

Philosophy of Religion (Christianity)

1. Belief about deity

Jesus

- Jesus of Nazareth was born a Jew c.7 - 4 BCE.
- He began preaching at about the age of 30.
- He would have been regarded as a Jewish Rabbi (teacher).
- His teaching was not accepted by the Jewish authorities.
- Many of his followers believed he was the Jewish Messiah.
- Some thought that as the Messiah he would restore Israel to its former glory.
- The claim of Messiah troubled the Roman authorities.
- Jesus was arrested and crucified.
- After his death his tomb was found empty.
- Many of his followers claimed to have experienced meeting the resurrected Jesus.
- Christians believe that after a period of forty days Jesus returned to the Father.

Trinity

The term Trinity refers to the Christian belief that the one God is made up of three persons:

- Father
- Son
- Holy Spirit

The three persons of the Trinity have separate roles and should not be confused:

- Father – Creator
- Son – Saviour
- Holy Spirit – Sustainer/Sanctifier

Creeds

- The word ‘Creed’ comes from the Latin ‘Credo’ meaning ‘I believe’.
- The earliest creed was probably ‘Jesus is Lord’.
- Creeds developed as Christianity spread.
- They were used at baptisms as statements of belief.
- The first creed to be accepted by all Christians was the Nicene Creed in 325 CE.

The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

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.
- Atheists do not believe in God. They see religion as a human invention. They often criticise people with religious belief as being superstitious. Some atheist such as Richard Dawkins think religion is dangerous; it misleads people into thinking that there is more to this life. They tend not to believe in miracles.
- Agnostics believe that it is impossible to know one way or another as to whether God exists or not.
- Judaism and Islam share a common ancestry with Christianity. They are often referred to as the Abrahamic faiths with their belief in one God – monotheism.
- Hindus believe that God has revealed himself in various gods or Avatars.
- Buddhism is unusual in that it does not believe that the question about God’s existence is important.

Traditional Attributes of God

- Omnipotent – all powerful, without rival, can do anything
- Omniscient – all knowing
- Omnibenevolent – all loving, all good
- Omnipresent – ever present, God is everywhere at the same time
- Eternal – without beginning or end, all existing
- Transcendent – above all things
- Immanent – within all things
- Creator – the maker of all things, God is the uncreated Creator, the first cause or prime

Ontological Argument

Argument put forward by St Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109) in his *Proslogian*:

- God is that which nothing greater can exist
- Something which exists in reality is greater than that which exists only in the imagination
- If God is that which nothing can exist then God must exist in reality and not just in the imagination
- Therefore God must exist

Cosmological Argument

Argument put forward by St Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274):

- Something cannot come from nothing
- The universe cannot have come about by itself
- Something else must have brought about the universe – a ‘first cause’
- That something is God

Teleological Argument

Argument put forward by the Christian philosopher William Paley (1734 – 1805). Sometimes known as the argument from design:

- If you walked along a path and found a stone you would assume that it had always been there
- If you walked along a path and found a watch you could only assume that it hadn’t come about by chance but someone had put it together and designed it
- If you look at the world about you, you will see how intricate it is e.g. the human eye
- There must be a designer
- Therefore there must be a God

Argument from experience

Some people argue that they have personally experienced God. God can be experienced:

- When prayers are answered
- When miracles happen

Moral Argument

Some people argue that the fact everyone has a conscience is evidence of God’s existence:

- Everyone has a basic understanding of right and wrong
- This conscience comes from God
- God must exist

Background and Upbringing

- Some people believe in God simply because of their own family upbringing
- Such people may not question their belief in God
- Some describe this as ‘blind faith’
- Science and religion are sometimes seen as opposing each other e.g. the atheist zoologist Richard Dawkins. Some scientist however are Christians e.g. John Polkinghorne

Miracles

A miracle may be defined as:

- An event attributed to divine intervention
- A violation of a law of nature by a supernatural being
- A highly improbable or extraordinary event, development, or accomplishment.
- A remarkable set of circumstances

The Miracles of Jesus

There are a number of accounts of miracles performed by Jesus in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Miracles in the New Testament can be divided into four main groups, as follows:

- Natural miracles
- Casting out demons (exorcism)
- Healing the sick
- Raising the dead

Christians would also say that the final miracle was the resurrection of Jesus and the appearances he made to his followers after his death. Christians have different views about the miracles of Jesus: some take them literally, others look for rational explanations, and some do not think they are important as other aspects of Jesus’ ministry.

Possible explanations for the Miracle Stories

- Jesus really was the Son of God. The miracles show that he was who he said he was.
- They took place but there are rational scientific explanations for them e.g. Jesus was walking along a sand bar which made it look like he was walking on the water.
- They are mythological in nature and didn’t actually take place. They are stories belonging to a pre-scientific age.
- They are literary devices, like metaphors, which the gospel writers used to make some religious point.
- The gospel writers were just lying and were out to deceive people.

Miracles Today - Lourdes

- In 1858 Bernadette Soubirous while searching for wood saw an apparition of a lady in a grotto.
- The villagers identified her as the Virgin Mary.
- The lady told her to dig into the earth and drink the water there.
- She was told to build a chapel there.
- The apparition told Bernadette that she was the “I am the Immaculate Conception”, a term for the Virgin Mary which was being debated in the Church at the time.
- Today Lourdes has become a major centre for pilgrimage – 5 million pilgrims every year.
- There have been a total of 66 miracles which have been authenticated by the Catholic Church.

Miracles Today – Prayer Meetings

- Many Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches believe that God is still performing miracles today.
- There will be prayer meetings where people are invited to come up to the front to be prayed over.
- Many people claim to have been cured of life time illnesses.
- Some Televangelists have been criticised for preying on people’s gullibility and making money.