

Unit 1: THE NATURE OF GOD

Checklist - tick these off if and when we cover them:

OVERALL

This Topic is concerned with the fundamental question of belief in a Divine Being. Candidates should be aware of the differing ways in which the religions studied understand this concept. Candidates should also be aware of the ways in which symbols are used by religions to describe God and aid worship.

The nature of God

Reasons people give for belief in God

The authority of sacred texts for believers

*Ways in which, according to believers, God can be known –
revelation through scripture and through God's intervention in the world*

SPECIFICS

Christian beliefs about the nature of God;

Reasons Christians give in support of their belief in God;

The authority of the Bible for Christians;

Belief in God intervening in the world through miracles and in the person of Christ.



JUST TICK THEM
OFF IF YOU THINK
YOU KNOW THEM

These notes are based on the hard work that Mr Antonio D'Onofrio put in over his time at Sion School. Many thanks to Mr Starkey who typed up these notes and donated his efforts to the common good of our GCSE students. These notes are not being endorsed in any way - please use them if you want to. The main help is through the booklet which costs £10 and can be found on the GCSE page. (JR 21/9/7)



UNIT ONE: THE NATURE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

- Christians are monotheists. This means they believe that only one true God exists.
- Christians believe God is holy (= special, separate, unique and to be worshipped). They base their belief on the Law of Moses / the Mosaic Law / the first of the Ten Commandments, set out in Exodus 20
- Much of the Nature of God is impossible to understand in an entirely logical manner but Christians rely upon Faith to accept this fact

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD IN CHRISTIAN BELIEF

- Eternal – was never born and will never die
- Omnipresent – is everywhere, in all things and all places at the same time
- Omniscient – knows everything, including the depths of every individual's heart
- Omnipotent – is almighty or all-powerful
- Created everything and has a (divine – Godly) purpose for everything, and especially His highest creation on earth, Man
- Is perfectly good and perfectly loving

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

- According to this doctrine (=fundamental Christian teaching), there are 3 Persons contained within the single God in whom Christians believe.
- This “three in one” doctrine is a mystery. This means it cannot be logically understood by human beings, but can only be accepted through Faith
- The 3 Persons of God are:
 - *God the Father – as loving Creator – giving life to and taking care of His people/ family/children. Some more modernist Christians nowadays also speak of “God the Mother”, insisting on the Creator’s maternal role towards human beings and the wider creation, but the traditional image of God as our Father predominates*

- *God the Son – Christians believe that God’s only Son came to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus did this to save mankind by sacrificing His earthly life, and showing us the correct path through His teaching and deeds on earth*
- *God the Holy Spirit – Christians believe this 3rd Person of the Trinity was sent 10 days after the Ascension (rising) of Jesus into heaven (and thus 50 days in total after Jesus’s Resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit’s purpose was to give courage/ guidance/inspiration to the Apostles and Disciples, and this purpose is the same for Christian believers today. In Christian art, the Holy Spirit is often pictured in the form of a dove, symbolizing Peace and Hope and the ability to rise above the things of earth.*

ARGUMENTS/REASONS USED BY CHRISTIANS FOR BELIEF IN GOD

- Christians maintain that the universe could not have come into existence by accident – that a Creator must have started it. They reason that everything has a cause, and God is the cause of Creation.
- Christians point to the complexity and beauty of Creation, visible in even the smallest flower, and insist that there must be a God / Creator behind it all.
- Many Christians insist they have personal experience of God’s existence and presence, either through prayer or healing (or even near-death experiences during illness). Some may refer to their own conversion experience, a change of heart (sometimes termed being “born again”) by which they come to believe in God and Christ as His Son.
- Some Christians will also attribute at least some of their strength of belief in God to their Christian family upbringing and the mutual support of their Wider Faith Community (ie parish or fellow attendees at their local church).
- Christians also often refer to conscience, the inner voice which tells us what is right / good and

what is wrong/bad/evil, as proof of God's existence. This voice speaks to us even when we are sure we cannot be found out by other human beings when we are about to do wrong.

COUNTER-ARGUMENTS BY NON-BELIEVERS IN GOD'S EXISTENCE

- Non-believers (atheists) argue that the Universe could well have come into being just by **random chance or accident**- as the result of a "**Big Bang**", not a Divine Creator for whom there is no hard evidence
- Non-believers argue there is **no Design** devised and driven by God at work in the world, but simply a **process of natural evolution**
- Non-believers say there is no such thing as conscience coming from God, but only **cultural conditioning**, by which our (Christian) parents/teachers/the wider society in which we live teach us from our earliest childhood the patterns of behaviour they wish us to follow. They say therefore that so-called **conscience** is no proof that God exists at all.
- In the same way, non-believers dismiss near-death experiences/conversion experiences/sense of the nearness of God in prayer and in the Faith Community as all imaginary things of which Christians convince themselves in error

THE BIBLE: STRUCTURE, CONTENT AND IMPORTANCE

- The Bible (from the Greek plural *biblia* = books) is a **collection of writings which is central to Christian belief**
- The Bible is divided into 2 main sections, the **Old and New Testament (OT and NT)**.
- The OT is sub-divided into 39 Books containing very varied writings – stories, poems, psalms, records of prophecies and the lives of prophets, laws
- For Christians, the OT is the story/record of God and Man/God and His Chosen People over many centuries before the promised coming of Christ, the Messiah

(from the Hebrew meaning "anointed one")

- The NT is a much shorter work than the OT, but contains 27 Books.
- The NT includes the 4 Gospels, relating to the birth, life, teaching and deeds of Jesus, ending in His Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.
- The NT also includes a number of Letters/Epistles from 4 Apostles of Jesus – Paul, Peter, James and John.
- The NT also contains the Acts of the Apostles. These are accounts of the early deeds of the Apostles as they began to preach the Good News of Salvation for all believers in the Divinity and Resurrection of Jesus (ie, not only Jews)
- Finally, the NT contains the Book of Revelation, a series of visions and prophecies concerning the eventual Second Coming/Return of Jesus in Glory at the end of time.
- Many Christians view the NT as the more important part of the Bible, because it tells directly of the Founder of Christianity, sent by God the Father to bring a new, joyous and hopeful understanding of God and Man's relationship with Him

CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

- All Christians would say the Bible is a very special set of books, and many would say they are more important than anything else ever written.
- The Bible's importance to Christian belief is underlined by use of a variety of its texts, both OT and NT, in much of Christian worship and ceremony. Its central role in societies of the Christian tradition is illustrated by the use, for instance, of the Bible for witnesses taking an oath to tell the truth in Courts of Law, even though many such witnesses today do not attend church regularly.
- Christians believe that the Bible has authority (ie its content should be

respected and obeyed) because they believe it comes from God and is meant to show us how God wants us to live.

- Christians believe we should strive to follow the ways of the good people described in the Bible, and above all the ways of Jesus in the NT
- In various ways, Christians look for guidance from the Bible as to how they should behave. There is, however, a wide range/spectrum of views among various Christian Churches as to how the Bible should be interpreted.
- **The most conservative (-traditionalist) Christians** would maintain that, since the Bible comes from God, every word of it must be literally true and cannot be doubted or questioned in any way.
- The most insistent traditionalist Christians are sometimes termed **fundamentalists**. Controversially, they maintain that the Story of Creation in Genesis must be factually (rather than figuratively) true, and that God did make the earth in 7 days, created Man from the dust, and took one of his ribs to make Eve. Fundamentalists reject any explanations of Creation involving scientific theories of Evolution, for instance of Man developing from the apes.
- **More liberal/modernist Christians** say there are many different kinds of truth in the Bible, some factual but many not factual. A simple example for them would be the appearance of the Devil in the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent. They would say the serpent image is a figurative/symbolic way of portraying the way human beings are tempted by evil. They might go on to say the Garden of Eden was not a geographical fact, but the Bible authors' imaginative way of portraying the original happy state of Adam and Eve's existence before they disobeyed God.
- The view of more modernist Christians is that not every word of the Bible was

literally put into the writer's mind directly, as if dictated by God. Such Christians fully accept that the central messages are from God, but believe the biblical writers used their own imaginative and creative skill to convey them.

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS ON GOD'S INTEREST/INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORLD

- Christians believe God is permanently and deeply involved and interested in His Creation, and particularly mankind as part of that Creation.
- This close interest, Christians believe, dates from the time of Adam and Eve (Genesis) and continues today ("And I will be with you always, to the end of the age" – the final words of Jesus to his Apostles, recorded at the end St Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 28.
- Many Christians believe God intervenes directly in the world today, for instance by bringing miracles of healing to people with apparently incurable diseases, or saving people from seemingly certain death in an accident or disaster.
- Christians point to the many miracles in the NT showing God's power through Jesus to change the (normal) laws of nature in terms of health, weather, food, and even life and death:
 - *the healing of a blind man (Luke 18: 41-43)*
 - *the healing of the 10 lepers (Luke 17: 11-19)*
 - *the calming of the storm on Lake Galilee (Luke 8: 22-25)*
 - *the feeding of the 5000 (Matt 15: 13-21)*
 - *the raising back to life of Lazarus (John 11: 38-44)*
- Some Christians, particularly of the Roman Catholic tradition, point to more recent miracles, such as at the Shrine of Our Lady in Lourdes, France. They believe that Our Lady appeared there to Bernadette Soubirou and her friends in 1858, and that medically inexplicable cures have taken place regularly in the grotto area and nearby spring waters ever since. They take this as a sign of God's continued Grace and Pity for the sufferings of mankind.