

GCSE Religious Studies

B603 Revision Sheet (Ethics 1)

Part 1- Religion and Medical Ethics

Section 1- Christian Attitudes to Abortion

A few words on the “Sanctity of Life”

You will need to know the meaning of the term “**Sanctity of Life**”. This is the belief that life is holy or sacred and that it belongs to God. Christians apply this idea to different moral issues.

What is abortion?

Simply put, abortion is the ending of a pregnancy through unnatural means before the birth of the baby. Nobody would deny that once a child is born it is a human being and as such has a right to be protected. The question with abortion is whether the unborn child should have the same level of protection as other members of society, and if so, when should the protection begin? It is really the question of when a full human being begins. Broadly speaking, the debate about when life begins falls into three main areas.

1. Life begins **at birth** (i.e. when the baby has passed down the birth canal and has drawn its first breath).
2. Life begins **at viability**. This is the stage at which the baby could survive outside the womb if it was born prematurely, and is currently 21 weeks into pregnancy.
3. Life begins **at conception**. This means that at the very moment of conception, when the sperm unites with the ovum, human life exists and has a right to life and the protection of the law.

All human beings, according to Christianity, are unique because God makes them and life is a special and priceless gift. Scientifically, humans are also unique. Each person possesses a unique DNA pattern and can be identified by this. Everyone has a set of fingerprints that is unique to them. Even identical twins, who may look alike down to the minutest detail, have different sets of fingerprints. A person’s DNA is exactly the same at 80 years old as it was at eight years old, at eight days old, and at eight seconds old. In fact, the DNA of a person is fixed at the moment of conception.



However, at the moment of conception the future is made up of a few cells. It is not what we would normally describe as a human being. It is actually a few cells that have the potential to become a human being.

What does the Bible have to say about abortion?

There is no direct teaching about abortion in the Bible, although there are many references to the sanctity of life that a Christian could use to make their decision about abortion.

The Lord said to me, "I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah 1:4-5

This quote seems to give the foetus the same status as a person. A foetus, just like a person, has been created by God- in Jeremiah's case for a special purpose. Jeremiah was a prophet of God.

The quote below also seems to give the foetus a status equal to that of a person.

You created every part of me: you put me together in my mother's womb....

When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew I was there- you saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in your book, before any of them ever began."

Psalms 139:13; 15-16

Some Christians, perhaps because of the above two quotes see abortion as the murder of another human being, and this is something which the Bible expressly forbids-

Do not commit murder.

Exodus 20:13

On the other hand, you can find other instances in the Bible where the life of a foetus seems to be considered less important than a human life.

Genesis 38:24

This is a short story describing the pregnancy of a woman named Tamar. Tamar's pregnancy was discovered three months after conception, presumably because it was visible at that time. Because she was a widow, without a husband, she was assumed to be a prostitute. Her father-in-law Judah ordered that she be burned alive for her crime. If Tamar's twin foetuses had been considered to have any value whatsoever, her execution would have been delayed until after their birth. There was no condemnation on

Judah for deciding to take this action. (Judah later changed his mind when he found out that he was responsible for Tamar's pregnancy.)

What do Christians say about abortion?

There are differences of opinion amongst Christians also, and the fact that the Bible has nothing specific to say about the issue does not help Christians to resolve the issue. A Christian individual's opinion on the issue of abortion therefore revolves around how they interpret the Bible. Roman Catholics tend to adopt a more "hard-line" approach to abortion than most other denominations (including the Church of England and Quakers), and the Roman Catholic Church tends not to permit abortion under any circumstance **except** when the **doctrine of double effect** comes into play. In this case this would mean that an abortion is necessary to save the life of the mother; such as in the case of an ectopic pregnancy.

Some famous quotes are included below-

If you do make a mistake, don't destroy the life... because also to that child God says: I have called you by your name, I have carved you in the palm of my hand: you are mine.

Mother Teresa

Abortion has been considered to be murder since the first centuries of the Church, and nothing permits it to be considered otherwise.

Pope Paul VI (1970)

Both of the above Christians are Catholic, and the Catholic Church has always taken a hard line with regard to abortion. However, members of other denominations have been more flexible with their opinions-

Although the foetus is to be specially respected and protected, nonetheless, the life of the foetus is not absolutely sacrosanct if it endangers the life of the mother.

(Church of England Board of Social Responsibility Report



Pope Benedict XVI

Section 2- Christian Attitudes to Fertility Treatment

What is fertility treatment?

Fertility treatment is used when people want to have children but are unable to have them in the usual way. This may be because either the mother or father is infertile, they are in a homosexual relationship, or they have passed the natural age for childbearing but still want to have children.

Fertility treatment can take many different forms depending on the problem that is preventing conception from happening naturally. Sometimes drugs can be used to overcome the problems. Often, conceiving a baby is much more difficult, and many couples who are keen to have families try many methods of fertility treatment in the hope that something might be successful. For some, this means waiting for months or perhaps even years.



Sometimes a pregnancy can be created using **IVF** which is “in vitro” or “in glass” fertilisation. IVF involves the egg and the sperm being brought together outside of the woman’s body, in a test tube, and then if conception takes place and an embryo is formed, the embryo is carefully placed back inside the woman’s body in the hope that it will continue to grow.

Another method of fertility treatment is **Artificial Insemination**. Sperm is collected and placed in the woman’s uterus artificially. Sometimes, this is the husband’s sperm, but if the husband is unable to produce healthy sperm, or if the woman does not have a male partner, sperm can be used that comes from an anonymous donor.

These procedures do not always work and they can be very expensive. However, if they do work and a baby is born, people can become parents and experience the pleasures of bringing up their children.

What are the different Christian opinions of fertility treatment?

There is no teaching in the Bible which refers explicitly to fertility treatment, because it is something that was not possible in the time when the Bible was written; doctors did not have the technology. If people had no children, then they often were very unhappy, but there was nothing that they could do about it. In the Bible, if someone cannot have children, then this is believed to be God’s decision-

Hannah had no children... because the Lord had closed her womb.

(1 Samuel 1:2,6)

Fertility treatment, just like abortion, is an area where not all Christians agree. Many couples want to have children, and if they find that they cannot conceive, it can bring a great deal of unhappiness. Some Christians believe that if couples can be helped, with medical treatment, to have the family that they have always wanted, the treatment should be encouraged. They think that giving fertility treatment would be the most loving way to behave and shows **agape** (love for everyone), and will bring about the creation of new human life which is a good thing. It is following the example of Jesus as a healer, and is keeping the commandment, **The Golden Rule**, given by Jesus about treating other people in the way that you would like to be treated yourself-

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7:12

Other Christians, however, are not sure that fertility treatment is always acceptable. They might argue the following-

1. That if people have no children, this is God's way of saying that he has different plans for them. Perhaps fertility treatment is going too far, and trying to make things happen which are not part of God's intentions.
2. In order to increase the chances of a successful pregnancy, many clinics that offer IVF treatment often fertilise more than one egg to try and create just one embryo that will grow properly in the mother's uterus. This creates "spare" embryos and if it is believed that these embryos count as "persons" individually created and loved by God, then destroying them is the same as murder. Sometimes these embryos are not destroyed but are frozen for future use or used in medical health in order to find new ways of overcoming disability and improving health.
3. Methods of treatment (such as Artificial Insemination) that involve eggs or sperm from anonymous donors are also against the beliefs of some Christians because it can be seen as introducing a third person into a relationship, when God meant it to be between just two- this is seen as another form of adultery by some Christians and could cause problems for the child in later life.
4. People are also concerned because fertility treatment makes it possible for women to have babies when they have passed the menopause, and it is possible for women in lesbian relationships to have children. Some Christians believe that this is wrong because it is unnatural; they think that babies are meant to be born to people who are in heterosexual relationships and who are under 50 years of age. They argue that it is unfair to the child to introduce it to this kind of life.

What is the teaching of the different churches on fertility treatment?

The different Christian denominations have different views on fertility treatment. For example, the Roman Catholic Church recognises that couples that are unable to have children can be very unhappy. However, the church teaches that human embryos are human lives, and must not be treated as if they are disposable. The Roman Catholic Church also teaches that artificial insemination is acceptable as long as it does not introduce a third person to the relationship.

The Methodist Church believes that it is right for scientists to try to learn more about the causes and cures of infertility. It accepts that using “spare” embryos” for medical research is important, and believes that this experimentation should be allowed, but only in the early stages, up to fourteen days after fertilisation. The Methodist Church is keen to be involved in committees which discuss the morality of new medical investigations.



Section 3- Christian Attitudes to Euthanasia and Suicide

What is euthanasia?

Almost everybody agrees that life is precious. It is something that is to be valued and is worth preserving. If somebody were involved in an accident, most people would go to help him or her without questioning whether or not their life was worth saving. Some people believe that what is important is not just the fact that a person *has* life but that the life has *quality*. They believe that if a person's quality of life is very low, then that person or somebody representing them (in cases where they are very young, very old, in a coma, etc.) should be allowed to make the decision that their life should be ended. The ending of a life in a situation, which relieves suffering, is called euthanasia.

"Euthanasia" literally means "a gentle, easy death." In Britain, as in many other countries, euthanasia is illegal. A doctor who deliberately ends someone's life can be charged with manslaughter or murder. However, there have been recent cases where doctors have been acquitted of such charges. In these cases the court has decided that the person's quality of life was at such a low level that it was right to end that life.

Types of Euthanasia

There are four types of euthanasia-

1. **Active Euthanasia.** This is more commonly called suicide.
2. **Compulsory Euthanasia.** This is where a decision is made that a person should die without the consent of that person. The case of Tony Bland, a teenager who fell into a coma after being crushed at the Hillsborough football ground in 1989 is an example of compulsory euthanasia. Tony's parents went to court and gained the right to have his life-support machine turned off on the basis that his life no longer had any quality.
3. **Voluntary Euthanasia.** This is where a person chooses to end his or her own life in a dignified way- sometimes referred to as a "mercy killing". This is legal in some countries (for example Holland), but certain conditions have to be met before it is permitted. These conditions are to ensure that the euthanasia is voluntary and the person in question is not being coerced into taking the decision, and that the person is diagnosed as being beyond hope of recovery by two separate physicians. The Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation Society actively campaigns for the legalization of voluntary euthanasia. In the United States, the medical doctor, **Jack Kevorkian** was recently sent to prison for aiding a person to end his own life.

4. **Passive Euthanasia.** This is where a person is not helped to die, but where their life is not artificially prolonged using any drugs or technology. For example, a person who is terminally ill may have their pain controlled and the symptoms of their illness carefully monitored, but no effort made to extend their life beyond its “natural” life span. The hospice movement looks after people and helps them die with as little pain and as much dignity as possible.

What does the Bible have to say about euthanasia?

Christians believe that life is a special gift from God, and this affects all their beliefs about the body and the care it should receive. As a gift, it should be treated with respect and dignity, since it is unique and sacred (the “sanctity of life”.) Through his actions and teaching, Jesus made it clear that everyone is valuable in the eyes of God. This is a guiding principle for Christians today. Death is seen as a stage in life, not necessarily the end of life, and to end it prematurely is against God’s plan. The following are passages from the Bible-

Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you! So if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple

Corinthians 3: 16-17

Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds

Matthew 22:39

Do not commit murder.

Exodus 20:13

All of the above quotes have been used to support the idea that the Bible is very much against Euthanasia. However, as with most issues, we can always find a quote which seems to support the opposite view-

Judges 16:29-30

Samson had been chained to the two middle pillars of a temple. He pushed them apart, thereby knowingly causing the collapse of the building, his own suicide and the death of people inside. The death toll exceeded the number of people that he had killed during the rest of his life -which was considerable. Samson had been blinded, and no longer wanted to live as a captive. And by causing his own death, he had a chance to destroy many of the enemy.



What do Christians say about euthanasia?

Again, there are many different opinions on whether an individual has the right to end their own life, or whether people are merely “stewards” of their own lives and their life is really something that belongs to God.

The Catholic view is that euthanasia is always wrong. Although there may come a time when it is not thought to be beneficial to the patient to prolong their lives using drugs, it is never right to end someone’s life before it would naturally end. Instead, Catholics favour the Hospice Movement as an alternative to euthanasia. Hospices are shelters for the terminally ill where people can die in dignity. The founder of the **Hospice Movement**, a Christian called **Dame Cicely Saunders** said this-



Anything which says to the very ill or the very old that there is no longer anything that matters in life would be a deep impoverishment to the whole society.

John Paul II, the previous **Pope** was also very much against the idea of euthanasia-

Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God.

On the other hand, those that have been in the situation of suffering incredible pain have found the idea more attractive. **Stewart Alsop** was a journalist who died in 1975 of a rare form of cancer. During his illness he briefly shared a room with a man who he called Jack. Jack was about 28 and dieing of cancer of the bowel, a very painful form of cancer. Jack’s wife would visit him in the day and continual pat him on the stomach to relieve the pain, at night, though, Jack’s pain would be unbearable and he would scream in agony. Alsop wrote about his and Jack’s experiences and came to this conclusion-

The third night of this routine, the terrible thought occurred to me. “If Jack were a dog,” I thought, “what would be done with him?” The answer was obvious: the pound, and chloroform. No human being with a spark of pity could let a living thing suffer so, to no good end.

In cases such as these, Catholics may agree that the “doctrine of double effect” would come into play- relieving someone who has a terminal illness of their extreme pain may be a good and the most loving thing to do even if the

outcome of giving a patient a dose of morphine has the side-effect of ending their life.

What do Christians think of suicide?

Most Christians believe that it is wrong for a person to make the choice to commit suicide, although at the same time they recognize that people who try to take their own lives have often gone beyond the stage where they are able to make sensible decisions. The most famous example of suicide in the Bible is the suicide of Judas after he had betrayed Jesus. When Judas realized what he had done in accepting the thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus, he went out and hanged himself. The Bible does not say whether Judas was right or wrong to do this.

In a short passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul explains to the early Christians that they have a responsibility to look after their bodies because God lives in them-

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you?

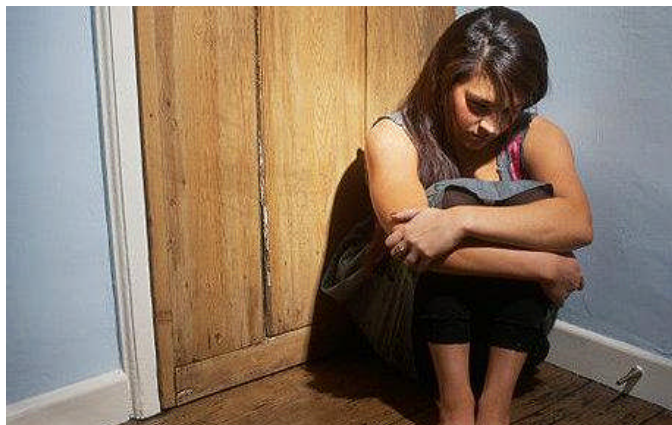
1 Corinthians 3:16

Paul compares the body to a temple, the most sacred building of all. People took great care of their temples, decorating them with their most expensive materials. Paul teaches that Christians should think of their own bodies like this, and look after them. Christians might use this passage in a discussion about suicide, to show that the body should be treated as a place where God lives, and should be respected, not killed.

Most Christians believe that the right response to suicide is to try to be loving and forgiving. People who attempt suicide should be helped, not condemned.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you?

1 Corinthians 3:16



Section 4- Christian Beliefs about the Use of Animals in Medical Research

What do Christians believe about Animal rights?

Animals have been kept in captivity, and domesticated for at least 4000 years. Recently, however, there has been a marked change in public attitudes to animals and the way that they are treated in the modern world. There are many difficult questions to ask and answer.

Treatment of Animals Today...

Serious questions have been asked about the way that animals be treated today in four respects:

1. Animals in captivity. Since the mid nineteenth century, animals have been kept in captivity (zoos) and as performers (circuses). Due to public disquiet, few circuses today use live animals. Animals are still kept in captivity in zoos but more and more emphasis in these places is on the conservation of endangered species.
2. Animals for food. Over 150 million tonnes of eat are eaten worldwide in a year. Many people feel very unhappy about the way that animals are reared, fed and slaughtered. They become “vegetarians” and do not eat meat of any kind. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that eating meat is incompatible with a belief in God. Many Christians, though, are very unhappy about the way that animals are reared and so feel that they cannot eat meat. Most people who do eat meat are beginning to ask questions about the way that the food industry treats animals. Can it be right to pen up animals and completely control their light, heat, ventilation, exercise and food intake as we do in factory farming?
3. Animals for research. Over 250 million animals a year are used in research for medical and cosmetic purposes. Much of this research is carried out without an anaesthetic being used. In this country alone 250,000 animals- including mice, rats, cats and dogs- die as a result of the experiments carried out on them. Many scientists agree that the supposed justification for these experiments is over-valued and much of the information could be obtained without using animals.
4. Hunting animals. People hunt and shoot animals for enjoyment. Fox-hunting and stag-hunting have been part of the English way of life for centuries. Rearing and shooting pheasants on large country estates is big business. Attempts to outlaw such activities have proved very controversial and at the end of the 20th century it has set many town and country people on a collision course.

From a Christian point of view...

The Bible assumes that people will kill and eat animals. Amongst the many laws that God gave the Jews were those telling them how to kill and cook animals. This reflects the story of creation in the opening chapters of the Bible-

And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:28

No one has been quite sure over the centuries what the words "subdue" and "have dominion" were intended to mean. Later in the creation story, human beings are described as "stewards" of the earth and that suggests a rather different picture. A steward has delegated authority from his master to whom he is, in the end, answerable for his actions. "Subdue" and "dominion", however, suggest power and that is certainly how people have understood their power in the past.



It is worth remembering that Jesus called himself the "Good Shepherd". It is very difficult to imagine God the Shepherd and Jesus, the Good Shepherd, approving of factory farming methods, cosmetic experiments being carried out on animals and hares and foxes being chased to a point of total exhaustion.

What is the Church teaching about animal rights?

Catholic theology does not accept that animals have rights. However, its teaching focuses on human duties towards animals. Animals, as our fellow creatures, should be a particular concern in our attitude towards creation. "We owe them kindness." (From the Catholic Catechism)

"To deny animals rights is not to underestimate our obligation with regard to animal welfare. It is possible to oppose cruelty and exploitation without getting trapped into arguments about 'rights'".

Should Christians be vegetarians?

Quakers were among the first vegetarians in the 19th century. Today many Quakers are vegetarian, but it is a matter of choice as it is for other Christians also. They have a larger proportion of vegetarians than other well-known denominations and at gathering of young Quakers the diet is almost exclusively vegetarian.

What other uses of animal are acceptable or unacceptable?

The most controversial area of animal welfare for Christians is that of using animals for medical experiments. For over 100 years the Quaker Concern for Animals group has tried to influence other Quakers to resist vivisection on ethical grounds. But Quaker doctors and researchers who use animals in experiments justify this on the grounds of the gain to human and animals in terms of knowledge.

Official teaching of the Catholic Church tolerates the use of animals in medical and scientific experiments **“if it remains within reasonable limits”** and if this contributes to **“caring for or saving human lives.”** Catholics also believe that animals may be domesticated and used to help people in their work or leisure.

Nearly all Christians are united in condemnation against using animals for researching cosmetics.



Part 2- Religion and Human Relationships

Section 1- The Roles of Men and Women in the Family

What are Christian views about the role of men and women in the family?

Christians have different views about the roles that men and women should have within a family. Some Christians believe that God designed men and women to have different roles. Men and women, they say, are equally valuable to God, but they were created for different purposes.

In the book of Genesis, the creation story tells how Adam was created first, and then Eve. Eve was made because God realized that it was not good for Adam to be on his own; he needed a companion-

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable helper for him."

Genesis 2:18

Some Christians might say that this shows that women are meant to be helpers of men. The duties of a man come first, and the woman should support him, because that was why she was made in the first place. In the Genesis story, Eve was the first person to sin, and she tempted Adam to copy her; so some Christians say that this shows women are weaker than men and more likely to do wrong. They might use this to argue that men should have the final say in the family if there are differences of opinion.

In the New Testament, **1 Peter** (a letter written to a newly formed Christian church) echoes these views-

Wives... be submissive to your husbands... Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner.

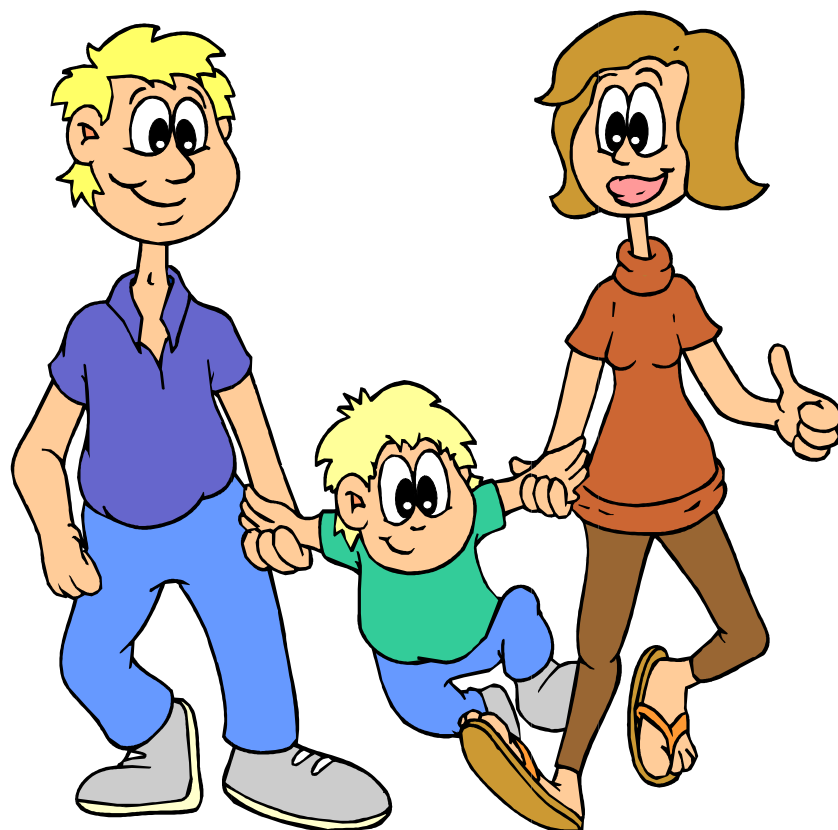
1 Peter 3:17

Some Christians, therefore, argue that these teachings are still true today. They might say that a woman should have a different role from a man, particularly in marriage. She should look after the home, take care of the children, and support her husband in his career. If, for example, her husband is offered a promotion which involves moving house, she should be willing to go if this is what he thinks is right.

Other Christians believe that these views belong in the past, and say that they are not appropriate in modern society. They might argue that men and women were created equally and were both made in “the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Therefore there is no real difference between them and men and women should have equal responsibilities and opportunities. If a married couple have children, both the mother and father should share child-care, and both partners should be able to go out to work if this is what they want to do. They might justify these beliefs by drawing attention to Biblical passages which say that Christianity means there are no important differences between men and women-

There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
Galatians 3:28

In some Christian households, therefore, women take on traditional roles of child-care and housework, and consider it their job to support their husbands in their careers. Other Christian households have a more modern view, where men and women have more similar and equal roles.



How should men and women behave in the church?

Many Christians believe that everyone, men and women has a distinct role to play in the church; they call this the church family. Following Old Testament passages about the superiority of men, St Paul taught that women should be silent in the church-

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first and then Eve.

1 Timothy 2:11-13

Some Christians also suggest that because Jesus chose 12 men to be his disciples, he clearly intended men to take the leading role within the church. From the disciples, Jesus chose Peter to lead the church and, according to tradition, Peter became the first Bishop of Rome (or Pope). Roman Catholics believe that Jesus intended men to be the leaders of the church family and every Pope who has followed Peter has been male. Roman Catholics do not permit women to become priests.

However, more liberal Christians look to the way which Jesus treated women in the Bible for guidance on the place of women in society. Jesus permitted women to be his followers and showed them respect. The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) shows Jesus encouraging a woman to sit at his feet in order to learn from him. This was not something women were usually allowed to do.

After his resurrection Jesus also chose women to reveal himself to first- again showing that he held women in high regard. Therefore, less traditional denominations believe that men and women should have an equal role in the church family. The Church of England has allowed the ordination of women priests since 1994.



Section 2- Beliefs about Marriage

What do Christians believe about marriage?

Although there is nothing wrong with choosing to remain single, marriage is seen in the Bible as very valuable, and something that should be taken seriously. In the story of the Creation God makes Eve a partner for Adam. In this story the writers of the Bible have tried to show that they believed that it was God's intention from the very beginning that men and women should be joined together for life. The bond between a man and a woman creates new life when children are born, and in this way God's creation continues.

The Bible makes it clear that marriage is to be taken very seriously and that men and women should stay faithful to their husbands and wives. One of the Ten Commandments is-

You shall not commit adultery.

Exodus 20:14

Christians believe that it is very important for people who are married to remain faithful to each other, because adultery leads to a lack of trust and shows disrespect for the holiness of marriage. Christians would still try to be forgiving and compassionate and to think about whether their own behaviour is perfect in these situations.

The Church of England teaches that marriage is a gift from God, and in the Roman Catholic Church marriage is one of the seven sacraments, which means that it is one of the ways in which people can see a symbol of the bond God creates with people. In marriages, the love between a husband and wife shows something of the love of God.

Christians believe that marriage is very important because within marriage, people learn about love and can express love. They find out about the importance of forgiveness, tolerance, comforting each other, celebrating together, appreciating someone else's qualities, and thinking about the well-being of another person. They believe that through marriage, they learn more about God, because God is love.

So what do Christians think about "civil" partnerships?

A civil partnership is a relationship in which the two people involved live together, possibly as husband and wife, but is not married. More orthodox Christians (such as Roman Catholics) tend to frown this type of union and say that marriage is a much more favourable way in which two people can live together. More liberal Christians (Quakers) say that God favours any form of partnership between two people as long as it is based on love and is monogamous.

What happens in a marriage ceremony?

Christians believe that, ideally, marriage should be for life. In a Christian marriage ceremony, the priest or vicar begins by explaining that God created marriage, and that it symbolises the relationship between Christ and the Church. The bride and groom agree in front of the congregation that they are free and willing to marry each other, and then they make promises or vows. The traditional vows are shown opposite, but many couples now choose to write their own vows.

After the vows have been said, the couple exchange rings and the marriage is blessed. There are prayers for the couple and usually hymns. The bride and groom have to sign the marriage register, which is a legal document, and two guests witness this.

Weddings customs in Christianity vary according to the culture of the couple. In most cultures, the bride wears a white dress, symbolising purity. She often has bridesmaids who help her with her dress and her flowers. Sometimes confetti is thrown, or sweets are given to the guests. Or money is pinned to the bride.

The Wedding Vows

I, N, take you, N,
To be my (husband/wife)
To have and to hold
From this day forward;
For better for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Till death do us part,
According to God's holy law;
And this is my solemn vow.

Although the customs might be different depending on the culture, the main elements of a Christian marriage remain the same. Christian marriage ceremonies are designed to reflect Christian teachings about the purposes and value of marriage-

- They reflect the belief that marriage is something intended by God, from the beginning of creation.
- They show that men and women should enter a Christian marriage of their own free choice, and not because someone has forced them into it.
- They reflect the Christian belief in **monogamy** (a faithful partnership between one man and one woman).
- They show that A Christian marriage is meant to be for life.
- They reflect the belief that a permanent marriage is the best context for having children.



Section 4- Christian Beliefs about Sexual Relationships and Contraception

What are the Christian beliefs about sex?

Within Christianity there are many different opinions about sexual relationships. Many Christians believe that sex is only appropriate when it takes place between two people who are married to each other. This means that sex before marriage; homosexual relationships and affairs outside marriage are all considered to be wrong. They argue that the Bible teaches that the human body is a “**temple of the Holy Spirit**”-

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19

This means that it should be treated with respect. They might also say that God designed sex for a purpose- to create children and to strengthen the love between married couples. If sex is used only for pleasure and not for the reasons that God made it, then this behaviour spoils something that was supposed to be very special.

Other Christians believe that these views are old-fashioned. They say that the main message of Christianity is love, and that sex is morally acceptable within any relationship that is committed and loving, whether or not the people involved are married to each other. Some Christians then, might accept sexual relationships between a committed homosexual couple, or between two people who are living together on a permanent basis, but they would still think it is wrong for people who have only just met to have sex or if they do not particularly care about each other or do not plan to stay together in a lasting relationship- this is **promiscuity**.

What do Christians think about “same-sex relationships”?

Roman Catholics reject homosexual relationships as being deviant to what God wants people to practice. There are several passages in the Bible that condemn same-sex relationships-

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Neither the sexually immoral... nor homosexual offenders.

1 Corinthians 6:9

In 2008 a Vatican official stated that “Homosexuality is a disordered behaviour. The activity must be condemned,” and the Pope told Catholics that

homosexuality was a greater problem for the future of the world than climate change.

However, more liberal Christians accept homosexual relationships as another form of loving relationship and permit same-sex couples to have a blessing ceremony after their civil ceremony if they wish. Members of the Church of England vary in their response. Some priests will agree to hold a blessing ceremony after a civil partnership and others will not.

What do Christians believe about contraception?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that artificial contraception is wrong. It is acceptable for Roman Catholics to use “natural methods” to plan their families, such as only making love at times of the month when a woman is at her least fertile, but it is not acceptable to use artificial methods such as the Pill or condoms. This is taught because Roman Catholics believe that the main reason why God created sex was so that children could be brought into the world, and they say that using artificial contraception goes against God’s plans.

Some people, however, including some Roman Catholics, disagree with this teaching. They argue that it could sometimes be a good idea for people to use contraception, especially if they do not have enough money to support a large family.

Other Christian Churches, such as The Church of England, give very different teachings. They say that using contraception is the responsible thing to do. People should be free to choose when to have children, and how many they want to have, so that every child brought into the world is wanted by its parents. Family planning using contraception is therefore encouraged.

