

Introduction

You can use these revision notes to revise for AS- or A-level Religious Studies for AQA. Your qualification is made up of two components:

- Component 1: Philosophy of religion and ethics
- Component 2: Study of religion and dialogues (A-level), or Study of religion (AS-level).

AS-level Component 2: Study of religion

Content

For Component 2, you will have studied one of five of the world's major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism.

These revision notes will help you to revise if you studied Christianity. Within Christianity, you will have studied the following topics:

- Sources of wisdom and authority
- God
- Self, death and afterlife
- Good conduct and key moral principles
- Expressions of religious identity.

A-level Component 2: Study of religion and dialogues

Content

For Component 2, you will have studied one of five of the world's major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism.

These revision notes will help you to revise if you studied Christianity. Within Christianity, you will have studied the following topics:

- Sources of wisdom and authority
- God
- Self, death and afterlife
- Good conduct and key moral principles
- Expressions of religious identity
- Christianity, gender and sexuality
- Christianity and science
- Christianity and the challenge of secularisation
- Christianity, migration and religious pluralism.

How the Assessment works

Component 2 is examined by one written exam, which is 3 hours long. This paper is split into three sections.

The total maximum mark for the whole paper is 100 marks.

These revision notes cover only Component 2. You can use My Revision Notes AQA A-level Religious Studies: Paper 1 Philosophy of religion and ethics to revise for Component 1.

How the Assessment works

Component 2 is examined by one written exam, which is 1 hour long.

This paper consists of two compulsory two-part questions.

- The first part of each question tests AO1 and is worth 15 marks.
- The second part of each question tests AO2 and is worth 15 marks.
- So the total maximum mark for the whole paper is 60 marks.

This component represents 33 per cent of your overall AS-level.

Section A: Study of Christianity

This section contains two compulsory two-part questions.

- The first part of each question tests AO1 and is worth 10 marks.
- The second part of each question tests AO2 and is worth 15 marks.
- So the total maximum mark for this section of the paper is 50 marks.

Section B: The dialogue between philosophy of religion and Christianity

- You have to answer one unstructured synoptic question from a choice of two.
- This question is worth 25 marks.

Section C: The dialogue between ethics and Christianity

- You have to answer one unstructured synoptic question from a choice of two.
- This question is worth 25 marks.

This component represents 50 per cent of your overall A-level.

Preparing for the examinations

Remember that two skills are assessed in the exam, but there are some general points that apply to both parts of each question.

- Ensure that your writing is legible. Examiners cannot mark or give credit for what they cannot read.
- Spend a minute or two in jotting down a very brief plan (words and phrases, not sentences) of relevant points that you might include.
- Remain focused on the question throughout. Answer the question that is set, not the one that you would like it to be.
- Include reference to scholarly opinion, whether a school of thought or a named scholar, but do not confuse them.
- Use specialist terms and spell them correctly.
- Paragraph your work. Use a new paragraph for each of your main ideas or arguments.

A01 is assessed in the first part of each of the two questions

- The command word for AS-level is 'explain'.
- The command word for A-level is 'examine'.
- AO1 tests knowledge and understanding. Your answer to the first part of each question should not contain any evaluation.
- Do not give a general introduction stating your intent by repeating the question or setting out what you intend to cover in your answer. That is a waste of valuable time.
- Give a range of points in your answer but do not try to include so many that your answer becomes like a list because you do not have time for development.
- Develop each of the points you make with further comment and support them with evidence, including, as appropriate, reference to scripture.
- Be aware of chronology. Do not, for instance, state that Aquinas disagreed with embryo research.
- Aim at fulfilling the Level 5 criteria, as shown in the table below.

AS-level (13–15 marks)	A-level (9–10 marks)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Knowledge and understanding is accurate and relevant and is consistently applied to the question.● Very good use of detailed and relevant evidence which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate.● The answer is clear and coherent and there is effective use of specialist language and terminology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Knowledge and critical understanding is accurate, relevant and fully developed in breadth and depth with very good use of detailed and relevant evidence which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate.● Where appropriate, good knowledge and understanding of the diversity of views and/or scholarly opinion is demonstrated.● Clear and coherent presentation of ideas with precise use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.

A02 is assessed in the second part of each question

- The structure of the question for AS-level consists of a statement followed by the command 'Assess this view'.
- The structure of the question for A-level consists of a statement followed by the command 'Evaluate this claim'.
- This tests your ability to analyse arguments or viewpoints and to evaluate them.
- AO2 is not about giving one set of views, then another set of views and finally giving your own view. Such a response would consist mainly of AO1. It is about assessing the persuasiveness and reasonableness of an argument by examining the strengths of its claims and the strengths of the counter-arguments.
- First of all, set out clearly and coherently the argument in support of this claim.
- Then give critical analysis of the argument. This might involve raising some of the following questions about the argument:
 - Is it inconsistent or illogical at any point?
 - Does it make any unjustified assumptions?
 - Does it give reasonable evidence in support of its claims or does it ignore or downplay evidence that might count against the argument or alternative interpretations of the evidence?
 - Does it exaggerate its claims or make sweeping generalisations?
 - Does it include subjective and biased opinion?
- Use trigger words such as 'however', 'additionally' or 'nevertheless' to help the examiner see where you are making critical analysis.
- This should lead you to include consideration of at least one different viewpoint from the argument in support of the statement.
 - There is no need to consider more than two different viewpoints in your answer.
 - They need not be opposing viewpoints.
- This should lead you finally to an evaluation of the argument, i.e. to an assessment of its value.
 - You might assess it as convincing.
 - You might think it fails because of the flaws it contains or because a different argument or viewpoint is more persuasive.
 - You might conclude that it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion.
- At the very start of your answer note any key terms or phrases in the statement and ensure that you address them throughout your answer; this will ensure a fully focused response.
- Aim at fulfilling the Level 5 criteria, as shown in the table.

AS-level (13–15 marks)	A-level (13–15 marks)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reasoned and evidenced chains of reasoning supporting different points of view with critical analysis. ● Evaluation is based on the reasoning presented. ● The answer is clear and coherent and there is effective use of specialist language and terminology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A very well-focused response to the issue(s) raised. ● Perceptive discussion of different views, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought with critical analysis. ● There is an appropriate evaluation fully supported by the reasoning. ● Precise use of the appropriate subject vocabulary.

1 Sources of wisdom and authority

Introduction to the Bible

What is the Bible?

REVISED

- The word 'Bible' means 'books' and it is Christianity's sacred text.
- It is a collection of books that express beliefs about God and God's purposes for humanity and the rest of the created world.
- The earliest writings date from early in the first millennium BCE, but some are based on oral traditions that are many centuries older.
- The latest writings belong to the second century CE.
- The Bible falls into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- The books of the Old and New Testaments together form the **Canon of the Bible**.

The Old Testament

- The **Old Testament** contains the writings of the Jewish scriptures (the *Tenakh*) though the order is different.
- It was in fixed form by the first century BCE.
- Some of the writing is in prose but much is in poetry; it contains a wide range of different types of literature.
- There are four main parts:
 - The first five books are known as the Torah ('law') and they do contain many law codes, e.g. the Ten Commandments, but they tell the history of the origins of the Jews, starting with the creation of the universe and ending with the death of Moses.
 - Historical writings that tell the history of the Jews from the conquest of Canaan and ending in the period of Persian rule in the fifth century BCE.
 - The prophetic books contain the insights of individuals into God's purposes for Israel.
 - Wisdom literature covers a wide range of themes and types of writing. It includes an examination of the suffering of the innocent, erotic love poetry and a commentary on life that is at times cynical and agnostic.

The New Testament

- The **New Testament** contains Christian writings that date mainly from the first century.
- It reached fixed form by the fourth century CE.
- There are four main parts:
 - The Gospels contain the good news about Jesus, recounting his ministry, passion (suffering and death) and resurrection.
 - The Acts of the Apostles is a history of the early Church.
 - The Epistles are letters written mainly to Christian communities to give guidance on belief and lifestyle.
 - The Book of Revelation uses graphic imagery to describe the Last Judgement.

Testament means 'covenant'/'agreement'.

Canon of the Bible refers to those books believed by the leaders of the early Christian Church to be inspired by God and therefore authoritative.

Old Testament refers to the covenant that God made with Israel on Mt Sinai through Moses.

New Testament refers to the covenant made by God with humanity through the death of Jesus.

Now test yourself

- 1 What beliefs overall do the books of the Bible contain?
- 2 What is the meaning of the word 'Testament'?
- 3 What are the four main parts of the Old Testament?
- 4 What are the four main parts of the New Testament?
- 5 What is meant by the phrase 'the Canon of the Bible'?

TESTED

The nature and authority of the Bible

Conservative approaches

REVISED

Evangelical Protestants

Many evangelical Protestants hold what is called a fundamentalist view of the nature and authority of the Bible. They believe:

- The Bible is the infallible word of God; it contains no mistakes of any kind.
- The authors were directly inspired by God.
- Apparent contradictions in content are due to the limitations of the human intellect, i.e. they are not real contradictions.
- When it comes to the Genesis story of creation, there are different approaches among fundamentalists, but all agree that the account given is true.
 - Those known as young earth creationists have a literalist approach to the Bible and reject any theories that contradict the literal meaning of Genesis 1.
 - Those known as old earth creationists regard Genesis 1 as giving a scientifically correct account of the origins of the universe; they do not adopt a literalist approach.

Exam tip

There are many differing views on the nature and authority of the Bible among Christians and the labels attached to each of these views vary. What actual label you use does not matter as much as your ability to show that you understand the differences in understanding among Christians.

Key quotation

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

Two fundamentalist approaches to Genesis 1

Young earth creationist

- Creation occurred about 6,000 years ago (using Bible genealogies)
- Literalist understanding of the text
- Creation in six days means literally six days
- Creation of every species is a separate act of creation
- Humans essentially different from animals
- Scientific theories rejected as products of limited and mistaken human intelligence
- Some say that fossil evidence was planted by God to make the earth look old and test faith

Old earth creationist

- Acceptance of scientific dating of universe, i.e. circa 13.8 billion years ago
- Not literalist, e.g. Hebrew word for day has more than one meaning
- Creation in six epochs/stages
- Acceptance within limits of Darwinian evolution
- Humans a 'special' creation, i.e. different from animals
- Genesis 1 and modern science compatible, e.g. 'let there be light' refers to the Big Bang and the six 'days' match the six stages of the evolution of the cosmos according to scientific thinking

Catholic views

- The Bible is inspired by God, but was written by human beings.
- The inspiration, i.e. the way in which it is the word of God, relates to the Bible as a whole rather than to each word or verse.
- They distinguish between the key messages in the Bible regarding salvation, which they believe are without error, and the accounts of the individual authors who were products of their time and culture, and need to be understood in that context.
- Genesis 1 was never intended as a scientific or factual account of the origins of the universe; the author used the genre of myth to convey truths about the nature of God as creator and the nature of humanity and of the created world.

- Guidance in interpreting the Bible comes from **Tradition** and the **Magisterium**, as well as the use of the individual's informed conscience and reason.

Key quotation

The Bible is not meant to convey precise historical information or scientific findings to us. Moreover, the authors were children of their time. Their forms of expression are influenced by the sometimes inadequate cultural images of the world around them. Nevertheless, everything that man must know about God and the way of his salvation is found with infallible certainty in Sacred Scripture.

Dei Verbum

Tradition refers to teachings, customs and practices of the Church passed down through the centuries and seen as equal in importance to the Bible.

Magisterium refers to the teaching authority of the Pope and bishops who preserve and interpret the Bible and Tradition.

Neo-orthodox approaches

REVISED

Neo-orthodox approaches are based on the arguments of philosophers like Karl Barth.

Karl Barth (1886–1968)

Karl Barth was a Swiss Protestant theologian who believed that the Bible:

- is not the word of God but it contains the word of God
- is the way through which humans may experience God, realising their need for forgiveness and divine mercy shown through Jesus
- is not inerrant with respect to science, history and religion, as its writers were products of their time and subject to limitations of intellect.

Liberal approaches

REVISED

This term covers a wide range of approaches:

- Some believe that those who wrote the texts were guided by God.
- Others believe that the Bible is an entirely human document, consisting of what the writers believed about God and his purposes for the world.
- What individual authors wrote was a product of the culture and age in which each of them lived and of their particular temperament and outlook on life.
- The Bible is not inspired, but it may be inspiring to individuals, e.g. Jesus' statement in Matthew 26:52 that those who draw the sword will die by the sword may inspire some Christians to adopt a pacifist approach to war.
- The Sea of Faith Network, which includes Christians with very liberal views, claims that faith is a purely human creation, so the Bible has no authority other than any that an individual might choose to give it.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 How is the Catholic view of the Bible as the word of God different from that of Evangelical Protestants?
- 2 What is the key difference between young earth and old earth creationist approaches to Genesis 1?
- 3 What did Karl Barth say about the Bible as the word of God?
- 4 Give three ways in which liberal Christians understand the nature of the Bible.

The authority of the Church

Outline history of the Church

REVISED

- After his resurrection Jesus gave the **Apostles** authority to lead the Church.
- The Apostles passed on their authority to new leaders (**bishops**) and this transmission of authority continued down the centuries.
- It became known as the **Apostolic Succession**.
- In Western Europe, the Bishop of Rome (known as the **Pope**) was the leader of the Church and everyone had to obey him.
- In the sixteenth century, many Christians rebelled against the Pope's authority and they became known as Protestants (because they protested against the established Church).
- From the sixteenth century, there were two main Christian traditions in Western Europe:
 - the Catholic Church, led by the Pope
 - the Protestant Church, which consists of many different **denominations**.
- One of the key areas of disagreement between the traditions related to the authority given to the Bible and the authority given to the Church.

Exam tip

You need to understand the different views on the authority of the Church in relation to the authority of the Bible that are found in the Catholic and Protestant traditions. For this, it helps to have an outline knowledge of the history of the western Church from its beginnings in the first century CE to the **Reformation** in the sixteenth century.

Outline of the two different views of the authority of the Bible and the Church

REVISED

Protestant view	Catholic view
Sola scriptura : the Bible alone has authority	Bible and Tradition are equal in status
Believers interpret what it says to them in their situation through prayer and in the light of their conscience	The Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church) is the guardian and interpreter of both the Bible and Tradition.

Reformation refers to the split in the Church that occurred in the sixteenth century when individuals and groups protested against what they believed to be wrong teaching and corrupt practice in the Catholic Church.

The **Apostles** (from the Greek word that means 'sent out') were the disciples chosen by Jesus to be with him in his ministry and to continue his work after Jesus' resurrection. A wider group of Christians, including Paul, were also called apostles.

Bishops in the Catholic Church derive their authority from the Apostolic Succession. They are in charge of a group of parishes in a geographical location known as a diocese.

The **Apostolic Succession** refers to the idea that the Apostles passed on their authority to the bishops whom they appointed to succeed them. This passing on of authority from bishops to bishops has continued down the centuries.

The **Pope** is the leader of the Catholic Church and Catholics believe that the Pope's authority can be traced back in a direct line to Peter.

Denomination is a term that refers to a recognised branch of the Christian Church.

Sola scriptura means 'Scripture alone', which is the view of the Protestant denominations.

The Protestant Churches

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

- **Sola scriptura**: the Bible is the only source of religious authority.
- Christians should not say that some parts are true and others are false.
- The Bible gives the standard of measurement for deciding on the truth of Church teachings.
- Without the Bible, there would be no Church.
- This precedence of the Bible over the Church is illustrated in Luther's belief that salvation comes through faith, not through the institutions of the Church and that all Christians have equal access to God through prayer.
- This belief is known as 'the priesthood of all believers' and comes from the New Testament.

The Baptist Church

- Baptists are evangelical Christians, but most are not fundamentalist.
- They combine the *sola scriptura* approach (**special revelation**) with the use by the individual of reason and conscience (**general revelation**).
- The New Testament takes priority over the Old Testament and as the inspired word of God, it provides the standard by which all other teachings should be assessed.
- They reject the authority of the Church as an institution, i.e. of religious tradition, creeds, etc.

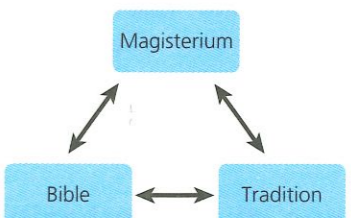
The Catholic Church

- The Gospel was passed on in two ways that are equal in status because both were inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- The Bible was passed on in written form by the Apostles and other inspired religious teachers.
- Once the Bible gained its fixed form, it could neither be added to nor taken away from.
- Tradition was passed on in oral form (and eventually written down) by the Apostles. This is known as the Apostolic Tradition.
- It is always in agreement with what is contained in the Bible, though it may contain truths not found in the Bible.
- It is a living form of the truth in that it is added to by new insights, e.g. ethical teachings on bio-medical issues.
- The passing on and interpretation of the Bible and Tradition are overseen by the Magisterium.
- It receives the authority from God to give an interpretation of both the Bible and Tradition that is authentic, and its teachings must be obeyed.

Key quotation

We find the true faith in Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church.

Youcat 12



Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 What is the Catholic view of the status of the Church in relation to the Bible?
- 2 What do Catholics mean by the Apostolic Succession?
- 3 To what does the term Magisterium refer?
- 4 What do Protestant Christians mean by *sola scriptura*?
- 5 How did Martin Luther explain the relationship between the Bible and the Church?

Key quotation

Let us not change the Word of God; we ourselves should be changed through the Word ... It is by the standard of Scripture that the believer is enabled to measure all other teaching.

A Skevington Wood,
Captive to the Word

Key quotation

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.

1 Peter 2:9

Special revelation refers to the way in which God makes himself known in specific ways/times. The Bible and religious experiences are two forms of special revelation.

General revelation refers to the way in which God makes himself known to people through nature, reason and conscience, for instance. The knowledge of God that may be obtained in this way is available to all people at all times.

Magisterium refers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, consisting of the Pope and bishops.

The authority of Jesus

Summary of the two different views about the authority of Jesus

REVISED

Jesus' authority as God's authority:

- based on the claim that Jesus was **God incarnate**.

Jesus' authority as only human:

- based on the claim that Jesus was not divine.

Exam tip

These two ways of understanding the nature of Jesus' authority are not so much denominationally based as based on different understandings of the authority and reliability of the Gospels and on interpretation of the text.

Jesus' authority as God's authority

REVISED

This is the traditional view as stated in the Nicene Creed and is the official view of almost all Churches. It is based on an acceptance of New Testament claims about Jesus as true.

- According to the Gospels, Jesus claimed to have divine authority.
- That authority was seen in
 - his teaching
 - the miracles attributed to him
 - the titles used by and of Jesus, e.g. Son of God, **Messiah**, Son of Man.

Key quotations

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matthew 28:18

Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people ...

John 17:1-2

Jesus' divine authority seen in his teaching

On one occasion, according to Mark, those who heard Jesus teach were amazed both by what he said and the manner in which he taught. They were used to their religious teachers giving instruction that was based on teachings from previous religious teachers. Jesus, however, taught in a new, direct and original way. He taught with authority, and those who believed in him were convinced that his authority came from God.

Jesus' divine authority seen in his healing

The emphasis in the story of Jesus healing the centurion's servant is on the amazing faith of the Roman centurion who recognised the absolute authority of Jesus over healing, comparing it to his own authority over the soldiers under him. In the same way that just one word was enough for instant obedience, so Jesus needed only to say the word for healing to take place. But the story also shows that Jesus had a unique authority.

God incarnate states the belief that Jesus is God in human form; 'incarnate' means 'in flesh'.

Messiah is a title meaning 'anointed one' that was used for Jewish kings, indicating that they were chosen by God and so were sons of God; Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Key quotation

The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

Mark 1:22

Key quotation

Lord, don't trouble yourself ... But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me.

Luke 7:6-8

Jesus as Son of God

In the Old Testament, this title was used of kings.

- The phrase 'son of' means 'reflecting the nature of'/'like'.
- Kings were thought to have been adopted by God at their accession.
- They were meant to reflect God's justice and mercy in their rule.
- By the time of Jesus, it was linked with the title of 'Messiah', which also included the idea of being chosen by God to rule on his behalf.

In the New Testament, the title indicates Jesus' unique divine authority.

- At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as the Son of God and he is said to be 'my beloved Son' in the visions at his baptism and transfiguration.

Key quotation

Jesus said, 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son ...

Matthew 11:27

Jesus as Son of Man

In the Old Testament, this was a very ambiguous term.

- It could mean 'I', a human being, a representative of humanity or a supernatural figure bringing God's judgement.

It was Jesus' preferred title for himself.

- Its ambiguity made it less likely that he would be thought of as a power figure and potential revolutionary.
- He used it to describe his role as the 'suffering servant' spoken of in the Old Testament and to his God-given authority both in the present and the future.

Key quotations

I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Mark 2:10

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45

... you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One ...

Mark 14:62

Jesus' authority as only human

REVISED

Two groups of Christians take this view:

- Small groups in the early centuries of the Church and in more recent times who interpret texts in a different way from the majority of Christians.
- Liberal Christians who reject any idea of divine inspiration underlying the Bible.

Adoptionism

- The belief that Jesus was not divine by nature.
- God 'adopted' him as his 'son' at the baptism (Mark 1:9–11) in the same way as kings in ancient Israel were thought to be chosen by God as his earthly representatives.

Unitarianism

- This denomination, still in existence, was founded in the eighteenth century.
- It adopts a **deist** view of the creation of the world, i.e. God created the world but then had no further connection with it.
- Jesus was just a spiritual leader so his teachings may contain useful insights, but there is no idea of divine authority attaching to them.

Liberal Christian views

- The Gospels were products of several decades of thinking about the significance of Jesus' life and teaching.
- Jesus' teaching and the stories associated with him had been passed down by word of mouth and would have been altered and even exaggerated in the telling.
- This process can be seen in the Gospels themselves, e.g. in the differing accounts of the calming of the storm that are found in the first three Gospels.
- The influence of Greek philosophy and mystery religions led to the human Jesus being transformed into a divine figure.
- This is reinforced by the outlook of modern science, which rejects the possibility of miracles.
- Jesus, then, was a human being like all other humans, though his deeply spiritual nature gave his teaching authority.

Adoptionism was the belief held by some Christians in the early Church that Jesus was not divine by nature, but was adopted by God at his baptism.

Unitarianism is a small Christian denomination that rejects belief in the divinity of Jesus.

Deist refers to the view that God did not have any further relationship with the world after creating it; deism's belief in God is founded on reason and nature.

Christian responses to the teaching of Jesus

REVISED

- Those who see Jesus' authority as God's authority will feel they should obey his teaching, but that may not be as simple as it seems; some of his teaching seems to be totally impractical and counter-intuitive.
- Those who regard Jesus' authority as only human are free to decide for themselves whether or not they should follow his teaching.

Christian understandings of Jesus' teaching on retaliation and love for enemies (Matthew 5: 38–48)



Jesus as a role model

Whatever their view of the nature of Jesus' authority, all Christians see him as a role model.

- They believe that they should seek to emulate his life of self-giving love, which reflected his teaching that the two greatest commandments were love of God and love of neighbour.
- Many non-Christians, such as Gandhi, have been inspired by the teaching and example of Jesus.

Pacifists reject any use of violence; Christian pacifists may base their beliefs on texts such as Matthew 5: 38–42.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 Which two titles are used in the Gospels to refer to Jesus' divine authority?
- 2 What do Unitarians believe about the authority of Jesus?
- 3 Why do some liberal Christians believe that Jesus' authority was only human?
- 4 Give three ways in which Christians interpret Jesus' teaching to 'turn the other cheek'.
- 5 What overall attitude do Christians have to the life and teaching of Jesus?

Exam practice: AS-level

- 1 a Explain the beliefs of one Christian tradition about the authority of the Bible. [15 marks]
b 'The Bible is inspired by God.' Assess this view. [15 marks]
- 2 a Explain how Catholic views about the authority of the Church might influence the lives of ordinary Catholics. [15 marks]
b 'The Church is the most important source of authority for twenty-first century Christians.' Assess this view. [15 marks]
- 3 a Explain why many Christians believe that Jesus' authority was God's authority. [15 marks]
b 'Jesus teaching in Matthew 5:33–48 is impossible to follow.' Assess this view. [15 marks]

Exam practice: A-level

- 1 a Examine two different Christian views concerning the nature of the Bible. [15 marks]
b 'The Bible is inspired by God.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]
- 2 a Examine different Christian views on the authority of the Church. [10 marks]
b 'The Church is the most important source of authority for twenty-first century Christians.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]
- 3 a Examine how their belief that Jesus' authority was God's authority influences the attitude of some Christians to his teaching. [10 marks]
b 'The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:33–48 about turning the other cheek makes sense only if Jesus intended it as an ideal.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]

2 God

Christian monotheism

One God

REVISED

- **Monotheism** is the belief held by all Christians that there is only one God.
- In the earliest centuries of Israel's history, the Jews believed that other gods existed, but should not be worshipped. The Sinai covenant makes it clear that Israel's God, the Lord, alone should be worshipped.
- The development of monotheism can be seen in the Old Testament writings of the prophets.

Key quotation

I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.
Isaiah 44:6

- The classic statement of monotheism is found in the Jewish statement of faith known as the *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4.
- Israel's monotheism was not a philosophical concept, but it applied to life; it was ethical monotheism.
- This was expressed in Israel's obligations as set out in the **Sinai covenant**.

Key quotation

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.
Exodus 19:5

- These obligations were listed in the Ten Commandments.
- When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the greatest, he said that love of God and of neighbour were the greatest and summed up the whole of the Jewish religion.

Key quotation

The most important one ... is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.
Mark 12:29–31

- **Ethical monotheism**, as seen throughout the New Testament, ties in with Christian beliefs about salvation.

Exam tip

As you revise each of the topics set for study, e.g. God, you should start to see the links with other topics that you have studied in philosophy, ethics and Christianity. Seeing and making such links should enable you to answer exam questions in greater depth. You might like to note them down to refer back to when you are working on the Dialogues.

Key quotation

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

Exodus 20:2–3

Key quotation

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Deuteronomy 6:4

Monotheism refers to the belief that there is one God.

The **Sinai covenant** refers to the agreement made through Moses between God and Israel; in return for their absolute commitment to God, Israel was to be God's chosen people.

Ethical monotheism means that belief in one God includes also following the moral codes linked to that belief, e.g. the Ten Commandments.

Omnipotent creator and controller of all things

REVISED

Omnipotence

Most Christians believe that God is **omnipotent**. The idea of omnipotence is understood in different ways.

- Some follow Descartes' view that omnipotence means God can do absolutely anything. This interpretation raises issues relating to the problem of evil.
- Most Christians think that omnipotence means that God is able to do anything that is logically possible. This answers the issue of the problem of evil, but there are further issues relating to free will and determinism.

God as omnipotent Creator

There are three approaches to the belief in God as Creator:

- 1 A minority of Christians think in terms of the universe as coming out of God's own being. Most, however, reject this identification of God with the created universe because it limits God.
- 2 The view accepted by many Christians is that the universe was created by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). This idea is expressed in the repeated 'Let there be ... and there was ...' in Genesis 1. His word brought everything into existence and ordered it. It is based on the usual English translation of Genesis 1:1–3.
- 3 The third approach, using an alternative translation and adopted by process theology, is the view that the earth was already in existence and in a state of chaos. God then worked at ordering it.

Transcendent and unknowable

REVISED

This refers to the belief of many Christians that God is beyond and outside the world of space and time.

- God is eternal and limitless.
- Catholic teaching refers to God's **aseity**.

God as the omnipotent controller of all things

- The biblical references to God as King express the belief that everything is subject to God's control.
- Most Christians believe that God not only created the universe, he also sustains it.
- The ethical teachings found in the Bible show how God sustains human life in the spiritual as well as the physical sense.
- Most Christians believe that God is **omniscient**. This creates issues both for the problem of evil and for human free will. There are three approaches to the concept of omniscience:
 - 1 God knows past, present and future absolutely and in a causative sense. This means that he controls everything that goes on in the universe, including human actions. This view is known as **theological determinism**.
 - 2 Because God exists beyond space and time, **spatio-temporal language** is not appropriate in relation to him, although we have to use it because it is all we have. God simply sees and knows all things, including the free choices that humans make, but his knowledge is not causative. (This was Aquinas' view.)
 - 3 According to Swinburne, God exists within time and knows all that it is logically possible for God to know. This means he cannot be the cause of human future choices, because he cannot know them, though he might be able to predict them.

The clearest expression of this belief is seen in the call of Moses.

- Moses asked to know God's name, and the reply was 'I am who I am'. In other words, no human can possibly know God's name, i.e. understand what it means to be God.

Omnipotent means all-powerful.

Creation ex nihilo refers to the belief that God created the universe out of nothing.

Omniscient means all-knowing.

Theological determinism is the view that God's absolute control of everything means he causes all that happens.

Spatio-temporal language is language related to space and time, e.g. 'fore-knowing'.

Aseity is the belief in God's self-existence; it is his nature to exist.

The doctrine of the Trinity

REVISED

Many Christians believe that God is 'Three in One'.

- For some Christians, Trinitarian belief is implied in the Old Testament.
- The Hebrew word often used in the Old Testament for God (*Elohim*) is plural.
- In Genesis 1, God as the 'father' of the universe created through his word and his spirit broods over the watery chaos.
- There are clearer hints in the New Testament, e.g. in the baptism of Jesus.

Key quotation

Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

Mark 1:10–11

In the early centuries of the Church's existence, Church leaders considered the implications of:

- biblical texts
- their conviction that Jesus was uniquely the Son of God
- their experience of the power of the Holy Spirit guiding the lives of individual Christians and the life of the Church as a whole.

A number of **heresies** drove them to set out formally the doctrine of the Trinity that is held by most Christian denominations:

- There is one God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Each **Person** possesses fully all the attributes of the Godhead: eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.
- The relationship between the three Persons is one of mutual indwelling.

Key quotation

God is not solitude but perfect communion.

Pope Benedict XVI, Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, May 2005

The importance of the doctrine of the Trinity

For most Christian Churches, belief in the Trinity is important for many reasons, some of which are outlined below.

- The diversity together with unity within creation reflects the diversity within the unity of the Godhead.
- It can be seen as a reflection of the Trinitarian paradox of unity within diversity.
- It connects with Christian beliefs about sin and **atonement**.
- Those Christians who believe in the doctrine of original sin claim that God sent his Son to atone for that sin through his crucifixion and resurrection and so reconcile humans to God; the Holy Spirit works within believers' hearts and lives, giving hope of eternal life.
- The doctrine of the **Trinity** explains the otherwise paradoxical claim that God is both **transcendent** and **immanent**.
- Moltmann described the relationships of the Persons of the Trinity in terms of mutual self-giving and receiving love. This is to be reflected in human relationships.

Heresies are beliefs stated to be false by the leaders of the Christian Church, e.g. adoptionism (see previous chapter).

Person in relation to the Trinity is a translation of the word 'persona' which was used of a mask worn by Greek actors.

Atonement is literally 'at-one-ment'. It refers to the Christian belief that through the death of Christ, the barrier of sin was broken and humans were reconciled to God.

Trinity is literally 'tri-unity' and refers to the Christian belief that God is one nature in three Persons, i.e. is both one and three.

Transcendent refers to the belief that God is without limits and is beyond the world of space and time.

Immanent refers to the belief that God pervades and sustains the universe and that humans are able to have a personal relationship with God.

Jesus as the Son of God

REVISED

For Christians who believe that Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus' authority is God's authority.

Exam tip

Before revising this section on the two set texts, read through again the sections on Jesus as a source of authority in pages 244–248 of your text book and in pages 7–11 of this revision guide.

John 10:30

- This was Jesus' response to those who asked him if he was the Messiah.
- There are two possible ways of understanding the word 'one' in this text.
- 'One' as referring to common essence; 'of one Being with the Father' is the phrase used in the Nicene Creed.
- 'One' as referring to unity of purpose; God's purpose for humanity and Jesus' mission were in harmony.
- Biblical support can be claimed for both these ways.

Key quotation

I and the Father are one.
John 10:30

Unity of essence	Unity of purpose
The idea of pre-existence is present in: John 1:1–2 which states that the Word was in the beginning with God 8:58 where Jesus states 'Before Abraham was, I am'	John 18: where Jesus prays that he and his disciples might be one
The Jews who had asked the question regarded his answer as blasphemous and wanted to stone him to death	In part of his discussion with the Jews, Jesus said that he was simply doing God's work

Further points to consider are:

- Jesus himself spoke Aramaic, so what he said might have been distorted in the translation into Greek.
- John's Gospel was written probably over 60 years after the crucifixion, which gives another possible reason for distortion.
- Many scholars think John's Gospel was an interpretation of the life and teaching of Jesus as recorded in earlier traditions and Gospels.
- One of the reasons for John's Gospel was the need to combat heresy, so this might have 'slanted' the text.

1 Corinthians 8:6

This forms part of Paul's reply to the question raised by Christians in Corinth as to whether it was permissible to eat meat from animals that had been sacrificed in pagan temples. He is here reminding those reading his letter, many of whom were converts from paganism, that monotheism is central to Christian faith. It reads like a statement of belief, so maybe Paul was quoting something in current use in Christian worship. He sets out his teaching on this in a style reminiscent of Hebrew poetry found in the Old Testament, which is structured not on rhyme but on parallelism and rhythm:

Key quotation

... yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

1 Corinthians 8:6

One God, the Father	from whom are all things	and for whom we exist
One Lord, Jesus Christ	through whom are all things	and through whom we exist

- Some Christians think that Paul had the *Shema* (as quoted earlier in this chapter) in mind and that he was equating Jesus with God.
- Other Christians think that the use of the preposition 'through' suggests that Jesus was God's agent in creation but not in the sense of being divine.
- There is no way of giving an absolutely definite answer on what is meant by this and other New Testament texts about the status of Jesus.
- It took the Church several centuries of debate to get its thinking clear on this and perhaps such texts represent early steps in that process of thought.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 What is meant by ethical monotheism?
- 2 Give two ways of explaining what is meant by omnipotent.
- 3 What do Christians mean when they refer to God as transcendent?
- 4 Who are the three Persons of the Trinity?
- 5 What are the two ways of understanding 'one' in John 10:20?

God as Personal, God as Father and God as Love

The Bible often describes God in **anthropomorphic** terms; for instance, in Genesis 2, God is said to walk in the garden in the cool of the day. At the call of Moses, God tells him that 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt ... and I am concerned about their suffering' (Exodus 3:7). God is depicted as having human emotions and a human body. This type of language understands God as personal and refers to God in human terms.

God as Personal

REVISED

This refers to the belief that humans can relate to God.

- God is immanent, i.e. involved in the world and accessible.
- God hears and answers prayers.
- This is seen in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the spirit of a believer.

Key quotation

... your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you ...

1 Corinthians 6:19

God as Father

REVISED

In the biblical world, this was not just a term relating to the family. The oldest male in the society was responsible for, respected by and had absolute control over the rest of the group. So Old Testament references to God as Father attribute to him a number of roles:

- Creating the universe
- Rescuing Israel when in trouble
- Setting standards of behaviour, e.g. in giving the Ten Commandments
- Exercising justice, rewarding obedience and punishing misdemeanours.

New Testament references include ideas of both protective love and power.

Jesus often referred to God as Father.

- In the parable of the Forgiving Father, God's unconditional and ceaseless love is depicted.
- Jesus tells his disciples that their heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him and teaches them a prayer that addresses God as 'our Father'.
- Jesus' relationship with God is seen in his prayer in Gethsemane, where he uses *Abba*, the intimate Aramaic term for Father.

Key quotation

'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'

Mark 14:36

Paul claims that when they pray 'Abba, Father', Christians become adopted children of God.

The **Apostles' Creed** refers to God as Father in two senses: as creator of the universe and as the father of Jesus.

Key quotation

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord ...

Apostles' Creed

Anthropomorphic language refers to language describing God in terms of a human.

The **Apostles' Creed** is, in its current form, a fourth century statement of Christian belief.

God as Love

REVISED

Philosophically, the reality of evil challenges claims that God is **omnibenevolent**, but Christians nevertheless trust in God's love from their own experience and on the basis of biblical teaching.

Omnibenevolent means all-loving.

- The Old Testament uses the Hebrew term *hesed*, often translated as 'steadfast love', to depict God's dependable commitment to the covenant with Israel.
- The New Testament equivalent of *hesed* is the Greek word *agape*, which denotes God's selfless, self-giving, generous and unconditional love for humanity.
- According to the writer of 1 John, 'God is love' (1 John 4:8).
- *Agape* is part of the nature of the Trinity.

Key quotation

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

- Because they are created in God's image, human relationships have *agape* at their heart.
 - Hence Jesus' two greatest commandments: love of God and love of neighbour.
 - *Agape* was central to Fletcher's situation ethics, which you studied in Component 1: Philosophy and Ethics. This is discussed in the Dialogues section on page 125.

God as King

REVISED

Monarchy was a familiar concept for most of the biblical period and whether monarchs ruled small city-states or huge nations, the ruler's authority was absolute. So it is not surprising that 'king' and other royal titles were used of God.

In his vision in the Temple, the prophet Isaiah saw God seated on a throne (the Ark of the Covenant was thought of as God's throne) and he feared he would die, 'for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts'. The vision is one of God's power over everything, including life and death.

In the previous chapter of this revision guide, there was reference to Jesus as Messiah. The term was

used of Israel's kings and so its application to Jesus suggests a kingly figure, associated with power and wealth, which was why Jesus did not use it himself.

Jesus was associated with the inauguration of the Kingdom of God:

- This is not a place but refers to God's rule as King of the universe.
- It is often understood as both a present and a future reality.
- Understood as part of the future reality; Jesus, the anointed King, will return to fully establish the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God there will be no pain or hunger, and there will be peace.

The problems with anthropomorphic language

REVISED

- Using this kind of language puts limits on a God who is believed to be transcendent.
- The portrayal of God suggests someone like us who is changeable and therefore not reliable; he is therefore not worthy of worship.
- Many Christians, though, would say that the only meaningful way for humans to describe God

is to use such language, though they recognise its limitations when applied to a Being who is essentially beyond human understanding. However, this does not solve the issue.

- Many of the metaphors used for God are associated with domination and above all, they are male.

The debate about gender-specific language

REVISED

- Women feel excluded by the use of gender-specific language that is found throughout the Bible, which is culturally conditioned and reinforces patriarchal stereotypes of male superiority.
- In response to this, some gender-neutral translations of the Bible have been produced. Many hymns and some prayers and forms of worship have been revised.
- However, this does not address the problem highlighted by feminists that the God portrayed in the Bible is a male figure, with all the typically male attributes of power.
 - Such language encourages a distorted and unacceptable understanding of God.
 - The standard gender-neutral translations of the Bible do not apply gender-neutral terms to God.

In an attempt to redress this, many United States divinity faculties are encouraging lecturers to avoid the use of male pronouns when speaking of God and to replace them with words such as 'God' or 'Godself'.

- A post-Christian thinker like Daphne Hampson does likewise, but in her case she also has a rather different conception of 'that which is God'.

In response, other Christians, including some feminist theologians, point to the presence in the Bible and in the thinking of the Church of feminine attributes used of God.

- An early Church theologian (Clement of Alexandria) referred to Christians nursing at the breast of God the Father.
- Meister Eckhart (a medieval mystic) referred to God lying on a maternity bed and giving birth.
- Another medieval mystic, Mother Julian, made frequent references to God in feminine terms, stating that 'as truly as God [the Father] is our Father, so truly is God [the Son] our Mother'.

Other Christians think that to remove all gender-specific references from the Bible would be to lose many insights, as it was a product of its culture and to be properly understood, it needs to be studied in that context.

- The biblical writers deliberately avoided reference to God as Mother because of the prevalence of fertility religions; references to God as Father prevented the infiltration of their beliefs and practices into Jewish and Christian faiths.

There are also feminists who think that attributing 'female' qualities to the male God just compounds the problem. The male now contains all within himself. What is needed is to see women and men, female and male, as equal.

Feminist issues are studied again in a later topic of the specification (Christianity, gender and sexuality).

Now test yourself

TESTED

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 What do Christians mean when they say that God is immanent? | 4 What is the problem for feminists of the biblical depiction of God as king? |
| 2 Why do many Christians refer to God as Father? | 5 Why do some Christians think it would be wrong to remove all gender-specific language from the Bible? |
| 3 What is the problem with using anthropomorphic language to describe God? | |

Key quotation

I have concluded that fundamental to the Abrahamic religions is the will to subvert women and establish man as norm ... [in so far as that is the case] these religions are a form of fascism.

Daphne Hampson, Academy Conferences lecture, Oxford, April 2016

Key quotation

For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.

Isaiah 42:14

The concept of God in process theology

Process theology

REVISED

Process theology, which developed in the twentieth century, originated in the ideas of A.N. Whitehead who was strongly influenced by quantum mechanics' ideas that the sub-atomic world is in a process of continual change. His ideas have been developed further by David Griffin.

God is not the Creator

Griffin rejects the traditional Christian belief in creation out of nothing:

- He adopts the alternative translation of Genesis 1:1–3 that is given earlier in this chapter.
- The universe has always existed; it is uncreated and eternal.
- It was therefore not created by God.
- God, like the universe, is uncreated and eternal.
- The relationship between God and the universe is **panentheistic**.
 - They exist together just as the human mind and human body exist together.
 - The universe is in God and God is in the universe.
- God's role in relation to the universe is to persuade it into order and complexity.
 - This attempt has gone on for 13.7 billion years, using the processes of the Big Bang and of evolution.
 - The world's independence of God explains the very slow and arduous progress.

Panentheistic is the adjective used by process theology to describe the relationship between God and the universe. God and the universe exist together in the way that human minds and bodies exist together. Everything is in God and God is immanent in the universe.

God is not omnipotent

- God does not have unlimited power. This follows on from his views on God's relation to the world.
- Because it is independent of God, the ever-changing chaotic matter making up the universe is able to resist God's attempts at persuasion.

Assessment of process theology

REVISED

Positives of process theology

- It has support from quantum mechanics.
- It fits in with the theories of Big Bang and evolution.
- It is supported by one possible translation of the Hebrew in Genesis 1.
- It gives an explanation for why God does not control evil: he cannot.
- It claims probability rather than certainty for its views, so it is not a 'closed book'.

Negatives of process theology

The solution to the problem of evil is for many people its most attractive feature, but it comes at a huge cost.

- Its claim that God is not omnipotent goes against what many people, not just Christians, imagine a divine being should be.
- A God who is not omnipotent would be not truly God and not a God worthy of worship in the eyes of many Christians.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 In what two ways are God and the universe similar?
- 2 What word describes the relationship between God and the world?
- 3 What does that word mean?
- 4 What is God's role in relation to the universe?
- 5 What does process theology believe about the power of God?

Exam practice: AS-level

- 1 a Explain Christian beliefs about God as the omnipotent creator of all things. [15 marks]
b 'From a Christian point of view, God is unknowable.' Assess this view. [15 marks]
- 2 a Explain different Christian views on depicting God as personal. [15 marks]
b 'The use of anthropomorphic language helps Christians to understand the nature of God.' Assess this view. [15 marks]
- 3 a Explain the views of process theology about God's relationship with the universe. [15 marks]
b The concept of God in process theology is not Christian.' Assess this view. [15 marks]

Exam practice: A-level

- 1 a Examine the importance for many Christians of belief in the Trinity. [10 marks]
b 'Belief in monotheism is incompatible with belief in the Trinity.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]
- 2 a Examine different Christian views on depicting God as personal. [10 marks]
b 'The use of anthropomorphic language helps Christians to understand the nature of God.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]
- 3 a Examine the differences between traditional Christian views and those of process theology about God's relationship to the world. [10 marks]
b 'The concept of God in process theology is not Christian.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]

3 Self, death and afterlife

The meaning and purpose of life

At some point(s) in their lives, most people wonder about the meaning of life in general and, in particular, about what purpose their individual lives have. They draw on their personal experiences and they may be influenced by the views of those they

respect and admire. Christians also tend to look for answers or guidance in the beliefs and teachings of their religion, referring to the sources of authority that were considered in the first chapter of this revision guide and in the text book.

To glorify God and have a personal relationship with him

REVISED

Christians believe that humans cannot know the nature of God. (Refer back to the consideration of God as transcendent and unknowable in the text book and in the previous chapter of this revision guide.)

- The Old Testament writings often refer to God's glory.
- God's **glory** was, according to John's Gospel, reflected uniquely in Jesus.
- Christians believe that because they, like all humans, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), they should reflect God's glory in their lives.
- Jesus taught his disciples that their lives should encourage others to give glory to God.

Key quotation

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

- Living a life that glorifies God means that Christians experience the **Kingdom of God** in this life as well as beyond death.

Key quotation

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

John 5:24

To prepare for judgement

REVISED

- According to the creation story in Genesis 2, humans were created for fellowship with God, but disobeying God led to alienation.
- God alone could restore the relationship and he did this through the death of Jesus, the supreme act of reconciliation.
- The final act of this reconciliation is the **judgement** that all humans will face.
- Jesus taught in his parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46) that this would be based on how people responded or failed to respond to those in need.
- Heaven can therefore be seen as a reward for good behaviour, which links to the idea of justification by works.

Glory refers to the infinite beauty and splendour of God.

The **Kingdom of God** is not a geographical location: It refers to the rule of God.

Judgement refers to the traditional Christian belief that after death, people's lives will be assessed by God.

To bring about God's Kingdom on earth

REVISED

The concept of the Kingdom of God was a key part of Jewish thinking, and in the time of Jesus, there were several ways of thinking about it:

- Jewish rabbis (teachers) thought of the Kingdom as linked to the keeping of the Torah (all 613 commandments set out in the Law). The Kingdom would, however, be brought about by God.
- Many Jews of Jesus' day thought of it in terms of the coming of the Messiah as a military figure who would liberate Israel from Roman occupation.
- Christians believe that Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom.
- Some Christians think of it as an event entirely in the future, linking it to their belief in the Second Coming of Jesus and Judgement Day, referring to Jesus' teaching in the parable of the sheep and the goats.
- Other Christians believe that although the Kingdom will be fully realised after death, it is also a partial reality now.

Key quotation

When we pray, 'Thy kingdom come', we call for Christ to come again, as he promised, and for God's reign, which has already begun here on earth, to prevail definitively.

Youcat 520

- Yet others see it as their purpose to live in such a way that the values of the Kingdom are realised fully on earth:
 - 1 This links to the concept of stewardship, which Christians understand as the responsibility of caring not only for their fellow humans but for the whole of God's creation.
 - 2 The Old Testament prophets spoke of a new age marked by justice, peace and the fulfilment of everyone's needs.
 - 3 The eighth century prophet Hosea envisaged God making a new covenant with the whole of creation.
 - 4 Instead of waiting for God to intervene, humans are called to work actively for the realisation of the Kingdom on earth by pursuing justice, etc.

Key quotation

[Christians] are sent to engage in society so that the kingdom of God can grow among men.

Youcat 139

This understanding of the purpose of life does not exclude the more personal approaches seen above.

- Many of those most actively involved in working for the realisation of God's Kingdom on earth see it as a means of giving glory to God.
- What they do arises out of their personal relationship with God, sustained by prayer and meditation.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 Outline two Christian views on the nature and purpose of life.
- 2 In whom, according to John's Gospel, was God's glory uniquely revealed?
- 3 What, according to Genesis 2, led humans to become alienated from God?
- 4 To what does the Kingdom of God refer?
- 5 What do Christians mean when they say 'Thy kingdom come'?

Key quotation

'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Mark 1:15

YouCat is the Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Resurrection

Concept of the soul

REVISED

In the early Church, Christians tended to combine Jewish ideas with those of Neo-Platonism; the latter were widely accepted in the first-century Mediterranean world.

Jewish thinking

Key quotation

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

- In the Old Testament there are two Hebrew words for soul, *nephesh* and *ruach*.
- They are associated with the principle of life.
- The *nephesh* was said to be given by God to Adam.
- The word is often linked with the word 'heart', which was thought of as the seat of the will.
- In the teaching of Jesus also, the word is often used alongside 'heart' and 'mind', almost in the sense of 'inner self'.

Greek thinking

Plato thought there were two spheres of reality:

- The imperfect world, in which humans live and have only a partial understanding of reality and truth.
- The world of **Forms**.
- The body perishes at death but the soul is immortal and after death is returned to the world of Forms before experiencing **reincarnation**.

Modern thinking

- Many Christians think of the soul as the moral and spiritual dimension of human life – distinct from the physical body. The soul is given by God before birth, and after death it returns to God. This is known as **dualism**.
- Others think of humans in a holistic sense, the physical and mental/spiritual dimensions being inextricably linked and both perishing at death.
- Psychologists use the term 'psyche' to refer to what makes a person an individual.

Forms refers to Plato's theory that everything in the physical universe is a particular and imperfect instance of a perfect idea in the metaphysical world of Forms.

Reincarnation is the belief that at death, the soul is separated from the body and is 're-enfleshed' into another body.

Dualistic in relation to the concept of the soul means that the soul is thought of as a totally separate entity from the body, from which it separates at death.

The resurrection of Jesus

Belief in life after death was a late development in Jewish thinking in the Old Testament era, and was not a prominent belief in Judaism, but belief in the resurrection of Jesus was from the very start and still is, for most Christians, a central tenet of the Christian faith for a number of reasons:

- It forms the basis of the Christian hope of life after death.
- Paul expressed memorably the sheer pointlessness of life and faith if the resurrection of Jesus is a fiction (see key quotation below).
- All four gospels state that the tomb was empty:
 - All accounts of the resurrection appearances have in common the fact that his friends knew it was Jesus, though not necessarily immediately.
 - He was the same, yet different, and not subject to human limitations.
- It was a unique event.
 - Those whom Jesus was said to have raised to life would in the future have faced death again.
 - Jesus through God's power conquered death, which opened up the possibility of eternal life after death for humanity.
- Christians interpret this idea of resurrection for humanity in different ways:
 - Some think in terms of physical resurrection.
 - Others think in terms of spiritual resurrection.

Key quotation

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile ... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19

Resurrection of the flesh according to the writings of Augustine (354–430 CE)

REVISED

Augustine believed that the Fall (described in Genesis 3) affected not only Adam and Eve but also the whole of humanity.

- Every human is infected with sin in every aspect of his/her being: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.
- Humans are totally dependent on God's grace to deliver them from the eternal punishment that sin merits.
- Christ's saving death achieved atonement and his physical resurrection showed to believers what was a possibility for those whom God had chosen.
- Jesus' resurrection and ascension were physical.
- Augustine believed that God could perform the same miracle for anything created with a soul.
- In this physical resurrection, both the spiritual and physical effects of sin would be erased.
- Augustine's thinking can be seen in the Catholic Church's teaching about resurrection.

Key quotation

God created us with a body (flesh) and a soul. At the end of the world he does not drop the 'flesh' like an old toy. On the 'Last Day', he will remake all creation [...] this means that we will be transformed but still experience ourselves in *our element*. For Jesus, too, being in the flesh was not just a phase. When the risen Lord showed himself, the disciples saw the wounds on his body.

Youcat 153

Spiritual resurrection

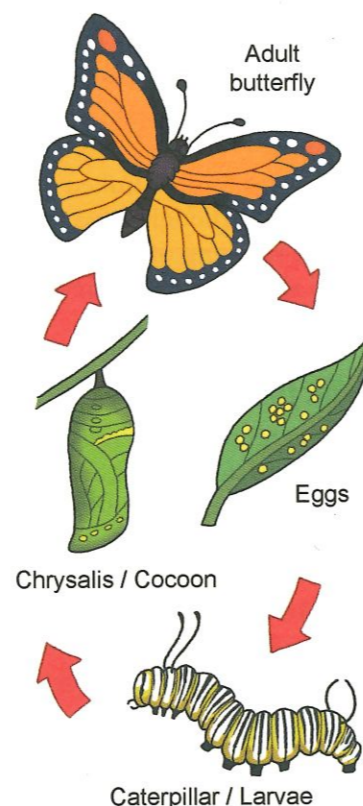
REVISED

Some Christians reject the idea of a physical resurrection.

- They believe that after death, the body decomposes in a grave or is destroyed by cremation.
- They believe that the soul survives death and lives on with God.
- They believe in a 'spiritual resurrection', along the lines of what Paul taught.
- To explain the idea they might use the analogy of the life cycle of the butterfly.
- The various stages of the life cycle are physically totally different, yet the essential identity is the same.

Key quotation

... the world has come to believe that the earthly body of Christ was received up into heaven. Already both the learned and unlearned have believed in the resurrection of the flesh and its ascension to the heavenly places ...

St Augustine, *City of God*

The significance of 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 50–54

REVISED

Key quotation

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ...

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 50–54

On the basis of his belief in Jesus' resurrection as set out earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul believed that Jesus' death and resurrection had freed humans from the power of sin and death and had opened up for humanity the possibility of eternal life in the presence of God.

- He believed in resurrection of the body rather than immortality of the soul:
 - not the resurrection of the physical earthly body; that body perished at death
 - rather, a new spiritual and imperishable body, appropriate to the new mode of existence after death.
- He believed that the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world of human experience were imminent:
 - He describes this in language that many Christians believe was meant as metaphor, showing the momentous nature of what would happen.
 - The trumpet heralds the arrival of a king.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 Explain the dualist concept of the soul.
- 2 Give two reasons why belief in resurrection is very important for most Christians.
- 3 Why do some Christians reject belief in a physical resurrection?
- 4 Why do some Christians think that the life cycle of the butterfly reflects the resurrection?
- 5 What did Paul teach about the nature of the resurrection body?

Different interpretations of judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory

Christian teaching

REVISED

The Nicene Creed sets out the belief in judgement and the afterlife.

Key quotation

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end [...] We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Nicene Creed

The Catholic Church believes that:

- there are two types of judgement after death: **particular judgement** and **general judgement**
- particular judgement refers to the judgement that takes place straight after death and determines the eternal fate of the individual
- the general judgement will take place at the Second Coming of Christ and is upon humanity as a whole
- those who are free from sin are directed immediately to the eternal joys of God's presence in heaven
- those who knowingly and deliberately reject God's love and mercy and those who have committed **mortal sin** and have not repented of it and sought God's forgiveness are directed to hell, which is the state of eternal separation from God
- those whose **venial sins** have not been remitted are directed to **purgatory**, where they will be prepared for heaven

There are three ways of looking at judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory: as physical, as spiritual, and as psychological realities.

Particular judgement

refers to the idea held by some that judgement occurs immediately after death.

General judgement refers to the final judgement believed by some to occur at the end of time.

Mortal sins are very serious sins, e.g. murder, that will result in eternal separation from God if those who commit them do not seek God's forgiveness.

Venial sins are less serious sins that do not lead to eternal separation from God.

Purgatory is the mainly Catholic idea of an intermediate state after death in which those destined for heaven are purified of venial sin to make them fit for heaven.

Judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory as physical

REVISED

This was the view almost universally held in the West until modern times. The powerful, both in the Church and in the secular world, saw it as a way of controlling the peasants. Some fundamentalist Christians still believe in it, though any Protestants who think this way reject the idea of purgatory.

- At the end of the world, Christ will return in glory to judge all humans according to their deeds.
- Those assessed as holy will be taken to heaven (often depicted as a city) by angels.
- Those who have committed mortal sins will be cast into hell to suffer torment, often depicted as blazing fire, for eternity.
- Those whose sins are venial undergo a period of cleansing suffering and pain (known as purgatory) and this will enable them to enter heaven.

Key quotation

Then I saw a great white throne and [Christ] who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. [...] The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Revelation 20:11-12

Judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory as spiritual

REVISED

For those who believe in resurrection as spiritual rather than physical, ideas of judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory as physical realities do not make sense. Many Christians therefore understand them as spiritual realities.

Modern Catholic thinking, for instance, understands heaven, hell and purgatory as spiritual rather than physical realities. The view of judgement is similar to that of the Eastern Churches, with a two-fold judgement.

- Heaven is a spiritual state.
- Likewise, hell is not a physical realm of torture. It results from the deliberate choice of mortal sin without repentance and refusing God's offer of forgiveness.
- Purgatory is not a place.

Key quotations

Heaven is the endless moment of love. Nothing more separates us from God ...

Youcat 158

Hell is the condition of everlasting separation from God, the absolute absence of love.

Youcat 161

Purgatory ... is actually a condition. Someone who ... still needs purification before he can see God face to face is in purgatory.

Youcat 159

Key quotation

The so-called particular or personal judgement occurs at the moment of death of the individual. The general judgement, which is also called the Last Judgement, occurs on the Last Day, at the end of the world, when the Lord comes again.

Youcat 157

Other Christians reject the idea of particular and general judgement, because that is the language of space and time, which ends at death. There can be only one spiritual judgement, which takes place at death. For the same reason, they reject belief in purgatory.

Judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory as psychological realities

REVISED

Some Christians reject any belief in life after death as it lacks empirical evidence. They think in terms of living in such a way as to bring heaven on earth. Others think of judgement, heaven and hell as products of the human mind. Whichever view is held, joy and unhappiness ('heaven' and 'hell') may be experienced as psychological realities.

- A life lived in accordance with one's convictions is spiritually fulfilled and so the individual experiences joy, etc.
- The opposite is true for one whose life is one of inner conflict and this may lead to the need for psychotherapy.

Objective immortality in process thought

REVISED

In process theology:

- 1 God and the universe are uncreated and eternal.
 - God did not create the universe out of nothing; his purpose has always been to create order and complexity from chaotic and formless matter.
- 2 God is not omnipotent.
 - He seeks to achieve his purpose through 'persuasion', leading to intelligent, complex beings.
- 3 God and the universe exist panentheistically.
 - God is the soul of the universe, so God experiences every single process within the universe.

These beliefs affect ideas about life after death.

- Most process theologians believe in **objective immortality**. That is, after death, all individual beings (human and animal) remain eternally as 'objects' in the mind of God. In that sense, they never die.
- Process theologians reject the idea of **subjective immortality**, which is the belief held by most Christians that after death, humans exist as thinking subjects with continued experiences, etc.

Process theology avoids the anthropocentrism of much Christian thought about this life and life after death but many people, Christian and non-Christian, reject the idea of objective immortality because:

- it is meaningless. If a person no longer has individual experiences, what significance can being in the mind of God have for that person?
- one feature of life after death for Christians is that innocent suffering will be redeemed. If a person no longer exists as an individual but simply as an object in the mind of God, there will be no awareness of this having been done.

Objective immortality refers to the belief of process theology that after death, all living things exist for ever in the mind of God.

Subjective immortality refers to the belief of most Christians that the thinking self continues as the same subject of consciousness.

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 What does it mean for God to be the soul of the universe?
- 2 What do process theologians mean by objective immortality?
- 3 What is meant by subjective immortality?
- 4 What flaw in much Christian thinking does process theology's view on life after death avoid?
- 5 Why do many Christians think the idea of objective immortality is meaningless?

Exam practice: AS-level

- 1 a Explain Christian views on the meaning and purpose of life. [15 marks]
 b 'The most important purpose of life for Christians is to prepare for judgement.' Assess this view. [15 marks]
- 2 a Explain the significance of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians on resurrection. [15 marks]
 b 'The resurrection Christians look forward to is not one of the flesh, it is only spiritual.' Assess this view. [15 marks]
- 3 a Explain the influence of Christian beliefs about judgement in different Christian traditions. [15 marks]
 b 'Traditional beliefs about resurrection give more hope to people than objective immortality in process thought.' Assess this view. [15 marks]

Exam practice: A-level

- 1 a Examine Christian views on the meaning and purpose of life. [10 marks]
 b 'The most important purpose of life for Christians is to prepare for judgement.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]
- 2 a Examine why there are different views in Christianity on the nature of the resurrection. [10 marks]
 b 'The resurrection Christians look forward to is not one of the flesh, it is only spiritual.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]
- 3 a Examine different Christian understandings of heaven, hell and purgatory. [10 marks]
 b 'Traditional beliefs about resurrection give more hope to people than objective immortality in process thought.' Evaluate this claim. [15 marks]