

Christian Beliefs 1 – The Trinity

Christians believe in one God. Christians believe that there are three equal, yet distinct, persons in One God – the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each person has three separate and unique roles. The oneness of God means God is all-powerful and who is the source of salvation. It also means that God is unique and that everything must come from God, and only he should be worshipped.

Quote: *'You shall have no other gods before me.'*

The word 'Trinity' is not mentioned in the Bible, but when Jesus is baptised he is seen working with the Father and Holy Spirit showing unity in his ministry and mission.

Quote: *'As soon as Jesus was baptised, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, whom I love; with him I'm well pleased.'*

The Trinity is important to Christians because:

- Christians can understand God better because they can relate to the different aspects of the Trinity.
- It is a model of mutual love and unity and therefore helps Christians to understand more about relationships because the Trinity is very similar to the way they live.
- The Trinity is a loving relationship with each of the persons relating to the others – just like a family.

Christian Beliefs 2 – The Trinity 2

The Nicene Creed is an important statement of belief about the Trinity. It states that:

The Father is the creator of the universe and is the Almighty (having complete power.

Quote (Nicene Creed): *'We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.'*

The Son is Jesus Christ who is 'Lord' and the Son of the Father.

Quote (Nicene Creed): *'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.'*

The Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son. It is spiritually active in the world, he helps Christians know God and worship him, and he equips and empowers believers.

Quote (Nicene Creed): *'We believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.'*

The Trinity is reflected in worship in the following ways:

- During Holy Communion, participants recite the Nicene Creed.
- Some Churches sing hymns which refer to the father, son and Holy Spirit.
- Christians bless themselves by making the sign of the cross when entering the Church or hearing the name of the Trinity.
- Priests/Ministers begin their sermons with the phrase "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".
- Baptism and marriages are performed in the name of the Trinity.

Christian Beliefs 3 – Creation

There are two accounts of Creation in Genesis:

Genesis 1 – Takes an overview of creation

God creates the world in six days: 1) Light and Dark 2) Water and sky 3) Land and plant life 4) Sun, moon, stars 5) Fish and birds 6) Land, animals and humans

Quote: *'God said let there be light, and there was light.'*

Genesis 2&3 - Focuses on the development of humans

God creates Adam from dust and places him in Garden of Eden. Adam is forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God makes Eve. Eve eats an apple from the forbidden tree and gives some to Adam. Humans are punished by expulsion from Garden. After each day of creation God looked at everything he had made and he was pleased.

Quote: *'The Lord God formed a man from dust and breathed life into him.'*

Quote: *'Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib of Adam.'*

The Bible teaches the Trinity were all involved in the act of creation. Jesus was with God the Father at the start, acting in the creation. Christians believe he is the source of life.

Quote: *'In the beginning was the Word.'*

The Holy Spirit was also present at the start of creation to protect what has and will be created.

Quote: *'The spirit of God was hovering over the waters.'*

Christian Beliefs 4 – Creation 2

The story of creation can be understood as:

- Metaphorical – God created the world but not exactly how the Bible says. The Bible is a book of words about God rather than the words of God. The story in Genesis is more myth than fact. Most would see Genesis 2 as a commentary on chapter 1 rather than a different story. They also would see the days as eras lasting millions, or billions of years rather than 24 hours. These Christians may accept scientific theories like the Big Bang as they might think that when God says 'let there be light' that is the light from the explosion of the Big Bang.
- Literal – (Creationists) believe the story of creation in the Bible is literally true. It is a book of scientific and historical fact. God created the world in six, 24-hour days. They do not believe that Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other. Instead, Genesis 1 gives the overall broad picture of creation, whereas Genesis 2 zooms in on day 6 of creation and gives details of exactly how God created male and female and animals. Literalists don't accept scientific explanations e.g the Big Bang and evolution.

Christian Beliefs 5 – Creation 3

Why is creation important for Christians:

- It shows God's goodness, the key teaching of the Bible is that God's creation is good. This is shown in Genesis 1 at the end of each day of creation.
Quote: *'And God saw that it was good.'*
- God created human beings in his image, meaning that all humans occupy a unique place in creation. They are the only creatures who are able to know and to love their creator.
Quote: *'Let us make man in our image.'*
- As humans were made in God's image, it means that they are capable of self-knowledge – knowing who they are and why they are here; this means humans have free will. It is this freedom that reflects the huge responsibility they have been given – to care for the planet God has made.
Quote: *'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.'*
- God gave humans stewardship (looking after something so it can be passed on to the next generation). This means they should treat animals and the land kindly, and share things fairly.

Christian Beliefs 6 – Incarnation

Jesus is the Incarnation of God – he is God as a human being on Earth.

The Bible teaches that God came down to live among people which enables them to relate to Him. Parts of this teaching are mysterious and beyond human understanding.

Quote: *'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.'*

The belief in Incarnation is important because:

- It shows God's love to humanity as he sent his son to Earth as a human.
Quote: *'For God so loved the world he gave his only son.'*
- It shows that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. He came to Earth show humanity what God is like.
Quote: *'I am in the Father and the Father is in me.'*
- It allows Christians to have a relationship with God because Christians can understand Jesus easier than they can understand an infinite, omnipotent being. This is because Jesus was human so could understand human suffering and challenges.
Quote: *'He appeared in the flesh.'*
- The incarnation was a virgin birth which shows Jesus was truly God's son.
Quote: *'He will be called the Son of the Most High.'*

Christian Beliefs 7 – Jesus' Last Days

Last Supper

Jesus predicts his death and prepares disciples for the future by teaching them to love and serve each other. He predicts that one disciple will betray him – Judas. Jesus uses bread and wine to symbolise body and blood.

This event forms the basis of the Eucharist – the most important form of Christian worship where blessed bread and wine is shared using Jesus' words.

Quote: *'This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me.'*

Betrayal, Arrest and Trial

Jesus and his disciples are at Gethsemane where Jesus prays to God asking to 'take the cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done' (the cup being his crucifixion). This demonstrates his humanity. Judas arrives with crowd to arrest Jesus. Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin, found guilty of blasphemy, and condemned by all present. He is taken to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death even though Pilate believes he is innocent. Jesus is flogged and taken for crucifixion. These events highlight Jesus' suffering and his treatment by others, which is necessary for Christians to think about Jesus' sacrifice.

Quote: *'Take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.'*

Christian Beliefs 8 – Jesus' Last Days 2

Crucifixion

Jesus is nailed to a cross between two criminals. Darkness comes over the land in the middle of the day. Jesus' last words: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" shows his separation from God and that he was truly human as well as the pain and suffering that he endured. His death was a sacrifice to restore humanity's relationship with God and is the source of salvation.

Quote: *'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.'*

Resurrection

A group of women went to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. This proves that Jesus was God and that all he said was true and shows Christians that if they follow Christ, they too can reunite with God and receive eternal life.

Quote: *'If Christ had not been raised then our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'*

Some Christians believe Jesus needed to die in order to fulfil the prophecies from the Old Testament that the Messiah would suffer and die; to atone for the sins of humans and restore the relationship between God and humanity. Also, for Christians, Jesus' death on the cross was proof of his humanity – he did actually die. This means that Jesus truly was God incarnate.

Christian Beliefs 9 – Jesus’ Last Days 3

Ascension

After his resurrection, Jesus visits his disciples to teach them about the future and tells them they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, after which he is witnessed ascending into heaven. Christians believe that the ascension removed Jesus from the limitations of human flesh and allowed him to be present where his followers were. This event shows that Jesus returned to God and that all Christians are capable of ascending to heaven if they follow Christ. It reminds Christians that Jesus has gone to heaven to prepare a place for them so that they don’t need to fear death. It also shows that through the ascension, Christ is no longer restricted by time or space and so can be with them on earth wherever they are.

Quote: *‘He was taken up before their very eyes.’*

Some people think Jesus did not have to die because he was God and so should not have to die; the teachings of Jesus would have continued to influence people to do good whether or not he died; Jesus’ actions as a preacher and a miracle maker were enough to gain him a following and he showed people how to live without sin; the Bible makes it clear that God hates human sacrifice so some Christians think Jesus did not have to sacrifice himself on the cross; God can forgive sin without the need for a sacrifice. Finally, Christians believe that God is holy; allowing Jesus to die is the opposite of holy.

Christian Beliefs 11 – Salvation 2

Atonement

Jesus died to save humanity from sin. The relationship between God and humanity was restored. This is called atonement – at-one-ment. Jesus died as an act of undeserved love (grace) to humanity. Humans and God are ‘at one’ again because of this sacrifice. Christians can only be saved through belief in Jesus, not simply by following laws.

Salvation and atonement are important for Christians because:

- Salvation gives them the possibility of eternal life.
- Salvation encourages them to live their lives following the example of Jesus as he was perfect and this enables them to have a relationship with God.
- Each member of the Trinity plays a role in salvation:
 - God sent his son to die.
 - Jesus sacrificed himself.
 - The Holy spirit enables humans to understand the truth about God.

Atonement is important because the atoning death of God’s son was the only way to bring salvation to humanity. Atonement confirms the idea of a loving and all powerful God who cares about human beings and wants to have a relationship with them. Atonement also allows humans to reconcile with each other.

Christian Beliefs 10 – Salvation

Salvation – The act of delivering from sin or saving from evil.

Jesus Christ came to bring what Christians call **salvation**, by saving them from their sin and reuniting them with God.

Quote: *‘For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.’*

Jesus came to save humanity because Adam and Eve ruined humans’ perfect relationship with God, leaving all humans born sinners or at least likely to be sinful by disobeying God. This stops humans from knowing God. Jesus died for humanity’s sins, a sacrifice that restores their relationship with God.

Christians believe that people were separated from God’s love due to sin and disobeying the law of God e.g. The Ten Commandments. Jesus emphasised that everyone needed to repent and righteousness was not possible without the grace that came through Jesus. In order to achieve salvation they need to have faith in Jesus.

Quote: *‘Salvation is found in no-one else.’*

Salvation is only possible through God’s grace. People need to repent and live a good Christian life.

Christian Beliefs 12 – Eschatology

Eschatology is Christian thought on the afterlife. All Christians believe that this life is not all there is. They believe that God will reward the good and punish the bad in some form of life after death.

The Bible teaches that heaven is a place of eternal peace and joy for followers of Christ – some believe it is a physical place, while others believe it is being one with God.

Quote: *‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, there will be no more death or crying or pain.’*

Hell is a place of punishment and separation from God. Many Christians believe that hell is the opposite of heaven; it is a place of suffering away from the presence of God. Some Christians do not believe in hell and that non-believers just cease to exist upon death.

Quote: *‘They will be punished with everlasting destruction.’*

There are different attitudes about heaven and hell among Christians:

- Most Catholics believe that all Christians will eventually go to heaven and that good followers of any religion may go to heaven, but everyone else will go to hell.
- Some Christians believe that only good Christians will go to heaven, but bad Christians and all members of other religions will go to hell.
- Some believe that all good people will go to heaven whatever they believe, but bad people will go to hell.
- Other Christians believe that there is no hell, only levels of heaven, so everyone will eventually go to heaven (universalism).

Christian Beliefs 13 – Eschatology 2

Purgatory is an idea in the Catholic Church where Christians are 'made clean' from sins ready for heaven. Whilst it is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, Catholic thought has been influenced by certain verses in the Bible.

Quote: *'But nothing unclean will enter heaven.'*

Protestant Christians do not believe in the idea of purgatory because it is seen as non-biblical. This is stated in the **39 Articles of Religion** which is an ancient statement of the beliefs and teachings of the Church of England.

Quote (39 Articles of Religion): *'It is vainly invented, and repugnant to the Word of God.'*

On the Day of Judgement, God will judge all people on how they lived on earth. This will be followed by Jesus' Second Coming and the Kingdom of God. Catholics and Protestants believe that this will be a final judgement at the end of the world when the living and the raised dead will be gathered before God. The final judgement is taught in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats which says that the final judgement will be based on whether people have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed strangers, and visited the sick and those in prison; those who have done this will go to heaven, those who have not will go to eternal punishment.

Quote: *'The dead were judged according to what they had done.'*

Christian Beliefs 15 – Problem of Evil

There are two types of evil and suffering: **moral evil** – actions carried out by humans that cause suffering e.g. murder and **natural evil** – things which cause suffering but have nothing to do with humans e.g. earthquakes.

The problem of evil may cause people to question or reject belief in God:

- Evil and suffering may make people think that God does not exist.
- How can I worship a God who is not omnipotent/benevolent?
- Why should I believe in a God who is not omnipotent/benevolent?
- How could God allow so much suffering if he is benevolent and could stop it?
- If a Christian experiences suffering caused by a natural disaster like an earthquake, or if their child dies from a disease, the problem can sometimes lead believers into rejecting religion and becoming atheist or agnostic.

Evil and suffering may raise problems for Christians because:

Christians believe God is omnipotent - if God is all-powerful he would be able to remove evil and suffering, omnibenevolent – if God is all-good he would want to remove evil and suffering as he cares for his creation, omniscient – if God is all-knowing he would know how to remove evil and suffering.

However, many Christians argue that God is benevolent and cares for his creation and so he would want to stop suffering.

Quote: *'The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.'*

Christian Beliefs 14 – Eschatology 3

Jesus' resurrection shows that there is life after death for all who follow him. God will raise the dead in a spiritual form, as evidenced by Jesus' physical appearance to his disciples. This raises issues about what people's spiritual bodies will be like and where they will go.

Quote: *'For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.'*

Life after death is important because:

- Christians believe that what happens to them after they die will be determined by how they have lived in this life. Therefore, Christians will try to live a good Christian life following the teachings of the Bible and the Church so that they go to heaven and not hell when they die.
- The afterlife rewards people and offers hope for the future. It gives Christians' lives meaning and purpose. They feel that for life to end at death does not make sense.

Christian Beliefs 16 – Solutions to the Problem of Evil

Biblical Solutions:

- Satan is the cause of suffering; he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
- Job was a good man made to suffer by God to test his faith, Job accepted that suffering is part of God's plan and is told that there is no simple solution, and he must simply trust God. This teaches Christians that they may not understand why they suffer but they need to trust God.
- Psalm 119 acknowledges that suffering exists but suggests that God is trustworthy. These solutions offer hope through prayer and having God's help and strength when suffering helps Christians to cope with the problem.

Quote: *'Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good and what you do is good.'*

Practical Solutions

- Develop compassion, kindness and courage to deal with evil in the world.
- Help each other improve the world, e.g. through charity work.
- Become doctors, nurses or social workers to overcome evil and follow Jesus' example.
- Pray for God's help and encouragement. These views encourage Christians to treat evil and suffering as manageable problems to be confronted and encourages Christians to treat suffering as a reality of life.

Christian Beliefs 17 – Solutions to the Problem of Evil 2

Theoretical Solutions

- Vale of Soul-Making - evil and suffering provides opportunities to do well and improve people's character. This allows for soul-making. God created this world as a place for people to develop their souls.
- Free Will - first abused by Adam and Eve, is the cause of evil – not God. Therefore evil and suffering is a result of humans misusing their free will.

Quote: *'So the Lord God banished Adam from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.'*

Biblical solutions are useful as they help Christians understand God more clearly and trust that he will make everything right in the end. However, people in the Bible still experience suffering, and God does not always stop it, and so it can be harder to trust God when things aren't going well.

Christians would say that practical responses to evil and suffering are not a 'solution' to the problem, but they can be successful in easing suffering. Christians believe suffering is a reality of life, and they have a choice to respond practically to help with the consequences. Theoretical solutions are useful because they explain that evil and suffering come from human free will, and not God; and they encourage Christians to use times of evil and suffering to make better choices. However, it may not be reasonable to expect people to respond well in times of suffering.

Exam Question:

- a) Outline three events in the last days of Jesus' life. (3 marks)
- b) Explain two ways the Biblical account of creation can be understood. (4 marks)
- c) Explain two reasons why salvation is important for Christians today. In your answer you must refer to a source of wisdom and authority. (5 marks)
- d) 'It is not possible to believe in God and accept evil and suffering in the world.' (12 marks) Evaluate this statement considering arguments for and against. In your response you should:
 - Refer to Christian teachings
 - Reach a justified conclusion