

**GCE A LEVEL**

# Component 1A Christianity

AO2 supporting resources (Yr 2)

## Support for centres with AO2: some suggestions for teaching

**NB the nature of this information is for developing AO2. What follows are NOT definitive answers – lines of argument are suggested in order to demonstrate the skills of AO2, but the WJEC strongly advises further development and for teachers and candidates to apply their own ideas and evaluation in response to the materials already provided.**

For the skills of AO2 it is important to remember that what is being assessed are skills of evaluation and not simply knowledge and understanding of content. The six bullets for each Theme are listed beneath the AO1 content. They are NOT questions in themselves but rather indications of the areas of debate that may arise in a typical AO2 question statement. In addition, as AO1 material is studied the whole purpose of AO2 is to approach an understanding of the AO1 material in a critical and evaluative way that is very much a rigorous and academic discipline.

One of the most common features of a Principal Examiner's report is the regular comment that candidates just **present lists of views** in support of and/or challenging an argument often in response to a question expecting an evaluation. So, for instance, a typical mark scheme may list bullets of points to consider but to repeat them does not demonstrate AO2. How the points are **USED** and **DEVELOPED** by the teacher and candidate to form critical analysis and evaluation is crucial and transforms any suggested material into academic debate that mirrors the AO2 Band descriptors.

There is nothing wrong with preparing your considerations and reflections of a topic in response to the 'Issues for evaluation and analysis' section of the Specification; however, what is important is **making sure that there is some form of personal analysis or commentary throughout the answer** that can then be **used to form a reasonable conclusion**.

Evaluation and analysis skills present themselves as a constant dialogue between the voice of the evidence or the views that you are selecting, and that of your own voice, with the end result of you having the final word that states clearly your position [conclusion(s)].

## Component 1a: Christianity (Year 2)

### Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Christianity Theme 1 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 1: The extent to which the Bible can be regarded as the inspired word of God.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- God's activity inspiring the Bible meant using humans as stenographers (a person whose job is to transcribe speech in shorthand) only.
- God worked in some sort of partnership with human writers, where their personalities and even their views were involved.
- God was not involved in the process of inspiring the words, but rather the historical events which, in turn, inspired human writers.
- The Bible is not inspired at all as is evidenced by scientific and historical errors.
- Whether or not the Bible is inspired can only be known once one has made a full commitment to Christianity, testing the Bible's claims in faith and practice.
- The Bible contains both the direct words of God (i.e. through the prophets) as well as interpretations of these direct words.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- If God ignored human personalities and viewpoints in the writing of the Bible, what would this say about the character of God and the way that God chooses to work?
- Does the fact that Biblical stories and values having been at the cutting edge of social change (i.e. end of slavery, suffragette movement etc.) suggest that this Book has a special status?
- Many people claim that there are 'errors' in the Bible – but can you actually come up with one?
- Does the presence of errors in the Bible rule out the idea of God having been involved in the Bible's formation?
- Can someone outside of Christianity really come to a judgement on the 'inspirational' value of the Bible? Don't you have to be on the 'inside' to know this?
- Is there a 'cumulative' argument for the Bible as Word of God (i.e. a combination of factors that point to a compelling conclusion)?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The Bible gives direct access to the mind of God as the entirety of the Bible's formation has a miraculous character.
- The Bible gives indirect access to the mind of God as God chose to work through the personalities and worldviews of the authors – yet a lofty ethical and spiritual 'standard' shines through.
- The Bible demonstrates all the flaws and brilliance of any human book; its only truly unique claim is that it belongs to Christianity and has been adopted by Christians as the Book of books. It is not inherently inspired apart from this.

## Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Christianity Theme 1 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

**Issue 2: Whether the Christian biblical canonical orders are inspired, as opposed to just the texts they contain.**

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- God's revelation can't be ordered since God's Spirit is equally and uniformly involved in all of it.
- The order of biblical books is merely the result of accidents of history.
- A definite biblical ordering is evidenced by God's concern both with Torah and the Life of Jesus, the 'canons within the canons' of the Old and New Testaments.
- It is reasonable to believe in the ordering of biblical books since God works through human communities and traditions.
- There are some obvious reasons that the canonical order is the way it is (the canon within the canon); however, other aspects appear haphazard.
- Only a miracle could bring together so many diverse stories into one overarching narrative, beginning with the creation (Genesis) and ending with heaven (Revelation).

Key questions that may arise could be:

- If Christians believe the entire canon is inspired by God, then why have so few read through all of it?
- How long did it take for the Jews to conclude their canon? The Christians?
- What is (are) the most important part(s) of the Bible for Christians or Jews that you know or have read about?
- Doesn't every Christian just have their 'favourite verses', regardless of any of the ordering in the Bible?
- What aspects of Jewish or Christian worship speak to the importance of certain parts of the Bible?
- If ordering is important we would expect that what appears 'first' to be the most important. Would Jews defend Genesis as the 'most important' book of the Hebrew Bible? Would Christians defend Matthew as the 'most important' book of the New Testament?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Biblical ordering is a result of a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit; therefore, Jews and Christians believe it is important to preach, teach and learn in a certain order.
- Biblical ordering is a result of human disagreement, discoveries, and debates. This is abundantly clear from the arguments that preceded canonical decisions.
- There is some indication of a partial order that could be from a divine source (the canon within the canon); however, aside from this, there appears to be no plan as is evidenced by the canons having evolved as a result of debate and discussion.

## Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Christianity Theme 1 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

**Issue 3: The extent to which the kerygmata (within the areas of Acts studied) are of any value for Christians today.**

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The kerygmata have a historical value to Christians as the ‘first’ public announcements of the Christian church.
- Some Christians believe that the value of the kerygma is that it models the kind of power and persuasiveness the Church can have today.
- Some Christians believe it is a mistake to take any passage of scripture and declare it more important than other passages since God inspired all of it.
- Some Christians believe that the kerygma is of limited value today since the priorities of the Church have changed.
- Some Christians believe that issues pertaining to the presence of myth limit value of taking the kerygma literally (Bultmann).
- Some Christians believe that the author rightly recognized the power of the Christian living and that this applies to today (i.e. Dodd realised eschatology).

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What festival in the Church is centred on the first speech in the book of Acts – and what is the relationship of this festival to the annual church calendar?
- Which kinds of churches believe that the dynamism and miracles found in the early church are relevant to today’s churches?
- If the book of Acts was cut out of the Bible, to what degree would this effect Christian faith and practice today?
- What are some activities of contemporary Christian churches that cannot be found mentioned in the speeches of the book of Acts?
- What elements of the Kerygma as presented in the speeches in the book of Acts present stumbling blocks to ‘modern’ people?
- What are some aspects of the events described in Acts that may have impressed even a sceptical onlooker?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The speeches in the book of Acts, containing the kerygmata, are of foundational importance to Christians today in that they describe both the creation and direction of the Christian church.
- Though important, the speeches in the book of Acts should not be elevated above other aspects of Scripture and Tradition. In fact, if the Holy Spirit exists (as Christians proclaim), one would expect the church to grow and evolve to include messages and activities other than those mentioned in the speeches.
- The kerygmata are of great importance to Christians today but they need to be reinterpreted in light of contemporary circumstances and the idea that God is free to work in ways other than described in the book of Acts.

## Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Christianity Theme 1 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 4: Whether the speeches in Acts have any historical value.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The kerygma in Acts conflict, generally, with a modern approach to historical study.
- The identity of the author and the number of years this writing is removed from reported events raise serious questions.
- The books of Acts is a clearly stylized account which does not convey the real thinking of the figures who give the speeches (such as Paul).
- We need to be sceptical without being paranoid: there are many reasons to trust that the author had access to solid historical data.
- Issues of style, grammar and subject matter are simply what we would expect of any author reporting on events.
- Bultmann says that the search for historical value misses the point of the kerygma which is to awaken faith.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Has there ever been any 'solid' evidence for miracles having happened? What does 'solid' require?
- If we find it difficult to remember a news event from last week, what is the implication of this for the writer of Acts who wrote this account decades after the events?
- How might the principles of testimony and credulity (Swinburne) impact our assessment of the historicity of these speeches in the book of Acts?
- If it were proven to you that the events in the book of Acts were factually accurate, would this have a dramatic impact on your life? Why or why not?
- Should we trust a reporting of any event less if it has been put into the style and idioms of the reporter?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Acts has tremendous historical value; it was never questioned by the early church. In fact, it is difficult to conceive of a Christian church at all without these dramatic events having happened.
- There are many reasons to doubt the historical value of the book of Acts. Not least among these is the pre-modern worldview it reflects (i.e. miracles of healing and speaking in tongues).
- Perhaps the most important question is not whether or not Acts has historical value (as this can be endlessly debated), but what inspired the disciples of Jesus to have a powerful faith in a threatening environment.



## Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Christianity Theme 1 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 5: The validity of using critical realism to understand Jesus.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Christians shouldn't have to accept that their viewpoints on the meaning of Jesus are merely subjective, private and personal.
- The scientific world view is 'objective'; and has 'won' its encounter with religious points of view for good reasons (for example, we no longer believe in demonic possession).
- A scientific world view is, itself, a story that needs to be questioned; it has even been questioned outside of religion (postmodernism). There is no such thing as a neutral point of view.
- One does not need to believe in miracles to appreciate Jesus; it is possible to see Jesus' relevance by using only a scientific/historical approach.
- The best way to understand history is to understand (i) that all our understandings of reality are filtered by our experience and (ii) that there is, indeed, a reality beyond our experience!
- The alternative of critical realism is either naïve realism (we don't interpret reality) and phenomenism (all we have are interpretations) – clearly there are problems with each of these views.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Does our culture view religious convictions as 'personal' and 'private'? Is that fair to those viewpoints?
- Is there anything to prevent us from dismissing the Bible's claims about Jesus as fiction and/or mythology?
- What are some examples of scientific claims simply masking a quest for money and power?
- If one arrives at the view that Jesus was a purely human figure, does this mean that he cannot be significant for one's faith?
- Is it unreasonable to think that something miraculous 'really happened' at the beginning of the Jesus movement even if what happened was not exactly as the Bible reports?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Critical realism is a clever Christian strategy to undermine scientific views and promote Christian faith. It purports to be 'critical' in that it accepts that we are interpreters but it, in turn, uncritically accepts the outdated worldview of the New Testament.
- There is ample evidence that a 'scientific world view' is its own 'story' and contains elements which rule out aspects of reality that are inconvenient to its biases. After all, how can anyone live without faith? And if we cannot live without faith, shouldn't the role of faith be a part of the public sphere?
- Critical realism makes some excellent points about the biases of enlightenment-inspired approaches to history but that does not mean that a Christian world view is correct. After all, one can be a non-Christian critical realist.

## Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts

Christianity Theme 1 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 6: The validity of using apocryphal gospels to understand Jesus.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The apocryphal gospels date from much later than the New Testament Gospels.
- They shouldn't be overlooked because of their date; they can represent earlier traditions.
- Both the Gospel of Thomas and Q can be argued to be early sources; the fact that they do not contain miraculous birth and resurrection stories may be significant.
- Aren't we just assuming that the miraculous cannot occur and looking for sources (the apocryphal gospels) to confirm that point of view?
- We have so many early, canonical sources compared to early non-canonical sources. We should, therefore, focus on the former rather than the latter.
- The Gospel of Thomas that we possess dates hundreds of years after the life of Jesus and no one has found Q. Therefore, we should stick with the canonical gospels as more reliable sources for the life of Jesus.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Why put our trust in the reports of Gospels from hundreds of years after the canonical Gospels?
- The social revolutionary figure of Jesus died in the early 30s of the Common Era and we have reports of a Patriarchal and conservative church in the 50s and 60s. What might have been going on in the 30s and 40s?
- What is Q? Why do scholars think this is an early source?
- What is it about the Gospel of Thomas that makes scholars consider it could be an early source?
- Are Crossan's views of Jesus fuelled by his bias against miracles (i.e. Jesus' miracles of healing interpreted as social inclusion).

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The apocryphal Gospels provide a window into the tumultuous 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> decades of the Common Era when there were a variety of Christianities in conflict with one another.
- The apocryphal Gospels are simply too few and too late to lead to any reasonable historical hypothesis as to the 'true' history of Christianity. Q does not even exist as a discrete document.
- Though there is compelling evidence for an early dating for some of the sources Crossan privileges in his reconstruction (Q and Thomas), we would simply need more evidence to take seriously some of the themes in other sources that Crossan believes are important.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3: ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 1: The extent to which wealth is a sign of God's blessing.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- God always gives wealth as a blessing for faith and obedience.
- God sometimes gives wealth as a blessing for faith and obedience.
- Wealth as a blessing might occur, but it should never be sought or expected.
- Wealth is not given to many who are known in the Bible to be very close to God.
- Suffering can also be a part of the life that God gives those who follow God's path.
- The possession of wealth is often related to greed and the danger of selfishness.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Were the 'Patriarchs' in the Hebrew Bible wealthy? Why? Can you name a Patriarch and describe their wealth?
- How many people did Jesus tell to give up all of their material possessions? Should doing so constitute a requirement for church membership – why or why not?
- Does the Bible describe wealth and riches in purely material ways? Can you think of an example when this is not the case?
- Jesus was not wealthy; in fact Crossan says that a 'tekton' (craftsman) was definitely a peasant. If Jesus was poor, does that mean that he was not favoured by God?
- In the Bible, does obedience lead to wealth and prosperity or to suffering?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The link between material wealth and blessing is undeniable in the Bible and Christian living. This can be proven through the Patriarchs, the Kings of Israel and the vision of a prosperous future given in prophetic literature. The prosperity of current church leaders ensures that we do not see this merely as a historical phenomenon.
- To say that there is a link between wealth and blessing is to put God in a box, to reduce God to our servant. When looking at the life of Job, Jesus or any number of Biblical characters there is clearly something more important in the life of faith than wealth.
- Wealth can be a blessing that results from obedience; but it can also be an enticement to evil or a superfluous quality as far as God is concerned. The Biblical and contemporary contexts in which people of faith gain wealth is key to determining which is the case.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 2: Whether the ascetic ideal is compatible with Christianity.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The lifestyle of Jesus, John the Baptist and the early church clearly follow an ascetic ideal.
- It is not clear at all that Jesus was an ascetic, or if he adopted his lifestyle from necessity.
- The teaching in the New Testament on money, prayer, fasting, celibacy etc. supports an ascetic ideal.
- New Testament teaching in this area is descriptive not prescriptive.
- The diversity of ascetic expressions proves that there is no ascetic ideal in the Bible or in Christianity.
- Stewardship rather than an ascetic ideal is a better way to meet the clear message in the Bible to help those in need.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- How did John the Baptist live? How did this contrast with Jesus' lifestyle?
- Could Jesus have appeared to be a 'winebibber' and 'glutton' when contrasted with the lifestyle of John the Baptist?
- What is the 'cumulative' message of the various passages in this subtheme on wealth?
- What is the difference between stewardship and the ascetic ideal?
- What forms of asceticism have been practiced by the Christians in history? Now?
- Do you agree that you can tell much about a person's priorities and values by how they spend their money? If so, does this mean that an ascetic ideal is a fairly certain sign of Christian commitment?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Christianity demands an ascetic commitment. Sometimes Jesus makes this explicit. At other times it is implicit as seen in the lifestyle of Jesus, Paul and others who clearly had no wealth and did not aspire to it.
- Any 'ideal', including an ascetic ideal or a prosperity ideal limits God. The real emphasis in the Bible is not on asceticism but on stewardship. In other words it is having the attitude of not possessing anything in a final sense that leads one to a Christian lifestyle no matter how much wealth is involved.
- Some are called to an ascetic ideal and some are not – this reflects Jesus' treating each of his followers in different ways, offering different prescriptions for living based on what he felt would best lead them to a God-dependent lifestyle.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 3: The extent to which the UK is a modern mission field.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Christians, especially those of the evangelical variety, see any location where there are those who do not follow Jesus as a mission field.
- The sharp decline of Christianity in the United Kingdom, compared the rise of Christianity in the global south make the UK appear to be an especially needy mission field.
- Stepping back from Christian belief, the UK is a mission field simply because others see it this way – especially reverse missionaries.
- Some Christians would say it is unhelpful to see the UK as a mission field in the evangelical sense because there are many paths to God and people of different faiths or none can come together for humanitarian causes.
- It is misguided to see the UK as a mission field since it is an officially Christian country where both the established Christian church as well as a variety of denominations influence society.
- The decline of Christianity is by no means inevitable; it may simply be dormant and awaken without missionary effort.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What is the 'Great Commission' of Christianity – and where is this found in the Bible?
- Where in the world is the church growing most rapidly and what 'style(s)' of Christianity is popular in these areas?
- What is a missionary? What is a 'reverse missionary'?
- What should be more important to Christians: evangelical or humanitarian outreach?
- Does the fact that the Britain has an 'established Church' as well as a long history of Christianity mean that it doesn't need to be evangelised by Christians from other countries?
- How might an atheist, agnostic, or adherent of a religion other than Christianity react to calling Britain a 'mission field'?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The United Kingdom is most certainly a mission field due to the dramatic decline of Christian belief and practice and the relevance (to believers) of the command of Jesus in Matthew 28.
- It is inappropriate to label the UK as a mission field due to the historic and continuing presence of Christianity in so many social structures – if people want to be a Christian, then there are ample places they can reach out to without the need for a missionary to point the way.
- It depends on how the word 'mission' is interpreted. If this word is interpreted in an 'evangelical' sense, then it could be argued that Britain does not need more mission; this is from a bygone era that is being surpassed by modern and postmodern interpretations of the world. If it is interpreted in terms of humanitarian efforts formed

by Christian values, then many (even non-Christians) might not object to calling Britain a 'mission field'.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 4: The relative ease of assimilation of Christian migrants into Christian churches in the UK.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Many Christians work hard to assimilate migrants into their congregations since they have the mandate to do so from the Bible.
- Differences in language and culture can make assimilation difficult even when a Christian migrant attends the same denomination in the UK as in their home country.
- Assimilation is much easier when there are already a high proportion of migrants in the worshipping community leading to social and economic support.
- Differences in worship style and theology can make assimilation difficult.
- Most migrants live in 'economic corridors' in the UK; therefore, there may be no migrants to assimilate in many remote or rural areas of the United Kingdom.
- Churches struggle to find priests and/or volunteers who can speak languages relevant to immigrant communities; this makes assimilation difficult.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Imagine a Catholic or an Anglican from a non-English speaking country arriving in the UK and attending the same Church. What issues might they need help with? What Church practices might they find to be barriers to worship?
- What Biblical reasons do Christians in existing churches have to welcome Christian immigrants into their churches?
- What are some reasons so many Christian immigrants do not attend churches indigenous to the UK, but join new churches or denominations primarily composed of other Christian immigrants?
- What are the locations in Britain that one is likely to find both an influx of immigrants in existing churches as well as new churches and denominations composed primarily of immigrants?
- What are some differences in worship styles that might exist between Christian immigrants from the Southern Hemisphere to established denominations in the United Kingdom? The Northern Hemisphere?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Many Christian immigrants are finding a warm welcome and an ease of assimilation into existing churches due to the awareness and promotion of these issues in large UK church bodies.
- Assimilation is more of an ideal than a dream given the facts that (i) existing churches serve their own needs and find it difficult to bridge the gaps of language and culture and (ii) immigrants have need of social, cultural and economic support that can best be obtained through churches composed of other immigrants with programmes specifically tailored to their needs.

- Assimilation is not easy, but it is happening to a limited extent as churches embrace the ideals and the practical advice of their leaders/denominations. However, some local congregations do this better than others.



### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 5: Whether men and women are equal in Christianity.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Christianity declares the full equality of men and women in its scriptures. Jesus embodies this principle in his ministry and several movements in the church have manifested this spirit.
- Christianity is merely a reflection of cultural patriarchy and androcentrism, serving only to legitimise cultural sexism. Many of its sacred texts betray this bias.
- There is a mixture of inequality and equality in Christianity; Christianity can reform itself by returning to its egalitarian roots.
- Patriarchy is fully fused with theology and practice in Christianity; no meaningful reform is possible.
- There is a trajectory from inequality to equality at work in Christianity. This is because the principles of the justice-seeking prophets are now being interpreted as applying to the place of women in society.
- Many Christians do not see Mary as a role model only for women, but for men as well. She points to a shared set of qualities that all men and women are to embody.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Which women were leaders in the Old Testament? The New Testament?
- Which verses in the Bible are most infamous for their confining of women to certain roles?
- Which Biblical verses suggest full equality between men and women?
- Why was Junia's name changed to Junias? (Romans 16:7)
- What were some leadership roles women had in the early church?
- Why was Mary Daly taken to court?
- Which denominations ordain women as pastors/priests – and when did they begin doing this?
- Can women relate to a male saviour, a male God and male heroes of the faith?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Women are equal to men in Christianity. This is evident from the creation of Eve as an equal to Adam, the high-status Jesus accorded to women and the enormous influence of women as leaders in the church, including the ordination of women today as Bishops.
- Women are not equal to men in Christianity. Most Christians worldwide worship in churches that do not allow for the ordination of women and hold restrictive views on the roles of women in society. In fact, the Church has supported the dominant patriarchal orientation of culture rather than challenging it.
- The Church is evolving from patriarchy to equality, though this is a slow and uneven process. This evolution is a result of the Church taking the social justice message from the Hebrew prophets seriously and applying them to issues of gender.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 ABC considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 6: The extent to which feminist theology impacts modern Christian practice

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The presence of feminist theological writings, the teaching of feminist theology at seminaries and the many denominations that have begun to ordain women since the 1970s are signs that feminist theology has had an impact on the Church.
- The impact of feminist theology is superficial; most Christians worship in churches that refuse to ordain women and are permeated with sexist language and patriarchal views of God.
- Feminist theology has appeared to have no impact in either conservative Protestant churches or the Roman Catholic Church for different reasons.
- Though it is true that in some churches there appears to be no impact, there are signs of change and hope even in traditional churches.
- Even in churches that ordain women there is still a long way to go before the ideas and proposals of feminist theologians are fully manifested.
- The fact that many women choose to use traditional, patriarchal features in their wedding ceremonies shows the limited impact of feminist theology.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- How prevalent is the subject of 'feminist theology' in the media, in seminaries and in theological writing today?
- How prevalent are condemnations of feminist theology and theologians amongst Christians today?
- What might the status of the ordination of women in churches tell us about the status of feminist theology?
- What versions of the Bible have been produced that show the influence of feminist theology?
- What event in the church gave rise to the show, 'The Vicar of Dibley'? What was the public reaction to this series?
- Though women are ordained in many parts of the Anglican Communion, what continuing issues do they encounter that suggest that feminist theology has still not made a big impact on churches?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Feminist theology has had an enormous impact on the Church; this is evidenced in its growth as an academic discipline, in the ordination of women worldwide, in new versions of the Bible and in the attention given by Churches to issues of gender equality.
- Feminist theology has largely been ineffective in changing the church. This is evidenced by the relatively few number of women ordinations worldwide, the contempt for this movement by evangelical Christians and the prevalence of traditional gender roles promoted by the Church.

- It is too early to reach a judgement on this movement. This is because there has been nearly 2000 years of patriarchal theology and practice in the church – and feminist theology only came to full theological force in the 1960s. Though there is evidence of some change, a longer period of assessment will be needed before any conclusions can be reached.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 1: The effectiveness of the Christian response to the challenge of secularism.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The church has responded well to the challenge of secularism, showing vitality in several areas as well as creative and positive social outreach (e.g. Street Pastors, Alpha Course, Cathedral growth).
- The church has met mixed reactions when it has attempted to use modern means to 'advertise' itself and its mission (e.g. #justpray).
- Traditional forms Christianity continues to be a resource to even an increasingly secular society e.g. weddings, funerals, programmes for the community in the local church.
- The church has not been successful in responding to secularism, it will continue to decline in the face of scientific and technological advances.
- 'Christian' vs. 'secular' is a false distinction; for many there is no opposition. Christians can join with those who profess no-religion and those with no religion can join in common causes with Christians.
- The challenge of secularism is more imagined than real, as a number of popular events and media programs demonstrate the depth and influence of Christianity (royal weddings, religious programming on radio and television).

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What have some churches in the United Kingdom done to promote themselves as relevant and available to the general population?
- What are some examples of outreach churches in the UK have been involved in that have as their focus the general population?
- In what ways do non-church members engage with the Christian church in the UK?
- What are some reasons that many people would feel embarrassed to have an association with the Christian church?
- How do contemporary legal decision support or challenge the presence of Christian faith in the UK?
- Would the absence of Christian churches be a loss for villages, towns and cities? Why or why not?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Christianity has risen to the challenge of growing secularism. This is evidenced in creative programs, outreach and special events designed to attract the non-Churched. Furthermore, lower attendance may not entail a loss of belief as people can believe without belonging.
- Christianity has withered as a result of the onslaught of new atheism, humanist attitudes and a growing number of the population who find church attendance irrelevant in a culture that provides alternative solutions to life's deepest issues.
- There is no single 'response' of the Church to secularism. Some churches have retreated from contemporary culture, forming a subculture of traditional beliefs and

practices; this is attractive to many. Other churches have used modern means to spread its time-honoured faith and yet other churches have adapted their beliefs and practices to suit the contemporary era. It is unclear which of these strategies, if any, are the most successful.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 2: The extent to which the UK can be called a Christian country

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The UK can be described as a Christian country merely because of how deeply embedded Christianity is embedded from its past.
- The UK can be described as a Christian country because of how influential Christianity is in society, politics and the media in contemporary life.
- It is a mistake to characterize the UK as Christian given the decline of the church and the rise of the 'no-religion' category; it may be more relevant to argue that Britain is multi-faith, spiritual or secular.
- The UK is between Christianity and secularism; it is by no means certain that Christianity will continue to decline, but it does not have the strength it once had.
- The continuing influence of the state Church in media, politics and communities (i.e. Bishops in the House of Lords) demonstrates that the UK is indeed Christian.
- Movements to end the influence of religion in the state both prove that Christianity remains powerful, but that its influence may be waning (i.e. Humanist UK's campaign against state funded faith schools).

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What signs do you see in your home, school, town, country (etc.) of this historic tie of Britain to Christianity?
- What evidence do you see of Christianity in the media: radio, music, movies, television, etc.?
- What signs do you see of atheism, secularism and the decline of the church?
- What percentage of your friends and family might say they are in the 'no religion' category? What would they mean by this phrase?
- Almost 30% of children in England and Wales attend faith schools, with many of these as state funded. Are you in favour of this? Against?
- What is the meaning of the word 'secularism'? What is the origin of this term?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- It is appropriate to call the UK a 'Christian country' not only because of its historic ties with this religion, but also because of the many ways in which the values, beliefs and practices of this religion continue to shape its culture – even for those who do not formally attend churches.
- It is inappropriate to call the UK a 'Christian country' because the people who make up this country, have rejected this religion and are engaged in building a secular country. Faith schools, bishops in the House of Lords, a state church and other signs of 'official Christianity' are nothing more than a 'religious hangover' from the past.
- The UK shows signs of a growing secularism but it too early to conclude that this means it is no longer a 'Christian country'. This is because of a strong 'implicit' presence of Christianity in the UK: many of those who categorise themselves as 'no religion' are receptive to spirituality, in times of crisis and celebration, a large

proportion of the population turn to the Church, and people hold values and attitudes that have clearly been formed by Christianity.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 3: The extent to which a scientist must be an atheist

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Most scientists are atheists, especially when you look past the faith-friendly language (e.g. references to God by Einstein and Hawking are not compatible with Christian beliefs).
- A significant number of scientists are theists (e.g. Polkinghorne and the study to which McGrath refers).
- It does not matter how many scientists are atheists or theists since science is a separate realm of enquiry than religion.
- If religion is a biological and psychological aberration, then scientists should turn away from belief.
- The characterisation of religion as at odds with science is not evidentially based; for instance, the charge that religion breeds violence is difficult to prove empirically.
- Atheism can be seen itself as a faith if it embraces scientism, the belief that science will eventually answer all of life's questions. Therefore, a scientist need not be an atheist.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Is belief in God helpful, unhelpful or neutral when considering scientific questions? Can you give any examples to support your views?
- How have scientists who are theists justified their faith?
- The division between religion and science is sometimes described as religion being concerned with 'why' and science with 'how'. Do you accept this? Why or why not?
- One explanation for religious belief is to treat it as a failed hypothesis. That is, it attempted to explain co-incidences in life; however, it has been surpassed by more accurate observations. Do you view religious faith as a 'hypothesis'?
- Is there any evidence against the view that religion breeds violence?
- Is there any evidence against the view that religion stifles science?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The pursuit of science will inevitably lead you to an atheist position simply because of the fact that the 'God hypothesis' has been shown to be false – and, not only false, but damaging to human progress and development.
- Belief that science leads to atheism itself is a kind of faith which involves believing that science explains everything – even before it has been explained. When religion is seen as a 'non-overlapping' phenomenon with science, it will be clear that scientists can hold to whatever faith they like without this adversely affecting their science.
- The answer to this question really depends both on what area of science in which one is working and what type of faith one espouses. For instance, there could be a high degree of compatibility between a liberal religious faith which includes theistic evolution and a scientific pursuit of environmental studies and a low degree of



compatibility between a fundamentalist religious faith which includes the theory of a young earth and a scientific study of cosmology focusing on the origins of the universe.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 4: Whether science has reduced the role of God in Christianity

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Belief in a personal, creator God will fade, as do beliefs in fictional childhood entities as scientific understanding improves. (e.g. 'God of the Gaps' approach).
- Natural selection as well as other cosmological theories have already replaced the 'God-hypothesis' for many people.
- Science does not have evidence to support any hypotheses about how life was created or why the universe supports life – therefore there will always be room for God in Christianity.
- Many Christian theologians do not embrace the 'god of the Gaps'; they believe that atheism has to answer why it is we live in an intelligible universe.
- Belief in God persists because Christians have not realised how science can fill the gap we have for meaning and purpose.
- This issue depends entirely on the definition one uses for the term 'God'. If God is interpreted literally (a supernatural being living in a heaven 'up there'), then it may be argued that science has challenged this view. However, has science challenged metaphorical views of God (God as the ground of all being).

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What are the similarities and differences between belief in God and belief in the tooth fairy?
- Does Natural Selection provide a compelling explanation for the appearance of design and order in the world?
- Has science explained how life came to be?
- How might the 'God of the Gaps' approach fail to describe the faith of many religious adherents?
- Can science, like religion, bring people a sense of inspiration, meaning and purpose? If so, how does this work?
- Have scientific breakthroughs been responsible for reducing the numbers of religious believers? Or, have other factors been at work?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Science has undoubtedly reduced the role of God in Christianity as is evidenced by many explanations for God being replaced by naturalistic views.
- The role of God has not been reduced in Christianity simply because most Christians never believed in a 'God of the Gaps' in the first place. Religious belief in God views God as the all-pervading force holding the universe together at a deeper level than any scientific observation.

The role of God has not been reduced in Christianity. This is because the truths that we are alone in the universe, that there is no life after death, and that there is no final justice other than what we create in society, are too hard for religious believers to swallow – even though science has ways to inspire, nurture and give meaning to our lives.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 5: The extent to which it is possible to be both a committed Christian and a religious pluralist

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- A Christian cannot be a pluralist because pluralism contradicts creedal beliefs about Christ
- A Christian cannot be a pluralist because pluralism is an 'anything goes' philosophy which waters down the concept of God.
- A Christian can be a pluralist because there are other ways to think about Jesus which maintain his importance for Christians.
- A Christian can be a pluralist because experience is at the heart of religion more than scripture and tradition.
- Inclusivism or Universalism are better answers than pluralism since they acknowledge truth outside of Christianity but are also Christocentric.
- One can only know their own context and background. A committed Christian can't be a pluralist because we have no access to truth beyond our particular context.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- How is Jesus Christ unique for Christians?
- If all religions are reflections of ultimate truth or reality, how can a pluralist avoid the charge that 'anything goes' when it comes to morality?
- Have all Christians at all times believed that Jesus was the God-Man? Is it possible to be a Christian without believing this?
- When thinking about more than one religion, can one say that there are any similarities between religious experiences? Could these similarities point to a 'core' reality behind all religions?
- What other ways are there to acknowledge truth outside of Christianity without becoming a pluralist?
- What are some Bible verses that appear to challenge pluralism and how might a pluralist handle these verses?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Not only is it possible to be a Christian and a pluralist, but truth demands it. On a Biblical level, it is a logical extension of the idea that the Logos is but one incarnation of God and that the focus of Christianity is on the experience of love not doctrines. Furthermore, there will be no peace in the world without peace amongst religions; this is obtained through a pluralist theology.
- Theological pluralism is a complete betrayal of the Christian message and mission. Why would Jesus, after all, issue the great commission of Matthew 28 if all religions were paths to God? Furthermore, there is no way to be faithful to church traditions other than to acknowledge a Christology which believes that Jesus has two natures: God and Man.

- The theoretical question on pluralism co-existing with Christian commitment is irrelevant since there are already many Christians in pews who are pluralists. These Christians believe that all religions provide paths to divine reality, yet they attend church and participate in their own traditions – no matter what theologians might debate.

### Theme 3: Significant social and historical developments in religious thought

Christianity Theme 3 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

#### Issue 6: The extent to which the Christian Bible promotes exclusivism

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The Bible does promote exclusivism not only through passages about devotion to the one God, but also in passages that speak of condemnation and judgement for those outside of the true path.
- Arguments against exclusivism may weaken belief in the Bible and therefore are rejected by many Christians
- There are passages in the Bible that do not speak in an exclusive or condemnatory manner of those outside of Christianity.
- If one explores the meaning of 'Love your neighbour' they will be led away from exclusivism.
- One can look at exclusivist statements as historically conditioned beliefs.
- The Bible reflects a 'tribal' mentality (us vs. them) that is found in all primitive (and not so primitive!) cultures.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- When you look at the so-call 'exclusivist' Bible passages in their context, is it true that their intention is to show all other religions as 'false' or 'wrong'?
- Could Christianity survive if Christians did not believe it is 'more true' than other religions?
- Can you think of a character outside of Israel in the Hebrew Bible or a character outside of Christianity in the New Testament whose spirituality was spoken of positively?
- Does 'love thy neighbour' apply between Christians and those who are not Christian? If so, does love always demand that Christians attempt to convert others?
- What situations did the earliest Christians face that might have pushed them towards believing that those outside their group were 'wrong'?
- If exclusivism is correct, how many people go to Heaven or Hell?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The Bible is plainly exclusivistic. Any attempt to argue otherwise is mere sophistry. This is supported not only by numerous passages about the fate of those who do not worship Jesus, but also by the clear focus on Jesus and his followers speaking the truth in a corrupt and fallen world.
- The Bible reveals a God who is inclusivistic rather than exclusivistic. There is simply no way that a loving God would condemn people to hell based on their lack of belief. When one takes a deeper look at the Bible there is ample evidence that God takes one's context and circumstances into account if one is outside of Christianity.
- The Bible is a mixed-bag when it comes to exclusivism. It does promote exclusivism in places; inclusivism in other places and even pluralism can be seen as hinted at – if one follows the Biblical logic of love. The key to interpreting which of these Biblical messages should be most important to Christians is not the frequency with which they appear in the Bible or in Christian tradition but in how God/Ultimate reality leads people in their spiritual experiences.

## Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Christianity Theme 4 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 1: Whether the work of the World Council of Churches can be viewed as a success or a failure.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The World Council of Churches is a success in terms of numbers and diversity of membership.
- There are deep divisions lurking just beneath the surface of these impressive numbers (such as Orthodox objections to liberal theology and Roman Catholic rejection of the ordination of women).
- A historical perspective which considers centuries of divisions can see the WCC as a success.
- The vitality of the programs of the WCC around the world demonstrates its success.
- The tendency of member churches to believe that they are, ultimately, the true church could ultimately lead to the failure of the WCC.
- Some Christians believe that this is not about success or failure, but about obedience to the attitude of Jesus in John 17:20-22.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Which major church bodies are in the WCC? Which ones are not?
- What do evangelical or fundamentalist churches find difficult about the 'tone' or 'direction' of the WCC?
- What are some factors that have prevented the Roman Catholic Church from becoming a full member?
- What have been the attitudes of the Eastern Orthodox Church to the ecumenical movement since 1920?
- What have some of the programs of the WCC achieved?
- In the Gospel of John 17:20-22, what was Jesus' desire for the church and why did he desire it?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The work of the WCC is an unqualified success, given the numbers and diversity of Christians involved and when compared the status of the movement prior to the 20th century
- The WCC has failed to include the world's largest church body (the Roman Catholic Church), as well as many Protestant denominations and independent Protestant church bodies. Various Orthodox churches also struggle to stay involved. The 'liberal' direction of the WCC combined with its 'watered down' approach to theology and mission mean that it will never achieve its stated goals.
- Since the Christian Church has existed for 2000 years and the WCC for less than 100 years, it is too early to conclude if it has been a success or failure. There are signs of strength and weakness. However, many Christians are moved to work toward Ecumenical progress without regard to immediate success or failure because of the words of Jesus in John 17.

## Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Christianity Theme 4 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### **Issue 2: The extent to which the non-membership of the Roman Catholic Church affects the aims of the World Council of Churches.**

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- The aim of spiritual sharing is being met through present participation of the Roman Catholic Church in the WCC.
- However, the aim of full 'visible unity' seems a distant reality given the different approaches to understanding 'church'.
- The Roman Catholic Church has full membership on two program areas of the WCC
- Changes within denominations that make up the WCC have an adverse effect on the Roman Catholic church feeling it can work with the WCC.
- The self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as the manifestation of Christ's church on earth rules out unity with other Christian churches.
- The WCC's aim is not to be a 'super-church', but a resource for Christian unity; therefore, non-membership does not affect its goal.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What are the groups and initiatives in which the Roman Catholic Church is engaged with the WCC?
- How does the Roman Catholic Church regard non-Catholic denominations?
- What does the word 'catholic' mean?
- What were some key pronouncements about the ecumenical movement (both positive and negative) in the 20th century?
- What changes in the Church of England in the late 20th century put a strain on Anglican-Roman-Catholic relations and how are these strains reflected in the WCC?
- What is the current Pope's attitude or relationship to the World Council of Churches?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The complex relationship the Roman Catholic Church has with the WCC does not in any way affect the aims of the WCC, since ecumenism is a journey rather than a destination.
- Given the relatively brief time the WCC has existed compared to the lifespan of the Christian Church, Roman Catholic participation could be seen as positive and ground-breaking even though they are not full members. After all, the World Council of Churches has aims other than visible unity.
- The refusal of the Roman Catholic Church to become a full member is a huge impediment to one of the chief aims of the WCC: visible unity. As long as the Roman Catholic Church sees itself as the only true expression of Christ's Church on earth, the WCC will be frustrated in its aims.

## Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Christianity Theme 4 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 3: The strengths and weaknesses of the Charismatic Movement

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- It is a strength that the Charismatic Movement emphasises the experiential dimension of Christianity.
- Trinitarian theology that has been too focused on the Father and Son; the Charismatic movement addresses this imbalance.
- The Charismatic Movement could be seen to devalue non-charismatic worship and create 'second-class' Christians.
- The Charismatic Movement has an imbalanced focus on the more 'miraculous' spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament.
- The Charismatic Movement has the potential to unite Christians since it is more ecumenical than Pentecostal denominations.
- The Charismatic Movement has the potential to divide Christians by its evangelical stance on theology and judging those outside its movement.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Has Christianity in the UK become too 'dry and dull'? Does it need the charismatic movement to liven it up?
- Does the Christian church outside of the Charismatic movement usually focus on only two members of the Trinity (the Father and the Son), without showing the relevance of the Spirit?
- Do the extra-ordinary experiences of millions of Charismatic Christians worldwide constitute evidence for the validity of religious experiences?
- Is the charismatic movement actually more ecumenical than the World Council of Churches?
- According to the Bible can one be a 'fully fledged' Christian without speaking in tongues?
- Is the happiness, joy and sense of 'release' in the Charismatic movement a positive phenomenon regardless of whether one believes in God or not?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- The charismatic movement is incredibly strong in terms of revitalising the Christian church; this is shown not only in numbers, but by the ecumenical nature of its expression across all major Christian denominations.
- The charismatic church is incredibly weak in that it divides Christians into 'haves' and 'have-nots'. It also rests upon personal experience and charismatic leaders; the history of the Christian church has shown that movements need to become more traditional in order to survive.
- The charismatic movement can be judged to be strong from a secular perspective in that (i) it provides positive psychological experiences to a broad cross-section of the



population and (ii) has revived an often failing institution and given a spiritual home to immigrant communities in Britain.

## Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Christianity Theme 4 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 4: Whether a natural explanation for charismatic experiences conflicts with the religious value of the experience.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- As the context and source of charismatic experiences is distinctly religious for adherents, naturalistic explanations would threaten this.
- There are many reasons to doubt the religious source of charismatic experiences and therefore the religious values associated with these claims.
- Naturalistic explanations can explain charismatic experiences and show that they may have some value to those who are especially needy.
- It is possible to accept both natural and supernatural sources for charismatic experiences and to find ways, therefore, to place a high value on these experiences from both a religious and non-religious point of view.
- It is difficult to see how charismatic Christians would ever accept a non-religious value being assigned on their experiences.
- What matters is the 'fruit' of the experience rather than its source. If charismatic experiences lead to better lives, then their source (natural or supernatural) does not matter.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- Are there naturalistic explanations for speaking in tongues?
- What are the naturalistic explanations for other reports of miraculous experiences in Charismatic worship?
- If one adopts a naturalistic explanation for charismatic Christian experiences, does that mean that these experiences have no value? Why or why not?
- Does a naturalistic explanation rule out a super-naturalistic one?
- Can one achieve similar levels of joy and euphoria as those in Charismatic worship in secular experiences? What are some examples?
- What are the elements in Charismatic worship leading up to the experience of being 'slain in the Spirit'.

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- A naturalistic explanation for charismatic experiences replaces super-naturalistic explanations since the latter reflect a 'God of the Gaps' orientation. Furthermore, contemporary understandings of psychology make it likely that charismatic worshippers are tapping into aspects of the brain which are underutilised in daily life, triggered by psychological experiences in worship.
- There is no conflict between naturalist and super-naturalist explanations of charismatic experiences since naturalist explanations point to the location of the experiences in the brain centres but do not explain why those brain centres are active in the first place – the 'Spirit' provides the 'why'.
- Though there are naturalistic explanations, these are likely to have no impact whatsoever on Charismatic Christians – even if these explanations prove a super-naturalist orientation to be incorrect. This has to do with the human need to have a

full range of emotional experiences which are, for some people, only accessible through certain forms of religion. Therefore, one could argue for the value of charismatic experiences even with naturalistic explanations.

## Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Christianity Theme 4 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 5: Whether the political and ethical foundations of liberation theology are more important than any religious foundations.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Liberation theologians have been influenced by a Marxist analysis of economics and a Marxist conclusion about the violent force needed to institute change.
- The Vatican has quite rightly been concerned about the atheism, materialism and loss of religious freedom that has accompanied the Marxist revolution in the Soviet Union.
- Liberation theologians are not politicians, they are pastors concerned for the welfare of their people.
- Jesus spoke about money and possessions more than any other subject; therefore it is only natural that Christianity develops a political aspect – you cannot separate the two.
- The Bible does not draw a line between faith and political realities – this is evident from the Exodus, through the prophetic movements of the Hebrew Scriptures to the first sermon of Jesus in which he announced liberation.
- Marxism and Christianity are incompatible due to the former's focus on materialism, atheism and violence.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- To what degree did Jesus' movement and teachings concern themselves with social realities and social change?
- Did any priests in Latin America take up arms?
- How did liberation theology get started?
- Are base ecclesial communities primarily concerned with politics?
- Is the study of God a spiritual or political form of learning?
- What passages of the Bible speak about economic and political liberation?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Liberation theology is really just Marxism in disguise; the religious elements are twisted to support an essentially secular, materialistic and atheist movement.
- Liberation theology comes from a religious foundation; it has been created by religious adherents, is for religious adherents and seeks to interpret Christian faith in today's world.
- The question depends on how the terms 'religious' or 'theology' are defined; a 'spiritual' definition which separates faith from history vs. a more 'holistic' approach to that term will determine the answer to this question.

## Theme 4: Religious practices that shape religious identity

Christianity Theme 4 DEF considers six starting points for evaluation focus.

### Issue 6: The extent to which liberation theology offered a cultural challenge to the Roman Catholic Church.

The following six points may be used as a starting point in developing a suitable argument:

- Liberation theology has made inroads into the vocabulary and topics of discussion in the Roman Catholic Church in, at least, superficial ways.
- It can be argued that liberation theology has made stronger inroads amongst the Bishops of Latin America than at the Vatican.
- Reactions across the Roman Catholic Church to base ecclesial communities reveal both reception and resistance to liberation theology.
- The journey of Pope Francis with liberation theology reveals that there is no static view of liberation theology in the Roman Catholic Church and that it may be growing in its influence.
- Catholics across the world are sympathetic to the suffering of the poor as is illustrated by the focus on the 'preferential option to the poor'.

Key questions that may arise could be:

- What messages at Vatican II especially inspired Liberation Theologians
- What does 'preferential option for the poor' mean?
- Why did Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger reject liberation theology?
- What has been Pope Francis' reaction to liberation theology (both when he was a bishop and now)?
- What aspects of Roman Catholicism appear to be the opposite of (or opposed to) the concerns of Latin American Liberation Theologians and what aspects appear to be aligned with this movement?

Possible conclusions to some arguments put forward could be:

- Liberation Theology does not offer a cultural challenge to the Catholic church simply because the Church accepts and promotes its most fundamental principles of a preferential option for the poor, the establishing of base communities without priests and instituting practical help for those suffering.
- Liberation Theology hugely challenges an institutional church bent on a patriarchal use of power, with priests and sacramentalism at the centre, quietism on political matters and helping people become 'spiritual' at the risk of prolonging their suffering and misery.
- It is difficult to know the full extent of the challenge of Liberation Theology because the 'culture' of the Catholic church is not monolithic – it is diverse. Gustavo Gutierrez's invitation to the Vatican and harsh criticism by Pope Francis of capitalist systems seem to reflect that the Church embraces as many themes as it might reject – more time is needed to assess the real impact of Liberation theology on a diverse church.