

GCSE Christianity – Practices revision notes

Key concepts:

(A questions – you must have definition & example)

Evangelism: Preaching of the gospel to others with the intention of converting others to the Christian faith. For example, by public speaking or distributing leaflets.

Sacraments: An outward sign of an invisible and inward blessing by God. For example, Baptism and Eucharist.

Omnipotent: The idea that God is all powerful, all mighty and unlimited.

Omnibenevolent: The idea that God is all-loving and infinitely good.

Trinity: The concept of God as three persons: son, Father and Holy Spirit

Incarnation: the idea that God became 'flesh' or human in the form of Jesus

Atonement: the belief that Jesus' death on the cross healed the 'rift' between humanity and God

Resurrection: the belief that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, conquering death.

Forms of Worship:

Worship is an expression of adoration and praise for God, which is referred to frequently in the Bible. For example, 'To keep the Sabbath Day holy' is often interpreted as a command to worship God. Not all worship involves prayer or listening to sermons. For example, the Salvation Army has music central to their worship.

Liturgical Worship: Worship that follows a set structure and established rituals, which is more or less the same every time. For example, a set of pattern prayers or the use of a set book in a service. In the CoE, liturgical worship is rooted in Thomas Cranmer's *Exhortation and Litany* of 1554, which outlines how Church services should take place. A good example of Liturgical worship is the Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion or Mass. It may contain: The Liturgy of the Word, which is readings from the Bible, a public profession of faith and prayers of intercession. It also may contain: the liturgy of the Eucharist: The altar is prepared with bread and wine, the Eucharist prayer and Lord's prayer is said and people share the bread and wine.

Informal Worship: Some Churches have moved away from Liturgical worship to adopt a more informal approach, which does not have a set structure and is more spontaneous in nature. Services in Evangelical denominations are often more formal than traditional worship. This approach emphasises the importance of the Holy Spirit and spontaneous action. Although it is considered modern, it does resemble the type of worship offered by Christians in the first decades of the Church. The ability to worship anywhere where Christians gather is emphasised here, rather than just the church building.

Individual Worship: Worship that takes place in addition to worshipping in a Church. Christians believe it is important to form a personal relationship with God and worshipping alone is part of this. Traditionally, worship tended to be seen as a formal process that should take place in congregations with other Christians at set times in churches/chapels – known as 'corporate worship'. However, as society has changed and individuals have more freedom the idea of private worship has gained ground. Many now pray alone with family and do not gather in a Church. As attendance in the CoE declined in 2016 to its lowest, the continued debate about the roles of individual and public worship is likely to become more important.

'Where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there with them.' (Matthew 18:20)

'Go to your room, close the door and prayer to your father who is in heaven' (Matthew 6:6)

'Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.' (Proverbs 22:6)

The nature and importance of prayer:

Prayer was at the heart of Jesus' lifestyle and Christians believe it is an essential part of your faith. Jesus states that you should worship God in the spirit and in truth, meaning that your worship should not be superficial, but that you should worship God with all of your thoughts actions and words. Worship involves prayer, which is about developing a special relationship with God. Different types of prayer are:

Adoration – deep love and respect for God

Confessional – statement of faith through prayer

Contemplation – meditation

Penitential – saying sorry

Praise – giving praise e.g. singing hymns

Thanksgiving – saying thank you

Supplication – asking for something

Set Prayers: These prayers allow Christians to learn and repeat prayers that have a significant meaning. They allow it to become collective, so when recited with others their single voices become a communal voice. For example – the Lord's Prayer, recited in almost every Christian service. Jesus instructed the disciples to pray by using the Lord's Prayer and many find them useful as they are part of a tradition. Most Protestant denominations use the set prayers in 'The book of Common Prayer'.

Extemporaneous Prayers: These are non-formulaic and spontaneous, which some Christians view to be more spiritually honest. Some Christians believe prayers in this way are influenced by the Holy Spirit and some reject prayers like the Lord's Prayer as they believe that by repeating set prayers, the real meaning is lost and people just end up repeating them without thinking about the meaning.

Informal Prayers: Due to set prayers written normally in formal, standard English – for example, God is referred to as 'father' rather than 'dad', some Christians find this difficult to relate to and have adopted an informal voice in their prayers, speaking to God in more day-to-day language. Informal prayer tends to be private and involves communicating with God, meditation and personal reflection. Quakers value the idea of being in God's presence and sit in silence and stillness in services. They believe this allows them the opportunity to reflect, which helps them become closer to other members of the congregation and to God. In the Pentecostal Church, worship is also informal and Christians feel they are moved by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to speak in tongues sometimes. Movement and participation is required - often music, singing & dancing.

Sacraments:

A sacrament is 'an outward sign of an invisible and inward blessing by God. For example, Baptism and Eucharist. Although there are a range of different sacraments, most Protestants only recognise Baptism and Eucharist, as they were the only two documented in the Gospels as being practiced by Jesus. However, Quakers and the Salvation Army don't believe in these two sacraments, as they believe that sacraments are an inward spiritual experience and that there is no need for external rituals. Whilst some evangelical Churches carry out rituals like baptism, they don't believe they are sacred so don't consider them sacraments.

Baptism:

Infant baptism: Christians believe baptism must be carried out by a lay person, and in most Roman Catholic and Church of England Churches, children and infants are baptised. In infant baptism, parents and godparents make promises to bring them up in the Christian faith. For denominations that practice infant baptism, children will often have a 'confirmation' ceremony in their early teens or as adults when they are able to declare their own faith and remake the original promises made. However, Baptists do not believe in infant baptism as they think that a believer should be able to

declare their own faith, and babies are unable to do this. Further, Jesus himself was baptised as an adult.

Why is baptism important? It is a rite of entry that allows people to become members of the Christian Church. Many Christians believe original sin is removed through the act of baptism. It follows the personal example of Jesus who was baptised as an adult by John the Baptist. Believer's baptism gives an individual an opportunity to publically claim their faith.

Baptism links us directly with the death and resurrection of Jesus: *'We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too may live a new life.'*

Jesus instructed his disciples to baptise: *'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit'.*

Through baptism, you can enter heaven: *'No one can enter God's Kingdom, unless they are born of the water'.*

Eucharist:

Eucharist, also known as 'Mass or Holy Communion' is a sacrament instituted by Jesus at his Last Supper before his crucifixion, where he shared bread and wine with his disciples. Christians today continue this tradition, as they believe it brings them closer to God as it is an act of thanksgiving for the life and death of Jesus. This is an example of liturgical worship. There are various views on Eucharist:

Transubstantiation: When Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ.

Consubstantiation: The Lutherans (Protestant Reformers) concept of 'sacramental union' – that the body and blood of Jesus are somehow present 'within' the bread and wine.

Many Protestants reject transubstantiation. Instead, Presbyterians view that Christ is spiritually present, rather than literally. Baptists believe that the ritual is simply an act of remembrance – known as '**memorialism**'. Despite the differences, food and drink are intrinsic to human physical health and survival in the same way that Christians believe this sacrament is important to spiritual health and survival.

Celebrations: Christmas & Easter

Christmas:

A celebration of the birth of Jesus – the *incarnation*. Christians do not believe Jesus was actually born on Christmas day, but mark this day to focus on the *incarnation*. Due to its importance, a period of time known as **advent** was set aside to allow Christians to prepare for Christmas. It begins four Sundays before Christmas and traditionally, many Christians fasted during this time. The Eastern Orthodox Church still practices fasting, though Western Churches do not. Many people have advent calendars to count down the days.

Christians celebrate Christmas by: nativity or crib scenes in schools or churches. Nativity plays in schools and churches. Christingle services in church where children make a Christingle (orange with a candle) to show Jesus as the 'light of the world'. Carol concerts with Christmas carols. Exchanging cards with a religious image and greeting. Decoration of houses inside and out and mid –night Mass on Christmas Eve. Some also attend Church services on Christmas day, as well as having meals with family and exchanging gifts.

Non-religious people also celebrate Christmas, but it has no religious significance: School nativity plays have become winter concerts and the design of many Christmas cards show only fun or wintry aspects of this time. Some now regard it as a 'wintertime' festival, rather than a religious one.

Easter:

This is the most important festival - it remembers the death and resurrection of Jesus. Easter is celebrated by:

Lent: A period of 40 days leading up to Easter, remembering the time Jesus fasted in the desert praying. The devil tried to tempt him during this experience, but he resisted. It begins with *Ash Wednesday*, where Catholics attend a service where they are marked with black ashes in the shape of a cross on their forehead. Many Christians often give something up for lent to mark the fact Jesus fasted in the desert. The day before lent is known as *Shrove Tuesday*, which was an opportunity to use up the foods Christians would be giving up during lent.

Holy Week: This is the week that precedes Easter Sunday, when Christians remember the events in Jesus' life that led to his death. *Palm Sunday* commemorates his arrival in Jerusalem – Catholics and Anglicans receive crosses made of palm leaves to remind them of this. *Maundy Thursday* reminds them of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, where Jesus had bread and wine with them. To remember this, Christians often have Communion services (Mass). As Jesus also washed his disciples' feet, some Catholic priests will often do this for his congregation. *Good Friday* remembers Jesus' death on the cross – mourning services will be held and Catholics fast on this day.

Easter Sunday: This marks the day of Jesus' Resurrection – it is a day of celebration. Christians attend special services and Churches are filled with flowers. Many exchange cards with family and friends, exchange Easter eggs, attend services during Lent, visit cemeteries to leave flowers for the deceased and complete personal readings of the Bible.

Pilgrimage: Walsingham & Taize

A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place, usually an act of religious devotion. It has always been a practice in the Christian religion, where many pilgrims have travelled to the Holy Land to walk in Jesus' footsteps. For Christians, a pilgrimage is faith in action – a journey representing the journey that all Christians undertake from earth to heaven.

Walsingham: Located in Norfolk, 30 miles North of Norwich and has been a holy place since 1061, when the widow of the Lord of the Manor had a dream in which the Virgin Mary asked her to build a replica of the house in Nazareth where the announcement of the birth of Jesus took place. Around 1150, a small monastic church was built on site. From then onwards, it became a shrine that pilgrims would visit, but the *reformation* in 1538 resulted in its destruction. Then, in 1829, Catholics were allowed by law to visit the site again. It is important as it reminds them of the importance of Jesus birth, and because our human journey itself begins with birth.

Taize: Located in Burgundy, France, it was founded in 1941 by Roger Schutz and is an important ecumenical monastic order, as the monks are from different Christian denominations. The monks come from many different countries and live a life of communal prayer. Today there is more than 100 brothers from Protestant and Catholic traditions and reconciliation is at the heart of Taize – by bringing together different Christian denominations, the Taize community promotes understanding and co-operation between them. Today it is one of the most famous sites from young people (100,000 visit each year for curiosity, adventure, holidays, act of religious devotion, act of atonement and to ask God for something (supplication). While here, they participate in set times of prayer in the 'Church of Reconciliation' and spend time in private prayer and attend Bible study groups.

Remember to prepare for a part D question on whether pilgrimage is out of date in today's society



Christianity in Britain today – the changing landscape

The Christian Church faces many challenges today, as increasingly many religious beliefs and teachings are regarded as either out of date or irrelevant. Many more people now claim to be

atheist or agnostic and Christianity is only one of many religious traditions followed by people in Britain. Therefore, the religious landscape is becoming more pluralistic. Attendance at Church places has declined and the celebration of religious festivals have lost their religious significance, such as Christmas and Easter. Many people regard both celebrations as an impotent time to spend with family and friends, and cards and gifts are exchanged without any religious connection. They are therefore much more of a secular celebration.

For A/A8 grades: revise the exact facts and figures information glued in your books, so you can give this as examples ☺

UK laws, festivals and traditions

As Christianity was first introduced by the Romans almost 2000 years ago, it is deeply embedded in many laws, festivals and traditions in the UK. As the 'Church of England' is the established religion of England, it has direct links to the government and other official bodies such as judiciary (court system). Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and made himself head of Church of England. Today, the monarch (Queen) is the supreme governor of the CoE, as well as being Head of State.

Many of our traditions have their foundation in Christianity: 'Keep holy the Sabbath day' – shop hours are restricted on a Sunday. In UK court of law, witnesses giving evidence are asked to swear they are telling the truth – they often do this on the Bible or their own holy books. If they are non-religious, they can make a 'witness affirmation', where they promise to tell the truth. Christian hymns and readings are often made a public events – National Service of Remembrance. Lots of people mark marriage in a church, even if they aren't religious.

Many of our laws have their foundation in Christianity: 26 of the most senior CoE Bishops are part of the UK parliament and for laws to be passed they must be approved by the bishops as well as the MPs. Meetings at parliament are opened with prayers and many laws reflect Christian 10 commandments: 'Do not kill/steal'.

Many of our festivals have their foundations in Christianity: The Christians calendar influences UK public holidays – Christmas and Easter. School holidays fall over these periods and many businesses will close. The 2011 census revealed the UK to be pluralistic. Today, many people of other religions may take time off school or work to celebrate their own festivals. For example, Eid al-Fitr in Islam where 75,000 people gather in Birmingham to celebrate the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan. Non-religious groups such as Humanists might recognise World Humanist Day (in June), but these are not widely celebrated in the UK.

The role of religion in education: About 1/3 of state funded schools in England & Wales are faith schools. Of the 7000 faith schools in England and Wales, 98% have a Christian character. All pupils must be taught religious education by law and schools should provide a daily act of worship. RE should reflect that the traditions of the UK are in the main Christian. However, many schools celebrate a variety of religious traditions throughout the year.

The role of the Church in the Local Community

Primarily, Church is a place of worship, but they reach out to communities in different ways. Some services Churches provide are religious in nature. For example, Baptisms, marriages etc. However, lots of churches have a church hall which can be used for a range of activities including: food banks, summer fetes, emergency shelters, youth clubs, family and community centres, cubs and brownies.

The worldwide Church

Evangelism is the way in which the gospel is spread. Christians hope by telling others about Jesus' message, many will be converted to the Christian Faith. For many, evangelism is best shown through:

- 1) **Mission:** It is a mission of the Church to help Christians live out a life of faith, but also to tell Christians the message of salvation to all. Many regard it as their duty or mission to convert others to Christianity. In the past, missionary work had a clear intention to bring people to the Christian faith, as well as bringing education and support to the poor and disadvantaged. However, today, many would debate the ethics of converting people to Christianity, as in an increasingly pluralist society many think you should be respectful of peoples faiths rather than trying to encourage people to change religion.
- 2) **Church Growth:** In January 2016, it was reported that CoE attendance has dropped to its lowest level ever – below one million. However, some Churches, especially evangelical are thriving in Britain in recent years. Some Evangelical Churches have evangelised through ‘Church Planting’ – the process of establishing non-traditional Churches. *The Ichthus Fellowship*, started in London in 1974, aims to do this and they have established new churches across London and Kent and have links with Churches across the UK and abroad. *Fresh Expression* is a movement within the CoE, who have tried to change the way churches and congregations meet and worship to attract people to the Church. One example is a café church, where people will meet to talk about their faith and have refreshments. This can take place in a Church building, or workplaces, gyms or the beach.

Despite the changes in the UK, it is important to recognise that Christianity is a world religion and is growing successfully in other parts of the world, such as Asia, South America and Africa. The Pew Research Centre estimates that by 2050, 4/10 Christians will live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The work of Tear Fund

How does Tearfund Help?: Tearfund is a Christian Charity that works through Church groups giving help to the poor in many countries. It currently works in over 50 countries, providing emergency aid when natural disasters occur and carrying out long term projects to support local communities. It raises public awareness of social issues such as poverty and discrimination. It also gives practical help in order to act out the teachings of Jesus to help others and encourages self-help for individuals and communities. In Columbia, they have worked with children and teenagers and set up 30 sports clubs for football training, providing safe places for young people to socialise away from the risk of joining gangs. Further, they offer mentoring to equip them with life skills.

Why do Christians chose to support charities?: They try to follow Jesus’ command: *‘Love your neighbour’* and *‘Treat others as you would like to be treated’*. They also try to put into action the unconditional or selfish love that Jesus discusses – *‘agape’* love. They also follow religious texts about charity: *‘It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than to enter the kingdom of God’* and *‘Those who have two coats, give one to the man who has none’*.

Persecution of Christians past and present

Persecution is ‘persistently cruel treatment, often due to religion or belief’. Persecution of Christians has always taken place, and many Christians have become known as ‘martyrs’. This is used for someone who has died or is killed for their religious faith. Jesus himself was a martyr and he warned his disciples that they would be persecuted for their faith – they were all martyred. Christians believe that when given a divine commission from Jesus to evangelise, this may be in the face of danger. In some parts of the world, Christians are treated unjustly in societies where Christianity is at a minority - Terrorist organisations like IS have taken Christians homes from them and violently attacked them. Evangelical organisations seek to help persecuted Christians:

Open Doors: Established in 1955, when Brother Andrew – a Dutch missionary, smuggled Bibles into the Soviet Union. Today, it helps persecuted Christians by distributing Bibles, providing practical support for Christians who have been the victims of disasters, speaking on behalf of persecuted

Christians to raise awareness of their situation and to gather support and training Christians and Church leaders to deal with the trauma they may be suffering while maintaining their faith.

Christian Freedom International: The work of CFI centres around the bible verse of “Remember those who are in prison, and those who are mistreated.” (Hebrews). Since 1998, they have been on the forefront in the battle for the rights of persecuted Christians around the world. It helps persecuted Christians through the distribution of food, water, medicine, clothing, Bibles, and other basic supplies in countries where persecution is most intense. CFI has built field hospitals, schools in refugee camps, Bible Schools, and Centers to aid disabled Christians. Further, CFI has consistently remained active as a “voice for the voiceless” in Washington, DC, providing political advocacy and practical grassroots action on behalf of the millions of Christians who routinely suffer for their faith

Working for Christian Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the idea that people should make up after an argument and move on. Within the Christian church, the many different denominations had led to conflict and tension. However, living in a pluralist society today, many think that it is important to work together as much as possible. Two organisations working for Christian reconciliation in the world today are:

The Ecumenical Movement: This is an attempt to bring different denominations together and promote unity through the world. It began with the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, and as a result there is more co-operation between different Christian denominations. For example, some Churches now share a common building and joint services. Although different denominations still exist, many believe there is only ‘one’ church.

The World Council of Churches: This is a world-wide fellowship of churches seeking unity and making connections between denominations. Each year they hold a special prayer week, which brings together different denominations in more than 110 countries. The Catholic Church is not part of WCC, but does take part in some national and local ecumenical organisations. ‘Churches together in England’ is a practical attempt to offer ways of achieving greater unity and during the special week of prayer each January, special ecumenical services are organised.