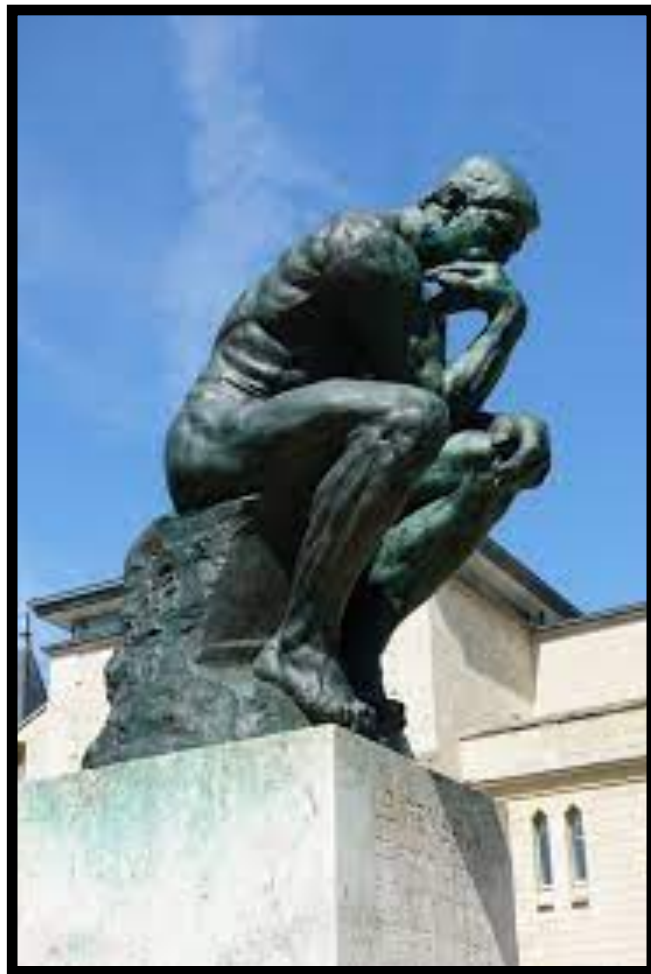


Exploring Philosophy, Ethics & Christianity



Your A-Level in RE



Booklet Aims



To introduce you to some of the **content** in your **A-level** and to **begin** developing **skills** needed for your **A-level** so you can make the **best possible start in September.**

Contents

This booklet is divided into three sections:

I Philosophy

II Ethics

III Christianity

I What is Philosophy of Religion?

Philosophy of religion is the philosophical examination of religious beliefs, concepts and practices, aiming to understand the nature of religion, its relationship to reason, and its impact on human experience. It explores questions about the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, the nature of faith and the role of religious belief in moral and social life.

Key Words: The Nature of God

Immanent - This is the belief that God is nearby and we can feel His presence. This might help a religious believer as they feel God hears them and cares for them.

Transcendent - This is the belief that God is completely different to us and outside our world. This might help a religious believer when they pray because God is outside the situation and can provide that outside help.

Omnipotent - This is the belief that God is all-powerful. This might help a religious believer because it means God is more powerful than the difficult circumstances we face and God can rescue us.

Omniscient - This is the belief that God is all-knowing. This might help a religious believer because it means God knows more than we do and we have to trust Him to know what is right for us.

Omnipresent - This is the belief that God is everywhere. This might help a religious believer when they pray because they know God hears them wherever they might be.

Omnibenevolent - This is the belief that God is absolutely good. This might help a religious believer because they know that God is completely pure and nothing He does is ever bad or evil.

Knowable - This is the belief that although He is God, we can know Him. This can best be seen through prayer when humans can speak to God. For Christians, Jesus is the perfect example of how God is knowable because people spent time with God in human flesh.

Unknowable - This is the belief that because God is completely different to us we can never really know Him.

Monotheism - This is the belief in one God. For example, Christianity and Islam are monotheistic.

Polytheism - This is the belief that there are many gods.

Three Famous Arguments for the Existence of God

A. The Design Argument

This is an argument for the existence of God. It points to evidence that suggests our world works well - ie that it was designed in a specific way. The argument follows that if it was designed like this, then someone or something must have designed it.

There are many examples of how our world is designed in such a way that it works properly.

For example:

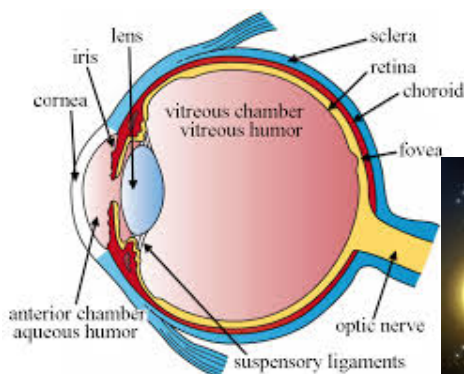
- Trees take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen.
- The Earth is uniquely placed in the solar system so that it can support life - not too close to the sun that we burn up, not too far from the sun that we freeze.

The design argument rejects the idea that we were created by random chance or that we exist because of a Big Bang (the scientific theory that the universe began with a huge explosion about 13.7 billion years ago).

William Paley (1743-1805) came up arguably the most famous version of the design argument. He compared the design of the universe to finding a watch. He argued that if you were walking on a moor (grassland area) and found a watch lying on the grass and saw how complicated it was you would have to assume someone made it. By looking at the watch you would see that all the coils, springs and movements all work together so that the watch is able to keep time. Anyone who found this watch, having never seen a watch before, would have to conclude that someone designed it for it to fulfil its purpose of keeping time.

Paley compared this to the design of the world. He argued that just as someone who found the watch would conclude that it was made by someone because of its design, someone who looks at the universe must conclude that there is a designer because of how the universe has been designed.

Task 1: Are the examples below evidence of design in the universe? Yes/No/Why?



Human Eye

Solar System

The Water Cycle

B. The Cosmological Argument

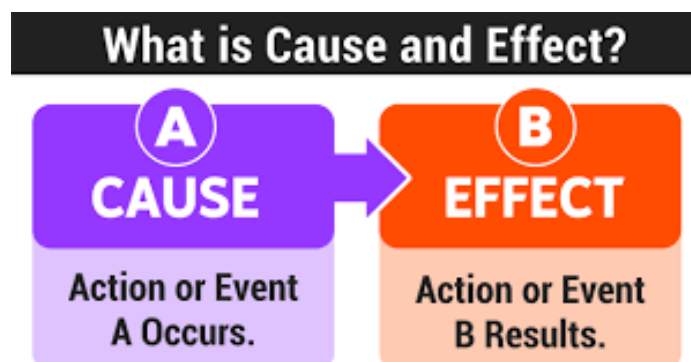
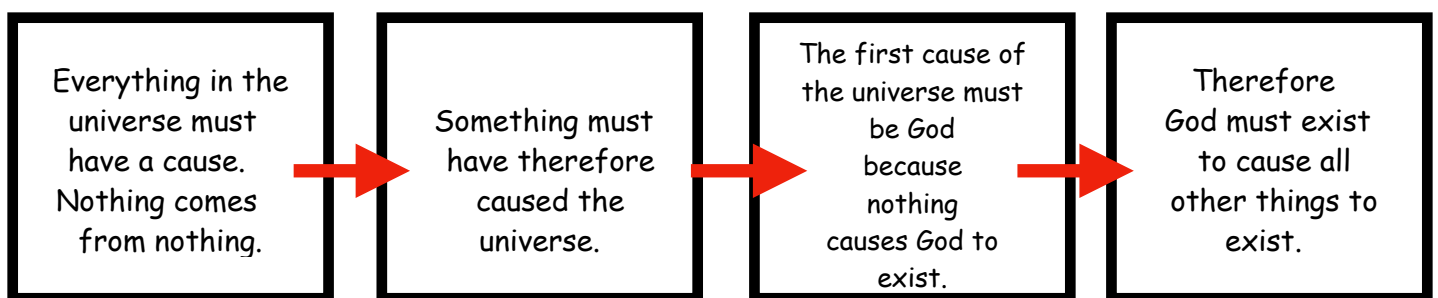
The Cosmological argument is an argument for the existence of God associated with St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas was a Christian monk who used reason and logic to point to the existence of God.

The Cosmological argument is based around cause and effect. The idea is that everything that exists has something that caused it. There is nothing in our world that came from nothing. As human beings we are used to seeing cause and effect in our everyday lives, so this argument is easy to relate to. For example, if you push someone (cause) they fall over (effect).

Aquinas argued that our world works in the same way. Someone or something must have caused the world to exist. The cause is God, the effect is the world.

Aquinas stated that this cause (which is outside our world) is the first cause - that is, the one that started everything. Aquinas argued that this first cause must have no beginning - that is, nothing caused it to exist because the first cause is eternal. He argued that this first cause is God. God is eternal (has no beginning, was never started) and God caused the world and everything else to exist.

Task 2: Make your own flow-chart of the cosmological argument. An example is below.



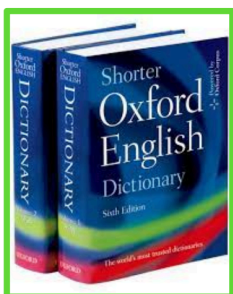
C. The Ontological Argument

The Ontological argument says that God's existence can be proven through the logical analysis of the concept of God itself. It argues that if you define God as the greatest possible being, and existence is a key part of his greatness, then God must exist. This argument doesn't rely on empirical evidence (evidence based on the 5 senses) but on the inherent logical connection between the concept of God and existence.

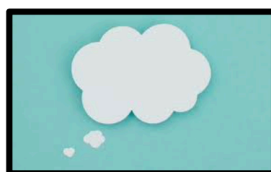
Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- **Step 1: God is defined as the greatest possible being.** This is the starting point- a definition of what God is believed to be.
- **Step 2: God must exist in your mind alone or reality.** Existence is a part of greatness. Therefore, anything lacking existence is inherently less great than something that exists.
- **Conclusion: Therefore, God must exist.** If God, by definition, is the greatest possible being, and existence is part of greatness, then God must exist.

Task 3: Can you use the diagram below to help you understand the ontological argument? Try drawing one with your own pictures!



Step One



OR

Reality

Step Two

Reality > Imagination



Conclusion

The Problem of Evil

Evil is a cause of human suffering. There are two types of evil:

- **Moral evil** - the acts of humans which are considered to be morally wrong, eg murder and theft
- **Natural evil** - natural disasters, eg earthquakes or tsunamis, which humans have no control over

These two types of evil can work together - moral evil can make natural evil worse. For example if a drought (natural evil) causes crops to fail, the policies of a government can make food shortages for the poorest people worse (moral evil). Religions differ in what they teach about the origins of evil. Some believe evil forces have been present in the world from the beginning. Some believe evil is part of God's creation and it may have a purpose that humans cannot understand. Some consider evil to be the outcome of human ignorance and to have no beginning.

Suffering

Suffering is the bearing or undergoing of pain or distress. Most people experience suffering at some time in their life. Religions attempt to explain suffering to help people to cope with it and to learn from it. For some religious people, the fact that people suffer can raise difficult questions about why God allows this to happen. Some people say that God allows humans to make decisions for themselves and that suffering is caused by the choices that people make.

Questions raised by the existence of evil and suffering in the world

What does the presence of evil and suffering say about God's love, power and purpose?

Is there a purpose to suffering?

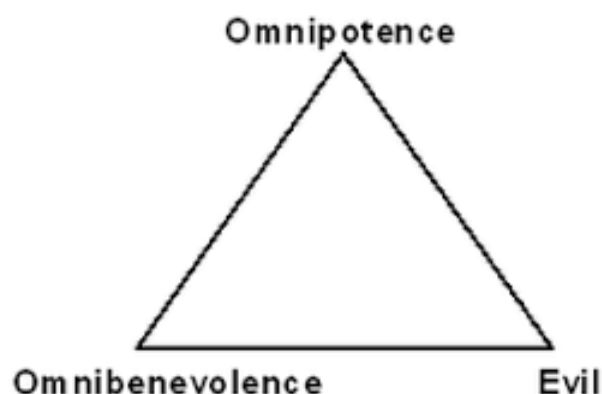
Is suffering the price humans pay for free will?

How do different religions respond to evil and suffering?

How do individuals respond to evil and suffering?

'The Problem of Evil' essentially brings into question why God allows evil and suffering when he is supposed to be benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient. Does the fact that God allows suffering mean he doesn't love us? Maybe it means he isn't powerful enough to stop it? Maybe it means he doesn't exist at all? Or, possibly he lets us suffer for a good reason we don't quite understand.

Task 4: Can you use the inconsistent triad to explain the problem of evil?



II What is Ethics?

Task 1: Read and answer the questions in full sentences

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that seeks to answer the big questions about right and wrong, good and bad, and how we should live our lives. It is concerned with moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conduct of an activity.

In A Level Religious Studies, we explore both secular and religious approaches to morality. We will examine how ethical theories have been developed by philosophers and theologians and how they are applied to real-life issues such as euthanasia, abortion, war, animal rights, and sexual ethics.

Ethical theories are not just abstract ideas—they are used to address real-life dilemmas. You'll be asked to evaluate ethical responses to complex issues like euthanasia, genetic engineering, animal rights and abortion. As part of your study, you'll compare how different theories might approach these issues and critically assess their strengths and weaknesses.

Three Main Types of Ethical Theory

1. **Deontological Ethics** - This approach focuses on the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions, regardless of their consequences. A well-known deontologist is Immanuel Kant, who argued that moral actions must be done from duty and should be universalised (i.e. what is right for one should be right for all). For deontologists, some actions (e.g. lying, stealing) are always wrong, no matter the outcome.
2. **Teleological (Consequentialist) Ethics** - This approach judges the morality of an action by its consequences. The most famous teleological theory is Utilitarianism, associated with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. It holds that the best action is the one that maximises happiness or pleasure for the greatest number. Unlike deontology, this theory might justify actions like lying if it leads to a better overall result.
3. **Virtue Ethics** - Rather than focusing on rules or outcomes, virtue ethics emphasises the moral character of the person acting. Rooted in the work of Aristotle, this theory encourages the development of virtues (positive character traits) such as courage, honesty, and generosity. A virtuous person, over time, becomes someone who naturally does the right thing, not simply by following rules or seeking results, but through moral growth and habit.

Religious Approaches to Ethics

Natural Moral Law (Aquinas): Rooted in the philosophy of Aristotle and developed by Thomas Aquinas, this theory claims that everything has a purpose given by God, and humans achieve moral goodness by fulfilling their purpose through reason and following natural laws. It identifies five primary precepts, such as preserving life and reproducing, which form the basis for moral action.

Situation Ethics (Fletcher): This Christian ethical theory argues that the most important moral principle is agape (selfless love). Joseph Fletcher taught that we should do whatever is the most loving thing in any situation. It rejects fixed rules in favour of a flexible, compassionate approach to moral decision-making.

Questions:

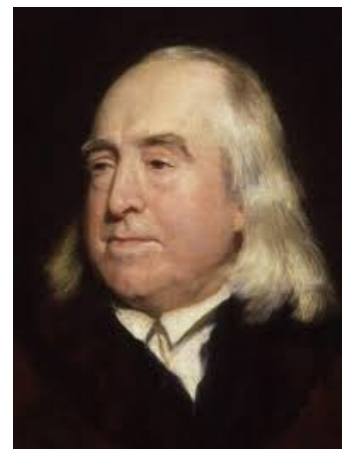
1. What is ethics, and how does it relate to religion and philosophy?
2. What are the key differences between deontological and teleological ethical theories?
3. Why might a utilitarian support an action that a deontologist would reject?
4. What is the main goal of virtue ethics, and how is it different from rule-based approaches?



Immanuel Kant



Aristotle



Jeremy Bentham

Key Words: Ethics

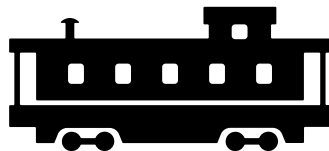
Term	Definition
Moral Absolutism	The belief that there are fixed universal moral rules that apply to all people at all times.
Moral Relativism	The belief that morality depends on context or culture; there are no universal moral truths.
Deontological Ethics	Ethics focused on the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions (duty-based). Example: Kantian ethics.
Teleological Ethics	Ethics focused on the consequences or outcomes of actions (goal-based). Example: Utilitarianism.
Virtue Ethics	An ethical theory focused on the development of character traits (virtues) rather than specific actions.
Consequentialism	The idea that the morality of an action is judged solely by its results.
Utilitarianism	A consequentialist theory that aims to maximise happiness or pleasure for the greatest number.
Natural Moral Law	A deontological theory (from Aquinas) that states moral principles are discoverable through reason and rooted in the nature of humanity.
Situation Ethics	A Christian ethical theory developed by Joseph Fletcher, arguing that love (agape) should be the guiding principle of ethics.
Agape	Unconditional, selfless Christian love - central to Situation Ethics.
Eudaimonia	A term from Aristotle meaning 'human flourishing' or the ultimate goal of life in virtue ethics.

Task 2: Ethical Dilemmas to Consider: Reflect on the following scenarios. Which ethical theory might help in each case? What would be the most ethical action in your opinion? Bring your ideas to discuss in your first lesson.

Dilemma 1: The Trolley Problem

A runaway trolley (another name for a train/tram) is heading toward five people working on a track. You can pull a lever to divert it onto another track, where it will kill only one person. Do you pull the lever?

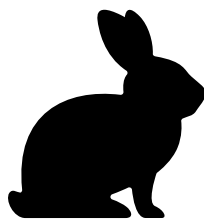
- Is it better to save five lives at the cost of one?
- Would it be different if the one person was a child?



Dilemma 2: Animal Testing

A pharmaceutical company is testing a new cancer drug. It shows promise but requires testing on animals, causing them pain and suffering.

- Is animal testing justified if it could save human lives?
- Would virtue ethics or situation ethics support it?



Dilemma 3: Lying to Protect

You're hiding a friend from someone who wants to hurt them. When asked if you've seen them, do you lie?

- Is lying always wrong?
- Would your answer change if you were following Kant's deontological ethics versus Fletcher's situation ethics?



Task 3: Choose one of the dilemmas above. Write a short (2-3 paragraphs) response answering:

- What is the right thing to do?
- Which ethical theory/theories support your view?
- What might a Christian or other religious approach look like?

Checklist for September in Ethics

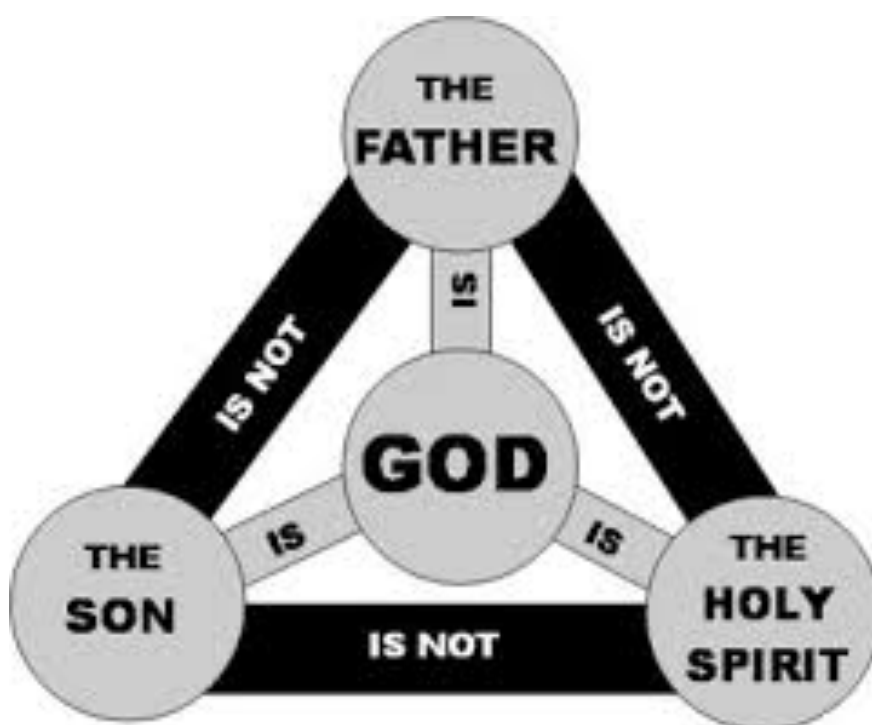
- ☒ Task 1: Answer questions 1 - 4 in full sentences
- ☒ Task 2: Complete and reflect on at least two dilemmas
- ☒ Task 3: Written response to one dilemma
- ☒ Learn key terms

III Introduction to Christianity

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with over two billion followers worldwide.

It is based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God and the saviour of humanity. At the heart of Christianity are core beliefs about God, Jesus, salvation, and how humans should live in response to God's love.

Christians believe in one God who exists in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - known as the **Trinity**. They believe that God is loving, just, and actively involved in the world. Jesus Christ is believed to be both fully God and fully human. His death on the cross and resurrection are seen as the key to **salvation** - the means by which humans are forgiven and reconciled with God. The life and teachings of Jesus also serve as a model for how Christians should live.



Core Beliefs

The Bible

The Christian sacred text is the Bible, made up of the Old Testament (shared with Judaism) and the New Testament. The New Testament includes the Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus, and other writings that guide Christian belief and practice. Christians regard the Bible as divinely inspired and a source of authority for faith and life.

Jesus and Salvation

Christians believe that through Jesus' death and resurrection, God offers salvation - the saving of humanity from sin and its consequences, ultimately allowing them to have eternal life with God. A key part of understanding salvation is the concept of original sin:

Original Sin

The doctrine of original sin originates from the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. When they disobeyed God by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they introduced sin into the world. According to St Augustine, all humans inherit this sin from Adam and Eve—it is a condition we are born into.

This idea is supported by Romans 5:12, where Paul writes, "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned."

Original sin separates humans from God and makes them prone to selfishness, suffering, and death. Therefore, salvation is necessary to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God.

Different Christian understandings of Salvation

1. Salvation through Grace (Protestant view)

Many Protestants believe that salvation is a **gift from God** and cannot be earned through human effort. This idea is based on Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Jesus' death and resurrection are seen as the means by which God's grace is made available to believers, allowing them to be reconciled with God.

2. Salvation through Faith (Evangelical View)

Evangelicals often emphasise faith in Jesus Christ as the sole requirement for salvation (*sola fide*). By believing in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, accepting his sacrifice, and repenting of sin, individuals receive salvation. This view minimises the role of good works (actions) in achieving salvation but encourages them as a response to God's grace.

3. Salvation through Works and Faith (Catholic View)

The Catholic Church teaches that salvation is a combination of grace, faith, and works. Catholics believe that while salvation begins with God's grace, humans must cooperate with it through faith, good deeds, and participation in the sacraments (e.g. baptism, eucharist, confession). James 2:17 supports this: "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

4. Atonement and Jesus' Role

All Christians agree that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are central to salvation. Through the atonement (the reconciliation between God and humanity through Christ), Jesus pays the price for sin: **Penal Substitution** - Jesus takes the punishment humans deserve.

Core Practices

Christian practices vary across denominations, but certain rituals and acts of worship are common. Most Christians gather regularly in Church, for **communal worship**, which often includes prayers, Bible readings, hymns, and sermons. The **sacraments** - especially baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist) - are central to some denominations. Baptism marks entry into the Christian community, while Holy Communion commemorates Jesus' Last Supper and his sacrificial death.



Prayer is also a vital personal and communal practice, often used for thanksgiving, confession, worship, and supplication (asking God for help). Christians also mark important festivals like Christmas (celebrating Jesus' birth) and Easter (celebrating his resurrection).

Historical Development of Christianity

Christianity began in the 1st century CE in the Roman province of Judea, rooted in Jewish tradition. After Jesus' death and reported resurrection, his followers began spreading his teachings. Over time, Christianity developed into a distinct religion, growing rapidly throughout the Roman Empire.

In 1054, a major split known as the **Great Schism** divided Christianity into the Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Later, in the 16th century, the **Protestant Reformation** led by figures like Martin Luther challenged aspects of Catholic teaching, resulting in the formation of Protestant denominations such as Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and Calvinism.

Today, Christianity continues to evolve, with thousands of denominations around the world, each with its own traditions, leadership, and interpretations of Christian doctrine.

Timeline of Christianity - Key Events

- C. 4 BCE - 33 CE: Life of Jesus of Nazareth.
- C. 33 CE: Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (central event for Christians).
- 1st Century CE: Early Christian communities form and spread throughout the Roman Empire.
- 313 CE: Christianity legalised in the Roman Empire by Emperor Constantine.
- 1054 CE: The Great Schism - split between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.
- 1517 CE: Martin Luther begins the Protestant Reformation.
- 20th-21st Centuries: Growth of Christianity in the Global South and rise of new denominations.

Different Denominations

Christianity is not a single unified tradition but includes many different denominations. Major branches include Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. These groups share core beliefs but differ in practices, authority structures, and interpretations of theology. For example, Catholics recognise the Pope as the Head of the Church, while Protestants typically emphasise the authority of the Bible alone.

Summary of the Split between Christian Denominations:

Christianity began as a single unified Church but split over time due to theological, political, and cultural differences.

1. The Great Schism (1054) - Split into Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic

- Cause: Disputes over papal authority (whether the Pope should have authority over the Church) and differences in theology.
- Result: The Church split into:
 - Roman Catholic Church (led by the Pope in Rome).
 - Eastern Orthodox Church (a group of churches, each appointing their own head e.g. Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox).

2. The Protestant Reformation (16th Century)

- Key Figures: Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli.
- Cause: Corruption in the Catholic Church, desire for vernacular scriptures (i.e. the Bible translated into people's own language), and theological disputes (e.g. people are justified before God by their faith alone, not through their actions).
- Result: Emergence of Protestant denominations:
 - Lutheranism (Germany, Scandinavia).

- Calvinism/Reformed churches (Switzerland, Netherlands, Scotland).
- Anglicanism (England (Church of England), a middle way between Catholicism and Protestantism).

3. Later Denominational Developments

- Protestantism continued to diversify, leading to many different Protestant groups, including:
 - Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, etc.
 - Each differed in beliefs on baptism, church governance, worship style, and sacraments.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Bible** - The sacred scripture of Christians, made up of the Old and New Testaments.
- **Trinity** - The belief in one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **Jesus Christ** - Central figure of Christianity, believed to be the Son of God and the saviour of humanity.
- **Salvation** - The process of being saved from sin and its consequences, often seen as a gift from God.
- **Baptism** - A sacrament symbolising entry into the Christian community, often involving water.
- **Holy Communion (Eucharist)** - A ritual remembering Jesus' Last Supper, involving bread and wine.
- **Denomination** - A distinct group within Christianity with its own leadership and practices (e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant).
- **Reformation** - The 16th-century movement that led to the formation of Protestant churches.
- **Grace** - God's free and unearned love, believed to be the means of salvation.

Task: Answer the comprehension questions in full sentences

- 1 . What is the Trinity in Christian belief?
2. What is Original Sin and where does this doctrine originate?
3. Briefly explain the concept of salvation in Christianity.
4. What is the Christian sacred text called, and what are its two main parts?
5. How do Protestants generally view the means of achieving salvation?
6. What is the Catholic Church's perspective on how salvation is achieved?
7. What is the Great Schism and when did it occur?
8. What was the Protestant Reformation and who were some key figures
9. Name two sacraments commonly practised by Christians.
10. What is the significance of Easter for Christians?