Christian Sacraments and Baptism Summary Sheet

(Pages 40-41 in the Christianity textbook)

This summary sheet is to help you learn about Christian sacraments and about baptism. According to the AQA specification you need to know the following things:

‘The role and meaning of the sacraments:

• the meaning of sacrament

• the sacrament of baptism and its significance for Christians; infant and believers’ baptism;

* different beliefs about infant baptism’

Terminology

**baptism** - a ceremony involving water by which someone joins the Church

**believer’s baptism** - (as opposed to infant baptism) baptism of people who have decided *for themselves* to become Christians

**Catholic Church** - the largest type of Christianity based in Rome with the Pope as overall leader

**christening** - baptism of babies

**font** - a basin in which babies are baptized

**grace** - kindness or help that has not been deserved/earned

**infant baptism** - baptism of babies/small children whose parents choose for them and take the vows on the children’s behalf

**Orthodox** - traditional Christianity from eastern Europe, west Asia and north Africa

**Protestant** - a type of Christianity that broke away (protested) from the Catholic Church

**sacrament** - a special ceremony in which someone receives grace from God (e.g. baptism)

What are sacraments?

Sacraments are **ceremonies** through which believers receive grace (special help) from God. In the **Catholic** Church there are **seven sacraments**:

1. baptism
2. Holy Communion/ Eucharist
3. confirmation (when you get older and take your baptism vows for yourself)
4. marriage
5. holy orders (being a priest/monk)
6. reconciliation (confession of sins to a priest)
7. anointing the sick.

**Protestants** believe there are only **two sacraments**: baptism and communion.

Why are sacraments important?

1. Some Christians believe that something **supernatural** happens when they receive the sacraments and that **God changes them** somehow.
2. Others believe that the sacraments are symbolic and that actions and physical things (like water, bread and wine) are just there to **represent deeper truths** about God and his people.
3. The sacraments help Christians in their **relationship** with God.

Baptism

In the Bible, nearly all people who become Christians get baptized in water. Even Jesus gets baptized and the voice of God the Father is heard from heaven and the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove. It is expected that all **new Christians** will be baptized and take **vows** as a sign of commitment to God. This is why in traditional churches the **font is near the entrance** to the church, symbolising entry into the Kingdom of God.

Vows

At baptism the person taking the vows says:

* ‘I renounce [give up] evil;
* ‘I repent of my sins;
* ‘I turn to Christ.’

Infant baptism

The first Christians were adults when they became Christians so were baptized as adults. Traditional Christians today (e.g. Catholics, Church of England, Orthodox) have their babies baptized.

1. This is often called **christening**.
2. The baby will have **two godparents** whose job is to help with the Christian upbringing of the child.
3. The **parents take the vows** on the child’s behalf.
4. The baptism happens in a **font**.
5. The priest puts **water** on the baby’s head and prays.
6. The **priest says** ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’
7. Sometimes the **sign of the cross** is made on the baby’s head using oil.
8. The **congregation** welcome the baby as a new member.
9. A **candle** may be lit and white may be worn.

People **do infant baptism** because:

1. Some believe that the baby will go to **hell** if he/she is not baptized and dies young.
2. They want to bring God’s protection and **blessing** on the child.
3. The baby should be as much a **part of the Christian community** as anyone else.

Some people **disagree with infant baptism** because:

1. The **vows** make no sense if you don’t take them yourself.
2. The baby has **no choice** and may decide not to be a Christian when they grow up.
3. There are no examples of it in the **Bible**.

Believer’s baptism

Some Protestants practise only believer’s baptism. This means that they will **not baptize babies** who are too young to understand or choose for themselves. Children may get baptized in these churches but they must understand what it’s about and choose for themselves. Examples of churches that do this are **Baptists and Pentecostals**.

The person getting baptized is often lowered into a pool of water and put **completely under** for a second before being **brought back up**. This symbolises:

1. **Dying to your old life and rising again** with Christ (who rose from the dead) to a new life;
2. Being **cleansed** from sin.