Pilgrimage in Christianity Summary Sheet

(Pages 46-47 in the Christianity textbook)

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

‘The role and importance of pilgrimage ... including:

• two contrasting examples of Christian pilgrimage: Lourdes and Iona’

Some terminology is obvious in meaning but in the exam you will be asked to give definitions of words so that is why such key terms are laid out below. As always, try to be very clear in your mind on the differences between Protestant and Catholic traditions. Making a table of these will help you.

Terminology

**abbey**  - a place of worship used by monks

**the Holy Land** - the main country where the Bible events happened (also called Israel or Palestine)

**intercession of the saints** – in the Roman Catholic Church, the idea of asking dead saints in heaven to pray for you

**Old Testament** - the first part of the Christian Bible (also called the Torah/Jewish Bible/Hebrew Bible)

**penance -** a Roman Catholic idea that a person who has sinned should do something to show that they are sorry, e.g. going on a pilgrimage

**pilgrim** - a person going on a pilgrimage

**pilgrimage**  - a journey to a holy place for religious reasons

**relics** - holy objects relating to saints or events from the Bible, e.g. bones of saints, items of clothing or nails from the cross of Christ

**rosary**  - in Roman Catholicism, a series of set prayers which the worshipper remembers using a string of beads, slightly similar to a Buddhist mala

**saint**  - a holy person

**Virgin Mary** - the mother of Jesus

What is a pilgrimage?

This is a journey to a holy place. The place may be considered holy because of miracles there or because a famous holy person has lived there or did something famous. Examples include: Walsingham (visions of the Virgin Mary); Santiago de Compostela (Spain); the Holy Land (life of Jesus) and Beverley (shrine of St John of Beverley).

Christians of all types might visit the Holy Land because they want to see where Jesus lived, died and did miracles and where Old Testament stories took place.

The role & importance of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is seen as an **act of worship** for *some* of the following reasons. Christians go on pilgrimage to:

* get **closer to God** in their faith;
* do **penance**;
* **reflect** on their own lives at a time of crisis or major decision;
* seek **healing**;
* ask for the **intercession of the saints** for them;
* **study the Bible** in the place it all happened;
* **worship** at a place that means something special to them.

Protestants & pilgrimage

**Strict Protestant** Christians do not believe in pilgrimage. This is because:

1. you can **worship God anywhere**;
2. **saints are virtually worshipped** at these places and the Ten Commandments say that you should worship only God;
3. pilgrimage sites are seen as taking advantage of pilgrims to **make money**;
4. the relics at pilgrimage sites are very often **fake**.

They also think that penance is wrong because it implies earning forgiveness when the Bible states that believers are **simply forgiven** if they admit to God they have done wrong. Likewise, the intercession of the saints is not believed in by Protestants because it is not mentioned in the Bible.

**Anglicans** and other less-strict Protestants do go on pilgrimages because they consider them to be special places where important things happened.

Two contrasted places of pilgrimage:

1. Lourdes (France)

* **The story**: In 1858 a Catholic girl named **Bernadette** Soubirous went out to find firewood. When she returned she said that she had had a vision of the **Virgin Mary** in a cave who had prayed the rosary with her and told her to dig for a spring of water. The water was found to have **healing** properties. Bernadette was later made into a saint by the Catholic Church.
* **Today**: thousands of pilgrims visit Lourdes every year. It is said that **67 miracles** have happened there and over **6,000 other cures**. Many sick and disabled people travel there looking for a cure.

2. Iona (Scotland)

* **The story:** In the 500s, Britain and Ireland were split into many separate, small countries, most of which did not know about Christianity. **St Columba** was a Christian from the royal family of a small country in Ireland. He left there after a war and began a monastery on Iona, an island off the west coast of Scotland. On Iona he trained **monks** in how to share their faith with others and send them **all over Scotland** to tell others about Jesus Christ. This was one of the most important ways in which **Scotland became Christian**.
* **Today:** There is a community of Christians on Iona who use the abbey. Many pilgrims go there on retreats because:
	+ it is a **peaceful** and beautiful place;
	+ they like to **worship** at the abbey, pray and read holy books;
	+ they **stay with the Christian community** and join in with doing the daily chores (e.g. cooking) in return for being taught about God.

Contrast between Lourdes and Iona

1. Lourdes is mainly **Catholic** but Iona is a mixture of many **types of Christianity**.
2. People go to Lourdes for **healing** but to Iona for **peaceful reflection** and worship.
3. Iona does not have so many **miracle** stories.

Possible Exam Questions

Explain two reasons why pilgrimage is an act of worship. (4 marks)

Explain two contrasting examples of Christian pilgrimage. (4 marks)

Explain two ways in which a pilgrimage may strengthen someone’s faith. Refer to sacred writings in your answer. (5 marks)

Explain two ways in which a pilgrimage to Lourdes is different from a pilgrimage to Iona. (5 marks)

‘There is no difference between a pilgrimage and a holiday.’ (12 marks)

‘The best way to reach an understanding of God is by going on a pilgrimage.’ (12 marks)