

Christianity AQA SPEC A Knowledge Organiser — KEY BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS

The nature of God

The Christian God is **omnipotent** (all powerful) **Omniscient** (all knowing), **Omnipresent** (present everywhere), **Omnibenevolent** (all loving):

"The Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Revelation 19:6).

Omnipotent means having unlimited power, or the ability to do everything. This means that nothing is impossible for God. Indeed,

Genesis 18:14 shows God asking, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

as a reproach to Sarah, who did not believe she would have a child at her advanced age.

But there would appear to be a problem here. If God is omnipotent, which the Bible says He is, then why do we have pain and suffering in the world? If He is omniscient he must know about it, omnibenevolent and he must care. God's omnipotence means that He could stop the pain and suffering, since nothing is impossible for Him. We must therefore conclude that He chooses not to.

The problem of suffering

A God that can stop human suffering but chooses not to doesn't sound like a very loving God. That's a problem, because the Bible says that God is love: (1 John 4:8). So if God is love and God is omnipotent - why is there so much neglect, suffering, pain and evil in the world? This is known as the problem of evil.

Christians respond to the problem of evil in several ways. One response that a Christian might give is that God has given people **free will**. This means that, even though God could make everyone do the right thing all the time, He has chosen to allow people the power to choose how they act. He has given plenty of instruction and guidance in the form of Jesus and the Bible, and it is up to people to follow that.

One more response that a Christian might give is that God has a **plan** for people, which might involve them having to suffer a lot. The reasons for this may not be clear to us as human beings, but God has His own reasons and we just have to trust Him. Other Christians might say that, because Jesus suffered the worst pain (being cut off from God when He was crucified on the cross), suffering is not something to be avoided. Yet another response might be that suffering is a way to help Christians to become better people, either by helping those who are **suffering**, or by being rewarded for their suffering in Heaven.



Prayer is also considered by Christians to be both a way of helping people who are suffering, and a way of helping the person praying to endure their suffering

The Problem of Evil

When considering the problem of evil, we also need to understand the Christian concept of original sin. This is the idea that humans are born sinful. Think of it like an inherited disease: we're all born with the defect of not being perfect creatures and there's nothing we can do to remove it. The problem with original sin is that, because we're all sinful, we are cut off from God and therefore in need of saving.

Some Christians, especially Catholics, would use the concept of **original sin** to explain the problem of evil: there is so much suffering in the world because we are imperfect and sinful creatures, who can only be saved through God's grace in the form of Jesus Christ. Catholics believe we were all tainted by Adam and Eve's original sin: disobeying God and eating an apple from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

Some Christians would use the idea of original sin to express the idea that evil does not come from God, but from the Devil, sometimes called Satan, who was believed to be one of God's angels who rebelled against God



The Creation of the World

The Bible begins with the statement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).



It then goes on to give an account of how God created the world in six days: fish and plants were created on the fifth day, with humans and animals all being created on day six. On the seventh day, God rested. **Genesis 2** gives a more detailed account of the creation of Adam, the first human, and Eve, who was formed from Adam's rib.

"The Lord God took soil and formed the animals and birds; the man named them, but none was a suitable companion for him. The Lord God put the man into a deep sleep, and while he slept he took one of the man's ribs and formed a woman out of it" (Genesis 2:20-24).

It's also in **Genesis 2** that we also get the account of how Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating forbidden fruit:

"You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do you will die that same day" (Genesis 2:16-17).

John's Gospel states that:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

The Word referred to here is usually interpreted as Jesus Christ (John later refers to the Word becoming flesh and living among us). This shows us how important Jesus has been ever since the beginning of time. **Genesis 1** tells us that the Holy Spirit also had an active role in creating the world:

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light" (Genesis 1: 2-3).

There are different opinions and beliefs within Christianity about how God made the world. For some Christians, the details in the Bible are literally true and they believe that God made the world exactly as described in the Bible. People who believe in the literal truth of the creation story are called **Creationists**.

The oneness of God and the Trinity

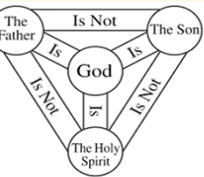
Christians believe in one God. However, they also believe in the Trinity, which is the concept of the three persons of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The **Nicene Creed**, which is the Christian statement of faith, expresses these ideas of belief in God.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father...

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified."

God the Father is the God of the Old Testament: creator, ruler, judge and Lord of the universe. **God the Son** is Jesus, who lived on Earth amongst humans and who died as a sacrifice to save humanity from eternal damnation. **God the Spirit** is the giver of life, who is active in the hearts of believers:



Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Each of the persons of God is God: Christians believe that God is simultaneously **Three and One**. While this may seem impossible, the point is that nothing is impossible for God, and that God cannot be understood by mere human logic. The concept of the Trinity is important because it highlights the mystery of God, but also helps Christians to relate better to God: they may be encouraged to worship the Father, follow the example of the Son, and ask to be filled with the Spirit.

The relationships between the Father, the Son and the Spirit can help Christians to understand how their own relationships should be conducted: for example, with mutual love, respect, generosity, tolerance of difference and so on.

The Afterlife

Christians believe that there is life after death, even though the body dies. A very famous line from the Bible is, *John 3:16*, states that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life".

Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected after His death on the cross, and that He ascended to Heaven to be with God the Father. Christians believe that Jesus has bought them new life after death through His sacrifice: "Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25-26).

However, Christians also believe that everyone will face judgement from God on Judgement Day: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

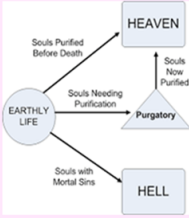
According to Christian belief, God will judge everybody by what they have done in their lives. Those who have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be **redeemed**, but those who have not accepted the gift of salvation will be **damned**. "Anyone not written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelations 20:15).

Some Christians believe that this judgement will happen when Christ returns to Earth (this is called the **Second Coming**), in order to resurrect the dead and establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Christians believe in **Heaven**; many Christians believe in **Hell**, and some Christians believe in **Purgatory** (a place where souls wait after death, to be cleansed of sin and prepare for Heaven).

There isn't a clear agreement about what Heaven and Hell look like; some Christians think of them as being physical places, whereas other Christians think of Heaven and Hell as more like states (Heaven is the state of being connected with God, and Hell is the state of being cut off from God).

However, there are several references to Heaven in the Bible as if it was a physical location: "In my Father's house are many rooms" (John 14:2); "Listen in Heaven, your dwelling place" (1 Kings 8:30); "Our citizenship is in Heaven" (Philippians 3:20).

As with any belief system, some followers take these ideas more literally than others.



However, some Christians interpret the details in the Bible as a parable or a story, which isn't literally true, but helps people to understand that the world was created by God. So, while Creationists would have a problem accepting a contrasting theory of how the universe began, other Christians can happily accept that science might have a different explanation for our origins.

For example, many Christians accept the **Big Bang theory of the universe**, but they also believe that the massive explosion, or 'big bang', that started the universe 15 billion years ago was caused by God.

Another challenge to the literal interpretation of human origin in the Bible is the theory of evolution. This is most famously associated with Charles Darwin, who wrote a book called 'On The Origin of Species' in 1859.



This book argued that human life evolved from much simpler organisms, and that a process called natural selection was responsible for the development of our species from apes.

Today, there is conflict about whether to teach **Creationism** or **evolution** in some schools, particularly in the USA. However, many Christians don't have a problem with the theory of evolution: they see the Bible story as a parable, or a simplified version to help people understand the idea that God made humans.

Jesus Christ and Salvation

As mentioned above, Jesus is believed to be one of the persons of God in the Trinity. *John 1:14* states that "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us".

This refers to Jesus being born as a baby to a virgin mother and living as a man on Earth. You'll sometimes hear this referred to as the **Incarnation**. The **Incarnation** is the idea that Jesus is both fully God and fully human at the same time. A key belief for all Christians is the **Resurrection**. This is the belief that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried in a tomb with a sealed entrance, and rose from the dead three days after His death. This is such an important belief for Christians because it proves to them that Jesus has power over life and death and that He died for their sins: they believe that, through Jesus' sacrifice, they will be spiritually resurrected to new life with God.

Jesus was crucified by the Roman authorities, who considered him a troublemaker. His claim to be King of the Jews was also seen as highly blasphemous to the Jewish council. According to Luke's Gospel, when Jesus was being crucified, He said, "Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Christians believe that Jesus ascended to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. The **Ascension** is the name given to the story of how Jesus appeared to various people, including some of the disciples, but people didn't believe the messages that they passed on about Jesus being alive again. So, Jesus appeared to eleven disciples as they were sat together, and told them to go forth and spread the good news:

"So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into Heaven and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).



Sin

The role of Jesus is so important in the Christian worldview because of the concept of sin. As mentioned above, original sin is the idea that humanity is born in a state of imperfection and disconnection from God. When Christians talk about **sin**, they are referring to two things: going against God's law and falling short of the standard that God requires. Because of original sin, humans fail to meet God's standards, both in their actions and their thoughts, and will therefore go against God's law time and time again.

The law given by God exposes everybody as sinners: "No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin" (Romans 3:20).

However, God gave the world a new law through Jesus: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

So even though nobody meets God's law well enough, through Jesus, there is still a chance for humanity to know and connect with God. Here we come to the idea of grace: Jesus fulfilled the law on behalf of humanity - not because humanity deserved it, but out of love for humanity. Once a Christian has accepted the covenant offered by Jesus, the Holy Spirit is then believed to give them strength: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

Atonement is the name given to the reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus Christ. Through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus (who is fully God as well as fully human), the sins or wrongdoings of humanity can be pardoned. In this way, Christians believe that God has found a way to maintain His perfect law, whilst also saving humanity, even though they are not up to His perfect standard.

Topic	RAG RATE	RETEST 1	RETEST 2	RETEST 3	Comments
Nature of God					
Suffering					
Evil					
Creation					
Trinity					
Afterlife					
Salvation					
Sin					