

Topic 10.1.1 The meaning, and importance for Christians, of believing in God as Unity and Trinity

KEY WORDS

Catechism – official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church

Creeds – statements of Christian belief.

Monotheism – belief in one God.

Salvation – the act of delivering from sin, or saving from evil.

Trinity – the belief that God is three in one.

Unity – God's way of being one.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

Exodus 20:2–3

'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this': "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Mark 12:29

We believe in one God.

The beginning of the Nicene Creed

The meaning of believing in God as Unity and Trinity

Christian beliefs are that there is only one God (God's **Unity**) who reveals himself to the world in three persons (the Holy Trinity). Believing in one God is called **monotheism**. Christians believe that God is One because the nature of the universe God has made shows oneness. It is a universe (uni meaning one) not a multiverse (multi meaning many). Everything in the universe has a pattern (such as the whorls in the centre of flowers or finger prints), indicating it was made by one God.

Most Christians believe that although God is one, he is experienced in the world as a **Trinity** – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a complex idea which the Church tries to explain by using the words 'person' and 'substance'. When Christians speak of God in his Unity, they refer to God's substance. When Christians speak of God at work in the world they refer to the three persons of God:

- The Father who created everything and to whom Christians pray when they say 'Our Father'.
- The Son who revealed God in his life on Earth and who saves people from **sin**.
- The Holy Spirit who inspires Christians and brings the presence of God into their lives.

Christians worship one God. The Trinity is a unity. Although the Church teaches that this is the great mystery, it is sometimes explained by symbols such as the shamrock.

Why it is important for Christians to believe in God's Unity

- The teachings of the **Bible** in both Old and New Testaments show very clearly that there is only one God. As Christians believe the Bible reveals God, God must therefore be a unity.
- The belief that God is a Unity is the first of the **Ten Commandments** which all Christians accept as God's rules about belief and behaviour.
- God's Unity was taught by Jesus as the greatest commandment, and Christians must believe and follow the teachings of Jesus, God's Son.
- God's Unity is the teaching of the Catholic Church (the **Magisterium**), as seen in the **Creeds**, the **Catechism** and the

writings of the **saints**, and Catholic Christians must believe and follow the teachings of the Church.

- Christians believe that God is **omnipotent**, if there were other gods, then they would have some power and so the Christian God would not be all-powerful. Only if God is a Unity can God be all-powerful, which is why it is so important.

Why it is important for Christians to believe in God as the Trinity

- The Trinity helps Christians understand the different ways that God has shown his presence in the world. God the Father helps Christians understand the power and creativity and his care for the world and its peoples. God the Son helps Christians understand the love of God, the sacrifice of God leading to **salvation** from sin and the promise of eternal life. The Holy Spirit helps Christians to understand the presence of God in the world and the strength that it brings to Christians.
- The **baptism** of Jesus as recorded in the **Gospel** descriptions clearly show that God is a trinity – the Father speaks, the Son is baptised and the Spirit descends in the form of a **dove**. If this is how God was revealed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it must be important.
- Belief in the Trinity is a part of the **Apostolic Tradition**. The **apostles** such as St Peter and St Paul refer to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and Christians must believe the teachings of the apostles.
- Belief in God as Trinity as well as Unity is the teaching of the Church through the Creeds and the Catechism, and the teaching of the Church should be the basis of a Catholic Christian's life.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church 234 states: *The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life.*

The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 253

Exam focus

Quality of Written Communication

Explain questions (part c in the examination) are where your Quality of Written Communication is tested, so you should answer these questions in a formal style of English, be careful with your spelling and try to use some specialist vocabulary (in this topic Trinity, Holy Spirit, salvation, Catechism, Magisterium, omnipotent would all be specialist vocabulary).

Questions

- | | |
|--|---|
| b Do you think all Christians should believe in the Trinity?
Give two reasons for your point of view. | 4 |
| c Explain why belief in God's unity is important for Christians. | 8 |
| d 'You can't believe that God is both one and three.'
Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion. | 3 |
| Give reasons why some people may disagree with you. | 3 |

Exam Tip

- c 'Explain' means give reasons. To answer this question you should use four reasons from this topic, and make each of them into a short paragraph. For tips on Quality of Written Communication see opposite.

SUMMARY

Christians believe in the Unity of God and also that God is a trinity.

God's Unity helps them understand the power and importance of God because there is only one God and Christians should worship him.

God's Trinity helps them to understand God's activity in the world as Father, Son and Holy Spirit

God's Unity and Trinity are important as they are part of the teaching of the Bible and the Church.

Topic 10.1.2 The meaning, and importance for Christians, of believing in God as the Father

KEY WORD

Faith – firm belief without logical proof.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty.

Apostles' Creed

I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:18

By calling God 'Father', the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 239



The meaning of believing in God as the Father

- Believing that God is the Father means that the father–child relationship should be the same as a Christian's relationship with God.
- It also shows that God creates human life like a father does. God is not a creator who creates and then leaves his creation to get on with things, he has a relationship of love and care with his creation.
- As their Father, God will provide for his children – in the story of creation it is written that the Earth is given to Adam and Eve and they are told that it will provide food for them.
- In the **Lord's Prayer** or 'Our Father', Christians learn that God will provide their daily bread and protect them from evil precisely because he is 'our Father'.
- Because God is the Father, Christians can turn to God as they would to a human Father when they are in need.

The importance for Christians of believing in God as the Father

- The Bible shows very clearly that Jesus referred to God as his Father. Jesus also told his disciples to call God, Father. The teachings of the Bible and of Jesus are of supreme importance as they are the basis of the **faith**.
- Every time Christians recite the **Apostles' Creed** they say that they believe in God as the Father Almighty, showing how important it is.
- The Catechism teaches Catholics to call God Father, showing how important belief in the fatherhood of God is.
- The importance of God's fatherhood is shown by the fact that without his fatherly care, he would not have sent Jesus to explain how Christians should live and to save people from their sins.
- It allows Christians to have a personal relationship with God because as their father they can talk to God through prayer and the Bible shows that Christians should pray to God as Father.
- It is a basic Christian belief as shown in the fact that children are taught from a young age that God is their heavenly Father. One of the first prayers they are taught is called the 'Our Father'.

◀ Charles de la Fosse painted God as Father in this way in 1668. Is this the way you think he should be drawn?



This photo shows the Holy Trinity from the Mosol Altarpiece, 1450–70

Exam focus

What do you think?

In these questions (part b in the examination) you must decide what you think about the issues and ideas you study. For this topic you need to think about:

- whether it is a good idea to call God Father
- what it means to call God Father
- why calling God Father is important for Christians.

The questions are meant to be quite easy and to get full marks you just need to give two reasons.

Questions

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| b | Do you think Christians should call God Father? Give two reasons for your point of view. | 4 |
| c | Explain why belief in God as Father is important for Christians. | 8 |
| d | 'God should not be called Father.' | |
| i | Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion. | 3 |
| ii | Give reasons why some people may disagree with you. | 3 |

Exam Tip

- b You should already have thought about this, and you just have to give two reasons for your opinion. For example if you think Christians should call God Father, you could use these two reasons:
- Jesus told his disciples to call God Father so Christians today should do the same.
 - God creates life like a father does so we should call him Father.

The Lords Prayer

*Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy Will be done,
on Earth, as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.*

Luke 11: 2–4

SUMMARY

Believing in God as Father means that Christians can have a relationship with God like they can with a human father. It also means that God will love, care and provide for them. This is important for Catholics because it is the teaching of the Bible, Jesus and the Church. It is also important as it gives Christians God's love and salvation.

Topic 10.1.3 The meaning, and importance for Christians, of believing in God as Creator

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

God saw all that he had made and it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

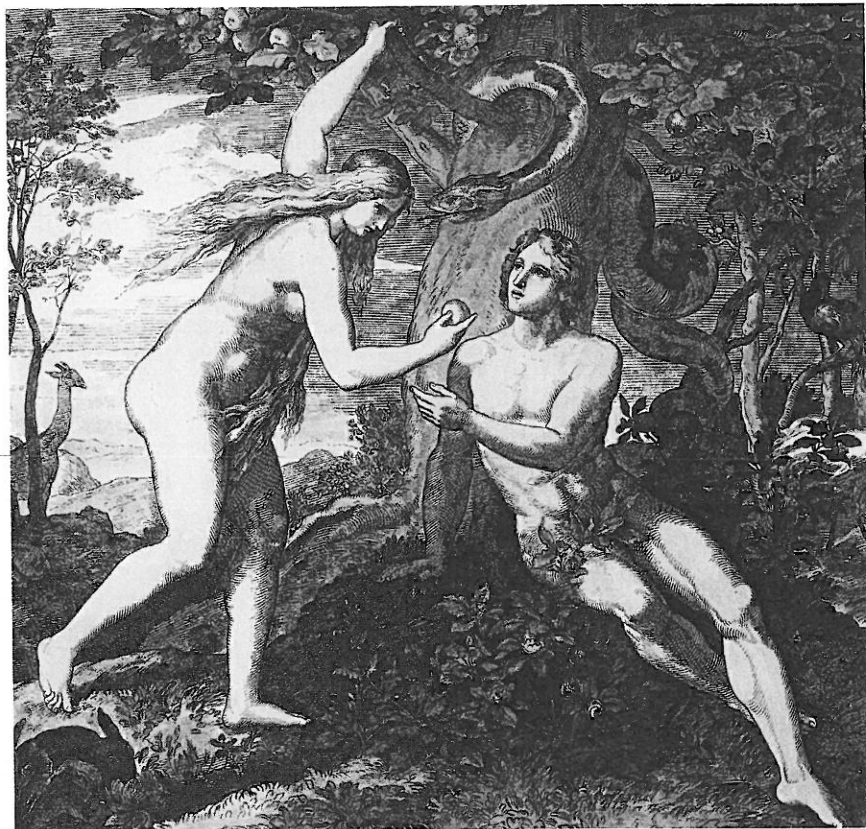
Psalms 19:1-2

In the creation of the world and of man, God gave the first and universal witness to his almighty love and his wisdom, the first proclamation of the 'plan of his loving goodness', which finds its goal in the new creation in Christ.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 315

The meaning of believing in God as the Creator

- God created the universe and all the things in it. Therefore this life is not an accident. Life has a meaning and purpose given to it by God.
- God created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), therefore he is all-powerful and is the cause of all life.
- As God has created the universe, and God is good, the universe itself must be good.
- God created human beings in his image, which means humans are a special creation.
- God created human beings last. They were the ultimate creation made after the rest of creation. This shows that they are the most important part, the pinnacle of God's creation.
- God as Creator has given humans the responsibility of caring for and safeguarding his Creation. This is important as it gives Christian life added purpose.



This picture of Adam and Eve by Theodore De Bry, 1590, shows how Genesis describes creation. Do you think this is factually correct?

The importance for Christians of believing in God as the Creator

It is important for Christians to believe that God is the creator because it shows:

- God's omnipotence. The Creeds and the Catechism teach that God is the Father Almighty – only an all-powerful God could create the universe.
- that the universe is not an accident. It was created by God who is good for a good purpose. We can find this purpose in the faith and teachings of the Church.
- that life is sacred because God is the creator of it. Those things which God creates must be like him, **holy**, so we need to treat creation carefully and with respect. God as Creator has given humans the responsibility of caring for and safeguarding his Creation.
- God's love for humans. God created the world for humans and gave them their purpose in living.
- that God continues to be the Creator. His work did not stop with the creation of humans, he continues to care for the world and show his love for the world by his creative power in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which brought salvation.

Questions

- b Do you think it is important to believe in God as Creator? Give two reasons for your point of view. **4**
- c Explain what it means for Christians to believe in God as Creator. **8**
- d 'It does not matter whether or not God created the universe.'
 - i Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion. **3**
 - ii Give reasons why some people may disagree with you **3**

Exam Tip

- d Use the evaluation technique from this page. Arguments for the statement could be the reasons why it is important in this topic. Arguments against are likely to come from your class discussions or your own ideas such as:
 - the argument ignores the evidence that the universe is not created by God, for example the Big Bang and evolution (see Topic 3.1.5)
 - only people who believe in God would think it matters, everyone else can quite happily accept that the world is just there. It does not matter because now the world is there we can live in it and treat it how we wish.

Exam focus

Evaluation questions

(part d on the examination)

- Decide what you think about the statement.
- Give at least three brief reasons, or two longer reasons, or a paragraph reason, supporting your point of view.
- Look at the opposite point of view and give at least three brief reasons, or two longer reasons, or a paragraph reason, for why people have this view.

The evaluation questions mean that you must always be aware not only of your own point of view about a topic, but also about the opposite point of view.

REMEMBER

One of your points of view should always be a Catholic one.

SUMMARY

Christians believe that God is the creator of the universe and all that is in it including human beings. This means that life is good and that life has a meaning and purpose given to it by God.

It is important to Christians that God is the creator of the world as it shows his power, his love and the relationship between God and humans. It is also important because if God created the world it means humans should regard it as holy and treat living things accordingly.

Topic 10.1.4 The meaning, and importance for Christians, of believing that Jesus is the Son of God

KEY WORDS

Atonement – reconciliation between God and humanity.

Compassion – a feeling of pity which makes one want to help the sufferer.

Incarnation – the belief that God took human form in Jesus.

Virgin Birth – the belief that Jesus was not conceived through sex.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 7:21

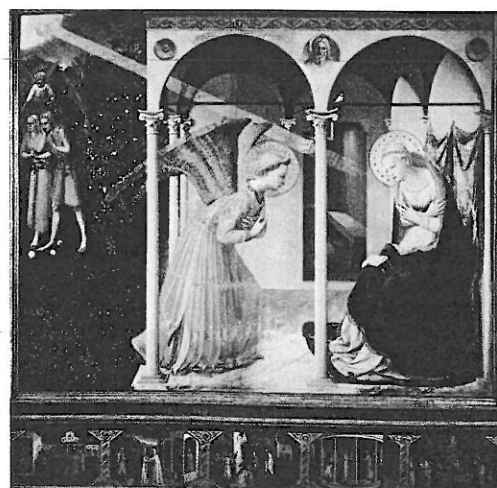
Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.'

John 6:32

The meaning of believing that Jesus is the Son of God

- Jesus is God **incarnated**. This means Jesus is God on Earth living as a human and experiencing life as a human. This means that in the life of Jesus, humans can see the nature of God.
- As Son of God, Christians believe that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. The Catechism says 'Jesus **Christ** possesses two natures, one divine and the other human, not confused, but united in the one person of God's Son' (481).
- As God's Son, Jesus had God's powers on Earth, which explains why he was able to work miracles, not only healing people, but also calming storms and walking on water, for example.
- Jesus was conceived by God. It was God's will that Jesus was incarnated, therefore Jesus was not conceived in the normal way. Christians believe that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, therefore Mary remained a virgin and Jesus was born sinless. This is referred to as the **Virgin Birth**.
- As the Son of God, Jesus' death was not a normal death, but a **sacrifice** for the sins of the world, bringing God's salvation to humans.
- As Son of God, Jesus rose from the dead so bringing not only salvation from sin, but also eternal life.
- It means Christians can worship Jesus because he is God, the second person of the Trinity. The Bible teaches that only God should be worshipped and that **idolatry** is a sin. However, Jesus as the incarnate Son of God gives Christians a person to worship.
- Jesus is the Son of God. He was conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit and not by sex. This is an important part of Roman Catholic belief; they call it the Virgin Birth.

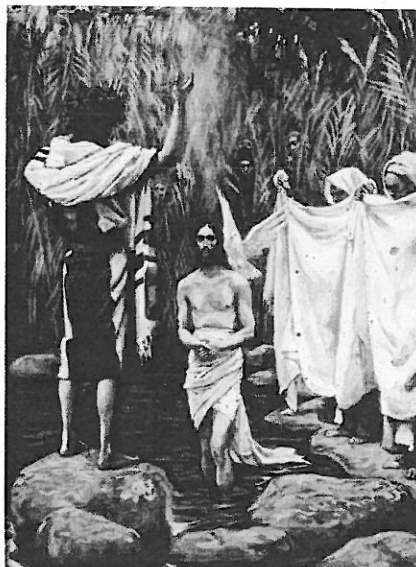
In this painting by Fra Angelico called *The Annunciation*, the Holy Spirit is visible in the left-hand corner and the image of God is in the centre above Mary and the Angel Gabriel. Do you think this is a good way to show Catholic beliefs about God the Son?



The importance for Christians of believing that Jesus is the Son of God

- Only the Son of God could bring salvation from sin. Sin prevented people from having a full relationship with God. The sacrifice of God the Son brought **forgiveness** of sins and **reconciliation** to God, which also gave people the chance to enter heaven.
- Believing in Jesus as the Son of God also gives Christians the chance to see what God is like. The love and **compassion** shown by God's Son inspires Christians today to share God's love.
- Believing that Jesus is the Son of God makes his life and teaching so much more important. If Christians follow the teachings of Jesus and try to live by his example, they know they are living as God wants them to.
- Believing that Jesus is the Son of God is a teaching of the **Cree**ds and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which all Catholics should believe.
- Believing that Jesus is the Son of God is important because only God's Son could institute the **Mass** – God comes into people's lives as Jesus becomes present in the bread and wine at Mass.

James J. Tissot, *The Baptism of Jesus* ► (1886–96). When Jesus was baptised a voice from heaven was heard to say, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' Luke 3:22



The title 'Son of God' signifies the unique and eternal relationship of Jesus Christ to God his Father: he is the only Son of the Father, he is God himself. To be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 454

Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, 'The Son of man has authority on Earth to forgive sins' and exercises this divine power: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Further, by virtue of his divine authority, he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1441

Questions

- b Do you think Jesus is God incarnated? Give two reasons for your point of view. **4**
- c Explain why it is important for Christians to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. **8**
- d 'Jesus is God.'
 - i Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion. **3**
 - ii Give reasons why some people may disagree with you. **3**

Exam Tip

- c 'Explain' means give reasons. To answer this question you should use four reasons from this topic, and make each of them into a short paragraph. For tips on Quality of Written Communication, look at page 107.

SUMMARY

Christian belief in Jesus as the Son of God means that Jesus was both man and God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was God on Earth. His example and teaching show Christians how God wants them to live.

It is important that Jesus is the Son of God because:

- it explains that there is a special relationship between God and Jesus
- his life shows what God is like
- his life and death bring salvation and eternal life.

Topic 10.1.5 The meaning, and importance for Christians, of believing in the Holy Spirit

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

Matthew 3:16

The Holy Spirit, who has led the chosen people by inspiring the authors of the Sacred Scriptures, opens the hearts of believers to understand their meaning. This same Spirit is actively present in the Eucharistic celebration.

Pope Benedict XVI on World Youth Day, April 2006

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:4

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1831

The meaning of believing in the Holy Spirit

- Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who, with the Father and the Son, is to be worshipped.
- Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the means by which God communicates with humans revealing God's presence in the world. In the Old Testament, the Spirit is called *ruah*, meaning breath, air, **wind**, that is, a presence which can only be felt not seen.
- Christians believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible by encouraging the writers of the Bible and guiding their writing to reveal the nature and will of God.
- Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the means by which God assists the Church in its task of preserving the Apostolic Tradition and in helping the Magisterium to formulate teaching.
- Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the means by which all the sacraments of the Church put believers into communion with Christ.
- Christians believe that through the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, God can strengthen and empower Christians today.

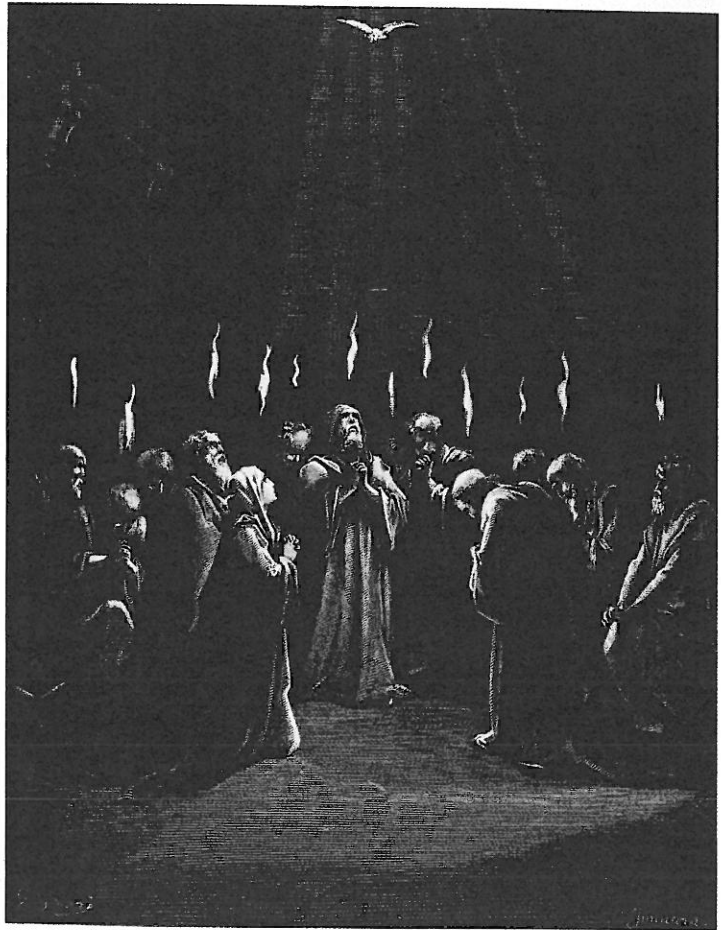


This icon of the descent of the Holy Spirit shows the gifts of the Holy Spirit being given to the apostles at **Pentecost**.

The importance for Christians of believing in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is important for Christians because:

- It is the third person of the Trinity and is God's presence in the world.
- Through the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation, it purifies people from sin, enabling them to have a relationship with God and enter eternal life.
- It inspires the teachings of the Church so the Church has a direct link to God and this means that the teachings of the Church should be obeyed as if they were the teachings of God.
- It gives guidance to the Church in the election of the Pope and the choice of the leaders of the Church, assuring Christians that the leaders are approved by God.
- Its gifts enable Christians to live lives full of **charity**, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity. This power of the Holy Spirit is important as it helps Christians live the lives Jesus wants them to live.
- It gives power to people, enabling them to live their Christian vocations fully.



In this painting the Holy Spirit is shown as tongues of fire descending on the disciples at Pentecost.

Questions

- b Do you think the Holy Spirit is important for Christians today? Give two reasons for your point of view. **4**
- c Explain what it means for Christians to believe in the Holy Spirit. **8**
- d 'The Holy Spirit is active in the world today.'
 - i Do you agree? Give reasons for your opinion. **3**
 - ii Give reasons why some people may disagree with you. **3**

Exam Tip

- b You should already have thought about this, and you just have to give two reasons for your opinion. If you think the Holy Spirit is important for Christians today, you could use two reasons from why believing in the Holy Spirit is important from this topic.

SUMMARY

Believing in the Holy Spirit means believing in the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the way God communicates with the world and who can be worshipped with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is important because Christians believe it:

- inspired the Bible
- guides the Church
- purifies from sin
- gives believers the presence and power of God.