

Philosophy of Religion (Christianity)

3. The end of life

Introduction

- Christians believe in life after death.
- They refer to the teachings in the Bible but believe it is part of their journey to be reunited with God and therefore it is impossible to know exact details.
- General ideas of after death include being reunited with loved ones.
- Jesus promised there would be a place for all who believed in him.
- Christians believe that death is not the end and that the immortal soul continues on a journey of eternal life in Heaven, Hell or possibly Purgatory.

The Soul

- The soul is usually regarded as the non-physical part of a person.
- The soul is often used to refer to someone's mind, personality, or emotional being.
- The soul is seen as the part of a person that makes them unique.
- Christians believe that the human soul does not die but lives on forever.
- After the body dies, the immortal soul lives on.

Heaven

- Christians believe that those who have followed God's way on earth and not sinned will go to Heaven.
- This is seen as a place free of suffering where they will spend eternity with God.
- Sinners who repent can also enter Heaven.
- The Bible includes many references to Heaven and many Christians believe it is a place where evil and suffering do not exist.
- As Revelation 21:4 states, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."

Purgatory

- Roman Catholics also believe in Purgatory where the souls go of people who have died but are not ready to go to Heaven.
- In the Middle Ages, it was common for rich people to leave money for prayers to be said after their death to decrease their stay in Purgatory.

Hell

- Hell is seen as an eternal place without God.
- In the Medieval period many pieces of art depicted a frightening view of Hell; it was shown as a place of torment and suffering, often associated with ideas of fire and steam where pain and torture were common elements.
- The idea of Hell was often used to try and get people to be morally good and follow the teachings of Christianity for fear of ending up in Hell.
- Many Christians believe the Biblical descriptions of Hell to be symbolic in order to try and help people understand a very difficult concept.
- Some Christians offer a different interpretation of Hell, it being an idea where at the point of death, the body and soul both no longer exist.

Own point of view and different points of views

- In order to get full marks on the last 12 mark question it is necessary to give another point of view, your own point of view as well as references to Christianity in your answer.
- Muslims and Jews hold similar beliefs to Christians about life after death. They have their own funeral rites.
- Atheists may well not believe in life after death. They believe that this life is all there is and people should make the most of it while alive. A humanist funeral might take the form of a celebration of the person's life.
- Hindus and Buddhists believe in reincarnation. A person's next incarnation depends on how they have lived their life. Hindus and Buddhists ultimately hope for Nirvana.

Limbo

- The early church was concerned about what happened to righteous people who had died before Jesus and babies who had died without being baptised and in a state of original sin.
- Some theologians postulated that these groups of people went to neither heaven nor hell but remained on the outside in a state of limbo.

Salvation

- Christians believe that God created everything good
- The story of the Garden of Eden tells the story about how humanity disobeyed God
- The sin of Adam and Eve is sometimes referred to as 'original sin'.
- Disobedience to God cannot go unpunished because God is just
- The relationship between God and humanity has been broken by sin
- Humanity deserves death for its disobedience
- Out of love God sends his Son, Jesus, to save humanity
- Salvation can be understood in several ways:
 - **Sacrifice** - In ancient times people used to sacrifice animals to try and please the gods. The Israelites sacrificed animals in the Temple in Jerusalem to try and pay for their sins. Christians believe that Jesus is the perfect sacrifice who died once and for all for everyone's sins.
 - **Substitution** - Christians believe that all humanity is under condemnation of death because of sin. Christians believe that out of love God sent Jesus to die on the cross in humanity's place.
 - **Redemption** - i.e. to buy back. Christians believe that Jesus, by his death on the cross, has paid the price for humanity's sin and brought humanity back from hell and death.
 - **Exemplary** - Jesus set a good example by being obedient to God even giving his life by his death on the cross.
- Jesus' death and resurrection is central to Christianity's understanding of Salvation

Judgement

- Christians believe that God will judge each human individually according to the way they have lived their life, their faith and their actions.
- According to the Apostles' Creed, God will judge the 'living and the dead' at the end of time.
- The book of Revelation in the Bible states that there are two books - one containing the deeds people have done in their lives and the other containing the names of all those who have shown belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Christians believe that they will be judged to determine their future in the afterlife on their actions and beliefs on earth.
- The Parable of the Sheep and Goats is used to teach the idea that when the Day of Judgement comes humans will be separated into two groups:
 - Those who have lived good lives and followed Jesus will be rewarded.
 - Whilst those who have not are damned to an eternity in Hell without God.

Funeral Rites

- Funeral rites are the customs and ceremonies that happen after a person has died.
- Many people will plan their own funerals if they are given the opportunity so they can be remembered in their own special way.
- Often people will want to choose suitable words to be spoken or music to be played which held a special meaning for them.

Funeral in the Catholic Church

- In a Catholic Church the funeral usually takes place during a special mass called a 'requiem mass'.
- Traditionally the priest would have worn black vestments. Today the priest wears white vestments, reflecting the Church's hope in the resurrection.
- There are several reminders of the person's baptism in the service:
 - The Paschal Candle is put at the foot of the coffin.
 - Holy water is sprinkled on the coffin.
 - The coffin is covered with a white pall.
 - A Bible is placed on the coffin.
 - After mass the coffin is incensed and sprinkled with water.

Key features in a Funeral Service

- Bible readings - which reflect Christian belief in the afterlife e.g. John 11:25-26
- Prayers - for the deceased (Roman Catholic) and the bereaved
- Eulogy - a speech given by the vicar, priest or close family friend
- Hymns - e.g. "The Lord's My Shepherd"
- Eucharist - some Christian (mainly Roman Catholic) celebrate the Eucharist
- Committal - After the service the body is buried or cremated - the words "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life" are spoken.

Funeral Rites and the Bereaved

- It is an acknowledgement that the deceased is no longer present
- Friends and family can comfort each other
- The life of the person can be celebrated
- It is an opportunity to express one's feelings and emotions
- Gives a sense of closure - allows those left to move on with their lives.

Words used at a Funeral

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the mornings hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight,
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there, I did not die.

Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

Words of Committal

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let the perpetual light shine on him. May he rest in peace.

Amen.

The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I want.
Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me rest.
Near restful waters he leads me and revives my weary spirit.

Psalm 23