



GCE

Religious Studies

**RS3 CHR:
Studies in Christianity (A2)**

by Gordon Reid

Topic One: The Church: its nature, role and ministry

AIM

At the end of this topic you should:

- Understand the nature of the Christian Church
- Understand the concepts of 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'
- Explain the nature of the Body of Christ and Communion of Saints
- Examine and evaluate the work of the Christian Church in the world
- Explain issues relating to God's saving work
- Understand the concept of ordination
- Explain Christian Church involvement in poverty, peace, charity and overseas mission
- Examine issues concerning apostolic succession and the ordination of women
- Understand the nature of the laity
- Evaluate the arguments for and against the Church's work in the modern world

The Nature of the Church

'Church' comes from the Greek '*Kuriakon doma*' – 'the Lord's House' but it is more than just a building used for religious worship. The Church is the body of Christian believers assembled together. For many, the Christian Church represents Christ on Earth, yet Christendom, as it is often called, is not united, but divided into many denominations, all worshipping the same Christ. The Church is also an institution, a source of authority, teaching and mission to the world outside.

'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church'

These are the so-called Four Marks or attributes that are the major distinguishing characteristics of the Christian Church, originated in 381CE by the First Council of Constantinople as it revised the Nicene Creed. They are the four most important affirmations of the Christian Church.

'one...'

The Nicene Creed speaks of the oneness of the Christian faith:

'We believe in one God...We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ.'

This describes the unity of the followers, or body, of Christ and comes directly from the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he urged his followers to be united in their belief and action.

'I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me.' - John 17:20, 23

The New Testament teaches that such unity and oneness provides evidence to all humanity that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world:

'There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.'

- Eph 4:5-6

Yet, since earliest times, the Church has been divided. Indeed, in 251 CE, Cyprian of Carthage in 'On the Unity of the Catholic Church' argued that it was vital to have one, unified church:

'You cannot have God as father unless you have the Church as mother...there is only one church, and outside its bounds, salvation is impossible.'

But such unity has rarely happened. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, claims that the title 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' only applies to itself, because the Catholic Church was, it is claimed, directly founded by Christ himself and the Pope, as Bishop of Rome, leads the one true Church of Christ.



For reflection:

Is the Pope justified in calling himself the leader of the one true Church?

However, Protestant denominations have always opposed this and divisions remain. The World Council of Churches, which seeks to establish Christian unity throughout the world, has for many years spoken of the need for unity of the Church which follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. But, as they sadly note, this is difficult in a world with so many different churches and

denominations – Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptists, Orthodox, Methodist and so on – how can there be ‘one’ church?



For reflection:

Why do you think the World Council of Churches regard unity as so important?

Critics have offered different approaches to explain the present disunity:

- The Imperialist approach – adopted for centuries by the Roman Catholic Church saying that it is the true church and all others are fraudulent pretenders (More recently, the RC has mellowed this stance to suggest that other Christian Churches are ‘separated’).
- The Platonic approach – that the Church is a visible, physical reality, but also, eventually, will become an ideal spiritual reality.
- The Eschatological approach – the Church is disunited now because it is physical and temporary. At the end of time it will be abolished and replaced with a perfect spiritual church.
- The biological approach – the Church has institutional differences, but, beneath these, it is an organic unity.



For reflection:

Do any of these approaches seem right to you? Why/ why not?

More recently, emphasis has been given to ecumenism – from the Greek ‘*oecumene*’ meaning ‘the whole world’ and under this view, the church is challenged to unite itself after centuries of separation. At the heart of this movement is the belief held by many Christians that the Christian Churches are united in the sense that they have a common calling from God and that it is simply the way that the different churches express this calling to various cultures and groups that make it look disunited. In fact, the Church is united in doing the saving work of God. In ‘The Church’, Hans Kung observed:

‘The unity of the church is a spiritual entity. It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all places and all ages and makes them into one people of God. It is one and the same Christ who through his word and Spirit unites all together in the same bond of fellowship of the same body of Christ...the Church is one.’

Alistair McGrath in 'Christian Theology' commented:

'The unity of the Church is here grounded not in any specific ecclesiastical organizational system, but in common commitment to the good news of Jesus Christ.'



Seminar work:

What qualities are really needed to make a Church? Why?

'holy...'

'Holy' means 'set apart for a special purpose by and for God'. The Church, therefore, is 'holy' because it is Christ's Church.

Jesus, it is claimed, established the Church in order to continue his work of salvation and the holiness of the Church as coming directly from Christ's holiness. McGrath:

'To speak of the 'holiness of the Church' is thus primarily to speak of the holiness of the one who called the church and its members. The Church has been separated from the world in order to bear witness to the grace and salvation of God.'



For reflection:

What makes the Christian Church holy?

'catholic...' (small 'c')

This term 'catholic' (small 'c') means 'universal'. It means that the Church, as the Body of Christ, must not be limited to a particular time, place, race or culture, but should include Christians of all denominations. The belief comes from the words of Christ which are sometimes called the 'Great Commission' to his followers to make his Church open to all humanity:

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' – Matthew 28: 18-20

The catholic or universal Church, therefore, is the ideal Christian church which is all-embracing and extends throughout the world. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in his Eighteenth Catechetical Lecture that:

'The church is thus called 'catholic' because it is spread throughout the entire inhabited world, from one end to the other, and because it teaches in its

totality and without leaving anything out of every doctrine which people need to know ...it makes available a universal remedy and cure to every kind of sin.'

More recently, Hans Kung observed:

'The catholicity of the church, therefore, consists in a notion of entirety, based on identity, and resulting in universality. From this it is clear that unity and catholicity go together: if the church is one, it must be universal. Unity and catholicity are two interwoven dimensions of one and the same church.'



For reflection:

What is the difference between 'catholic' (small 'c') and 'Catholic (big C)?

'apostolic...'

'Apostolic' refers to the origin and beliefs of the Church. The Church's teachings are apostolic because they come directly from the teachings of the original Apostles of Jesus. These were the people commissioned and charged by Christ himself with the task of preaching the Gospel message. This means, in theory at least, that there is directly an unbroken line of continuity in the Church's teachings from the Apostles themselves, right through history until the present day.

To call the Church 'apostolic', therefore, means to suggest that its teachings come directly from the first Apostles. As McGrath observes:

'In declaring the church to be 'apostolic', the creeds thus appear to emphasize the historical roots of the gospel, the continuity between the church and Christ through the apostles whom he appointed, and the continuing evangelistic and missionary tasks of the church.'

Thus, the apostolic nature of the church implies that it has been:

- Established in the world by the Apostles
- It keeps to and spreads the teaching of the Apostles
- Its leaders are the successors to the Apostles

Apostolic Succession

'You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.' - Gal 3:26

Linked very strongly to the notion of an apostolic church is the controversial concept of 'apostolic succession'. This is a doctrine, prevalent in the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran Churches, which asserts that God's chosen successors to the first Apostles are properly ordained bishops and church leaders. There has been, it is claimed, an unbroken line of succession from the first Apostles themselves right through the ages and to bishops today. These bishops thus inherit the spiritual, ecclesiastical and sacramental authority, power and responsibility that was conferred by Christ himself on the first apostles and this gives them great authority in matters of faith, morality and sacramental worship.

At the summit, for Catholics, is the Pope himself who is regarded as the direct successor of St Peter the Apostle and hence the Pope's title of 'Vicar of Christ on Earth'.

'You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church' – Matthew 16:18

Apostolic succession is transmitted when a new bishop is ordained (an Episcopal consecration) by the 'laying of hands' from an established bishop in the apostolic succession.

'Do not neglect your gift, which was given to you through a prophetic message when the body of Elders laid their hands on you.' - 1 Tim 4:14

The Church in Wales, as part of the Anglican and Porvoo Communion of Churches, accepts the doctrine of apostolic succession. However, apostolic succession brings problems. Although the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches adhere very strongly to the doctrine, a number of Protestant denominations claim that the authority given to the first Apostles by Christ was unique and for them alone. They argue that the most important thing for the Church today is to share in the same faith as the first Apostles, to believe their teachings as part of the scriptures and, like them, to receive the Holy Spirit into their lives – an 'apostolic continuity'.

These Protestants therefore reject the doctrine of the apostolic succession, claiming that it is not taught in the Scriptures, has no historical evidence to support it and has no real use in modern Christian life and action. Instead, they argue, 'apostolic' means to follow the teachings of the original Apostles and to be guided by the Holy Spirit, as they were.

In response, the Roman Catholic Church does not regard these Protestant denominations as being proper churches at all.



Seminar Topic:

Is the Christian Church really 'apostolic'?

Do the divisions within the Christian Church restrict its appeal to outsiders?

'Body of Christ'

The phrase 'Body of Christ' is a metaphor used frequently in the New Testament to refer to those who believe in Christ. As St Paul observed:

'The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ, for we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.' - 1 Cor. 12:12-13

'So in Christ we who are many form one body.' – Romans 5:20

It is believed that when Christ was in the world, he took on physical form to teach and demonstrate the love of God to humanity in a clear and tangible way. This work is said to continue through believers and, specifically, the church itself as the embodiment of Christ on earth:

'We will, in all things, grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body...grows and builds itself up in love.' – Ephesians 4:15-16

The people who form the church may be called the 'Body of Christ' because:

- They join Christ in his work of salvation (Ephesians 4:15)
- They follow Christ as their Head (Ephesians 1:22)
- The church is the physical way in which Christ's life is demonstrated in the world today
- Members of the Body share in Christ's resurrection (Colossians 2:12)
- Members of the Body are given gifts by God to enable Christ's work to continue: *'It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors or teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up.'* – Ephesians 4:11-12
- Members of the Body are equally valuable: *'There should be no division in the body...but its parts should have equal concern for each other.'* – 1 Cor. 12:25

Members of the Body, and, thus, the Christian Church, receive salvation through God's love:

'God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body.' – Ephesians 1:22

Communion of Saints

In the New Testament, a saint is someone who believes in Christ and lives in accordance with his teachings. Although this still holds true for Christians today, the concept of a saint has taken on a slightly different meaning. In the Roman Catholic Church in particular, a saint is someone whose life was so close to the example of Jesus Christ himself, that, after his/her death, they are canonised and venerated by Christians and held up as an example to follow. The holiness of the saints makes it possible to say that they dwell with Christ in heaven.

Many Christians, particularly Roman Catholics, pray to the saints in heaven to ask them to intercede with Christ on behalf of humanity. Such prayers are called 'invocation of the saints'.

Above all, many Christians believe that the Church is a family united both in heaven and on earth in one body, in which all members have a relationship with God. The saints in heaven are part of this family and are collectively known as '*The Communion of Saints*' (*Communio Sanctorum*). St Paul observed:

"...thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." – Colossians 1;12

Today, the term 'Communion of Saints' is taken to mean the fellowship of all Christians – past, present and future –so that it is the duty of the church to preserve the faith and transfer it intact to the next generation. In 'The Eucharistic Memorial' Max Thurian noted:

'They are a reminder of the mediation of Christ in the universal Church of all time. The Son of God has willed to be present in the incarnation to men by the mediation of his humanity...The saints are therefore signs of the presence and love of Christ'.



For Reflection:

Is it theologically sound to pray to the saints?



Research Topic:

Gather evidence from websites and elsewhere about the controversies facing the Christian Church today. Consider whether or not such criticisms are justified.

The Church as the kingdom of God on earth

Throughout his ministry, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God/ kingdom of Heaven, by which he meant God's reign of love on Earth. It may be described as God's rule over the hearts and lives of those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' – Matthew 6: 10

The kingdom of God comes as God saves his people from sin and darkness. For their part, it requires believers to repent and turn away from sin and wrong-doing and to live their lives according to the teaching and example of Jesus.

'I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' - John 3:5

The kingdom came into being with the ministry of Jesus, but will only be finally and fully established at the end of time, when Christ returns. In the meantime, the role of the Church is to be the living example of the kingdom of God. It is the witnesses to the kingdom and must prepare the world for its coming. The kingdom of God works in the world through the Church as it proclaims the gospel message.

'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.' – Matthew 9:35

The Church acts as a parallel on earth to the kingdom of God because:

- It represents the start of the kingdom which will be perfected at the end of time when Christ returns.
- It is a kingdom in itself, with a leadership, legal aspect and administration
- The Church exists as a less-than-perfect state until Christ returns for her.
- Believers are being prepared and made holy by the Church for the final establishment of the kingdom: *'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and he will reign for ever and ever.'* - Rev 11:15

The Church is therefore linked directly to the coming of the kingdom of God through:

- The apostle's teaching – which is the foundation of the Church
- Fellowship and community – believers are linked to each other and to Christ
- Believers share the Eucharist and common worship of God

Jesus warned that the Church and its members will suffer persecution and hardship as they work to establish the kingdom:

'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first...you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world...if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also...They will treat you this way because of my name...' John 15:19-21



For Research

In what ways can the Church today be seen as preparing for the kingdom of God?

The Role of the Church

God's saving action in the world today

'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' - Matt 25:40

The church is the people that God gathers together from the world – they are drawn together in local communities and bring the word of Christ to others. Together, as a church, the people of God spread his word and act as Christ would act by charity, service and humility, proclaiming and establishing the kingdom of God on earth.

God's saving work means the bringing of salvation and eternal life to all people. Through the sacraments and acts of kindness and love, the church acts as a sign or an instrument that spreads the word of God. The church both contains and communicates the invisible grace of God that she signifies. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes God's saving action as:

'The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men....the church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race. In her, this unity has already begun...at the same time, the church is a sign and instrument of the full realization of the unity yet to come.'

The Church is faced with the task of helping with the changing needs, demands and circumstances of the modern world. This means examining its attitudes and approaches to the problems of the world and keeping the Gospel of Christ alive and relevant to all people. Jesus said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" - Matthew 5:3

The 'poor' in the Bible are not just those without money or possessions. The 'poor' also means the 'poor in spirit' – those who know about human weakness and understand their dependence on the love of God. Jesus taught a great deal about the poor, the outcasts and the sinners. His message to the poor was that forgiveness and salvation were at hand:

'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'
- Luke 18:14.

The Bible teaches that followers of Christ should give to the poor and share with one another. In 'The Church in Response to Human Needs' Sugden wrote:

'Rather the wealthy need the poor to learn from them the nature and meaning of the deliverance God brings to them both.'

So, for the Church, charity is important because it is a sign of God's grace and it turns the poor into God's people:

'Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom he has promised to those who love him?' - James 2:5



For reflection:

What is God's grace?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights this aspect of God's saving action:

'The mission of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy of the Church is to prepare the assembly to...make the saving work of Christ present and active by his transforming power...to make the lives of the faithful a living sacrifice to God...and by taking part in the Church's mission through the witness and service of charity.'

The importance of charity was further emphasised by the Second Vatican Council in 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World':

'The joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ.'



Seminar Topic

What is 'God's saving action' and how does the Church help it to happen?

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI reinforced this message to Christians everywhere:

'Love for widows and orphans, prisoners and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential as the ministry of the sacraments and the preaching of the Gospel.'

Meanwhile, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, in his Christmas message in 2003, urged Christians of all denominations to engage in debate and action against poverty:

'When Christians grieve or protest about war, about debt and poverty, about prejudice, about the humiliations of unemployment...it is because of the fear we rightly feel.'

Christianity in action

The Christian Church must carry out the message of Christ in the world – this means acting as Christ would act and this means charitable works:

‘What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Suppose a brother is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed’, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.’ - James 3: 14-17

The Bible teaches that the poor are special to God and that earthly riches may separate a person from God, whilst those who are poor may be able to draw closer to him. Christians, therefore, are encouraged to use what they have to help others.

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven’ - Matthew 6:19-20.

‘For the love of money is a root to all kinds of evil’ - 1 Timothy 6:10



For Reflection:

Can a person be a Christian without doing good deeds and giving to charity?

Christians believe that wealth is a gift from God and should be used for the good of all. The Christian Church is sometimes depicted as a steward, who takes responsibility for the world on behalf of God. It means that members of the Church must be active in the relief of poverty and suffering:

‘Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven for ...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ - Mark 10:21, 25

It is argued that the Christian Church has a moral responsibility to help the poor, needy and oppressed. Some think that God will judge the Church according to how much concern it has demonstrated for those in need:

‘If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?’ - 1 John 3:17

‘“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink...?” I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’ - Matthew 25:37, 40

Christians are thus charged with developing qualities of compassion and generosity:

'True happiness is not found in riches' - Catechism of the Catholic Church



For reflection:

What does it mean to say that the Church has a moral duty to help those in need?

Charity work

For the Christian Church, caring for the poor is one of the most important ways in which believers can show their love for God. This is the principle of agape (unconditional love) – loving others without expecting anything back in return.

'Rich nations should have a responsibility to those who cannot develop themselves' - Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Consequently, Christians are encouraged to set aside some of their money and give it to the poor.

'On the first day of each week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income' -1 Corinthians 16:2

Some Christians do this by committing to a tithe – this is when they set 10% of their gross income aside to give to their church. They may also give further 'offerings' on top of this in response to particular needs which may arise in their community or in the world. Some churches demand this of their congregation whilst others leave it to individuals to make a choice whether to tithe. Many Christians who tithe believe that God will bless their finances so that they never feel the loss of the tithe.



For Reflection:

Should all Christians be required to tithe? Why/ why not?

Christianity in action - The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is a Christian organisation founded by William Booth in 1865 to help the poor in the inner cities. It began with Booth and his followers preaching about Christ in streets, pubs and music halls. They appealed to the common people and showed the love of Jesus in very practical ways – by providing soup kitchens to feed the hungry and running hostels and shelters for the homeless and for single mothers.

Today, the Salvation Army provides hostels for the homeless and food for those who sleep rough on the streets, and helps to locate people who have gone missing. It also provides rehabilitation centres for alcoholics and drug addicts and campaigns against drugs and other forms of addiction. The Salvation Army raises money for its work through collections and by fund-raising at Christmas and through sales of its magazine, called *The War Cry*. It also receives grants from the government and the local authority.

Overseas Mission

One of the most crucial aspects of the Christian life, and a vital part of the work of the Church, is overseas mission. At its heart, this means churches sending out some of its people to do the following:

- Support the establishment of Christian churches and missions overseas
- Support the training of priests overseas
- To pray, share and help those in need and to present the Christian message
- To provide opportunities for education, literacy, justice, health care and economic development.

The Churches provide a supportive network. The main support for Catholic overseas mission comes from 'Missio' organisation for overseas mission. In the same way, the Church Missionary Society and the Welsh Council for Mission and Ministry have supported mission work in a range of overseas locations for their people, whilst the World Council of Churches campaigns for peace and the care of refugees and victims of war.

Christian Aid

'We commit ourselves to strive for a new earth transformed by an end to poverty to promote the dignity and basic rights of every person' - Christian Aid – Vision and Values

Christian Aid is an organisation that was set up by the British Council of Churches after the Second World War to help refugees made homeless by the fighting and to help to relieve poverty around the world. Its aim is to help people to help themselves, so that they do not need aid in the future:

'We will work with those who are committed to supporting poor and marginalised communities to eradicate poverty and promote basic rights and justice' - Christian Aid – Statement of Intent.

As a Christian organisation, it works through groups of Christians who live in the country concerned and who best know the local problems and how to deal with them.

It raises money through donations, fund-raising and collections.

About 15% of this money is used on Emergency Aid. This is a disaster fund that is used to provide immediate help in floods, earthquakes and wars. The fund provides for food, medicines, blankets and shelters to the victims. The majority of the rest of the money is used on long-term aid, enabling people to help themselves out of poverty through 'appropriate technology'.

Christian Aid has also worked to help refugees of war, to provide medical care for those suffering with HIV and for countries to end human rights abuses.

Christian Aid tries to educate people so that they realize why there is such a vital need to raise money to help the poorer nations. The Christian Aid news magazine and other educational materials are sent to schools and the organisation campaigns in a number of ways to raise public awareness of the poverty of the world. In recent times, Christian Aid has appointed famous celebrities to become their ambassadors in poorer countries, helping to raise the profile of the problems which poverty brings.

Christian Aid adopts the principle:

'Give a man a fish: feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish: feed him for a lifetime'.

Christian Aid seeks to change the views and policies of the governments of the rich countries, by campaigning for an end to the oppressive debts which the poorer nation have and by encouraging nations to buy the produce of poorer nations at a fair price, through organisations.

In recent years Christian aid has campaigned alongside organisations such as 'Fair Trade' to challenge the rich nations to offer fairer deals to the poor and to safeguard the weakest and most vulnerable. They have campaigned to end poverty in developing countries by demanding the World Bank eases or cancels the debt-burden and that the European Union and the USA offer farmers in developing countries a fair price for their goods and pays poorer workers a fair day's wage.

CAFOD

'CAFOD's mission is to promote human development and social justice in witness to Christian faith and Gospel values.' - CAFOD – Mission Statement.

CAFOD, or The Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, was founded in 1962 by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. The aim was to provide a focus for all the smaller charitable efforts that were going on at that time and to raise money. Today it is involved in the relief of world poverty through over 1000 programmes worldwide.

Most of CAFOD's funding comes from the Roman Catholic Church – in 2002-2003 Catholic churches, groups and individuals raised almost £20 million for CAFOD's work, together with more than £10 million coming from governments and other donors and agencies.

In recent years, CAFOD has been involved in such issues as campaigning for a total ban against landmines, earthquake relief in El Salvador and humanitarian aid in Serbia, Latin America and Africa. CAFOD has also actively supported the fair trade movements and campaigned to cancel the debt of developing countries and CAFOD supporters campaigned outside the G8 summits in Birmingham and Genoa.

'CAFOD looks forward to a world in which ...the voice of the poor is heard and heeded by all, and lives are no longer dominated by greed' - CAFOD – Vision.



For Research

Look up examples of the work of Christian Aid and CAFOD.
Are their methods effective or not?

Could the Christian Church be doing more to help the needy?

The Ministry of the Church

Priests: training and ordination

'Christ has no body now but yours, no feet on earth but yours.' - St Teresa of Avila.

A priest is a person authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion and to act as a mediatory agent between humanity and God. A priest may also have the authority to administer religious rites, for example, the Eucharist.

It takes five years for a priest to be trained – it is a long and hard road, both physically and spiritually. Although there are some differences between the Catholic and Protestant traditions, the procedure is very similar.

So what kind of person is a priest? First and foremost, a person wishing to become a priest must be a committed Christian who believes that Jesus has 'called' them to this work. They must have a real love for God, a commitment to follow Jesus and be prepared to share their faith with others. They must also be friendly and approachable, caring, considerate, understanding, a good listener and someone with a deep love and respect for all people.

Someone who feels they are called to become a priest must first approach their local bishop and talk extensively with him. If all is well, then the candidate undergoes a special selection process by which the candidate is formally examined and judged as to whether or not they can go on. This is sometimes called a 'period of discernment,' where a candidate seriously examines their belief and calling. The Bishop makes the final decision and, if favourable, the candidate will then undergo training for the priesthood.

Over the next five years they will undertake theological training at a college run or sponsored by the church; learn how to serve the church community and develop pastoral and liturgical skills. The candidate may then formally apply to the bishop to be ordained as a priest and they may take on the role of church deacon, which is an ordained ministry in its own right, giving the candidate the authority to baptise and to carry out marriages. After six months, the candidate (ordinand) will be ordained by a special service in which:

- The people of God affirm that he/she is worthy
- The Bishop solemnly chooses the candidate to be a priest
- The candidate takes vows and promises to undertake the priestly ministry
- Prayers are said
- The bishop lays hands upon the candidates head to symbolise the coming of the Holy Spirit with the gifts of love, authority and service
- The Bishop speaks the prayer of consecration and anoints the candidate with oil, asking Jesus to preserve and sanctify them.

Ordination is an act of the church whereby a person is ordained to service and leadership within the Church community - ordination means becoming a priest.

In the New Testament, Jesus was seen as a prophet, priest and king and the ministry of the Church is to continue the work of Christ and prepare for the coming of the kingdom of God. Those who are ordained today are linked directly to the original Church of Christ (the Apostolic Church) and this is symbolically expressed by the action of the laying on of hands that a bishop enacts on the newly-ordained in order that they may carry out Christ's work.

Peter Fink observes:

"It is in function of this awesome commission of the church to some of its members that the church deems it proper, and indeed essential, to lay on hands and to entrust the minister and the ministry, to the power of God's Spirit".

The priest's relationship to Christ is highlighted in the ministries of preaching, teaching and leadership in prayer. The Church can see its own nature and destiny in the work of its clergy – it is through the Church, and its priests, that the work of Christ is seen to continue on earth.



Seminar work:

What are the main differences between a priest and a lay person in the Christian Church?

Is this biblically sound?

Priesthood of all believers

One of the most important Christian concepts, particularly within Protestantism, is the priesthood of all believers. This doctrine, coming from New Testament times, grants to all believers the right or responsibility to preach and spread the Christian faith. It stems from the words of St Peter which makes all believers into priests:

'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.' -1 Peter 2:9

For Protestants, the priesthood of all believers means that God is equally accessible to all believers and every Christian has the potential to minister for God. The reasoning behind this is that, through Christ, all believers have been given access to God and therefore every Christian has the equal potential to work for the kingdom of God.

Protestants believe that the church, made up of believers, is, in effect, a community of priests – a priesthood of all believers. Most Protestant faiths reject the idea of the priesthood as a professional group of clergy that is distinct, in a spiritual sense, from the ordinary believers. Instead, Protestants regard the professional clergy as servants who act on behalf of the people, for example by doing church administration, keeping church order, performing marriages and baptisms and administering communion.

Catholics tend to reject this concept and regard priests as having a unique spiritual and authoritative role within the church which distinguishes them from the ordinary believers;

'Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you...'
– Hebrews 13:17



For reflection:

Are Christians really a priesthood of all believers?

Priesthood in the Protestant tradition

Most Protestant denominations believe that there should be ordained ministers who are responsible for church order and discipline. In many Protestant denominations, such as the Lutheran Church, this is called 'the preaching office' or the 'office of the holy ministry' and it ensures order, authority and discipline among congregations. Priests are seen as servants acting on behalf of local Christians. As Luther noted in 'On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church' (1520):

'There are indeed priests whom we call ministers. They are chosen from among us, and who do everything in our name. That is a priesthood which is nothing else than the ministry. Thus 1 Corinthians 4:1: 'No one should regard us as anything else than ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God.'

In the Augsburg Confession it states:

'God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach or administer the sacraments without a proper public call.'

In some Protestant churches, leaders are called elders or pastors and have important roles in the teaching and pastoral leadership of the church, based on the words of St Paul:

'It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.' – Eph 4: 11-13



For reflection:

Why does the Church need priests?

Priesthood in the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican tradition

In the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican Communion, the priesthood of all believers is taken to mean that all Christians have a responsibility to preserve and spread the gospel. However, the liturgical and sacramental roles of the church are given over to ordained priests. In the Roman Catholic Church, priests must be men over 25 years of age, unmarried and celibate. In the Anglican Church, priests may marry and there are a number of women priests.

Priests therefore are:

- Mediators between God and humanity
- Representatives of Christ, consecrated by bishop to serve church
- Charged with celebrating the Eucharist
- Charged with leading worship and performing the sacraments in the name of the Church
- Encouraged to teach, preach and convert non-believers
- Able to forgive sins and perform spiritual and physical acts of charity
- Able to dispense God's mercy

'They are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament....they are to preach God's word, are people of deep and regular prayer, be steeped in sacred scripture, educators in the faith and work tirelessly for the glory of God through service to His people' - Vatican II declaration on Ministry and Life of priests .

The most significant liturgical acts reserved for priests are the administration of the sacraments, including the celebration of the Mass, penance, anointing the sick (unction) and confirmation (though in the Western tradition this is usually celebrated by a bishop). In the Eastern tradition, baptism and marriage may only be performed by a priest.



Seminar Topic:

What are the main differences in the roles of a Protestant priest and a Catholic one?

What are the reasons behind these differences?

Ordination of women

Within the Christian Church, women have traditionally been prevented from becoming priests because of the words of St. Paul:

'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.' - 1 Timothy 2:13

'Women should remain silent in the churches.' – 1 Cor. 14:34

However, there are now ordained women priests in the many Protestant denominations as well as Anglican Communion, including the Churches of England and Wales. The basis for this is the view that:

- Since there is a priesthood of all believers, this includes women
- Women may have had priestly ministries in the early Church (1 Cor. 16;19)
- Paul's apparent resistance to women priests is a specific criticism addressed to certain individual churches that he knew of and does not apply to churches as a whole
- Men and women are equal in Christ

'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' – Galatians 3:28

However, the Roman Catholic Church refuses to ordain women as priests, saying that it is a matter of divine law that only men can be ordained. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

'Only a baptized man validly receives sacred ordination'

The Roman Catholic view is that:

- The Church should remain faithful to tradition
- The teaching of the New Testament forbids the ordination of women
- The male gender best suits the sacramental nature of the priesthood – Jesus chose only men as Apostles

In 1994, Pope John Paul II wrote in his Letter 'Ordinatio Sacerdotalis' that

'The Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women.'

Furthermore, the Pontifical Biblical Commission observed:

'The masculine character of the hierarchical order which has structured the church since its beginning thus seems attested to by scripture in an undeniable way...the first Christian communities were always directed by men exercising the apostolic power....although the New Testament does not settle in a clear way whether women can be ordained as priests.'

In July 2010, the Vatican declared that any '*attempted ordination*' of a woman would be seen as a grave crime and any bishop ordaining a woman would, along with the woman, be excommunicated from the Church.

At the same time, perhaps ironically, the Archbishop of Canterbury was urging members of the Churches of England and Wales to move closer to resolving the problems surrounding the ordaining women priests as bishops.



Seminar Topic:

Should women be ordained?
Why/ why not?

The everyday role of a priest

Most priests spend their lives in parishes – a parish is the area around a church and is seen as one of thousands of small families or communities of God. One of the most important tasks of a priest is to help the people of the parish (parishioners) to discover the part God has given them to play and to manifest the gifts God has given to each of them. The priest must also enable them to develop and grow in their faith and to be responsible and mature members of the community.

The priest is responsible for their spiritual and pastoral welfare and should seek to create a loving, caring atmosphere where everyone feels that they are accepted and valued. In that sense, the priest acts as a kind of shepherd, tending his flock.

On a daily basis, a priest gets to know his parishioners, by visiting their homes, talking to them about their needs and problems, giving spiritual direction and, where necessary, ministering and praying with them.

The priest also has more specific duties – to run the church and keep it in good order, to lead funeral services, encourage youth work and to gather around him a team of parishioners who can help him and the church to carry out the work of God in the parish.

Some priests have a special ministry that does not involve attachment to a parish – for instance, priests in the armed forces, in hospitals and in schools and colleges.

Laity (Lay People)

The term 'laity' comes from the Greek *laos*, meaning 'people'. It refers to the ordinary members of the church who are not ordained clergy.

In the early Church there was no difference between priests and lay people – all shared a common belief in God and saw themselves as God's people, although people had different spiritual gifts to enable the Church to fulfil its role.

“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” - 1 Corinthians 12:27-28.

However, in the centuries which followed, a sharp divide took place between the special functions of the clergy and the more general ministries of lay people. It became the task of the laity to help the clergy, but they were often reluctant to do so.

Gibbs notes:

‘...they were often considered, and considered themselves, a lower grade of Christian than the ordained ministers.

The role of the laity

In Anglicanism, which includes the Church of England and the Church in Wales, the term 'laity' refers to baptised believers who are not bishops, priests or deacons. The laity, nevertheless, as baptised believers, are expected to minister in Christ's name. The Book of Common Prayer describes the ministry of the laity as:

‘...to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry out God's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship and governance of the Church.’

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the 'Lumen Gentium' defines the laity as:

'...all the faithful except those in holy orders... These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.'

Much of this work is done by lay people outside the church, for instance in the home, in schools and so on. Within the church too, much is done by lay people – they may sit on various governing bodies such as the local Parochial Church Council, Deanery Synods and the General Synod.

In the same way, in local churches, they may have an administrative role, for example by working in the church office, or taking responsibility, as Church Wardens, for the fabric of the building, or may work as musicians, teachers, youth leaders, cleaners and many other roles.

Within Church services, lay people may adopt a number of important positions, for instance vergers, ushers and torch bearers. One such special function is that of Lay Reader. This is a ministry whereby a lay person undergoes training and afterwards can act as a preacher, pastoral leader, worship leader and support for the priest.

Today, some Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches still experience difficulties in the nature of the relationship between priests and lay people. The problem is not only that they are no longer seen as equals, but that many lay people are happy to accept a lower standard of Christian commitment and behaviour for themselves and expect more from their priests. The lay people seem to prefer to be led by the priests in matters of liturgy and worship, rather than help and assist the priest. For many priests, this can be a real problem.



For reflection:

Should lay people play a more active part in the ministry of the Church?

Writing task

Explain the role of the Christian Church in the world today.

'The Church does not need ordained priests.' Assess this view.