus. Worldwide around 80,000 people become Christian every day and over 500 new churches are formed. Each Christian has a role in encouraging fellow believers and they can do this through social media, prayer, meetings and events.

Working for Reconciliation

Another of the sacraments is reconciliation. The mission of the worldwide church is to restore peoples relationship with God and on another. Christians believe that humans were reconciled to God through Jesus’ death and resurrection that restored the broken relationship between God and humanity. For Catholics, the sacrament of Reconciliation also helps to restore people’s relationship with God. Examples of the churches work on reconciliation are…

The Corrymeela Community: the community based in Northern Island brings together people from different background, faiths and political leanings and helps them to work together. They meet at a residential centre and build trust and look at ways of moving away from violence. They also work with schools.

Christian Persecution

Christians have faced ill-treatment since the beginning of Christianity and are still persecuted today. Sometimes this can have the positive effect of strengthening faith. It is estimated that 80% of all acts of religious discrimination today are aimed at Christians. This may involve high tax, job discrimination, attacks on Christian homes or being forbidden to build churches.

Christians try and respond to persecution in a positive way showing love and forgiveness where possible. They may campaign against the persecution or appreciate that it allows them to share in the suffering of Jesus. You could use the following quotes to support this…

*‘If one part suffers, every part suffers with it’* (Corinthians)

*‘Do not overcome evil by evil, but overcome evil with good’* (Romans)

The Churches response to world poverty

Christian charities follow the example and teaching of Jesus in working to relieve poverty. Christians believe that they should show Jesus to the world by helping the disadvantaged. They do this because…

-Jesus once told a rich man to sell everything and give to the poor (Mark)

-The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus tells of a rich man who ends up in hell for ignoring a begger.

-The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches the importance of helping all people.

-Jesus helped outcasts in society

These charities help people in poverty…

*CAFOD*: gives short term aid to those in conflict areas, lobbies government for decisions that respect the poorest and encourage catholic schools to give money and campaign for justice.

*Christian Aid*: supports projects to encourage sustainable development, provides emergency relief such as good and water, campaigns to end world poverty.

Exam Questions

Which one of the following is a type of worship that follows a set pattern? (Informal worship/ Private worship/ Non-liturgical worship/ Liturgical worship) (1 mark)

Which one of the following is the festival that celebrates the incarnation of Jesus? (Easter/ Good Friday/ Christmas/ Lent) (1 mark)

Give two ways that the church response to world poverty. (2 marks)

Give two reasons why prayer is important to Christians. (2 marks)

Give two reasons why the Lord’s Prayer is important to Christians (2 marks)

Explain two ways in which Christians worship. (4 marks)

Explain two contrasting ways in which Christians practice baptism. (4 marks)

Explain two ways in which holy communion has an impact on the lives of believers (4 marks)

Explain two ways that Christian Charities help the poor in poor countries. (5 marks)

Explain two reasons why Christian practice evangelism. (5 marks)

Explain two ways in which street pastors carry out their Christian duty. (5 marks)

12 mark Qs – you need to evaluate and give arguments (both religious and non-religious) for and against;

* ‘The most important duty of the Church is to help those people in need’
* ‘The best way for Christians to grow closer to God is to go on a pilgrimage’
* ‘The churches should focus on worship of God rather than helping the community’
* ‘The sacraments are just excuses for celebrations’
* ‘Worship should always be liturgical’
* ‘There is no difference between pilgrimage and a holiday’