

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

TOPIC 7

CHRISTIANITY BELIEFS

1

THE NATURE OF GOD

BELIEF	TEACHING	INFLUENCE	Some Christians believe this is best way to think about God because.....
OMNIPOTENT 	God is all powerful and almighty. God is the creator and owner of all things.	Makes Christians believe that God can do anything.	It helps them understand that everything was created by and therefore belongs to God. It should encourage them to care for the world as it was created by God.
LOVING 	God is all kind and all loving.	Encourages Christians to believe that God loves them and that there is a reason for their suffering.	It helps them feel comforted when they suffer as they believe God loves them. Makes people feel that there must be a reason why they are suffering.
JUST 	God is just and fair and judges human actions. God will reward the good and punish the bad.	Encourages Christians to follow the rules of their religion so that God will reward them when they die.	It gives them a reason to try to follow the rules of their religion as they will not want to be judged badly. It can also be a source of comfort as those who seemingly 'get away' with evil things will be judged by God and punished.

2

3

THE CHALLENGE OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

NATURAL EVIL

Things that happen through natural causes such as natural disasters and illness.



TEACHING

Some Christians believe that humans only suffer because they have sinned. **The problem with this explanation is that it does not explain why the innocent suffer.**

INFLUENCE

This view influences some Christians not to blame God for the bad things that happen to them.

THE PROBLEM

We suffer because of **natural evil**, like earthquakes and floods and from **moral evil** like murder and bullying. But that doesn't make sense!

- if God created the world, he could have made it without natural disasters
- if God is all-powerful, he could stop suffering
- if God loves us, he would not want us to suffer
- if God is just, he would not let innocent people suffer.



MORAL EVIL

Things that happen because someone makes a decision to do something evil such as murder and terrorism.



Does evil and suffering prove that God does not exist?

YES	NO
A loving God would not let people suffer	Some say that suffering is a punishment for sin – God is right to allow it
An all powerful God would not have designed a world that was going to break – through natural disasters	The majority of suffering is caused through moral evil, this is people making a choice to be evil and so is not God's fault

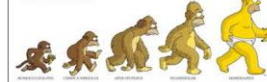
IDEAS ABOUT HOW THE WORLD WAS MADE - GENESIS

TEACHING

The Creation story is mainly found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. It tells how God created the world and everything in it from nothing. The Holy Spirit was present because it says 'The Spirit of God moved across the waters'. It took 6 days. The last thing he created was humans, who he made 'in his image'. On the seventh day, he rested.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

HOMERAPEN

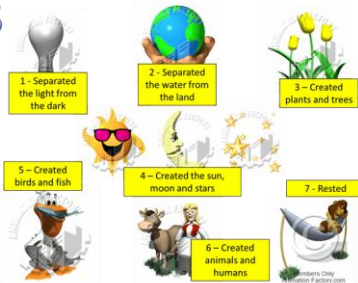


Genesis talks of animals and humans being created at seemingly the same time but science tells us that humans evolved from animals over time.

Genesis talks of the universe being created in a period of 6 days (the 7th day being when God rested) but science tells us that the universe was evolving over a significantly longer period.



What does this mean for Christians today who want to believe in the Bible?



LITERAL



The story is factually true, God made but was meant to have a spiritual meaning about the nature of God, eg He is a powerful creator who put humans in charge of the earth.

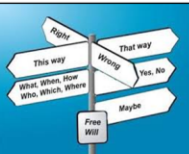
Science is mistaken.

STORY WITH A MEANING



The story was never meant to explain how the universe was made but was meant to have a spiritual meaning about the nature of God, eg He is a powerful creator who put humans in charge of the earth.

Science and the story have different purposes.



IDEAS ABOUT HOW THE WORLD WAS MADE

- JOHN 1

TEACHING

In John's Gospel, he tells us about how Jesus was present at the time of Creation. 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God'.

We know that 'the Word' is Jesus because he later says, 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'

4



- John's Gospel reiterates the main message of Genesis; that God was the **sole** creator of the universe (**Through him all things were made**).

- John uses 'Word' to refer to God (**the Word was God**) and Jesus (**the Word was made flesh**) so we can see clear links to the Trinity.



"The Word was made flesh"

INFLUENCE

Believing that God created the universe can make Christians think that they should look after it (stewardship).

Believing that Humans were made in the image of God can make Christians feel as though they are special as they are like God.

The creation stories prove that God created the universe?

YES

For Christians who take a literal interpretation, the stories show that God created everything.

The order of the events in Genesis is logical, eg water was formed before God made fish.

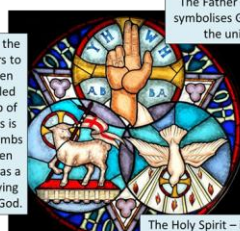
NO

The stories were never meant to explain how the universe was made, they are just stories with a meaning.

Genesis tells us that animals and humans were made on the same day which contradicts what evolution tells us.

5

The Son – the lamb refers to Jesus often being called the 'Lamb of God'. This is because lambs were often sacrificed as a way of giving thanks to God.



The Father – the hand symbolises God creating the universe.

The Holy Spirit – in the Bible it says that when Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove.

INFLUENCE

Believing that God became human can make Christians think that he loves them as he was willing to come to earth to help them (save from sin in the form of Jesus).

INFLUENCE

Believing that the Holy Spirit is active in the world can make Christians think that they have something to help guide them in life.

THE TRINITY

TEACHINGS

Christians often refer to God in three different ways; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that they believe in three different Gods, instead they believe each idea about has its own part to play.

Is the Trinity the most important belief?

YES

It explains the relationship between God and Jesus

The Holy Spirit provides a source of comfort and guidance for Christians in their daily lives

NO

The crucifixion shows HOW God carried out His plan to repair the relationship between Him and humans.

GOD THE FATHER



- Created the universe.**
- It is this version of God that Christians think about when they consider how they got here and what will happen to them after they die.

GOD THE SON



- Came down to earth as Jesus to save the world from sin.**
- It is this version of God that Christians remember when they think about God becoming human and interacting with people on earth.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT



"God's Spirit lives in you" (Corinthians 3)

- The force that guides Christians in their lives.**
- Christians believe that after Jesus' ascension, he sent the Holy Spirit to be a source of strength and inspiration to people.

"In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . ."

6

IDEAS ABOUT LIFE AFTER DEATH

TEACHINGS

INFLUENCE

BELIEF	EXPLANATION	QUOTE	
Judgement 	After we die, we will be judged by God who will decide if we can go to Heaven. He will judge us on our faith and our actions. Roman Catholics believe our souls go to Purgatory after we die until final judgement. In Purgatory, we are purified of our sins so we can go to Heaven.	The Parable of the Sheep and Goats tells us that we will be judged on how much we helped people in need.	Believing that God will judge them after they die can make Christians try to live a good and helpful life.
Resurrection of the Body 	1. Some Christians believe that we will be given a new spiritual body in Heaven. 2. Some Christians believe that their own body will be physically resurrected in Heaven.	St Paul said "It is raised a spiritual body" (1, reference to spiritual body)	Believing in the resurrection of the physical body can make some Christians want to be buried rather than cremated. (2, reference to own body)
Heaven and Hell 	Christians believe that when we are judged it is decided if we will go to Heaven or Hell. Heaven is a place of eternal happiness with God. Hell is a place of suffering without God. Some people believe these are physical places and Hell is a place of torture and pain. Others believe it is a spiritual place and the suffering of Hell is simply being without God. Some Christians believe that only good, believing Christians can go to Heaven. Others believe that all good people who believe in a God can go there (they don't necessarily have to be Christians).	Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."	Believing that there is an after life can be a source of comfort for those who suffer in this life as they will be rewarded for this in Heaven.

7

IDEAS ABOUT LIFE AFTER DEATH

Should Hell exist?

Yes

It is fair because bad people deserve to be punished – why should they go to Heaven?

It is fair because we were given plenty of warning in the Bible and by Jesus of what would happen if we did not follow God's teachings.

No

If God loves us, he should not want anyone to suffer like that forever, no matter what they have done.

God is supposed to be forgiving. He should give everyone another chance.



Does it make sense to believe in resurrection of the body?

Yes

If God is all-powerful, he can make it happen

It is taught in the Bible, so it must be true

No

There is no proof that it happens

We know our body decomposes after death – there would be nothing left to resurrect.



Should Heaven be just for Christians?

Yes

It can be difficult sticking to your beliefs and Christians deserve the reward of Heaven.

Jesus said the only way to the Father was through him.

No

All good people deserve the reward of Heaven for living a good life.

What about people who never get a chance to learn about Christianity? It's not fair on them.



Singer Bob Geldof has raised millions of pounds for people affected by famine but he is an atheist, does this mean he should not go to Heaven?

THE INCARNATION

TEACHING

The Bible teaches that the relationship between God and humans had become broken and so God decided to come down to earth Himself (in the form of Jesus) to fix it.

The plan was for Jesus to take on all the sins of people and die for them. This would mend the relationship between God and humans and would mean that, in the future, people who sinned could be forgiven and allowed into Heaven.

8



GOD



JESUS

God came to earth in human form. The 'carn' comes from the Latin word 'carne' which means flesh, literally translated, the word incarnation means 'to become flesh'.

QUESTION - How could Jesus be both human and God at the same time without losing his Godly powers?

ANSWER - He never lost his powers, he just chose to set them to one side so he could truly live as a human being.

Is the incarnation the most important belief?

YES

It explains how God was able to carry out His plan to fix the relationship between Him and humans.

NO

The crucifixion shows HOW God carried out His plan to repair the relationship between Him and humans.

It shows Christians how much God loves them because he was willing to come to earth to save them.

"The Word was made flesh"

THE CRUCIFIXION

WHAT CRIME WAS JESUS ACCUSED OF?

During his time on earth, Jesus told people that he was the Son of God. Whilst many people loved him for his new caring approach towards religion, many people found this claim disrespectful.

Their reason was that Jesus was a poor and gentle man and they were expecting the Son of God to be a powerful leader. Eventually, Jesus was arrested and charged with **blasphemy** (being disrespectful towards God) and was sentenced to be crucified.



9

KEY EVENTS

Jesus was arrested after one of his disciples, Judas, betrayed him. The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, sentenced him to be crucified. This was a method of execution often used by the Romans.

Jesus was nailed to a cross, with a crown of thorns on his head to make a joke of his crime – he was executed for being called the 'King of the Jews'.

It took 6 hours for Jesus to die. The Bible tells us that during this time, he forgave the people who were executing him and called out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'. When he died, a Roman guard commented 'Surely this man was the Son of God'. One version of the story tells us that the sky went black and the Temple curtain was torn in two.

QUESTION

What does the sky turning black represent?

Why did Jesus think God had forsaken him?

Why is the Roman guard's comment important?

What does the Temple curtain tearing in two represent?

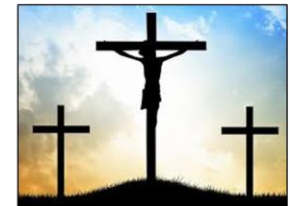
ANSWER

That the whole world reacted to what happened.

He may have felt abandoned by God in his suffering – remember, he was fully human.

It reminds us who Jesus is as part of the Trinity and shows the impact of the crucifixion on a non-believer.

That the divide between God and humans was now gone – the relationship between them was now fixed.



10

THE CRUCIFIXION

WHO WANTED JESUS TO DIE?

1, The Jewish Council Leaders (Sanhedrin)

Jesus' teachings about love and equality challenged their view of religion and they did not like it.

2, Pontius Pilate – The Roman Governor

The Romans ruled over the Jews and they had the final say on who was executed. Pilate initially wanted to release Jesus but then came under pressure from people saying that it would make him look bad to his superiors. He allowed another convict to be released instead.

3, Jesus himself

It was always the plan that Jesus would die. This is because the whole reason he came to earth was to allow himself to be killed as a sacrifice. This sacrifice would then atone (make up for) all the sins that humans had committed and would therefore 'fix' the relationship between humans and God.

KEY TEACHINGS

Christians believe that the purpose of the crucifixion was for Jesus to atone for the sins of humans by dying himself to mend the relationship between humans and God.

They also believe that he was brutally treated during his execution, eg he was whipped, had a crown of thorns pushed into his head and was then nailed to his cross.



INFLUENCE

Believing that Jesus died to save people from sin can make Christians think that God loves them because he was willing to sacrifice his son for them.

Believing that Jesus died to save people from sin can make Christians think that they can be forgiven for the sins that they commit in life as Jesus has already paid the price for these.

'He was put to death physically, but made alive spiritually'

Is the crucifixion the most important belief for Christians?

YES

This is actually HOW God carried out His plan to repair the relationship between Him and humans.

NO

The resurrection is more important because it shows Jesus' power over death.

The ascension is more important because it completes God's plan to fix the relationship between Him and humans.

11

THE RESURRECTION

KEY EVENTS OF THE RESURRECTION

On the third day after his crucifixion, some of Jesus' women friends went to his tomb to care for his body. When they got there, the stone had been rolled away and the body was gone.

One version of the story tells how an angel told the women to seek Jesus among the living and one of them, Mary, saw him. The disciples were unbelieving at first, but Jesus showed himself to them too.



Did Jesus' resurrection really happen?

YES

God is all-powerful, so he could have made it happen. There are eye-witness accounts of it in the Bible.

NO

It is impossible to come back from the dead. The disciples could have made it up. There are other explanations for the disappearance of Jesus' body, like it was stolen.

TEACHINGS

- Christians teach that it shows that God has power over death, so Christians can be confident they will live on after they die.
- Christians teach that it shows that Jesus really was the Son of God, since only he could do this, so it strengthens Christian beliefs in Jesus.

Is resurrection the most important belief for Christians?

YES

It shows God's power over evil and death.

It gives Christians hope that they will live again after they die.

It shows that Jesus was victorious and not defeated by his enemies.

NO

Incarnation is more important because it helps us to feel closer to God because he understands what it is like to be human.

The Crucifixion is more important because Jesus paid the price for our sins and allows us a second chance to go to Heaven.

'Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'

INFLUENCE

Believing that Jesus was resurrected can make Christians think that Jesus really was the Son of God and that they should follow his teachings.

It can also make them think that they will also be resurrected when they die.

THE ASCENSION

TEACHING

40 days after his resurrection, Jesus takes his disciples to Bethany. They see him rising up to Heaven and disappearing into a cloud. Angels tell the disciples that he will return again in the same way he left them.

'I am only with you for a short time and then I am going to the one who sent me.'



INFLUENCE

Believing that Jesus ascended to Heaven and left his disciples to carry on his teachings can make Christians think that they should follow the teachings of his disciples as well as those of Jesus.

Believing that Jesus ascended to Heaven can also make Christians think that Jesus really was the Son of God and that they should follow his teachings.



12

Is the ascension the most important belief for Christians?

YES	NO
It shows that Jesus was the Son of God because he returns to Heaven in this way.	The crucifixion is more important because this is actually HOW God carried out His plan to repair the relationship between Him and humans.
It completes the plan God had to repair the relationship between Him and humans.	The resurrection is a better way of showing that Jesus was the son of God because this shows power over death.

14

SALVATION

Salvation refers to the view within Christianity that Christians have been saved by Jesus, through his death and resurrection, from sin and its consequences (death). This means Christians do not have to fear death, or punishment, and can have a new start, having faith that God loves and cares for them.

Salvation can be found through.....

Jesus	Jesus took the punishment for the sins of humans as an act of atonement – to pay the price and restore our relationship with God. We could not do this on our own and needed Jesus' death on the cross to make it possible. His sacrifice means we can be saved.
Law	Before Jesus, Jews aimed to achieve salvation through following God's law (the Jewish law as written in the holy books), but many Christians believe that this was not a permanent solution, and Jesus' sacrifice replaced this.
GOD'S GRACE	Many Christians feel that they can receive God's grace through his teaching in the Bible and through sacraments; for example, reliving Jesus' sacrifice in the Eucharist, or accepting a new spiritual life through baptism.
THE HOLY SPIRIT	The Holy Spirit, the third Person of God in the Trinity, is also believed to be a means through which God can send his grace; by sending Christians the Holy Spirit to help them in their lives and faith.



Nicky Cruz was a violent gangster who was saved from a life of sin by God. He is an example of salvation.

'Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'

INFLUENCE

Believing that they can be saved from sin can make Christians feel that they do not have to fear death, or punishment, and can have a new start, having faith that God loves and cares for them.

It also makes them think that they should forgive others as they have faith that God is going to forgive them for their sins.

Does everyone deserve salvation?

YES	NO
Jesus died so that EVERYONE who was sorry for their sins could be forgiven	Some people do things that are too terrible to forgive, eg the Moors Murderers
All humans sin, it is part of human nature and therefore we should all be forgiven	

TEACHING

A sin is an action that goes against God's will and separates us from him. For example, murder, theft, lying or adultery.

The Bible says 'the wages of sin is death' and Christians believe that on Judgement Day, our sins will count against us if we have not said sorry for them and we may be sent to Hell.



SIN

TEACHING

Original sin is the first ever sin committed in the Bible, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were punished by being banished from the Garden of Eden and having to work hard and experience suffering.

Some Christians believe we have inherited this sin from Adam and Eve and it is as if we were part of it. Others believe the story shows that it is human nature to be sinful.

Should everyone who sins be forgiven?

YES	NO
Jesus died so that EVERYONE who was sorry for their sins could be forgiven	Some people do things that are too terrible to forgive, eg the Moors Murderers
All humans sin, it is part of human nature and therefore we should all be forgiven	

INFLUENCE

Believing that Eve tempted Adam into disobeying God can cause some Christians to have a negative view of women.

Believing that humans were once close to God, before they sinned by disobeying Him, can make Christians think that it is possible to regain this type of relationship with Him again.

13



'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'

ATONEMENT

WHAT IS ATONEMENT?

Atonement is to do something to make up for sin (to try and put things right).

Atonement for Christians refers to how Jesus achieved salvation, and how he redeemed humans; his dying made up for (or atoned for) their sins, so saved them from the consequences.

How is it different to salvation?
Salvation is what Jesus brought and atonement is how he did it (being crucified).

TEACHINGS

That Jesus paid the price for the sins of humans by being crucified, his sacrifice then repaired the relationship between humans and God and meant that people who were sorry for their sins could go to Heaven when they died.

Some also believe that Jesus' sacrifice defeated the devil, so that he could no longer control sinners.

INFLUENCE

Believing that Jesus suffered crucifixion to save them from sin can make Christians feel as though God loves them because he was willing to sacrifice his son for them.

This also makes Christians think that Jesus was the son of God because he was able to overcome death.

'For Christ died for sins once and for all'

15



In the TV series, 'Friends', Chandler atones for kissing Joey's girlfriend by sitting in a box and reflecting upon their friendship.

Can ALL sins be atoned for?

YES	NO
Jesus died so that EVERYONE who was sorry for their sins could be forgiven	Some people do things that are too terrible to forgive, eg the Moors Murderers
All humans sin, it is part of human nature and therefore we should all be forgiven	