

A-Level Religious Studies (Edexcel)

4B: Christianity

Revision guide

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*Anthologies

(1) Jürgen Moltmann, 'The Suffering of God', pp. 218–221 (Blackwell, 2001) ISBN 9780631226406

(2) McGrath A, McGrath J C – The Dawkins Delusion?: Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine, Chapter 1 Deluded About God?, pp. 1–13 (SPCK, 2007) ISBN 9780830834464

(3) Hick J – The Metaphor of God Incarnate, 2nd edition, Chapter 11 Atonement by the Blood of Jesus, pp. 112–127, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006) ISBN 9780664230371

(4) Barth K – Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Volume IV, Part 1, Chapter XIV, extracts from vs 157–357 (A&C Black, 2004) ISBN 9780567051295

Unit 1: Beliefs, Values and Teachings

1.1. Nature of God

- Personal relationship, omnipotence and immutability; ex nihilo, emanation, construction and artistic expression, goodness of creation, stewardship.*
- Implications of these teachings about God for an understanding of the self, the meaning and purpose of life, death and the afterlife.*
- Interpretations of these teachings and evidence for these views, the challenges of these interpretations and their significance for Christianity, the experience of these roles of God in the life of a Christian.*

With reference to the ideas of M Buber and Augustine.

Personal relationship

God within Christianity is often described as personal; he is loving and trustworthy and Christians are able to have a relationship with Him. This raises questions for the nature of God. Is God a person? Is personhood only for humans? How can we avoid talking about God as an object? Is it possible to have a personal relationship with God?

Spinoza: God is impersonal

- Humans can love God but God cannot return that love, personal two-way relationship is not possible
- Why: because that would require God to change his being, which he cannot do because he is perfect and perfection cannot be altered
- As God and the universe are the same indivisible substance, God does not care about human suffering
- Implications: God does not care about human suffering, it's our duty to try and understand God's plan

Buber: God is personal

Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) was an Austrian-Israeli philosopher. His main work was in existentialism and the relationship between human beings and the divine. Buber believed that the philosophy of dialogues (and the space in-between dialogues) was overlooked as a form of meaning and understanding. Buber's main work is "I and Thou" published in 1923. One of the major themes of the book is that human life finds its meaningfulness in relationships. In Buber's view, all of our relationships bring us ultimately into relationship with God, who is the Eternal Thou.

- Relationship between God and humans is not I-It (subject-object) but rather I-Though (subject-subject)
- In a relationship with God we don't just know *about* God but we also *know* God
- God's revelation is not just facts about God, but a self-revelation of God – thus a personal relationship
- God is not an object (passive), but a thou (active)

We can have a personal relationship with God because God is a Thou, not an It. God can never be reduced to a concept, thus He is not an It. God's revelation to humanity is not just revealing a list of facts about Himself, rather He revealed His nature to us, through historical (Biblical) and personal (Jesus) forms. Thus he is an active participant in the relationship, making Him a Thou. Knowing God is not just a collection of data about Him, but rather a getting to know his nature. God has made this possible, and therefore we can have a personal relationship with God.

How does Buber's philosophy help us to understand God as a person?

1. **God cannot be reduced to a concept** – only an 'It' can be treated in this way. For Buber, God is the 'Thou who can, by its nature, never become an It'.
2. God's revelation is **not simply a making known of facts about God**, but a **self-revelation of God**. Revelation includes knowledge of God as an 'It' and as a 'Thou'. We come to know things about God; yet we also come to know God. Knowledge of God includes both knowing of God as an 'It' and a 'Thou'. **Knowing God is not simply a collection of data, but a personal relationship.**
3. **God is not an object**. He is not a passive object waiting to be discovered. God must be viewed as a 'Thou', an active subject. Therefore God could take the initiative away from humans, through **self-revelation and a willingness to be known** in a historical and personal form (Jesus). Theology thus becomes **the human response to God's self-disclosure, rather than the human quest for God.**

A suffering God (immutability)

"I the Lord do not change" – Malachi 3:6

Yes God suffers

- Old Testament – God shares in the suffering of the people of Israel (**criticism**: passages are metaphorical (Philo))
- New Testament – Christ suffered, Christ is divine, therefore God suffers (**criticism**: Christ only suffered in his human nature)
- Moltmann – a perfect God must be able to experience suffering, he chose to do that because it was in his nature (love)

No God doesn't suffer (he is immutable)

- Philo said that God is perfect and unchanging, therefore cannot be affected by human suffering
- Anselm argued that God is compassionate in terms of our human suffering, but in divine terms is not – we experience him as compassionate, but that does not mean He is
- Aquinas said that love requires being open and vulnerable, so being loving and compassionate would contradict God's nature

God's unchanging nature is called **immutability**. God's immutable nature is often cited as one of the characteristics, along with omnipotence, etc. God is also said to be **impassable** (cannot be affected or changed by outside events).

However, the following paradox shows that God's immutability may not be compatible with his other characteristics.

1. If God is omniscient, God knows what time it is now.
2. What time it is now is constantly changing.

3. So what God knows is constantly changing. (First He knows that it is now t and not now $t+1$, later He knows that it is now $t+1$ and not now t .)
4. So God is constantly changing.

God's omnipotence

God's omnipotence means he can do anything. But there are logical contradictions which challenge this view: e.g. can God create a stone so heavy he cannot lift it? Can God make black white? Can God create a being greater than himself?

Anselm's response: Omnipotence is not necessarily a good thing. It could mean that God might tell lies or pervert justice which would be inconsistent with his nature.

Aquinas' response: God's omnipotence means he cannot sin, because to sin is to fall short of a perfect action, which means he would no longer be omnipotent

William of Ockham's response:

- There are two powers of God: 'absolute power' – when he could do anything; 'ordering power' – when he chose to establish order
- Once God chose to order the world, his power was restricted to acting within the order he had made. This remains until the end of time.
- **Criticism:** this is paradox – because of his omnipotence, God is now not able to do everything, He is now limited. How can this make sense?
- **Solution to the criticism:** "divine self-limitation" – If God is able to do anything, then he must be able to become committed to a course of action, and be able to stay committed to it. God can choose to limit his own options.

God as Creator

God as a creator is central to the idea of Christianity. There is a distinction between God and his creation, and that creation belongs to God. It also shows God's authority over the world. Some argued that God created through establishing order. Others said that God created the universe out of nothing.

Order from Chaos

- Early Christians, Gnostics and many sections of the Old Testament
- Gnostics believed the world had been created by a lesser creator God, and was therefore imperfect; they favoured the spiritual world which had been created by the supreme God
- Creation was an imposition of order on formless chaos
- God was an architect, who gave matter shape and structure

Ex Nihilo

As a reaction to Gnostic teaching of the demiurge, early Christian thinkers began to formulate the ideas of "Ex Nihilo" (from nothing). There was no pre-existing matter. Everything had to come from God and the existence of the world was down to God's freedom, goodness and nature. The decision to create the world is an example of a personal God making a decision to create the world.

Against previous philosophical and theological arguments in favour of an eternal cosmos, the church fathers reasserted the biblical doctrine of creation and in doing so they emphasised not only the transcendent otherness of God but also the astonishing immensity of God's power. God did not form the world out of a pre-existent matter, but spoke into being ("Let there be!") that which literally did not exist before.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), in his *Confessions* declares that through his Wisdom God creates all things, not out of himself or any other thing, but literally out of nothing (XII, 7; Pine-Coffin 284).

Augustine

Affirmed that creation was ex nihilo. It is a **changeless and timeless God who creates out of nothing**. This notion of creation out of nothing allows Augustine to affirm that **God is truly unchangeable**. For if God creates *out of* himself or *from* himself, it is hard to see how God could remain unchangeable.

The reality and act of creation is **solely down to the will of God**. It is not a necessity. **God creates because he wants to, and out of goodness**, not because the creative act is somehow a necessity.

Significance of ex nihilo

It proves that:

- God acts freely
- God is sovereign of all matter – there are no other creators
- God exists apart from (separate from) matter and so cannot change
- God can do anything (providing he does not create a contradiction such as squaring a triangle)
- All matter shares in God's likeness because it is created by him alone. However, not equal to God. Divine simplicity implies that God is uniquely different to the world
- Creation does not involve any change in matter itself because there is not pre-existing matter from which it can be derived. Matter appears from absolutely nothing. Aquinas: "creation is not a change"

Criticisms of ex nihilo

- Theoretical problem: absolute nothingness cannot be conceived.
- Biblical problem: Scripture – in Genesis, 2 Peter, and elsewhere – suggests creation from something (water, deep, chaos, invisible things, etc.), not creation from absolutely nothing.
- Empirical problem: We have no evidence that our universe originally came into being from absolutely nothing.
- Creation at an instant problem: We have no evidence in the history of the universe after the big bang that entities can emerge instantaneously from absolute nothingness. Out of nothing comes nothing (*ex nihilo, nihil fit*).

- Evil problem: If God once had the power to create from absolutely nothing, God *essentially* retains that power. But a God of love with this capacity is culpable for failing to use it periodically to prevent genuine evil.
- Empire Problem: The kind of divine power implied in *creatio ex nihilo* supports a theology of empire, which is based upon unilateral force and control of others.

Modified ex-nihilo?

- Stephen Hawkins: quantum physics has said that we can give a description of the universe before the Big Bang – does this disprove that God created the universe ex nihilo?
- Need to revise ex nihilo: matter of some kind has always existed, but God gave it form and purpose
- God is more than merely a first cause, but the preserver who enables matter to continue to exist

Emanation

Creation of the world was an **overflowing of God's creative energy**, like light coming from the sun. Creation comes from God, shows his divine nature – natural connection between God and creation. Each step of emanation means beings are less pure, less perfect

Opposed to creationism (where the universe is created by God who is separate from the universe).

Criticisms of Emanation:

Implies that creation was a kind of involuntary act, whereas the Bible teaches that God decides to act for himself in the matter of creation

God is seen as a personal God, who expresses his love in the act of creation – emanation doesn't support this

Construction

The Bible uses the imagery of God as a builder or **craftsman who constructs the world** (Psalm 127:1).

This highlights the idea of planning and purpose and the deliberate intention to create, while also highlighting the skill of the creator and the beauty and intricacy of his creation.

God has **planned the universe and given it purpose**, underlining the skill of the creator and the beauty and intricacies of creation.

This image of the builder suggests that God made the world from pre-existent material.

Criticisms: The image of the builder suggests that God made the world from pre-existent material that was already available. This was rejected by the early Christians in favour of ex nihilo.

Artistic expression

Creation as the 'handiwork of God'. Work of art and beauty that expresses the love and personality of God.

Strength: Overcomes the criticisms of construction and emanation (that God is impersonal).

Although this could still mean that God used pre-existent material, it does open up the possibility of creation out of nothing, just as artists or writers create their work out of nothing

Criticisms: Do artists really create their art out of nothing? If the universe is a work of art, why is there evil and suffering in the world?

Goodness of creation

"God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good." Genesis 1:10

Creation is repeatedly called "good" within the Bible.

A rejection of Gnostic ideas of the world being inherently evil.

However creation is not perfect because of human sin.

Sin is a departing from the trajectory on which God placed the world. The world we see is not the one it was intended to be.

Most Christian doctrines include a talk about a restoration of the world to its true glory – God's purpose for his creation will eventually be fulfilled.

Augustine: Every single thing that God has made is good. Each created thing reflects the goodness of God. Yet God is not an item in the universe, we should not worship his creations. God is its source.

Criticism: Do humans not count as part of creation? Surely God must take some responsibility for human sin. Is freewill a sufficient argument for the problem of evil?

Stewardship

"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28

One implication of God as creator is that he has full authority over the earth. Humans are seen as part of that creation, but with special functions within it. Stewardship is the opposite of ownership. We hold it in trust for God. Provides a theory for the exercise of human responsibility for the planet.

Creation is not just for the enjoyment of humanity, humans are stewards who hold the world in trust for God.

Criticism: "...rule over the earth" – some argue this sounds like dominion, not stewardship.

Implications of these teachings about God for an understanding of the self, the meaning and purpose of life, death and the afterlife

God as creator implies the goodness of creation:

- God's creation is good and able to be redeemed
- The Fall means that God's creation is not perfect
- The end goal of Christianity is the final restoration of God's creation
- Humans are created in God's image, so have the capacity to reflect the divinity in God's creation

Implications for the problem of evil: St Augustine's "privation of good". Christian duty to remove suffering in the world.

If God has created the world, this means that humans must be stewards. Our divine judgement rests on how well we have looked after the world.

1.2. The Trinity

a) *Biblical basis for ideas about the Trinity.*

b) *Notions of relation and analogy to understand the Trinity.*

c) *Modern views on the Trinity, their strengths and weaknesses, the impact of these views on the life of a Christian and their significance for Christianity.*

With reference to the ideas of K Barth and K Rahner.

Biblical basis for the Trinity

There is little explanation of the Trinity within scripture itself. It is better to think of the Trinity as something which emerges as an inevitable consequence of sustained engagement with the Bible and an interpretation of divine activity. Scripture doesn't necessarily contain the doctrine of the trinity, rather scripture bears witness to a God that must be understood in the terms of the Trinity.

The only two clear references to the Bible in Christianity.

- Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)
- May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

In the Old Testament, God is often depicted as three personalities: Wisdom of God (a person who is active in creation), Word of God (confronts humanity with the will and purpose of God, bringing guidance, judgement and salvation), and Spirit of God (the agent of the new creation).

Development of the Trinity

The Trinity as a concept was established in the 4th Century. It recognised:

1. The full divinity of Jesus
2. The full divinity of the Spirit
3. Their mutual relationship

Irenaeus – 'Economy of salvation'

- Response to the Gnostics who were arguing that the saviour God (Jesus) is inferior to the Creator God
- Said that God has ordered the salvation of humanity. There is one salvation and one God. However God introduces salvation by portraying himself in three distinct roles
- Human redemption is achieved as a result of the three persons of the Godhead performing their distinct tasks, yet acting together in unity.

Eastern vs Western theology

Eastern theology: each of the three persons of God had a distinct personality. The Son and the Spirit derive from the Father Himself.

Western theology: three persons work together in a mutual relationship, Father, Son and Spirit are equal within the Godhead.

Analogies for the Trinity

The real difficulty for most people lies in the *visualisation* of the Trinity. How can we make sense of such a complex and abstract idea? Theologians have used analogies for the Trinity to help people to comprehend it.

The Shamrock - a single leaf that has three different elements

The spring, fount and stream – one flows from the other and they share the same substance, water. The three aspects of the stream can be separated but they cannot be distinguished.

The chain – there are many links in a chain, yet to be connected to one is to be connected to them all. In the same way, someone who encounters the Holy Spirit also encounters the Father and the Son.

Rainbow – Christ is "light from light". The rainbow allows us to distinguish and appreciate the different colours of a sunbeam. There is only one beam of light, yet the colours blend seamlessly into one another.

Proper name – The Trinity is a shorthand way of identifying exactly what God we are talking about. “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” is the proper name for the God whom Christians know in and through Jesus Christ.

Traditional models of the Trinity

The Cappadocian model

- Defence of the principle of divine unity
- One Godhead, three different modes of being
- However, the Father has priority – he is the source of the Trinity, he imparted His being into the Son and the Spirit
- The Son is ‘begotten’ and the Spirit ‘precedes’ from the Father

Augustine of Hippo’s model

- Trinity is a union of equals
- Only in the role of salvation is the Father superior
- Father = creation, Son = wisdom, Spirit = love
- The Spirit binds the three persons of the Trinity together
- There are traces in the Trinity in humanity (because we are God’s creation); the Trinity resembles the way humans thought and acted
- The human mind is an image of God: mind, knowledge and love – 3 in 1

The Filioque controversy

- What was the origin of the Holy Spirit? Was it just the Father (as the Nicene Creed says) or from both the Father and the Son?
- Eastern Orthodox Church: the Holy Spirit and the Son derive from the Father. If the Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, then the Father is not the source of all things. The Son is the word of God, the Spirit is the breath of God
- Latin Catholic Church: The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son, yet not from two origins but from one origin

Criticisms of the Trinity

- Rationalist critique: it is logically incoherent and contains contradictions, a supposed “mystery” beyond the reach of human reason it offended reason by requiring belief in what could not be understood
- It’s not constructive as a construct
- Protestant Reformation: all doctrines should be based on the Bible, Trinity isn’t mentioned in the Bible
- There are no obvious benefits to the Trinity, is it just held on to for tradition?

Modern approaches to the Trinity

Karl Barth

- The Trinity is key to understanding how God revealed himself to sinful humanity; needed to make his message heart
- Two key concepts:
 1. Sinful humanity is incapable of hearing the word of God and receiving salvation
 2. However, God has revealed himself through the Trinity
- God exists in eternity and reveals himself to humanity in the present through Jesus
- God exists in **eternity** and reveals himself to humanity in the **present** through Jesus Christ. The Father, then is revealed through the son. The Holy Spirit enables humanity to interpret God’s revelation and recognise Jesus.

Barth proposed that the Trinitarian formula of “one God in three persons” be updated to “one God in **three modes of being**” (or “... ways of being”). The reason for the change, is that Barth believed that the word “person” has substantially changed in meaning to include an “attribute of self-consciousness” (especially in the Post-Reformation era). Barth therefore rejects “three persons” because it communicates that there are three “personalities” (or self-consciousnesses) in God, and this is the heresy of tritheism.

Strengths: revived the Trinity, established a firm connection between the doctrine and the actuality of revelation in history. Using “modes of being” explains the Trinity much better than “persons”. Barth argues he does not commit modalism (the idea that the Trinity is three different modes of God’s self-revelation) because they are not three different modes in which he appears, but three internal ways in which God is to himself.

Weaknesses: Moltmann criticises Barth for presenting a non-Trinitarian view (he accuses him of Sabellianism, which is the view that the Trinity is three separate beings).

Karl Rahner

- The Trinity can be understood in two different ways:
 1. **Economic** Trinity: the way God reveals himself in history, how his unity is experienced
 2. **Immanent** (sometimes essential or ontological) Trinity: the way God actually is
- Ultimately these two views are the same: the way God is revealed and experience in history corresponds to the way God actually is: *The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity (Rahner)*
- To put it another way: God’s actions reveal who God is. And since God acts as a threefold God, God himself must be threefold.
- Overcame the problems of previous theological views that focused solely on the immanent Trinity, and ignored the human experience of God

Strengths: Rahner says that the identity between “economic” Trinity and “immanent” Trinity does not lead to modalism (the belief that the Trinity is three separate beings) because God could not communicate himself to humanity as threefold unless He were threefold in reality. This view overcame problems of previous theological views about the Trinity being immanent, ignoring human experience of God and the Biblical witness to salvation.

Weaknesses: Again Moltmann criticises, saying its modalism / Sabellianism.

John Macquarrie

- We need a dynamic not static understanding of God
- Existential perspective: relating to the existence of humans
- Rejected immutable nature of God, believed God could change
- God as three, dynamic aspect. Dynamic “movements” within the mystery of Being:
 1. Father as a primordial being: ultimate act or energy
 2. Son as an expressive being: way in which the Father reveals himself to humanity
 3. Spirit as the unitive being: maintains the unity of the Trinity

Strengths: There is biblical evidence in the New Testament to support Macquarrie’s view – *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made (John 1:1-3).*

Weaknesses: Some would argue these are just three separate roles – modalism.

Impact of these views on the life of a Christian and their significance for Christians

Why is the Trinity important?

Its purpose is not to provide factual knowledge of God's hidden nature. The doctrine of the Trinity has other functions:

- it brings humanity face to face with the mystery of God
- it helps humanity recognise the God they meet in the Bible, in history and in their own lives
- it helps humanity understand God's complexity, otherness and mystery
- it helps humanity worship God
- it steers humanity away from wrong ideas of God, such as:
 - a patriarchal/hierarchical God
 - a God who can be logically understood
- it is the foundation of much Christian worship and liturgy
- it helps humanity understand its own nature as made in the image of God
- it provides a model for human relationships, both as individuals and in community

So, for example, one might be inspired by the doctrine of the Trinity to come up with an understanding of human relationships that was something like this...

- Human beings are made in the image of God
- God is a community of persons in a mutual loving relationship
- Therefore the essence of humanity is to be found in human relationships with others, with God, and with God's creation
- These relationships are filled with transforming power
- For human beings to live truly in the image of God, these relationships must be mutual, generous and just
- These relationships must acknowledge and value difference as well as sameness
- These relationships must accept as well as give

That's one way in which contemplating the Trinity might provide useful information for a Christian as to how they should try to live their life.

Is the Trinity useful?

“Absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity taken literally”. Immanuel Kant

Until quite recently, many theologians thought that the doctrine of the Trinity was pretty pointless.

And the churches themselves disagree about the content of the doctrine; the most common Western statement of the Trinity is not accepted by the Eastern churches.

And yet somehow it remains at the heart of the Christian faith:

*“It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of the Christian doctrine that God is one in three persons. This has correctly been called the teaching distinctive of the Christian faith, that which sets the approach of Christians to the “fearful mystery” of the deity apart from all other approaches”. Gerald S. Sloyan, *The Three Persons in One God, 1964**

The Trinity as a basis for human relationships

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches human beings how they should shape their lives. Many Christians see the relationship between the persons of the Trinity as providing a recipe for the best sort of human relationships. These are relationships in which individuality is balanced with relationship; relationships whose basis is mutual love and perfect communication.

The Trinity as a power structure

The relationships within God as a Trinity discredit any hierarchical power structure in which those lower down are dominated and oppressed by those above them.

Instead, using the example of the Trinity leads to an ideal structure of mutual interdependence and support in pursuit of a common aim.

Thus the Trinity shows the way God wants the world to be run and the power structures that he recommends to human society.

1.3. The Church

a) Key concepts of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

b) Interpretations of these teachings, challenges to these views and their impact on the life of Christian communities and individuals.

With reference to the ideas of Cyprian of Carthage and M Luther.

Unity

In his famous work, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, Cyprian of Carthage addressed the important matter of schisms and splits which he saw occurring in the church. The North African Church had been tearing itself apart, with some bishops declaring themselves to be the one true church. Cyprian considered this to be a departure from the true, universal church, which was built on the apostles and Christ. For him, there couldn't be rival churches. There is one God, one Spirit, one Church. To prove his point, he made his case based on Scripture.

Cyprian used the word unity not to mean 'together' but rather 'uniqueness' – **the unique relationship of the Church to its people and to God.**

Cyprian found that the unity was found in **having a single, universal church throughout the world** – with many members but one body.

The **bishops were the key** to the unity of the Church. This has three important features:

1. The worldwide (Catholic) church is identified by the **mutual recognition of the bishops** – highlighted by the fact that it takes the approval of three bishops to appoint a new one.
2. It gives bishops firm **authority**
3. **Preaching and teaching could be properly controlled** and regulated by the bishops so that charismatic or rebellious teachers could not have influence. The bishop was authorised by God to offer prayer and influence

Modern / Protestant view (Rowan Williams): Unity of the Church is found in the community of Christ – baptism, prayer, Holy Community.

Catholicity

The Nicene Creed refers to 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church'.

The word 'catholic' comes from the Greek *kath holou* which means 'referring to the whole', and this became the Latin word *catholicus*, meaning 'universal'.

Aquinas believed that the 'catholic' church **could embrace the entire world.**

When the Reformation occurred, it was feared that the unity of the church had been destroyed and that those outside the Catholic Church could not call themselves true Christians.

Luther believed that the key to the Christian message was **the Word of God**. Bishops were not essential – it was the true preaching of God's word that was essential to the identity of the church.

Luther did not believe that there was a difference between priesthood and individual believers. **All Christians are priests by virtue of their baptism, faith and the gospel.**

He did not think there was a need for an institutional church – it was simply a historical institution that helped to hold the Christian faith together.

Protestant writers claimed that the **true unity and catholicity lay in the fact that the universally accepted beliefs and doctrines still remained intact** – this was called '**doctrinal fidelity**'.

The Protestant Churches therefore claimed to be both catholic and reformed – they maintained their continuity with the apostolic church by virtue of **continued belief in the teaching of Christ and the Scripture.**

"Where the word is, there is faith; and where faith is, there is the true Church" **Martin Luther**

Modern / Protestant view (Rowan Williams): Catholic Church is in Christ – one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Catholic is not about being universal, but about working for justice, welfare etc.

Holiness

The **Donatists** believed that the entire sacramental system of the Catholic Church had become corrupted on account of the lapse of its leaders (many leaders were required to convert and burn Christian books under persecution from the Roman emperor, thus becoming traitors).

The Donatists asked: how could the sacraments be validly administered by people who were tainted by sin or morally impure?

Augustine responded with a theory grounded in the New Testament. He emphasised the sinfulness of Christians. The church is not meant to be a pure body, but a 'mixed body' of sinners and saints.

Augustine finds the image in two biblical passages: the parable of the net which catches many fishes, and the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

For Augustine, the **parable of the wheat and the weeds refers to the church in the world**: it must expect to include both saints and sinners. To attempt to separate them is premature; this will happen in God's time, at the end of history. **The church is holy not in its members, but in Christ.** Members are contaminated by original sin, however the church is **sanctified and made holy by Christ.**

Modern / Protestant view (Rowan Williams): To be holy is to believe in Christ, and Christ's sacrifices. Jesus established himself as the Holy place; his cross is the place of peace.

Apostolicity

Apostolic means “origination with the Apostles” or “having a direct link with the Apostles”. Remember that the Church is founded on the apostolic witness and testimony – the Gospels provided the foundation for Christian beliefs and worship.

The Church is thought of being apostolic in three ways:

1. **Historically** – the origins of the church can be traced back to the apostles
2. **Theologically** – the church maintains and transmits the teachings of the apostles
3. **Evangelism** and missionary tasks – the church is responsible for carrying on the apostles’ teachings, as given by Christ, e.g. caring for the sick and needy and the preaching of the gospel to the world

Potential criticisms

- There is not one single, universal church throughout the world. Cyprian’s vision has not been achieved.
- Are bishops influential in modern Christianity? Does the (Protestant) focus on individual salvation and faith undermine this?
- Doctrinal fidelity is a difficult concept to defend, considering the multiple interpretations of the Bible and the creeds.
- The Church may be seen simply as an historical institution used to hold the faith together (Luther). Does this make it obsolete in today’s society? Can faith continue without the Church?
- Should only those who are holy and righteous be considered Christians? Surely having faith and being a believer means that one adheres to a strict moral code.
- If the church is founded on apostolic witness, is this undermined by the problems of interpretation?

Protestant understanding (Rowan Williams)

How can Protestants still believe in a united, Catholic, holy, apostolic church?

Rowan Williams argues that the four marks of the church are about Jesus Christ. The Church is one because Jesus is one; the church is holy because Jesus is holy, the church is Catholic because Jesus is the saviour of all, the church is apostolic because, as the Father has sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us.

Understanding the nature of the Church is understanding who Jesus is and what he does.

Impact on the life of Christian communities and individuals

1.4. Key moral principles

- a) *The concept of Love as the principal Christian value and the basis of all other values and qualities.*
- b) *The love of God as revealed in creation, the incarnation and the Trinity as the basis of this value.*
- c) *The relationship of all Christian values with the key principle of love.*

Love is a key attribute in Christianity. God’s love for humanity is revealed in scripture and in nature. God is love, by his very nature.

1 John 4:9-10: ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

1 John 4:8 and 16 state that "God is love; and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

The love of God in the Bible

The love of God is a prevalent concept both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament uses a rich vocabulary to express the love of God, as a concept that appears in many instances. The love of God appears in a number of texts (e.g. Hosea 1-3, and then in Ezek 16 and Isa 62, etc.). God’s love of the people of Israel is described, and God is loving and forgiving to those who obey (e.g. Abraham and Job).

However, analysis of the love of God in the Old Testament has presented problems for modern scholars because there is inconsistency in how the principle is portrayed.

Both the terms love of God and love of Christ appear in the New Testament. In the New Testament, **God's love for humanity or the world** is expressed in Greek as agape. The same Greek word agape is used also of the love of **Christians for one another and for other human beings**, as in 1 Thessalonians 3:12: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else." The corresponding verb agapō is used not only of God's love and of the mutual love of Christians, but also of **Christians' love for God**, as in 1 John 4:21: "And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Potential criticisms:

- Is it possible to define agape?
- Is it possible for God to be loving and just? Are there passages that contradict God’s loving nature? How can these be explained?

The love of God as revealed in creation

God’s love is seen through His creation; his creation is his work of love for humanity. Psalm 119:64 The earth is filled with your love, Lord.

In Genesis, God created the universe and thought it was good. Genesis 1: God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

The vastness of creation gives testimony to God as Love.

Young earth creationism: God created mankind in his image, they were His greatest creation. God loved us so much He provided an infallible account (the Bible) of creation so that we can know Him and know His works.

Old earth creationism/Gap theory: God took time over His creation, suggests thought and planning.

Theistic evolution: God allows us to develop, become better, and develop reason and rationality so that we can know God.

The love of God as revealed in the Trinity

God is Love. Not just that God loves, but that *He is Love*.

This is revealed in the Trinitarian nature of God.

As the philosopher **Peter Kreeft** has said, "If God is not a Trinity, God is not love. For love requires three things: a lover, a beloved, and a relationship between them. If God were only one person, he could be a lover, but not love itself." Thus through the Trinity, God is, by his very nature, love.

Steps to His argument:

- *Being love* requires three things: a lover, a beloved and a relationship between them
- If God were only one person, he could be a lover, but not love itself
- Therefore God is love because He is a Trinity
- The Father loves, The Son is loved and the Holy Spirit is the relationship

In **John 14:31** Jesus expresses his love for God the Father. This verse includes the only direct statement by Jesus in the New Testament about Jesus' love for God the Father.

The love of the Father for his Son (Jesus Christ) is expressed in **Matthew 3:17** by a voice from Heaven during the Baptism of Jesus. The same sentiment is later expressed during the Transfiguration of Jesus in **Mark 9:7**, where a voice from Heaven tells the three disciples: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

The love of God as revealed in the Incarnation

The **Incarnation** reveals the love of God.

God took on human form because he loves us so much he wants us to gain salvation. He wants sinful man to have eternal life because he is forgiving and loving.

God took on human form (Jesus) because he is love. His nature required him to take this form so that we might know his love.

God's love is shown in his action of sending his only Son to die on the cross for our sins; he was the atoning sacrifice.

1 John 4: 9: *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 457 The Word became flesh for us in order to save us by reconciling us with God, who "loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins": "the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world", and "he was revealed to take away sins"

Evaluation

- There are contradictions to God's loving nature: in the Old Testament, God is seen to get angry, to punish disbelievers, to test his followers (e.g. Job)
 - Counter criticism: Some would say that it is because of God's love that he does these things – like a parent would punish their child, yet still love them
- There is inconsistency throughout the Bible about God's loving nature
 - Counter criticism: Some say God's loving nature is revealed throughout the Bible, as humans obey Him – we must earn His love through devotion and faith
- Does Peter Kreeft's claim that 'love requires three things' have any logical basis? There are examples to prove this statement is not true

Unit 2: Wisdom and Authority

2.1. The Bible

- a) *Role as a source of authority, its compilation and use, including as a basis for ethical teaching of the Church and the role of tradition.*
- b) *The Bible as revealed theology and its relationship to natural theology, role of Spirit in revelation/mysticism.*
- c) *Strengths and weaknesses of various models of interpretation of the text.*

Compilation of the Bible

The word Bible comes from a Greek phrase *ta biblia* – literally, “the books”. The Bible is split into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The **Old Testament** contains **39 books**, beginning with Genesis and ending with Malachi. It is written almost entirely in **Hebrew**, the language of Israel, however some shorter sections are written in Aramaic. Within the Old Testament, there are a number of different writings, the most important of which are: **The Law, the historical books, the prophets.**

The **New Testament** is of particular importance to Christians, as it sets out the **basic events and beliefs of the Christian gospel**. It contains **27 books** and is written entirely in **Greek**.

The four **Gospels** – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – **chronicle Jesus’ life and teachings.**

Gospel means “good news”. Each of the four writers, or “evangelists” sets out the **basic events lying behind the good news.**

Genres of the Bible:

- **Law** - Documents defining God’s relationship with Israel
- **Narrative** - The history of Israel, Jesus, and the church
- **Poetry** - Wisdom, worship, and contemplation
- **Prophecy** - God reaching out through His prophets
- **Letters** - Epistles sent to people and churches

The Gospels

- The four gospels have distinctive characteristics – for example, Matthew is concerned to present Jesus’ teaching, whereas Mark is more interested in focusing on the last week of his earthly life
- Taken together, all four build up a comprehensive account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- The word synoptic gospels is often used to refer to the first three gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) – this refers to their similar literary structure. John is different in style and wording
- This may be because John was written far later than the other gospels, and with a different purpose. Matthew, Mark and Luke were written 30 years after Jesus’ death, so felt pressure to present his life and teaching
- The fifth work found in the New Testament is the Acts of the Apostles, which give an account of the expansion of Christianity

Matthew: written for a Jewish audience in the 1st century. Major theme is the connection between Jesus and the OT prophecies and predictions regarding the Messiah

Mark: written with the purpose of communicating Jesus’ story to a generation of Gentile Christians who had not been eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus – Jesus as the “Son of God” is a major theme. Was the first gospel and the foundation of the others

Luke: intended for a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience. His purpose was to provide a historically accurate and reliable account of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Wanted to prove that Jesus’ story was true. Emphasise Jesus in the role of saviour

John: Written 3 generation after Jesus’s death. Different purpose and themes. Wrote his gospel after the fall of Jerusalem. This means he wrote in a culture of severe persecution of Christians. John saw an evangelistic opportunity to help many see that Jesus was the Messiah. Wanted to clarify a number of theological points and doctrines. Focused on Jesus as divine, the incarnation of God, as many people had forgotten and thought he was just a man.

St Paul

After the Acts, the next major section is the letters, or epistles. These letters provide teachings concerning both Christian beliefs and behaviour. Most were written by St Paul, whose conversion to the Christian faith led him to undertake a major programme of evangelism and church planting.

The New Testament ends with the book of Revelation, which represents a vision of the end of history, in which the writer is allowed to see into heaven, and gain a glimpse of the new Jerusalem which is prepared for believers.

The continuity between Old and New Testaments

The terms Old and New Testaments are theological in nature, and rest upon a belief that the contents of the Old Testament belong to a period of God’s dealings with the world which has in some way been **superseded by the coming of Christ in the New Testament.**

Christian attitudes to the Old Testament can be summarised as follows: **religious principles and ideas** (such as the notion of a sovereign God who is active in human history) **are still true; religious practices** (such as dietary laws and sacrificial routines) **are not.**

St Augustine argued it was necessary to see the OT in the light of the NT to appreciate its full significance and importance: *The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New*

The majority of Christian thinkers have emphasised **the continuity between the two testaments**, whilst at the same time noting the distinctions between them. E.g. **Matthew's gospel shows the continuity between Jesus and Moses, Paul's letters focus on the continuity of faith between Abraham and Christianity.**

The NT writers stress the fact that the God of the NT is **the same as the God of the OT.**

Inerrancy of the Bible vs. Inspired word of God

Biblical inerrancy is the doctrine that the Bible is **without error or fault in all its teachings**. It is **infallible** as it is **God's word**. Many evangelical Christians believe that the Bible is the exact word of God. This suggests the teachings contained within it are **universal, timeless and unquestionable**.

Other Christians believe that the Bible is the **inspired word of God**. This means God provided a **divine influence** on the prophets, apostles or sacred writings, by which they were able to **communicate truth without error**.

The debate often centres on 2 Timothy 3:16 – does this mean that scripture is inspired by God or inerrant?

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness **2 Timothy 3:16**

Criticisms:

- Evident errors and contradictions throughout the Bible
- Referring to passages in which God claims that the Bible is the word of God is seen as circular reasoning, because these statements are only true if the Bible is already thought to be inerrant
- Nowhere in the Bible does it imply or teach scriptural inerrancy

The Bible as a basis for ethical teaching

The Church points to two main sources of moral teaching – the **natural law** (found in human nature itself) and **divine law** (revealed by God).

The Ten Commandments contain God's specific **codification of the main principles of the natural law**. God revealed these commandments because Original Sin **made it hard for human beings to discern good from evil**.

The Ten Commandments are **practical expressions of God's love for humanity**, and will help humanity's relationship with God to grow, since humans will come to love what God loves (Aquinas).

Therefore the Bible is divine law, revealed by God. But it codifies natural law, already found in human nature itself. They are linked.

The Bible as a basis for ethical teaching

The New Testament asserts that all morality flows from the Great Commandment, to **love God** with all one's heart and to **love one's neighbour as oneself**. Jesus **reaffirmed these teachings** and united them together, proposing **himself as the model of love**

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. **Deuteronomy 6:5**

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself. **Leviticus 19:18**

The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of sayings and teachings of Jesus, which emphasise his moral teaching found in the Gospel of Matthew.

Evaluation: should the Bible be used for moral decision making?

- Many teachings in the Bible are obsolete – no longer necessary or relevant to today's society
- As the Sermon on the Mount suggests, Jesus himself was not reluctant to implement a process of development and change; truth should be ensured by integrity, not oaths (e.g. hatred of an enemy is to give way to love – turn the other cheek)
- Many of the Bible's teachings are morally offensive – e.g. a slave's obligation to his or her master (Colossians 3:22)
- Many modern ethical issues are absent in the Bible; there are no answers to many ethical questions. E.g. environmental issues, nuclear proliferation, global warming, stem cell research etc.

The Bible as revealed theology

"Theos" is the Greek word for God, so "Theology" literally means the study of God.

Revealed theology is a type of theology that claims **human knowledge of God comes through special revelations such as the Bible** or Qur'an or through visions or other types of direct revelations from God. It is the process of **deriving knowledge of God from contact with God Himself**, e.g. a vision or scripture.

St Thomas Aquinas said that revealed theology provides "saving knowledge" – that is, knowledge that will result in our salvation.

Link to ethics course – NML – Catholics believe that God has revealed his divine plan for human through nature and the Bible (natural and revealed theology).

Natural theology is the process of **deriving knowledge of God from the use of natural human reason, evidence and the world**.

Revealed Theology is the study of God and religious faith that is **revealed through sacred Scriptures and/or the teaching of Jesus**. The only way to know if God is through His divine revelation to us.

The Bible is not just a record of God's deeds, or even of his explanatory words which accompanied those deeds. In scripture there is a **revelation, which stands as valid for all time as a disclosure of the character and purposes of God**.

For many Christians, the Bible is not just a record of his word, it is his word.

In the early days of the Church, Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians received, heard and accepted the gospel, the Word of God, **not as the words of men but as God's word** (1 Thessalonians 2:13). This shows that Paul did not think the Word of God was limited to Jesus' revelation, but it was also a **verbal revelation** from God himself.

Therefore, special revelation gives **propositional truth and verbal communication** from God himself, written down in a **book**.

Evaluation: Barth claims that we know God in Christ and him alone. He denied the possibility of constructing natural theology from general revelation, and relegated Scripture from being the Word of God to being merely a testimony to that Word. Only Christ should be called the Word of God. The Bible contains only the words of men who experienced Christ.

Revealed vs. Natural theology

Revealed theology is based on **special revelation**, for example the Bible, the Church and Jesus Christ.

Natural theology is the study of God based on the **observation of nature**.

Observing nature is an intellectual pursuit, so natural theology involves human philosophy and reasoning as means of knowing God.

Has its roots in Thomas Aquinas – Natural Moral Law. Emphasised **man's ability to comprehend certain truths about God from nature**.

However Aquinas was careful to distinguish what could be learned through "natural reason" from doctrinal tenets. He said **truths learned from nature are "preambles to the articles of faith"**.

Reason may lead to faith but it cannot replace faith.

The relationship between the Bible and natural theology

The Bible does have references to natural theology. Here are some biblical points concerning natural theology:

1. The Bible teaches that a basic understanding of God can be gained from the natural world; specifically, we can see "**his eternal power and divine nature**" (Romans 1:20). We call this "general revelation" (see also Psalm 19:1-3).
2. The context of Romans 1 indicates that such a basic understanding of God's existence and power is not enough to lead a person to salvation. In fact, the **pagan's inherent knowledge of God (through nature)** has been distorted, leading to judgment rather than to salvation.
3. Natural theology can cause someone to theorise that God is invisible, omnipotent, and wise, but these are all abstract characteristics of an unnamed "Supreme Being." **Natural theology cannot teach the love, mercy, or judgment of God**, and it is worthless for bringing anyone to saving faith in Jesus Christ. "How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14).
4. The fall of man has affected the whole person, including the intellect. A reliance on natural theology assumes that **human reason has not been tainted by original sin**, yet Scripture speaks of the "**depraved mind**" (Romans 1:28), the "**sinful mind**" (Romans 8:7), the "**corrupt mind**" (Timothy 6:5), the "dull" mind (2 Corinthians 3:14), the "blinded" mind (2 Corinthians 4:4), and the need for the mind to be renewed (Romans 12:2).

Natural theology is useful insofar as God has created the world and the world still points to Him as Creator. However, given **the fallen state of our intellect**, many Christians believe that **we cannot properly interpret** even that without God's special revelation. We need God's **gracious intervention** to find our way back to Him. For Christians, what humanity needs more than anything is faith in the Bible and in Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:19).

Interpretation of the Bible

The history of Christian theology is very much intertwined with the interpretation of the Bible (sometimes referred to as "hermeneutics", from the Greek verb "to understand"). There are four different ways in which the Bible can be interpreted:

1. The **literal sense of Scripture**, in which the text could be taken at face value
2. The **allegorical sense**, which interpreted certain passages of Scripture to produce statements of doctrine (beliefs)
3. The **tropological or moral sense**, which interpreted such passages to produce ethical guidelines for Christian conduct
4. The **anagogical sense**, which interpreted passages to indicate the grounds of Christian hope, pointing towards the future fulfilment of the divine promises in the New Jerusalem

The role of Spirit in revelation/mysticism

The "Word of God" is deep rooted in Christian theology. "Word" implies action and communication. Just as a person's character and will are expressed through the words he or she uses, Scripture understands God to address people, who are thus made aware of God's intentions and will for them.

The "Word of God" can be understood in three ways:

1. **Jesus Christ as the Word of God** is made flesh (John 1:14) – the nature of God is made known through the person, deeds, character and identity of Jesus Christ
2. The "**gospel of Christ**" or the **message of Christ** – in this sense the phrase refers to what God achieved and made known through the life, death and resurrection of Christ
3. The term can in a general sense be used to refer to the **whole Bible**, setting the scene for the coming of Christ. For many the phrase 'Word of God' is an alternative way of saying 'the Bible'.

Karl Barth offers a theological account of the place of Scripture in the church, grounding it in the notion of **God's self-revelation in Christ**.

Doctrine of “the threefold form of the Word of God”:

1. Word of God embodied in **Christ**
2. Witness to this Word in **Scripture**
3. Proclamation of this Word in the **preaching** of the community of faith

Therefore there is a direct and organic connection between the preaching of the church and the person of Jesus Christ.

Criticism:

- For Barth, scripture is only a ‘witness of’ revelation, it is not itself revelation
- Does this reduce biblical authority to our subjective opinion of God’s divine address that confronts us through the human words of the Bible?

Bernard McGinn defines Christian mysticism as: “That part, or element, of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of [...] **a direct and transformative presence of God**”.

The biblical dimension of mysticism refers to “**hidden**” or **allegorical interpretations of Scriptures**.

The Christian scriptures provide many key stories and concepts that become important for Christian mystics in all later generations: practices such as the [Eucharist](#), [baptism](#) and the [Lord’s Prayer](#) all become activities that take on importance for both their ritual and symbolic values.

Other scriptural narratives present scenes that become the focus of meditation: the [Crucifixion of Jesus](#) and his appearances after his [Resurrection](#) are two of the most central to Christian theology; but Jesus’ conception, in which the [Holy Spirit](#) overshadows Mary, and his [Transfiguration](#), in which he is briefly revealed in his heavenly glory, also become important images for meditation.

2.1. The nature and role of Jesus

The nature and role of Jesus, including the strengths and weaknesses of key ideas, their impact on the development of Christianity and understanding the nature of Jesus in the life of Christians.

- a) *The Early Church – the Arian heresy and the Chalcedonian definition concerning the two natures of Jesus and his work in salvation. With reference to the ideas of Arius and Athanasius.*
- b) *The Reformation – views on salvation and justification, including notions of sin, sacrifice, justification by grace, revelation of God, Mediator, Prophet, Priest and King. With reference to the ideas of M Luther and J Calvin.*
- c) *Modern views – whether and how God suffers in or through Jesus, context to these thoughts and the relationship of biblical texts on suffering to notions of impassibility. (1) With reference to the ideas of J Moltmann and T Weinandy.*

Jesus and the early Church

Christology

Jesus is the Messiah: The Jews believed that the Messiah, a new king of Israel, would come from God and rule over a renewed people of God. Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus himself confirmed this: ‘The woman said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us”. Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he’ (John 4:25-26).

However, many expected the messiah to be victorious, and the fact that Jesus suffered and died were at odds with this expectation.

Jesus is the Son of God: In the Old Testament ‘Son of God’ was usually used in the sense of something ‘belonging to God’. All believers are children of God by adoption. However, this relationship between Jesus and God the Father is different from this: ‘The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory’ (Romans 8:17).

Jesus is the Son of Man: Son of Man is used to speak of a future eschatological figure, whose coming will bring divine judgement upon humanity.

Jesus is God: Jesus angered the Jewish authorities when he claimed to be God, a claim they regarded as blasphemous because they believed God was one. However, the New Testament does make this claim: ‘the Word was God’ (John 1:1).

Jesus revealed God to humanity: ‘anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). The Father speaks through Jesus and acts through him; in a very real sense, to have seen Jesus is to have seen God the Father.

The Arian heresy

The Arian heresy is concerned with the nature of Christ. Is he divine? Is he man? Can he be both at once? The controversy is concerned with just how ‘human’ Christ really was and in what respects he differed from other humans.

In the second century, some, such as the **Docetists**, took the view that Christ was divine and that he took human form just for the sake of appearance. So when he suffered on the cross, that suffering was apparent rather than real, because God cannot suffer physically.

This view was put forward by Saturninus of Antioch: ‘the Saviour was unborn, incorporeal and without form... he was a human being in appearance only’

This view was **heavily criticised** by many theologians, including **Ignatius of Antioch** who, in his Letter to the Trallians, wrote: Jesus was ‘truly born, who ate and drank, who was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and truly died, in full view of heaven, earth and hell, and who was truly raised from the dead’

The debate reached a climax with the **Arian heresy**. The scholar Arius argued that Jesus was human but ‘of like substance’ with God. This was challenged by Athanasius who said that he was divine ‘of the same substance’ as God.

ATHANASIUS said...

- Only God saves
- Jesus Christ saves
- Therefore Jesus Christ *is* God

Therefore Jesus is divine 'of the same substance' as God (homoousios)

ARIUS said...

Christ was:

- A creature made by God
- Of superior status to other creatures, but not as high in status as God
- Of actual superior status simply because God willed it, not because it was in his actual nature

Therefore Jesus is human but 'of like substance' with God (homoiousios)

Athanasius won the debate. The Nicene Creed of 381 CE was agreed upon. It became the basis of orthodox Christianity, affirming that **Christ is God incarnate**, 'of the same substance' as the Father:

'We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, the maker of all things seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten not made; of one substance with the Father... who took flesh, becoming a human being; he suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens; and will come again to judge the living and the dead'

The Chalcedonian definition

In 451 CE, the Council of Chalcedon laid down the definitive statement of the two natures of Christ.

It declared that **Jesus Christ was truly human and truly divine**, although it did not say how this was to be understood.

This has become the accepted view of mainstream Christianity: **'we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of one substance with us in relation to his humanity'**.

The Council of Chalcedon was the church's attempt to resolve, or perhaps rather to agree to live with, **the tension between the source of salvation (God) and the locus of salvation (humanity)**.

Evaluation

- Was the Arian controversy really resolved?
- Is it possible to reconcile the idea of one, transcendent, immutable God with the idea of Jesus as God incarnate?
- Is worshipping Jesus the same as worshipping God? What about worshipping Saints?
- Athanasius argued that Christians were right to worship Jesus because they correctly recognised him as God incarnate. Is this acceptable? Or is worshipping of Jesus idolatry because it's worshipping a human rather than God?

Reformation teachings of Jesus

The Protestant Reformation was the **16th-century** religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that **splintered Catholic Europe**, setting in place the structures and beliefs that would define the continent in the modern era. In northern and central Europe, reformers like **Martin Luther, John Calvin and Henry VIII** challenged **papal authority** and questioned the Catholic Church's ability to **define Christian practice**. They argued for a religious and political **redistribution of power** into the hands of Bible- and pamphlet-reading pastors and princes. The disruption triggered wars, persecutions and the so-called Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's delayed but forceful response to the Protestants.

Luther was a German theologian whose writings inspired the Protestant Reformation.

Luther had become **increasingly angry about the clergy selling 'indulgences'** - promised remission from punishments for sin, either for someone still living or for one who had died and was believed to be in purgatory. On 31 October 1517, he published his **'95 Theses'**, attacking **papal abuses** and the **sale of indulgences**.

Luther had come to believe that **Christians are saved through faith** and not through their own efforts. This turned him against many of the major teachings of the Catholic Church. In 1519 -1520, he wrote a series of pamphlets developing his ideas - 'On Christian Liberty', 'On the Freedom of a Christian Man', 'To the Christian Nobility' and 'On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church'. Thanks to the printing press, Luther's '95 Theses' and his other writings spread quickly through Europe.

In 1534, Luther published a complete **translation of the Bible** into German, underlining his belief that people should be able to read it in their own language. The translation contributed significantly to the spread and development of the German language.

The person of Christ

- The basis of Martin Luther's teaching is that it is through **Christ's righteousness** that humanity is saved
- Christ united himself with humanity through his **incarnate life and atoning death**
- Humanity, in return, **is united with Christ through faith**
- Christ **identified himself** completely with humanity and **took the guilt of human sin** on the cross with him, and even, in his humanity, felt abandoned by God at the moment of his death: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34)

Sin and Sacrifice

- Luther believes that humanity, although stained by sin, is **deeply loved and respected by God** and that the believer sees in Christ **the eternal love and goodness of God**
- The believer was **able to unite with Christ**, as a child of God, so that all Christ has is theirs, as the forgiven sinner becomes united with Christ
- Christ died to **pay the legal penalty for the sins of humanity** and, as a result, humanity is forgiven
- **Atonement is the reconciliation of God to humanity**: Christ died so that sin could be removed and the relationship between God and his people was restored
- Jesus **conquered and destroyed sin**, and his suffering was an **infinite sacrifice** for all time

Revelation of God

- Luther believed that it was **God's will** that he made himself known to mankind only through Christ
- God is known **only through Christ**, especially through Christ's humility, weakness and suffering: 'to seek God outside Jesus is the devil'
- This knowledge of God is possible because of the **two natures of Christ: human and divine**

Justification by faith

Justification is God's act of removing the guilt and penalty of sin while at the same time declaring a sinner righteous through Christ's atoning sacrifice. It is how God *justifies* us going to heaven.

For **Catholics**, this starts at Baptism and continues with the seven sacraments. Justification occurs after a lifetime of striving to do God's will and avoiding grave sins.

Catholic views are based on: Matthew 19:17–19:17: ¹⁷*And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

For **Protestants**, justification is a singular act in which God declares an unrighteous individual to be righteous, an act made possible because Christ was legally "made sin" while on the cross. Justification is granted to all who exercise faith.

Protestant views are based on: 2 Corinthians 5:21–5:21 ²¹*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Romans 5:1— *Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The Greek verb tense used in this verse means a **once-and-for-all transaction**. We have been justified - that is, **declared not guilty once and for all**. The word justify is not only a theological term, but it is a judicial or legal term as well. As far back as the book of Genesis, the question was asked, "**Shall not the Judge of the earth deal justly?**" (Gen. 18:25 NASB). If we accept the Lord Jesus Christ who died in our place, we **are justified, at peace, spared from the penalty**.

Luther emphasises the critical **role of faith** in establishing an intimate relationship between Christ and the believer.

Criticisms:

- Luther insists that justification is by faith, not works. The problem with this is that the role of good works in the Christian life becomes obsolete. Does this mean that good works were of no value?
- Philip Melancthon argues that there is still a place for good works within the Christian life, they are just not the cause of justification

Calvin – the doctrine of sin

Calvin believed that Jesus was the one who would bring salvation and restore sinful human nature. He argued that the **sin of Adam had plunged all of humanity into a state of depravity**.

Sin was not just the name given to human actions, but was the **direction and inclination of human nature**. People were sinners because that was **the consequence of their 'fallen' condition**; they sinned because they were sinners.

Freedom from sin **came from Jesus Christ**.

Calvin: the person of Christ

For Calvin, **Christ was the Mediator**, the one who speaks with God on behalf of humanity. A mediator **acts between two parties** and Christ is depicted in the New Testament as being **the mediator between God the Father and humanity**.

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15)

Calvin believed humanity could only know God through Christ and that, through Christ, God and humanity can only be reconciled through mediation. God is righteous and just and this means **he must give punishment to those who sin**. At the same time, he is a loving God.

A **mediator is needed so that God can be righteous yet loving and merciful at the same time**. To do this, God became a human: 'The work of redemption could not... have been accomplished unless the mediator were himself both God and man'.

Humans **lack the ability to save themselves**, so true knowledge of God and salvation had to come to them from outside, **from Christ**.

Christ was both true God and true human, the oneness of the God-Man.

- Jesus had to become human in order to be able to offer himself as a ransom for sin
- Through his sacrifice, he broke the power of sin and death over the human race

- As a human, Christ concealed his divinity under the 'veil' of his flesh, but his humanity was very real: he suffered real sorrows, felt human emotions and experienced human suffering

Calvin - Prophet, King and Priest

Calvin explained the work of Christ by speaking of his **three offices** (munus triplex Christi): Prophet, King and Priest.

1. To recognise Christ as **Prophet** was to realise that, outside of him, 'there is nothing worth knowing'.
2. As **King**, Christ acts as God's vice-regent in governing the world.
3. As **Priest**, Christ acted as the perfect mediator, sinless and pure. He satisfied the wrath of God by atoning for the sins of humanity by offering himself as a ransom.

Calvin – the nature of God

Calvin, like Luther, believed that humanity has a **natural awareness and consciousness of God**, which enables people to be dimly aware of him

This comes from:

- The natural world
- The human consciousness
- The whole course of events and human history

Calvin said that humanity was **so overwhelmed by sin** that people cannot find God themselves, so God chooses to reveal himself to them

Everything happens **because God wills it** (a firm belief in predestination), and it is the first duty of humanity to recognise and acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God

Strengths of Reformers' view of Jesus

Empowers individuals: to know God directly through Jesus rather than through a priestly hierarchy acting as mediators which could abuse this power through indulgences (the Church would sell indulgences to believers as a means to make money). Luther proposed a universal priesthood with Christ alone as mediator-directly accessible to all people at all times.

Biblical foundation: The reformation's central role of Jesus in salvation is underpinned by scripture: John 14:6: "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".

Loving God: This is an appealing understanding of the nature and role of Jesus as God, through love, steps down into the world to atone for our sin which we on our own would be incapable of, thus God shows his love for us through the role of Jesus as saviour.

Weaknesses of Reformers' view of Jesus

Creates schisms: The ignoring of the tradition of the Church amongst reformation theologians passed down from the apostles creates theological anarchy whereby individuals without a formal theological background can formulate their own understandings of the nature and role of Christ creating endless schism within the church. For example the Jehovah's witnesses argue that Jesus is God's only direct creation and that everything else was created through Christ by means of God's power, breaking with traditional teaching which damages Church unity.

Exclusive language: Calvin's assertion that outside of Jesus 'there is nothing worth knowing' is unhelpful in the drive towards inter-faith dialogue in a pluralist non-Christian society as it down grades the status and role of other religious leaders e.g. Guru Nanak, Muhammad etc..

Ignores tradition: The Biblical foundation to the reformation is appealing to those who give primacy to scripture (Protestants) yet this excludes and downgrades the role of tradition in understanding Jesus which comes via the apostles and priesthood which is favored in the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore the reformation's understanding of the nature and role of Jesus may be less appealing to some tradition focused Christians.

Modern views on Jesus

Keywords

- **Impassibility:** unaffected by emotion
- **Passibility:** Capable of feeling or suffering
- **Immutable:** unchanging
- **Aporia:** the expression of doubt
- **Divine apatheia:** God's incapacity to suffer
- **Pathos:** a quality that evokes pity or sadness
- **Transcendent:** outside of creation

The problem

In the central beliefs of Christianity there is a paradox. On the one hand God the creator is **transcendent** (outside of creation) and **immutable** (unchanging). On the other God the son is believed to have become **fully human** in the person of Jesus and to have **suffered and died** a painful death.

How can God be both transcendent and immanent? Can an immutable God really understand our suffering?

For **three main reasons** a paradigm shift away from a perfect impassable (unaffected by emotion) God as defined in Greek dialogues such as Plato's Republic went out of favour in the 20th century and was replaced with the notion of a suffering God

1. Firstly **protest atheism** developed in response to the horrors of the trenches of World War One and begged the question: **How can anyone believe in or worship a God that is detached, indifferent and invulnerable to human suffering? Christians cannot continue to have faith in a God who is immune to suffering**
2. Secondly a renewed interest in **Martin Luther's work** came about at the 1883 400th anniversary of his birth and the Weimar edition of his works was published resulting in many of his previously unpublished works becoming available. Especially Luther's idea about a God who is "**hidden in suffering**" became widely discussed
3. Thirdly, Christians came to believe that **Greek thought relating to an impassable God had influenced the Christian writers** of the patristic period (c. 100-700); they thought this should be challenged in favour of a God who suffers through and in Christ

Implications: Therefore scholars started to argue that **God is possible** – he can and does undergo emotional change and he can suffer

Jurgen Moltmann

"Whoever is capable of love is also capable of suffering because he is open to the suffering which love brings with it"

- Born into an atheist family and became a German soldier
- Surrendered at the end of WW2 and became a prisoner of war
- Was horrified at Nazi atrocities and felt shame
- An American chaplain gave him a NT and he slowly found freedom from his guilt through faith in Christ
- In his book *The Suffering God* he asks the question "Does God suffer?"
- He was bothered by the question: where was God, in Auschwitz? How should we think about God, after Auschwitz?
- The early fathers of the Church believed that God is unable to suffer – if God is impassable (unaffected by emotion), immutable (unchanging and eternal (outside of time) then he is unable to relate to human suffering
- However, Moltmann argues that if God is a God of love, God must suffer

In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann retold Elie Wiesel's horrific story of a Jewish boy hung by the Nazis along with two men in the camp at Buna. It took half an hour for the youth to die and, as the men of the camp watched his torment, one asked: "Where is God now?" Wiesel heard a voice within him answer: "Where is he? He is here? He is hanging there on the gallows."

Moltmann used the story to argue **for a God who suffers in union with those who suffer**. "How can God be an immutable, impassable, idle and indifferent bystander in the midst of such unspeakable suffering?"

If God is a loving and compassionate God, he must not only be aware of human suffering, but **he must also himself be an "active" victim of such suffering**. He too must suffer.

A God who does not suffer is a deficient, not perfect God. God was not forced to suffer, but willed himself to suffer.

Moltmann – the suffering of Christ

Moltmann then extends this to discuss the issue of God's suffering on the cross. Christ called out "My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?"

What does it mean for Christ to suffer and die? **Does the whole God / God the Father die too?**

Moltmann argues that **the pain experienced by Jesus (the Son) on the cross is different from the pain experience by God (in seeing his son die on the cross)**. God does not die – "we must speak in terms of the Trinity and leave the universal concept of God aside"

The Son suffers the pain and death of the cross, the Father suffers the loss of the son, but their involvement is not identical.

Bauckham's Divine Passibility

The Greek philosophical inheritance in traditional theology was adopted without the necessary critical effect of the central Christian insight into the divine nature: **the love of God revealed in the cross of Christ**.

For the Greeks, suffering implied deficiency of being, weakness, subjection, instability. But **the cross shows us a God who suffers out of the fullness of his being because he is love**.

He does not suffer against his will, but **willingly undertakes to suffer with and for those he loves**.

His suffering does not deflect him from his purpose, but **accomplishes his purpose**.

His transcendence does not keep him aloof from the world, but as **transcendent love appears in the depth of his self-sacrificing involvement in the world**.

Finally, if Christians know anything about God from the cross, it is that **'the weakness of God is stronger than men'** (1 Cor. 1:25). The cross does not make God a helpless victim of evil, but **is the secret of his power and his triumph over evil**. This is why 'only the suffering God can help'.

Strengths of Moltmann

Relatable post WW2: Moltmann's suffering God fits with the Japanese writer Kazuo Kitamori who argues in his book *A Theology of the Pain of God* that **true love was rooted in pain**. He argues "God is the wounded Lord, having pain in himself" God is able to give **meaning and dignity to human suffering** on account of the fact that he is also suffering. This makes God **more accessible and relatable** to humans especially in the post-world war two Japanese context where nuclear annihilation was brought to the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Modern: Moltmann's view of a suffering God fits with much modern 20th century theology such as A. N. Whitehead's process theology. This suggests **God is not omnipotent and therefore Moltmann's view of a suffering God in a process framework overcomes the paradox of an infinite almighty God unable to suffer**. Moreover if God is not omnipotent he is more accessible to a non-religious pluralistic society in which God can be welcomed as a **"fellow sufferer who understands"** rather than an indifferent immutable Platonic God unable to understand us.

Biblical Foundation: Recent studies of the Old Testament-such as Abraham Heschel's *God of the Prophets* and T. E. Fretheim's *Suffering of God* identify that **God shared in the pathos (emotion, sympathy) of Israel**: God is hurt and moved by the suffering of God's people under Pharaoh in Egypt. Moreover God **grieved over the sins** of his people preceding the flood. Therefore there is **Biblical foundation** for Moltmann's suffering God.

Weakness of Moltmann (Thomas Weinandy)

Son of God suffered, not God

- **Christ as the son of God experienced human suffering** in an authentic manner, suffering as humans do, however this suffering was not in his divine nature but in his **human nature**. Suffering is caused by the loss of some good and so Christ lost his human well-being and life, but he was **not deprived of his divine perfection** or good (he rose again). Hence God did not suffer.

God is transcendent

- Friar Weinandy rejects the shift in theology from the late 19th century onwards to a personable God who suffers and understands. Weinandy argues Moltmann **ignores the significance of God's transcendence (outside the world) for understanding God's immanence (within the world)**. He argues it is precisely because God transcends the whole created order of time and history that His immanent actions e.g. crucifixion within time and history acquire singular significance". Meaning if God was only immanent his actions like ours would be less important, **it is his transcendence which gives significance** and Moltmann ignores this focusing instead on God's immanent suffering.

God exists in his own distinct ontological order

- Moltmann ignores the fact that God occupies an **ontologically distinct realm to humans** as the creator. The sin and evil which causes humans to suffer is **contained wholly within the created order** hence God, set apart from this, cannot suffer and the sin of the created order cannot reverberate or wash back into the uncreated order. If the sin and evil of the created order caused God to suffer it would demand that he existed in the same ontological order to creation, rather than his own, which is false.

God is immutable: love is multiply realised

- Although God does in Biblical stories in the Old Testament appear to experience emotion: Psalm 103:13 "Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him" Weinandy argues that "while such statements are literally true about God, they are, I believe, **not to be taken literally**". Such statements do wish to inform us that God is truly compassionate and forgiving as he does grieve over sin and is angry with his people. However such emotional states **originate not from a change in God but from a change within the others involved**. God's love remains unchanging and unalterable regardless of his creations' actions it just **manifests in different ways** i.e. tough love rather than anger during the Babylonian exile.

Panentheism: no creator, no salvation

- Theologians who accept that God suffers must accept a form of **Panentheism** (God is both beyond and within the world) being within the cosmic order God must accept sin and suffering that comes with this. However Weinandy argues that if God's nature is constituted by his being a member of the cosmic order (within the universe) then **he can no longer be its all loving creator**. He argues "God may suffer in union with all who suffer...but in so suffering, **humankind, and even God himself are deprived of any hope of ever being freed from evil** and the suffering it causes". There is no hope of good triumphing over evil if God is limited by being within the world himself-how could he be our saviour? Therefore a suffering God is religiously devastating.

Unit 3: Practice and Identity

3.1. The Eucharist

- The importance of sacraments in some denominations, the context of differing practices of the Eucharist, interpretations of the variety of practices and their meaning and significance.*
- Key ideas, including sacrament, grace, transubstantiation and transignification, Real Presence, memorial.*
- The experience of believers when taking part in the Eucharist, reflection and self-awareness. Implications for Christian practice in the experience of a believer and Christian communities.*

Sacraments play a vital part in Christian worship. It is used to denote those rites and ceremonies in the Christian church that are outward signs conveying an inner truth. The word does not appear in the Bible; the original definition was found in *The Book of Common Prayer* – ‘an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace’. Sacraments express the way believers understand the fundamental relationship between God, Christ, the church, humanity and creation. They are, in a sense, the manifestation of the presence of Christ in the world.

In 1142, Peter Lombard, in *The Four Books of Sentences*, laid out the view that has remained the position of the Roman Catholic church ever since, that there were seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, marriage, penance for sins, unction for the sick and dying, and ordination. However, during the Reformation it was argued in some quarters that the only sacraments should be those ‘ordained of Christ our Lord in the gospel’ (Article 25 of the 39 Articles). This meant that only baptism and the Eucharist were retained in most Protestant churches. In the document *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Vatican II argued that the sacraments should be understood not as ritual mechanisms of **grace**, but in their living relationship to Christ and the church. It stated that the preferable way to celebrate the sacraments was in communal worship with all believers, rather than, as had often been the case, in a private way. The celebration of the sacraments ought to be more active and dynamic, as the sacraments are an important part of growth in the Christian faith: ‘*Sacraments not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it. That is why they are called “sacraments of faith”*’.

What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist, Holy Communion, Mass or Lord’s Supper is a rite that Christians perform in obedience to Jesus’s command in the gospel accounts of the Last Supper. The earliest description we have of what became known as the Eucharist is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Paul speaks of the ‘*Lord’s Supper*’ and states that part of the ritual is to repeat the words of Jesus on the night he was betrayed: ‘*This is my body ... this is my blood ... eat ... drink in remembrance of me*’. The main function of the Eucharist for Paul was to enable those who take part to recognise the presence of the Lord by his Spirit at the meal. There are also elements of memorial for the death of Jesus and an anticipation of his return. Because Paul himself was not present at the Last Supper, his teaching regarding the meal has come to him as a divine revelation and he includes a statement not found in the gospels: ‘*Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself*’ (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). This presumably means disregarding the true meaning of the rite and forgetting the sacrifice made by Jesus that it commemorates. Or it may mean that it should not be shared while there is unconfessed sin to be dealt with, hence the need for everyone to ‘*examine themselves*’ before partaking of it.

The three synoptic gospels (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–26 and Luke 22:14–23) all include versions of these words of institution. Even though the fourth gospel contains no Last Supper narrative (the meal is essentially substituted by a symbolic foot washing), John 6 appears to have Eucharistic associations: ‘*For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him*’ (John 6:55–56). Christians understand the Eucharist as denoting the presence of Jesus in a special way, although they differ about exactly how, where and when Christ is present. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek *eucharistia*, which means thanksgiving, and the corresponding verb *eucharisto*, to give thanks. The two forms are found in 55 verses of the New Testament, four of which record that Jesus gave thanks before giving his disciples the bread and the wine that he identified with his body and his blood. For most the Eucharist is a sacrament, although many Protestant traditions speak of it instead as an ordinance, which does not channel divine grace but is an expression of obedience to Jesus’s command.

The elements of the Lord’s Supper are most commonly unleavened bread and wine. In traditions in which temperance movements (Christians that reject the drinking of alcohol) have had strong influence, grape juice is usually substituted for wine. Roman Catholic and Anglican churches usually offer the host in the form of a tasteless white wafer, but many churches will now vary the form the bread takes to include literal sharing of one loaf, from which each participant tears off a fragment. This heightens the symbolism of sharing in Christ’s body.

The importance of the Eucharist in contemporary Christian communities

The Eucharist is the Christian church’s most important sacrament. The word *Eucharist* is the Greek word for ‘*thanksgiving*’. Other names for the Eucharist are Holy Communion, Mass and the Lord’s Supper. Aware of his approaching death on the cross, Jesus shared a farewell meal with his disciples (see Matthew 26:26–30 and parallels). He took ordinary bread and wine and shared them, saying of the bread, ‘*This is my body*’, and of the wine, ‘*This is my blood*’. According to Paul (1 Corinthians 11: 26), he then added, ‘*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes*’.

Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions see the Eucharist as an expression of the fulfilment of God’s plan for the salvation of humanity from sin, a commemoration of Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection, the means for Christians to unite with God and with each other, and a means of giving thanks for all these things. The Bible nowhere suggests how often Christians should take communion. Perhaps the most common practice in churches is to do so monthly, although it is not exceptional for it to be celebrated weekly or even more frequently. Generally, there is some latitude for churches to make their own choice, on the principle that it should be often enough to renew focus on Christ’s death and resurrection without being so often that it becomes routine.

Similarities in Eucharistic practice in Christian traditions

Ever since, Christians have taken bread and wine to remember Jesus and to give thanks for him. They believe that, by the grace of God, the bread and wine are symbols of, or in some cases, become, Jesus’ body and blood. Just as human bodies need physical sustenance, so do human souls need spiritual sustenance. In the mystical, timeless sustenance of the Eucharist, Christians believe that Jesus is present with them. The Eucharist is therefore the physical re-enactment of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples. It is also: a meal which has the real presence of Jesus; a source of grace to which all believers are invited; a memorial of Jesus’ last hours on earth; a celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, and of the Christian’s life with him; a symbolic reminder of God’s love for humankind; a fellowship, or ‘*communion*’ of Christians and between them and God.

Key quotes *For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* (1 Corinthians 11:23–27)

Key quotes *His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament ..., the bread and wine having been transubstantiated, by God's power, into his body and blood.* (The Fourth Lateran Council, 1215)

The Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharist

Only an ordained priest is validated to celebrate the Eucharist, and he serves to represent Christ and acts in his name before God, although Deacons may offer the chalice containing the wine and. Only bread made with wheaten and wine made from grapes may be used. According to the Roman Catholic Church, when the bread and wine are consecrated in the Eucharist, they cease to be bread and wine and become instead the body and blood of Christ. The empirical appearances are not changed, but the reality is. The consecration of the bread and wine represents the separation of Jesus's body from his blood on the cross, now united in the bread and wine. This mysterious change of the reality of the bread and wine used in the Eucharist is called **transubstantiation**.

This means that, once the priest has blessed the bread and wine, despite retaining the physical appearance of bread and wine they are transformed into the actual body and blood. Many Christians argue that this is not an idea found in the Bible, but Catholic teaching locates the doctrine in John 6:55, *'For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink'*, and Matthew 26:26, *'Take and eat; this is my body'*. However, Protestant teaching sees these as clearly metaphorical. After Mass, any remaining hosts are kept in a tabernacle and used for administering communion to the sick and dying.

The **real presence** of Christ in the Eucharist is a term used in Christian theology to express the doctrine that Jesus is really or substantially present in the Eucharist, not merely symbolically or metaphorically.

Transubstantiation

From the earliest times, it appears that Christians believed that the bread and the wine of the Eucharist, when consecrated by an ordained priest, changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus. Since the 11th century, the Roman Catholic Church has used the term **transubstantiation** to describe this change. Thus, in the teaching of the Roman Catholic church, the Eucharist is not just one of the seven but is considered the blessed sacrament. It does not only recall the events it celebrates but makes them truly present, so that it serves as an actual participation in Jesus's sacrifice that takes place in a very real way, but without the blood of the crucifixion being actually shed.

The Roman Catholic doctrine was challenged by Protestant Reformers, but in 1551 it was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent as *'that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood ... which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation'*. It was again reaffirmed in 1965 in Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Mysterium Fidei* (The Mystery of the Faith) written in response to two new terms proposed by two contemporary Catholic theologians, **transignification** and **transfinalization**

Transignification

Transignification is a theory put forward by Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009). It proposes that when the priest consecrates the bread and wine of the Eucharist they take on the real significance of Christ's body and blood, but are not chemically changed. Christ is therefore sacramentally, but not physically, present. The theory draws on two concepts which have to do with psychological reality: That all effective signs consist of two parts – *'signifier'* and *'signified'*. In the Eucharist, the *'signifier'* is the substance of the bread and the wine, while the *'signified'* is the substance of Christ's body and blood. That there are two kinds of presence, local and personal. Pupils may be *'locally present'* in a class, but if their thoughts are far away, then they are not *'personally present'*. In the Eucharist Jesus is personally, but not locally present.

Transfinalization

Transfinalization is a theory put forward by the German Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner (1904–1984). It proposes that when the priest consecrates the bread and wine of the Eucharist their purpose and finality are changed, but not their substance. They do not become Christ's body and blood, but serve a new function, which is to stir up faith in the mystery of Christ's redemptive love. Both theories are concerned more with the meaning of the Eucharist than with its substance, and both were condemned by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (1965), because they can be understood as denying transubstantiation.

Key quote *... it is not permissible to ... discuss the mystery of transubstantiation without mentioning what the Council of Trent had to say about the marvellous conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body and the whole substance of the wine into the Blood of Christ, as if they involve nothing more than 'transignification' or 'transfinalization' as they call it ... the spread of these and similar opinions does great harm to belief in and devotion to the Eucharist.* (Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, 1965)

Key terms

- **Transfinalization:** the belief that when the bread and wine are consecrated their purpose is changed, but not their substance
- **Transignification:** the belief that Christ is sacramentally, but not physically, present in the consecrated bread and wine
- **Transubstantiation:** the belief that the bread and wine of the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ when consecrated by a priest

Protestant understandings of the Eucharist

Consubstantiation

The term **consubstantiation** has been used in the English language since the late 16th century to describe a doctrine put forward by Protestant Reformers in that century to challenge the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. It teaches that the bread and wine of the Eucharist do not change into the actual body and blood of Christ when consecrated by a priest. They remain bread and wine. Nevertheless, Christ is spiritually present *'with them, in them and under them'*. The bread *'co-exists'* with his body and the wine with his blood. The prefix *trans-* means *'across, over'*. So *transubstantiation* means that the substance of the bread and wine literally *change over* to become the body and blood of Jesus. The prefix *con-* means *'with'*. So *consubstantiation* means that the body and blood of Jesus *co-exist with* the substance of the bread and wine. The term is often employed to designate the view of the Eucharist held by **Martin Luther** (1483–1546), the Father of the Protestant Reformation, but it was never used by him and is rejected by most Lutheran churches as unbiblical. While it is true that

Luther asserted the *'real presence' of Jesus in the bread and the wine, the term he used was not 'consubstantiation' but 'sacramental union'*. The doctrine was set out in the Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530.

Memorialism

Memorialism is a term used to describe the view of the Eucharist held by Huldrych **Zwingli** (1484–1531). Zwingli denied the real presence of Christ in the sacrament and taught that the bread and wine do not communicate him to the recipient. They are rather symbolic representations of his body and blood. In Luke 22:19, Jesus commands his followers to *'Do this in remembrance of me'*. The Eucharist is therefore a commemorative ceremony where participants remember Jesus' sacrifice for them on the cross. Jesus is present in the sacrament only to the degree that everyone brings him and his work to mind

Key quote Of the Supper of the Lord they (i.e. the Lutheran churches) teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise. (**Article X, The Augsburg Confession, 1530**)

Key terms

- **Consubstantiation:** the belief that the body and blood of Christ co-exist with the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist
- **Memorialism:** the belief that the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist are merely symbolic representations of Christ's body and blood
- **Predestination:** the belief that God has elected some people to be saved, but not others
- **Virtualism:** the belief that Christ's unique power (Latin *virtus*) is present in the consecrated bread and wine, but that this power is received only by the predestined elect

Virtualism

Virtualism is a term used to describe the view of the Eucharist associated with **John Calvin** (1509–1564). Calvin taught the doctrine of **predestination**, which asserted that God, even before he created the world, had chosen some people, whom Calvin called *'the elect'*, to receive salvation, while the rest were left to continue in their sins and receive eternal damnation. Calvin's view of the Eucharist arose from this belief. He taught that Christ's body cannot be present in the Eucharist, because Christ's body has ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:9–11). He did not, however, deny the presence of Christ's unique power (Latin *virtus*) in the bread and wine, but believed that this power is received only by the elect, who have been predestined to receive salvation. For this reason, the doctrine of virtualism is also known as *'receptionism'*.

Key quote- *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, *'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'* (**Luke 22:19–20**)

Who should take communion?

Christian denominations differ in their thinking as to who should be permitted to share communion. Justin Martyr wrote c. 150 CE 'No one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true' and for the first several hundred years of church history non-members were forbidden even to be present at the rite. Today, the Roman Catholic church and some conservative Protestant churches still exclude non-members from communion except under exceptional circumstances. Most Protestant communities, however, practise open communion and many feel that all that is necessary to share communion is faith in Christ, regardless of denomination, although some attempt to limit it to those who are baptised, as far as they can control this.

3.2. The diversity of practice in creative expressions of religious identity

- The depiction of the Nativity and the crucifixion in Christian art and its interpretations and role in Christian devotion.*
- The role of music in Christian worship in a variety of denominations.*
- The role of prayer in private and public devotion, including the use of aids to prayer.*
- The significance of these creative expressions and their impact on Christianity and the lives of Christians as an expression of religious identity and as a connection to, or vehicle for, religious experience.*

Art

Early Christian art

The beginnings of Christian art can be traced to **the end of the second century**. The Old Testament prohibited graven images yet the use of images became increasingly important after the death of Christ, partly **due to the important role played by images in Greco-Roman culture**.

In the third century, there was very little imagery of the nativity, crucifixion or resurrection of Christ. This is perhaps best explained by the **status of Christianity as a mystic religion**.

The **theme of death and resurrection** was common in early Christian art.

Meaning and interpretation of early Christian art:

- Paintings can be seen to **allegorically allude to the principal narrative of the life of Christ**
- The story of Jonah can be seen as an **anticipation or prefiguration of the story of Christ's own death and resurrection**
- The common subject is **salvation**
- The appearance of these images on early Christian tombs can be read as **visual litany: a request to be saved** as God saved Jonah from the belly of the whale, as he saved Daniel in the Lion's den etc.

The role of art in worship

Worship is very visual. Can the proclamation of the Word be strengthened by the visual in worship? Does imagery enhance worship for a believer?

The earliest use of a visual in worship from Scripture is the **Passover experience of the Hebrew people**. The blood of the lambs became **ritualised**, symbolising God's deliverance of the people out of bondage in Egypt.

Christian visuals such as the cross and the fish **symbolise the earliest creeds**. The cross says without words that Christ has risen, the fish proclaims that Jesus is the saviour. **Christian symbols and artwork become a universal language** that reinforce the doctrines and experiences of the Christian faith.

Their purpose is to **express and strengthen the proclamation of the gospel**.

Criticisms:

- The Protestant Reformers emphasised that believers can understand the Bible on their own. They **got rid of most church art for fear people would pray to a saint rather than to God** or would worship an image or its artist instead of the Creator
- They believe stark worship spaces help Christians **focus on the Bible and God**
- During the Reformation, many Protestant theologians criticised Christian art for being a form of idol worship. Many traditions discourage the use of art, including the depiction of God or Jesus Christ.

Despite this, many Christian traditions regard art as a helpful aid to devotion. They see the New Testament as affirming the belief that pictures of Jesus should be used in worship. Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) and the "exact representation" of God (Hebrews 1:4). Therefore Jesus is the authorised visual image for God – Jesus makes God known in a visible and tangible way. As Scottish theologian Hugh Ross Mackintosh says, "When I look into the face of Jesus, and see there the very face of God, I know that I have not seen that face elsewhere and cannot see that face elsewhere". Contemplation of the life and person of Jesus can lead people to a deeper knowledge of God.

The Nativity in Christian art

The Nativity of Jesus has been a major subject of Christian art since the 4th century

Artistic depictions of the Nativity are based on the narratives in the Bible

Christian art includes many representations of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child, often referred to as "Madonna and Child"

Nativity pictures include many narrative details, illustrating both the Life of Christ and the Life of the Virgin

The nativity scene is about appreciating the theological and spiritual importance of the birth of the saviour. The incarnation is about God's descent into the world of sin, so that he might raise us to heaven. The more we are reassured that God really did enter our world, the more we can be reassured that God will ultimately save us.

Early Christianity

The earliest representations of the Nativity are **very simple**. The **ox and the ass** are always present. They were regarded by Augustine as representing the Jewish people, weighed down by the Law (the ox) and the pagan peoples, carrying the sin of idolatry (the ass). **Christ arrived to free both from their burdens**.

Whilst there is no mention of these animals in the gospels, some have suggested they are linked to Isaiah 1:3, which speaks of the ox and the ass knowing their true master and his crib. This is seen as a prophecy linked to the birth of Christ, reminding us that the whole of the created order is involved in the birth of Christ and the new creation which will result from his resurrection.

Byzantine images

Formulated in 6th century Palestine and remains the imagery used in Eastern Orthodox to this day. The **setting became a cave**. Mary lies **recovering next to the infant**, who is on a raised structure. **Angels** surround the scene and the **Magi** may be shown approaching on horseback.

The Orthodox icon of the Nativity uses certain imagery to **parallel the burial shroud of Jesus from Good Friday**. This is done intentionally to illustrate the theological point that **the purpose of the Incarnation of Christ was to make possible the Crucifixion and Resurrection**.

Western depictions

The West adopted many of the Byzantine iconographic elements but preferred the stable rather than the cave. A popular mystic, **St Bridget of Sweden** influenced many images in Northern Europe. Before her death she had a vision of the infant Jesus lying on the ground and **emitting light himself**, and describes the **Virgin as blond-haired**.

Renaissance

From the 15th century onwards, the **adoration of the Magi** increasingly became a more common depiction. Paintings became more intricate and detailed.

In **The Mystic Nativity by Sandro Botticelli**, Mary is depicted in terms appropriate to the era of the painter rather than to the New Testament. Mary is portrayed as noblewoman of the time. The point being made is that Christ's entry into history is of importance to all ages, not simply the Palestine of the first century. Representing Mary as a lady of the Renaissance was a means of emphasising the transformative potential of the Christ-child for that era.

Angels are depicted as dancing with humans, perhaps showing the possibility of a new heaven and earth through Christ.

Jesus' crucifixion in art

Artists throughout the decades have striven to depict Jesus' crucifixion and by doing so bring to life one of the most famous moments of the Bible. Paintings of the crucifixion were **usually intended to foster meditation on Christ's self-sacrifice**, and thus indicate his suffering by showing him hanging heavily with bowed head and bleeding wounds.

The crucifixion was not a subject of early Christian art. Some understand this absence to be because **early Christians were too ashamed to represent their saviour in this way**. In the Roman world, crucifixion was a dishonourable and violent death for slaves and criminals.

Over time, for both religious and artistic reasons, the representation of the body of Jesus on the cross started to change. By the sixth century there was an **increasing interest in the story of his crucifixion** and a greater number of people began to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the holy sites where Jesus died and was resurrected.

The greater detail given to the Passion narrative across Holy week prompted an **artistic shift**. There was more scope for the artist to explore different aspects of the story, so there becomes **more interest in what Jesus experienced as a human on Earth**.

Unlike the stories associated with Christ's birth, the episodes of the Passion are coloured by **painful emotions, such as guilt, pity and grief**, and artists often worked to make the viewer share in these feelings.

By the sixth century, **blood began to be shown** at the site of the nails in the palms and feet. As the **human suffering of Jesus** continued to gain in theological focus, this was matched by artistic developments. The body begins to be shown **more realistically**, hanging from the cross, perhaps twisting in **pain**.

By the 12th century, the more profound S-curve emerges in depictions of the body of the crucified Christ. This was about both the technical proficiency of artists wanting to articulate the reality of what happens to a human body nailed to a cross, and the **deepening theological and devotional interest in the pain and agony of Christ**.

The crucifixion became a symbol of **God sending his only son to share in our own pain**.

Other figures in the paintings, for example the Virgin Mary, began to be depicted as emotional and sorrowful, which in turn makes the scene more accessible to pious meditation.

Some depictions of the passion of Christ depict Christ as raised up on the cross, focusing the attention on the way Christ was "raised up" on the cross so that we might in turn be raised up to heaven by his cross and resurrection. Others focus on the crowds around him, sometimes depicting rage and fury on the faces of those who mocked him. The point is to show that human sin is so deep rooted that our natural instinct is not to adore Christ but to crucify him. It is a reminder of the need for redemption.

Others focus on those who are standing around the cross. E.g. **Grunewald's altarpiece** here. On the left, three people mourn the death of Christ, intending to help us appreciate the appalling impact that Christ's death had on his disciples. John the Baptist is on the right, pointing to Christ, showing that he is the one who will redeem us.

Importance of crucifixion art

Churches and houses are often decorated with depictions of the crucifixion as a means of encouraging personal devotion.

Christian writers and artists have always been aware of the need to reflect on this pivotal event, and its life changing implications.

Christianity stresses the reality of Christ's agony on the cross and the salvation it achieved. Visual representations of Christ's suffering therefore stress the costliness of our redemption and deepens Christian appreciation of what he achieved.

Music

Song in scripture

After escaping from the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel sang a song to the Lord (Exod. 15). Singing was part of Israel's formal worship in both tabernacle and temple (1 Chron. 6:31-32, 16:42). The Psalms bear rich testimony that in joy and sorrow, in praise and lament, the faithful raise their voices in song to God. Hymn singing was practiced by Jesus and his disciples (Matt. 26:30). The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3: 16-17).

Music in the early church

- One of the earliest forms of worship music in the church was the [Gregorian chant](#) – Pope Gregory I was acknowledged as the first person to order such music in the church. It was known for its monophonic sound
- Common themes of Christian music include praise, worship, penitence (repentance) and lament (grief)
- Primitive Baptists – a cappella singing

Christian hymnody

- **Thomas Aquinas** defined a hymn as: "the praise of God with song; a song is the exultation of the mind dwelling on eternal things, bursting forth in the voice"
- The earliest Christian hymns are mentioned around the year 64 by **St Paul** in his letters
- The **Protestant Reformation** resulted in two conflicting attitudes to hymns:
 - Zwinglians, Calvinists and other radical reformers considered anything that was not directly authorised by the Bible to be offensive, so **all hymns that were not direct quotes from the Bible** fell into this category and were banned. Instead of hymns, biblical psalms were chanted (known as exclusive psalmody and still found in some "free churches" in Scotland)
 - The other approach, favoured by Martin Luther produced a burst of hymn writing and congregational singing. Luther and his followers **used hymns to teach tenets of the faith**

Contemporary Christian music

- In the US and in other countries with Evangelical music, there has been a recent development of Contemporary Christian music (CCM), which includes Christian pop, rock, metal, punk and other secular genres
- It began as a **form of evangelisation** for the young, and now plays a significant role in Evangelical Christian worship. A great variety of music styles has developed traditional praise

Denominational differences

Charles Wesley's hymns spread Methodist theology, not only within Methodism, but in most Protestant churches. He developed a new focus: expressing one's personal feelings in the relationship with God as well as the simple worship seen in older hymns. The Methodist Revival of the 18th century created an explosion of hymn writing in Welsh, which continued into the first half of the 19th century.

African-Americans developed a rich hymnody out of the spirituals sung during times of slavery. During the Second Great Awakening in the United States, this led to the emergence of a new popular style. Fanny Crosby, Ira D. Sankey, and others produced testimonial music for evangelistic crusades. These are often designated "gospel songs" as distinct from hymns, since they generally include a refrain (or chorus) and usually (though not always) a faster tempo than the hymns. As examples of the distinction, "Amazing Grace" is a hymn (no refrain), but "How Great Thou Art" is a gospel song. During the 19th century the gospel-song genre spread rapidly in Protestantism and, to a lesser but still definite extent, in Roman Catholicism. The gospel-song genre is unknown in the worship per se by Eastern Orthodox churches, which rely exclusively on traditional chants, and disallow instrumental accompaniment.

Along with the more classical sacred music of composers ranging from Mozart to Monteverdi, the Roman Catholic Church continued to produce many popular hymns such as Lead, Kindly Light, Silent Night, O Sacrament Divine and Faith of our Fathers.

Many churches today use contemporary worship music which includes a range of styles often influenced by popular music. This style began in the late 1960s and became very popular during the 1970s. A distinctive form is the modern, lively black gospel style.

The significance of music for Christian communities

- Music is seen as a gift from God, and is part of the created order. Human music-making participates in the music of creation and reflects the order, beauty and diversity of God's creation
- The human voice should be used to praise God. Karl Barth argues that singing is the highest form of human expression: "The praise of God which finds its concrete culmination in the singing of the community is one of the indispensable forms of the ministry of the church"
- Singing is the art form most suited to expressing the church's unity in the body of Christ. Different voices and instruments are blended to offer a single, living, unified work of beauty. John Calvin recognised the power of congregational singing and unison prayer in helping the church express and experience the unity of the body of Christ: "The chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of the believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same mouth, we all glorify God together, worshiping him with one spirit and the same faith."
- Music is always the servant of the Lord and should be used to glorify God. Calvin cautioned that "we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words".
- Through congregational song God's people learn their language about God – they learn how to speak with God. Hymns, both ancient and modern, which stretch minds, increase vocabulary, rehearse the biblical story and teach of the nature and mighty acts of God are essential for the congregation's growth in faith. Thus theology is expressed through congregational singing.
- The emotional power of music is a vital and moving aid to worship. Calvin recognised the emotional power of music: singing "lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our heart to a true zeal and eagerness to pray".

Prayer

Praying is the time spent being in the presence of God. St Paul taught it is the Spirit within who prays for us to communicate with God.

Prayer is an integral element of all forms of Christian worship. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines it as "a covenant relationship between God and humanity in Christ... In the new covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their father who is good beyond measure, with his Son".

Prayer takes a variety of forms. A distinction is made between the private prayers of individuals and the public prayer of the church. Perhaps the most important type of prayer is petitionary prayer, in which the congregation make specific requests of God. This type of prayer can be illustrated from the teaching of Jesus, who compared this type of prayer to human requests.

Christians are urged to make time to pray, as prayer is a sign of faith that will be rewarded by God. Christians believe that by praying through Jesus you can develop a personal relationship with God.

Types of prayer

Private prayer

- PRAISE / ADORATION – being joyful and loving God and His abundant bounty.
- THANKSGIVING - appreciation for God and His immeasurable gifts of love and goodness
- CONFESSION - contrition for our sins against God and others
- INTERCESSION – praying on behalf of someone else, being concerned about the plight and need of others
- PETITION – asking God for something

Public prayer

Mass – receiving the sacrament, giving thanks for the Lord's life and strength

Coming together for weekly prayers

Silent prayer / Contemplation

Using meditation or contemplation as prayer. Focusing on God and being conscious of Him. Sometimes an icon is used to focus the wandering mind such as a crucifix or statue. Meditation can help give insight into daily lives and spiritual journey.

The Divine Office / Liturgy of the Hours

This is the official set of prayers "marking the hours of each day and sanctifying the day with prayer". Together with Mass, it constitutes the official public prayer life of the Church. All priests and deacons are bound to say them daily. It consists primarily of psalms supplemented by hymns, readings and other prayers and antiphons.

Ejaculatory prayer

Prayers offered throughout the day – prayers of help, thanks, praise, gratitude, contrition.

Grace

Prayers at meals that recognise that God is the provider of everything, asking God to bless food before eating. Afterwards it can be a prayer of thanks.

The Lord's Prayer

The oldest Christian prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples. Teaches forgiveness so that God will forgive believers. It is a way to salvation and freedom.

Purpose of prayer

- Focus on God and get closer to him
- To learn not to be selfish and to realise not to be dependent on others
- Improve their life and help them come to terms with things they've done
- Help others who suffer, and to inspire them to do something practical to help others too
- Bring inner peace

Unit 4. Social and historical developments

4.1. Science

- a) *The challenge to Christian belief of modern science, including cosmology and evolution, and the view that science may replace a religious interpretation of the universe*
- b) *Strengths and weaknesses of these challenges, the responses to them and the impact of these debates on Christian thought.*

With reference to the ideas of Galileo and Darwin.

The challenge to Cosmology: Galileo and Copernicus

The work of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) sparked serious theological debates over the interpretation of the Bible.

The model of the universe that was most widely accepted during the early Middle Ages **placed the earth at the centre of the universe**. Increasingly detailed and precise observation of the movement of the planets and stars during the Middle Ages caused **increasing difficulties for this theory**.

During the sixteenth century, the geocentric model of the solar system was gradually abandoned **in favour of a heliocentric model, which depicted the sun as lying at its centre**.

The Copernican revolution

The Copernican revolution presented **the earth as one of a number of planets orbiting the sun**. It was one of the most significant changes in the human perception of reality to have taken place in the past millennium.

The Church had become so used to interpreting Scripture from a geocentric **perspective that it assumed that this was the explicit teaching of Scripture itself**.

Galileo vs the Catholic Church

In the seventeenth century, Galileo mounted a major defence of the Copernican theory of the solar system.

The issue was about **the correct interpretation of the Bible**. Galileo's critics argued that some biblical passages contradicted him.

For example, they regarded **Joshua 10:12 spoke of the sun standing still at Joshua's command**. They thought this proved that it was the sun which moved around the earth.

Galileo countered by arguing this was **simply a common way of speaking**. Joshua could not be expected to know the intricacies of modern celestial mechanics.

Galileo's views were met with resistance. The key factor was **theological innovation**: to concede Galileo's interpretation of certain biblical passages would **undermine Catholic criticisms of Protestantism**, which involved the assertion that Protestantism introduced new (and therefore erroneous) interpretations of biblical passages.

In short – if Catholics accepted the Galileo was correct, this would mean the entire Bible would be up for interpretation, meaning their argument that the Bible is unchangeable would no longer be valid.

Christian responses to Galileo

John Calvin's Reformer theology was of decisive importance in preserving the credibility of the Bible. He made two considerable contributions.

1. Calvin stressed the orderliness of creation: both the physical world and the human body testify to the wisdom and character of God. Therefore the sciences should be studied – it allows us to discover more about the natural world, and therefore uncover further evidence of the orderliness of creation and the wisdom of its creator.

Calvin thus gave a new religious motivation to the scientific investigation of nature – it came to be seen as perceiving the wise hand of God in creation.

The regularity of the universe, as established by Newton, Galileo and Copernicus, is interpreted as evidence of design.

2. Calvin also insisted that not all biblical statements concerning God or the world were to be taken literally, for they were written for the knowledge of its audience. Scripture, in speaking of the sun rotating around the earth, was simply accommodating itself to the worldview of its audience, not making scientific statements about the universe.

Writer Edward Wright said that Scripture was not concerned with physics, and its manner of speaking was "accommodated to the understanding and way of speech of the common people, like nurses to little children"

The Challenge to evolution: Darwin

Traditional Christian theology regarded humanity as the height of God's creation, distinguished from the remainder of the created order by being created in the image of God. Humanity is located within the created order as a whole, yet stands above it on account of its unique relationship to God.

Yet Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871) posed challenges to this view. Humanity had emerged, over a vast period of time, from within the natural order. This is immense implications for the theological status of human nature.

For Darwinists, we must recognise that we are animals, part of the evolutionary process. Darwinism thus critiques the absolutist assumptions concerning the place of humanity within nature that lie behind "speciesism" (a term introduced by Richard Ryder and popularised by Peter Singer).

Darwin himself struggled to come to terms with the implications for human status and identity. The conclusion to *The Descent of Man* speaks of humanity in exalted terms while insisting upon its lowly biological origins: *We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.*

Christian responses to Darwinism

Since the century and a half since the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, at least four categories of response have emerged:

1. **Young-earth creationism:** the earth was created in 6 days between 6000-10000 years ago. Book of Genesis is scientific fact. No living creatures of any kind before Eden, no death before the Fall. Noah's flood explains fossils.
2. **Old-earth creationism:** interpret the Hebrew word *yom* to mean an "indefinite time particle". Therefore the days in Genesis may be thousands or millions of years. There's a gap between Genesis 1 and 2 – meaning the creation of the universe and the creation of life came at different times.
3. **Intelligent design:** the biosphere is possessed of an "irreducible complexity" so it must have an intelligent designer. Does not deny evolution, but argues that Darwin's theory does not explain *why* species were created. Critics argue they will in due course be resolved.
4. **Evolutionary theism:** evolution is God's chosen method of bringing life into existence. This is not random, but the process is divinely directed. Some propose that complexity is explained by "God working within the system", perhaps at a quantum level. Others adopt a "fully gifted creation" perspective, arguing that God created the potential for the emergence of complex life in the initial act of creation.

Evaluation of the debate

- Darwinism can be "spun" in ways that are seemingly totally consistent with and seemingly totally opposed to Christian belief
- Both Darwinism and Christianity designate a spectrum of possibilities, making determining their conceptual overlaps and tensions both problematic and critically dependent on definitional issues
- Controversies are based on biblical interpretation – Darwinism allowed the Church to "check out" its interpretation
 - This is why Darwinism is much more controversial to conservative American Protestant movements – it doesn't allow for literal interpretation of scripture
 - It is much more acceptable to Catholic writers, who have always relied on magisterial interpretation of Scripture
- Darwinism is ultimately just a theory – it is open to modification, correction, development or even ultimate abandonment as the process of scientific advance continues. Who knows what the debate will look like in a century's time

Can religion and science coexist?

Modern science arose in Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries during a time known to us as the scientific revolution. Among the developments were Copernicus' heliocentric model of the solar system, Kepler's laws of planetary motion, Galileo's telescopic observations, and Newton's law of gravity.

But why is it that the scientific revolution occurred in a culture permeated with the Christian faith? Many scientists remained committed to their faith and to the church. Newton was in fact a prodigious theological writer.

A number of historians have suggested that modern society arose in a Christian culture because core Christian beliefs provided the presuppositions needed for science to get started.

R. G. Collingwood writes:

"The presuppositions that go to make up this Catholic faith, preserved for many centuries by the religious institutions of Christendom, have as a matter of historical fact been the main or fundamental presuppositions of natural science ever since."

For science to get going, one needs a set of presuppositions, or foundational beliefs, about the natural world. These beliefs include the following:

1. The universe is good, and it is a good thing to know about it. If people believe that matter is evil, they won't be inclined to investigate it
2. The universe is regular, orderly, and rational. If people believe that material behaviour lacks order, they won't bother to study it.
3. This order could be of two types. It could be necessary order, in which case we should be able to discover the order by pure thought. Alternatively, it could be contingent order, in which case we must discover the order by observation and experiment. Belief in necessary order is disastrous for science, whereas belief in contingent order is essential to its development.
4. Human sense perception and reason are basically reliable, and the regular patterns of material behaviour are intelligible to the human mind

How do these presuppositions follow from core Christian beliefs?

1. The scientists of the 17th Century believed the material world to be good because God had made it good. Genesis 1 ends with the comment, "God saw all that he had made and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Moreover, the essential goodness of matter is affirmed by the Incarnation.
2. The founders of modern science believed that the universe is regular, orderly, and rational because God is personal, rational, and faithful.
3. They believed that the order of the universe is contingent because the existence and behaviour of the created world depends on the will of a sovereign Creator. The importance of this theological perspective, for science, is that one cannot deduce the behaviour of the natural world from first principles. God could have made a world that behaved in any way he wished, so if you want to know how the world does behave, you have got to go and look. Hence, the importance of observation and experiment, an approach that distinguished the science of the 17th Century from the deductive approach of the ancient Greeks.⁴

4. 17th Century scientists believed that the behaviour of the material world is intelligible to human reason because God has made us in his image and given us a mind with which to think.

Ross Hastings

God has given us creation and scripture in order to know him. Those who work in science are part of God’s mission for us to know him. Science gives us insight into who God is

Denis Alexander

Science and faith are first cousins because of their common historical roots. Science’s language and concepts have theological roots, e.g. idea of natural law came from God’s moral law. Both science and faith are evidence-based, looking for answers and truth.

We don’t have to choose between faith and evolution. Evolution is actually supported by religion – God is the primary cause of it.

Alister McGrath

While religion can and has led to violence, as Dawkins and Hitchens have claimed, it can also lead to social goods, peace, improved human rights. Religion is not irrational – reason cannot answer all of life’s questions.

Iain Provan

We should not read science into the Bible, it’s not intended to be a scientific report. Interpretation of God’s two books (creation and Scripture) are not just perfect.

Richard Dawkins vs. Francis Collins

Dawkins	Collins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religion and science are incompatible Darwin’s theory of evolution contradicts the design argument – should not assume that because something is complicated, God must have made it Why would God have started evolution as a way of creating life? Surely there’s a better way of creating humans Saying that because something is improbable, God must have created it is not valid – assuming the existence of God is even more improbable It is possible that something may exist beyond our understanding, but this is not necessary the God of classical theism. If there is a God, it’s going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than anything that any theologian of any religion has ever proposed. Altruism comes from our instinct to protect others in our kin, as they would have originally shared our genes Outside our minds, good and evil have no meaning – good things happen and bad things happen, but this isn’t an objective fact of the universe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Science is compatible with the Christian faith – God cannot be contained within nature so God’s existence is outside of the realm of science At the moment of creation, God could have activated evolution Universal constants, e.g. gravitational constant, had to be perfect in order for life to occur – could not have happened by chance Science can coexist with miracles because science and faith can coexist Morality in humans points to the existence of God – it can’t be a selfish gene, acting out of self-preservation because sometimes we risk our life to protect others. This morality is a gift from God Faith is not the opposite of reason – faith rests on reason with the added component of revelation God explains the questions about why, science explains the how

William Lane Craig’s response to Dawkins

- “Who designed the designer” is a weak argument: it does not prove that God doesn’t exist, it only proves that you shouldn’t infer the existence of God on the basis of design. But you could prove God through ontological argument, cosmological argument, religious experience etc.
- You do not need an “explanation of the explanation” in order to recognise it’s the best explanation, e.g. if you found artefacts on the moon that were not put there by humans you would infer that aliens put them there, you do not need to then *explain* the existence of the aliens in order to recognise the explanation
- Finding explanations for explanations leads to infinite regress, which means nothing in science is explained!

4.2. Secularisation

- Religion in today’s society, declining numbers, the role of the Church in formal worship and in modern life and the strengths, weaknesses and impact of the teachings of popular atheists.*
- The rise of New Religious Movements and definitions of ‘spiritual’ and ‘religious’.*
- Disillusionment with some aspects of traditional religion compared to hard line atheism.*

With reference to the ideas of C Hitchens and R Dawkins.

Religion in today’s society

Unarguably religion has been a significant aspect of our society and culture since the beginning of human civilisation. The easiest way to define religion is to refer to it as a 'belief in, or the worship of a god or gods.'

Religion has been criticised for many decades for its harmful effects to both individuals and society, such as brainwashing, holy wars and terrorism. Many argue that all religious beliefs are irrational and unreasonable without a scientific explanation. The famous Marxist description of the religion being “the opium of

people," still appears relevant as religious movements all over the world seem to become institutions rather than places of asylum. However, for many, their religious beliefs are the stimulus to become better people.

Despite what may seem like an illusion to sceptics and atheists, they manage to maintain their morality and find their balance in life. Most people who practice religion claim that it has a liberating and calming effect which helps them to overcome fears – they see God as their protector and maintain a hope for better things to come. Studies done by the researchers from the Mayo Clinic in the US have shown that in general the spiritual involvement is associated with better health outcomes, including longevity, coping skills and less anxiety or depression.

Declining numbers

In the 2001 census it was found that 72% of the population said they were Christian but by 2011 that figure had declined to 58.8% with 33.3% having no religion at all. In 2015, only 49% said they were Christian.

In 1975, the average attendance at a Church of England service was 3% of the population, in 2015 it was 1.5%.

In 1993, 1.28 million Catholics attended Mass, but by 2010 attendance had dropped to 0.88 million.

The role of the Church in formal worship and in modern life

A local Christian church is important because it is the focal point of Christian identity and worship:

- Where people go to show their devotion to God
- Special services held for festivals, e.g. midnight mass at Christmas
- Offer sacraments to the people
- Provides marriage services
- Provide discussion and prayer groups
- Gives Christians a sense of belonging

To the Elders and the Flock

5 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5

Spirituality as a replacement for religion

Spiritual and religious: definitions

Religion can be defined as "belief in God or gods to be worshipped, usually expressed in conduct and ritual" or "any specific system of belief, worship, etc., often involving a code of ethics."

Spirituality can be defined as "the quality or fact of being spiritual, non-physical" or "predominantly spiritual character as shown in thought, life, etc.; spiritual tendency or tone."

Religion is a set of beliefs and rituals that claim to get a person in a right relationship with God, and spirituality is a focus on spiritual things and the spiritual world instead of physical/earthly things.

Opinion polls are suggesting that modern Britain is becoming less "religious" (going to church, doing sacraments, practicing religion) and instead are becoming more "spiritual" (belief in spirits, angels, a "universal life force" etc.). The findings suggest that even those who do not believe in God do not agree that humans are purely material beings with no spiritual element.

Does this mean that scientific materialism has limited appeal? Is it evidence that hard-line atheism of Richard Dawkins etc. has little popular appeal? These atheists have not managed to convince people that humans are purely material beings with no spiritual element, and that science provides the answers to everything.

Whilst we may think of "spirituality" in religious terms, it may be more useful to think of it as part of the human condition. Being "spiritual" is a flexible concept, capable of accommodating both the most devout religious believer to purely scientific wonder at the cosmos.

An example is the power of prayer. Only a small number of people agreed that "prayer could bring about change for the person or situation you are praying for" yet a popular view that was prayer "makes you feel more at peace". Such an idea of prayer as a kind of therapy is compatible with atheism as well as religion. Consider the rise in "mindfulness" in recent years – has this replaced prayer as a way of coping with the stresses of modern life?

The rise of new religious movements

New religious movement (NRM) is the generally accepted term for what is sometimes called a "cult". The term new religious movement has been applied to all new faiths that have arisen worldwide over the past several centuries.

NRMs are characterized by a number of shared traits. These religions are, by definition, "new"; they offer innovative religious responses to the conditions of the modern world, despite the fact that most NRMs represent themselves as rooted in ancient traditions.

Characteristics include:

- Countercultural – they are alternatives to the mainstream religions

- Highly eclectic and pluralistic
- Combine doctrines and practices from diverse sources
- Charismatic and sometimes authoritarian leader who is thought to have extraordinary powers
- Tightly organised
- Often make great demands on the loyalty and commitment of their followers and sometimes establish themselves as substitutes for the family

NRMs have arisen to address specific needs that many people cannot satisfy through more traditional religious organizations or through modern secularism. They are also products of and responses to modernity, pluralism, and the scientific worldview.

Examples include: the New Age movement, Hare Krishna, Scientology, Heaven's Gate.

NRMs represent various responses to the challenges of modernity: religious and cultural pluralism, the influence of science and technology, and the secularisation of much of modern life. They are a way for people to understanding their purpose and spirituality in an increasingly secularised world; attempts to find new spiritual alternatives to mainstream religious traditions. Whilst some are dangerous and have led adherents to a tragic end, many have provided religious solace to those who feel they cannot get it elsewhere.

Richard Dawkins

1. Religion is a by-product of the way we bring up children – there's a selective advantage for children to believe without questioning what grown-ups tell them in order for them to avoid what is dangerous. This makes them vulnerable to misinformation such as religion
2. Religion is a mutation of a 'meme' – an idea, behaviour or style that spreads from person to person
3. We don't need God or religion to have good morals
4. Genes are selfish but that doesn't necessarily make humans selfish. We can be altruistic due to genetic kinship, reciprocation etc. It's not a "God-given gift"
5. Religion makes the world's troubles worse – e.g. labelling children, segregation schools, taboos against marriage
6. Individual atheists may have done evil things in the past, but not in the name of religion
7. Religion actively perverts scientific enterprise as it teaches us not to change our mind or challenge things

Criticisms of Dawkins

- Religion has encouraged many people to do good, e.g. work for peace, reduce world poverty etc.
- Fundamentalism is only a small part of religion and is not actually "religious"
- Dawkins asserts that faith is not based on evidence. But the Christian faith is grounded on a combination of evidence, including that drawn from history, personal experience and the world around
- According to 'meme-theory', disbelief in God, disbelief in hell, and unbelief are also memes which could perhaps be accounted for as desires to live precisely as one chooses and to escape any responsibility of a non-temporal kind!
- Would Dawkins direct such criticisms against parents who taught their children that there is no God?
- Would he commend children who, although reared by atheist parents, came to believe in God after having 'quite independently thought it through'?
- If young people are as easily taken in as Dawkins thinks, then the persistence of atheism could also owe much to the gullibility of young people.
- The charge of wishful thinking can equally well be laid against those who believe there is no God.

Christopher Hitchens

Wrote the 2007 book *God is not great: How religion poisons everything* in which he makes a case against organised religion and argues for a more secular life based on science and reason.

Hitchens posited that organised religion is "violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism, tribalism, and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children" and sectarian, and that accordingly it "ought to have a great deal on its conscience".

Hitchens outlines stories from five cities around the world where religious groups have been responsible for great atrocities:

- Belfast: The ongoing Protestant/Catholic wars
- Beirut: Trying to accommodate the various religious populations therein destroyed the beautiful city
- Bombay: The Hindu nationalist party strong-armed the city and destroyed its culture
- Bethlehem: Torn apart by continuous competition and struggle between Jews, Christians, and Muslims
- Baghdad: Suffered the terrible reign of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship

He argues that religion has stymied the health of the general population:

- Restricting condoms towards the prevention of the spread of AIDS
- Young Muslim girls in Africa subject to infibulations (genital mutilations)
- The practice of circumcision for infant boys
- Jehovah's Witnesses refusal to grant blood transfusions for their children.

"Moral terrorism": Christians frighten their children with images of hell, burden them with guilt, and mutilate their infant genitalia (circumcision).

He recalls recent examples from the world which demonstrate the powerful and often negative influence that religious groups still hold on society. Pertinent illustrations include the theocracy Iran and its dangerous pursuit of nuclear weapons, and the Danish cartoon depicting Muhammad that caused rioting around the world. As, in Hitchens opinion, they are no longer useful, he concludes that religions and their involvement in public discourse should be banned.

Criticisms of Hitchens

- Hitchens' insistence that religion is all bad, and that opponents of religion are all good, forced him into strenuous intellectual contortions. He had to explain away the evangelical Protestants who campaigned for abolition of slavery on the one hand, and the crimes of the atheist Stalin on the other, which he did not convincingly do and could not have done.
- Religious congregations provide people with community, ritual, moral ideals and a way to understand their feelings of transcendence

Have modern atheists been successful in undermining religion?

YES	NO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dawkins successfully criticises the design argument as an argument for the existence of God - Dawkins' and Hitchens' examples of how religion has negatively affected the world (e.g. condom use, religious violence) are convincing - Christianity is on the decline in the UK – church numbers are falling rapidly - Humanists like Stephen Fry are trying to prove that you do not need God to lead a happy and fulfilling life – religion does not necessary make you more moral, in fact it can make you less moral (Dawkins) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dawkins does not undermine all arguments for the existence of God, he only suggests that design is not enough to <i>infer</i> God's existence - Christianity is growing in many countries, e.g. Evangelicalism in African diasporas - The aggressive and offensive nature of atheists like Dawkins undermines their arguments - There is evidence that "spirituality" is replacing "religion" – people are not convinced that science can explain everything / that there is nothing beyond our everyday existence - NRMs may replace traditional religious structures – these prove that people still crave the support structures and sense of belonging that religion provides

Anthology: McGrath *Deluded about God?*

Dawkins' argument	McGrath's response
Belief in God is infantile – a childish delusion. Belief in God is like believing in the tooth fairy / Santa.	Many people turn to God / religion in later life and do not regard this as a regression.
Bringing up children within a religion is a form of child abuse.	Secularists force their own dogmas down the throats of the same gullible children. Are you only abusive if you impose religious, but not antireligious, dogmas and delusions?
Faith is irrational – a "persistently false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence". E.g. Martin Luther's anxieties about reason in the life of faith.	Dawkins misinterprets Luther. His work is atheist propaganda – he does not do thorough research.
Dawkins takes issue with Aquinas' five ways – "proof" for God's existence based on causation, order etc.	Dawkins misunderstands an a posteriori demonstration of the coherence of faith and observation to be an a priori proof of faith. There are many beliefs that we cannot proof but are perfectly justifiable. Many scientific theories (e.g. evolution) may have to be discarded in the future as additional evidence emerges.
"Who designed the designer" – anything that explains something itself has to be explained.	Science searches for a grand "theory of everything" because that would require no further explanations. This contradicts Dawkins.
The fact that we exist is complex and improbable. Belief in God represents belief in a being whose existence must be even more complex and improbable.	Why is something complex improbable? Cannot leap from recognition of complexity to the assertion of improbability. There are many things that seem improbable, but improbability has never entailed nonexistence.
Criticises worship of the "god of the gaps" (God needs to be proposed in order to deal with gaps in scientific understanding).	Dawkins' criticism of the "worship of the gaps" is appropriate and valid!
All religious people try to stop scientists from exploring those gaps – religion teaches people to be satisfied with not understanding.	Crass generalisation of Christianity.

4.3. New Movements in Theology: Liberation, Feminist, Black theology

- The context and key themes of Liberation theology, Feminist theology and Black theology*
- The development of these ideas and their impact on the lives of believers and communities in Christianity today.*

With reference to the ideas of G Gutiérrez, S McFague and J H Cone.

<p>The debate is about whether "liberation", "feminist" or "black" theology strays from biblical interpretation.</p> <p>Does studying the Bible through the lens of feminism / racism / poverty mean that teachings and passages will naturally be skewed in order to fit the reader's narrative?</p> <p>Do scholars try to fit Christianity into their ideology, or are feminist / black / liberation movements needed because the church has strayed from a correct understanding of God's will?</p>
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Liberation theology

The case for liberation theology

Love for the poor must be preferential, but not exclusive. Ecclesia in America, 1999

Liberation theology was a radical movement that grew up in South America as a response to the poverty and the ill-treatment of ordinary people. The movement was caricatured in the phrase *If Jesus Christ were on Earth today, he would be a Marxist revolutionary*, but it's more accurately encapsulated in this paragraph from Leonardo and Clodovis Boff:

Liberation theology said the church should derive its legitimacy and theology by growing out of the poor. The [Bible](#) should be read and experienced from the perspective of the poor.

Q: How are we to be Christians in a world of destitution and injustice?

A: There can be only one answer: we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation.

The church should be a movement for those who were denied their rights and plunged into such poverty that they were deprived of their full status as human beings. The poor should take the example of [Jesus](#) and use it to bring about a just society.

Some liberation theologians saw in the collegiate nature of the [Trinity](#) a model for co-operative and non-hierarchical development among humans.

Most controversially, the Liberationists said the church should act to bring about social change, and should ally itself with the working class to do so. Some radical priests became involved in politics and trade unions; others even aligned themselves with violent revolutionary movements.

A common way in which [priests and nuns](#) showed their solidarity with the poor was to move from religious houses into poverty stricken areas to share the living conditions of their flock.

The case against liberation theology

The late [Pope John Paul II](#) was frequently criticised for the severity with which he dealt with the liberation movement.

His main object was to stop the highly politicised form of liberation theology prevalent in the 1980s, which could be seen as a fusion of Christianity and Marxism. He was particularly criticised for the firmness with which he closed institutions that taught Liberation Theology and with which he removed or rebuked the movement's activists, such as Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez.

He didn't mean that the Church was not going to be the voice of the oppressed, was not going to champion the [poor](#). But it should not do it by partisan politics, or by revolutionary violence. The Church's business was bringing about the Kingdom of God, not about creating a Marxist [utopia](#).

Some say that there was a clear political motivation behind the late Pope's ideas. He was fervently opposed to the communist hold on Eastern Europe, and so he could not possibly show any sympathy with the priests in South and Central America who were working with communist revolutionaries - such inconsistent behaviour would have destroyed his credibility.

This is too cynical a view. John Paul II was, as always, ruled by his faith and belief. He genuinely thought that the Liberationists were distorting Christianity, and he was determined to get the Church in South America back on the rails of redemption. For John Paul II, God's essential act was entering into our time and our humanity and transforming "our history into the history of salvation". It was through salvation that the poor and oppressed were to be raised up.

Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, O.P. (born 8 June 1928 in Lima) is a Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest regarded as one of the principal founders of liberation theology in Latin America.

Based on Roman Catholicism, he sought to interpret the teachings of Jesus from the point of view of the poor and oppressed in a world of poverty and injustice.

Liberation theology emerged out of the extreme poverty found in Latin America, an area that had been deeply Christian for centuries. The liberation theologians declared that such suffering was against the will of God and contrary to the teachings of Christ. Gutierrez remarked: 'We are on the side of the poor, not because they are good, but because they are poor'.

A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation (1971), explains his notion of Christian poverty as an act of loving solidarity with the poor as well as a liberatory protest against poverty. Gutierrez wrote 'The starting point of liberation theology is commitment to the poor, the "non-person". Its ideas come from the victim'.

Gutierrez called the oppressed masses the 'non-human beings' (*hombres cactus* – 'the cactus people'). These people are the victims of exploitation, which strips them of their right to a humane and dignified existence. He said that the message of Christianity demanded solidarity with the poor: 'Charity, the love of God for human beings, is found incarnated in human love'.

Proclaiming the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus also required the dismantling of those structures that lead to human poverty and oppression.

Gutierrez took the Exodus as an example of what God wanted to do for the world. The Gospel is all about liberation, at every level, including politically. He argued that charity was second-best; the Church should be fighting for justice. He said that God had a "preferential option for the poor". Influenced by Marx, he embraced socialist theory.

According to Gutiérrez true "liberation" has three main dimensions:

1. First, it involves political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice.

2. Second, liberation involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalised, the downtrodden and the oppressed from all “those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity”.
3. Third, liberation theology involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people. Liberation theology and Gutiérrez have both been the subjects of repeated Papal scrutiny.

Gutiérrez saw liberation theology as a pastoral movement. At the beginning, it was only found in the universities and among the education middle classes, but he helped to move it into the lives of the common people through the development of ‘Base Ecclesial Communities’, which are small groups of ordinary people who meet to pray and address the social and political issues that affect their lives.

Gutiérrez argued that the poor and oppressed should not be pitied, but must be seen as the shapers of the new path for humanity. The church must be involved in the historical struggle for liberation and theology is something to be ‘done’ not ‘learned’.

He centred liberation theology on Jesus Christ who, he said, came to earth as a poor person with the message that the kingdom of God was coming for the liberation of the poor. Liberation theology emphasises the notion of ‘structural sin’, it is society, rather than people, that is corrupted and requires redemption: ‘the very meaning of the growth of the Kingdom is also the ultimate condition for a just society and a new humanity’.

A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation was reviewed directly by then-Cardinal Ratzinger and found to contain ideas which, in the view of conservative Catholics, were disturbing. Although Gutiérrez himself was not censured, many other liberation theologians received Papal censure. Because of the perceived connection between followers of liberation theology and leftist groups in Latin America, such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, many liberation-minded priests were killed in Central American countries during the wars and civil conflicts of the 1980s.

Criticisms of Liberation theology

- It is too shallow and simplistic and avoids some of the deeper theologies concerned with sin, salvation and atonement.
- It has reduced salvation to a worldly affair and neglected the spiritual dimension.
- Equating salvation with liberation reduces salvation to a purely worldly affair, rather than a personal matter, and neglects its transcendent and eternal dimensions.
- Critics argue that Liberation theology is overly concerned with identifying power relationships between classes, at the expense of a concern for truth

Strengths of liberation theology

- It has brought new challenges and raised important questions
- Important for the Church to focus on the plight of the poor
- Makes Christianity / the Church more involved in the political and social arenas of life (based on the works of Moltmann and Bonhoeffer)
- Continues to have an impact in Latin America, where there are still millions of poor and oppressed people due to unrestrained capitalism and global economic policies

Impact

Because of the work of liberation theology in South America, it has become much more normal for the Church to speak of equality and justice for all, so much so that it seems to be an inherent part of Church teachings. However during the 20th century it would have been very radical for the Church to challenge the hierarchical structures of power – remember at the time, society was run by rich landowners, politicians and industrialists. To suddenly be told that the Church must change its message and liberate the poor was very radical. Thanks to the work of liberation theology, justice and equality has become a major theme amongst the church.

Feminist theology

Feminist theology refers to a Christian movement to reconsider the traditions, practices, scriptures and theologies from a feminist perspective.

Some of the goals of feminist theology include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities, reinterpreting male-dominated imagery and language about God and studying images of women in relation to the Bible.

Christian feminists believe that God does not discriminate on the basis of biologically determined characteristics such as sex and race.

The major issues are: the ordination of women, male dominance in Christian marriage, recognition of equal spiritual and moral abilities, reproductive rights, and the search for a feminine or gender-transcendent divine.

Liberal Christian feminists operate within a Christian framework but approach feminism (and theology in general) from a very liberal perspective. They believe the Bible writers were simply men of their times and were limited in their perspectives. Liberal Christian feminists employ a “hermeneutic of suspicion” — that is, they “systematically assume that the Bible’s male authors and interpreters deliberately covered up the role of women in early Christianity.”⁹ Using such a hermeneutic, it is easy to sift out from the Bible anything one finds offensive to one’s feminist tastes.

Evangelical feminists are those who generally (not always) hold to conservative views on the Bible and theology but who nevertheless embrace the feminist ideal of abolishing gender-based roles in society, church, and home. They believe the Bible is authoritative and, rightly understood, supports their feminist views.

Radical Feminist theologians: Other feminist theologians take a radical approach. Whilst still working within the Christian framework they seek not only to critique current practices, but also to reimagine and reconstruct new models of thinking and practicing Christianity. Thus they put forward a version of Christianity free from patriarchy.

Some are active within the church and take a **reform approach**, seeking modest changes in the traditions within Christianity.

Key teachings of Evangelical Feminism

- 1. Jesus was a feminist:** Jesus considered women on an equal plane with men – he taught women, he allowed women to listen to his teachings (Luke 10), a traditionally “intellectual” and therefore masculine role. The fact that Jesus chose 12 male disciples can be discredited because they were also all Jewish, so if you’re going to say that women can be leaders in the church, you also need to say that Gentiles can’t be leaders in the church. Women were the first to witness His resurrection, and sent them to teach the male disciples that he had risen – women at the time were thought of as untrustworthy, thus proving Jesus’ liberal view of women. Women were delivered from the male domination caused by the Fall through Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- 2. Female subordination (the curse):** Genesis 3:16 proclaims that God increases the pains of childbirth and makes men rule over women as a result of the Fall (Eve’s actions). However, feminists argue that this is not part of God’s original creation, it is a result of sin and the origin is Satanic. The death of Christ released humanity from the curse of sin so women are no longer to be subjugated under male headship – the mutual relationship of Adam and Eve before the Fall can now be restored.
- 3. Equal in Christ (Galatians 3:28):** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This does not mean we are spiritually equal but have different roles. It means there are no longer categories, different rights and privileges, codes and values. In light of this quote, all social distinctions between men and women should be erased in the church.
- 4. Mutual Submission:** Ephesians 5: 21 instructs men and women to “submit to one another” – feminists think this is more important than the later line “so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything”. Some say this line should be viewed in its social and cultural context.
- 5. Speaking in the Church:** St Paul states that “women shouldn’t speak in church” (1 Cor 14:34). However, earlier in the letter, Paul allows women to prophesy in the church. So female ordination should be allowed, yet (as St Paul goes on to argue) women should be properly covered so that she stands not as a sex object, but as man’s equal.
- 6. Silence in the Church:** St Paul’s comments that “it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” are challenged by feminists. They say “speak” refers to general talking or idle chatter, not formal lectures or teaching. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (St Paul says “a woman should learn in quietness and full submission... she must be silent”) are challenged by some feminist by claiming that Paul was speaking to the uneducated women of the time, in the 21st century women are educated so can teach and speak.

Feminist argument	Counter argument
1. The use of masculine language for God Referring to God as ‘He’, ‘Him’ or ‘Father’ degrades the status of women. Should refer to God using gender-neutral terms such as the ‘Divine’, or balance ‘He’ with ‘She’.	The Bible does not present God as literally, biologically male. When God refers to Himself, He always does so using masculine nouns. “Father” describes God’s relationship with us, more so than “Mother”.
2. Female submission in marriage The Bible states that men and women are spiritually equal, so women shouldn’t “submit” to their husbands.	There is a biblical mandate for wives to submit to their husbands. “Submitting” doesn’t make them inferior. But the Bible does prescribe unique and important roles for men and women.
3. The ordination of women Women should take on the same positions of spiritual leadership as men, with no distinction of roles.	Rejects biblical teachings. The role of the woman does not include any headship (1 Timothy 2:12). Titles such as “priest” and “pastor” cannot be legitimately claimed by women.

Sally McFague

Sallie McFague (1933-present) is an American feminist Christian theologian, best known for her analysis of how metaphor lies at the heart of how we may speak about God.

She has applied this approach in particular to ecological issues, writing extensively on care for the earth as if it were God’s ‘body’.

For McFague, the language of Christian theology is necessarily a construction, a human creation, a tool to delineate as best we can the nature and limits of our understanding of God.

What we know of God is a construction, and must be understood as interpretation: God as father, as shepherd, as friend, but not literally any of these. Though such habits of language can be useful (since, in the Western world at least, people are more used to thinking of God in personal than in abstract terms), they become constricting when there is an insistence that God is always and only (or predominantly) like this.

“We construct the worlds we inhabit, but also we forget we have done so” – her work helps unmask simplistic, absolutist notions of objectivity in relation to the claims language makes about God.

Images of God are usually embedded within a particular socio-cultural and political system, such as the patriarchal one feminist theology critiques extensively.

The “trick” of a successful metaphor is that it is capable of generating a model, which in turn can give life to an overarching concept of world-view, which looks like a coherent explanation of everything – looks like ‘reality’ or ‘truth’. This is how ‘male’ images for God have functioned in the Christian West – and it has done so in a way that is oppressive for all but (privileged) men.

McFague’s new metaphors:

- **God as mother:** we should be careful of anthropomorphising God, but it is important to see God as mother because of its association with the beginning of life, nurture, fulfilment. Must challenge dominant view of “Father”

- **Care for creation – the world as God’s body:** if we view the world, or cosmos, as God’s body it means we will take the cosmos seriously because creation is God’s self-expression.

Strengths of McFague:

- Panentheistic theology that stresses God as highly involved in the world

Weaknesses of McFague:

- If the earth is God’s body then God is not the omnipotent, omniscient and immutable God of classical theism – is there anything left that we can call God?
- McFague’s new metaphor of God as mother (nurturing, loving etc.) equally conforms to stereotypes about women. Surely it would be better to present gender neutral terms?

Strengths of feminist theology

- Calls attention to the invaluable role women have played in the church
- Points to the failure of many men in fulfilling their God-appointed roles of loving their wives *as Christ loved the church*
- Serves as an indictment against the abuse and oppression that women have all too often suffered at the hands of chauvinist men

Criticisms of feminist theology

- We ought to adjust our philosophy to match God’s word, not the other way round
- The claim that female subordination is a result of the Fall, and that in Christ all social hierarchy has been obliterated can be criticised. Male headship was established *before* the Fall – man was created first, and the woman was created from the rib of Adam to be his helper. God created them in a non-reversible relation to one another – male in loving headship over the female
- God gave moral instructions to Adam, not Eve. Eve led Adam into Sin. The Bible is undeniable
- Elimination of gender roles is not a legitimate inference from Galatians 3:28 – ontological equality and social hierarchy are not mutually exclusive
- Teaching doctrine in church is reserved for those men whom God placed in authority to represent Him in spiritual matters. Women cannot teach a congregation because, by the nature of teachings, this would place them in spiritual authority over men, which God has forbidden

Impact today

The category of women's experience, while embraced early on in feminist theology, has become problematic since it so often only seemed to describe the experience of one voice: that of privileged, white women. Feminist theologians were primarily white, privileged women working within the confines of the academy. As feminist theologians linked their projects to other liberation movements, the challenge was to examine their own bias of class and race. Feminist theologians began to question the category of "women's experience" e.g. "black womanism." There is no monolithic experience, no single way of being women. Feminist theologians are now a worldwide company of voices, celebrating the variety of experience. However, does this mean that theology as a whole has become contextualised and so particularised to any given moment in history that there are no general truths and themes which give Christianity any coherence or universal relevance?

Assess extent to which feminist theology been successful in challenging the traditional understanding of God?

Successful	Unsuccessful
It has challenged traditional understandings of the nature God as the male). Successfully raised and challenged the idea of a male creator God. Led to a development in some quarters of a Feminist 'Theology'. Led to perceived positive effect of women’s role in ecclesiological structures in some, though not all, denominations. Heightened issues in making 'God' more inclusive to females. Led to more inclusive gender neutral language in liturgy and some versions of biblical text (e.g. TNIV <i>If your brother sins to If a brother or sister sins</i>)	Little or no effect on altering traditional understanding or of offering any lasting alternative. Asserts the traditional doctrine of God. Neither has feminist theology challenged the traditional understanding of the divinity of Jesus as God Incarnate Very little actual effect upon understanding or position of women in the Church. Little effect on contemporary spirituality. Changes that have occurred often put down to wider societal issues than Feminist theology.

Black theology

Black theology, or Black liberation theology, refers to a theological perspective which originated among African American seminarians and scholars, and in some black churches in the United States and later in other parts of the world. It contextualizes Christianity in an attempt to help those of African descent overcome oppression. It especially focuses on the injustices committed against African Americans and black South Africans during American segregation and apartheid, respectively.

Black theology seeks to liberate non-white people from multiple forms of political, social, economic, and religious subjugation and views Christian theology as a theology of liberation—"a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ," writes James Hal Cone, one of the original advocates of the perspective.

Black theology mixes Christianity with questions of civil rights, particularly raised by the Black Power movement and the Black Consciousness Movement.

Further, Black theology has led the way and contributed to the discussion, and conclusion, that all theology is contextual - even what is known as systematic theology.

James Cone: black theologian

James Cone (1936 – present) was born in Arkansas, US. The suffering and racism he endured as a child are reflected in his writings – e.g. ‘coloured’ water fountains, being called ‘boy’, attending ‘separate but equal’ schools.

Only Jesus is the true revelation of God, not the Bible. Believes that the meaning of Scripture is not found in the *words* of Scripture, but only in its power to point beyond itself the reality of God’s “revelation” – which, in America, takes place in God’s liberating work among blacks.

Cone’s key beliefs:

1. **Black theology and black power:** There is a close relationship between black power and black theology – black power is the political arm of black freedom and self-determination, black theology is the religious arm
2. **God:** Cone bases his theology on God’s deliverance of Israel from oppression under the Egyptians – it proves that God is concerned for those who are poor and unwanted in society. God is helping oppressed blacks in 20th century America in the same way. Therefore he *is* black, in that he helps and identifies with them (Cone believes ‘black’ and ‘white’ are not just physiological concepts to do with skin pigmentation, but are also ontological concepts to do with “one’s attitude and action toward the liberation of the oppressed black people from white racism”. Therefore “blackness” refers to people who do work for liberation, “whiteness” symbolises sickness and oppression).
3. **Jesus Christ:** The role of Jesus as God-Incarnate was to liberate the oppressed. Jesus was (is) black – it’s important for black people to view him as such. “God is whatever color God needs to be in order to let people know they’re not nobodies, they’re somebodies”.
4. **Sin and Salvation:** Sin is anything that is contrary to the oppressed community or its liberation. Salvation has to do with *earthly* reality – Jesus is the liberator, but the human work of self-liberation is as important.
5. **The Church:** The black church has played an instrumental role in the religious and social life of black America. The black church was the creation of a black people. However the black church has now become a pawn for white power structures. Must return to pre-Civil War ideas of self-determination and liberation.
6. **Eschatology:** Rejects the “white lie” that Christianity is primarily concerned with life in the next world. Must focus on black liberation now, not just wait for heavenly reward.
7. **Revolution and violence:** Defines liberation as the “emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary”. Some violence is unavoidable – lesser of two evils. Revolutionary violence is less deplorable than the violence perpetuated by the system.

Strengths of black theology

- Reminds us that theology – if it is going to meet the needs of 20th century Christians – must find practical expression in society
- Reminds us that God is involved in his people in real-life situations (similar to Karl Barth / Moltmann – God is immanent, personal, suffering)
- Focuses our attention on the need to reach out to others in the body of Christ who are suffering
- Serves as an indictment against racism and inherently unequal power structures

Criticisms of black theology

- Imposing black experience (or any other experience, e.g. feminist, gay etc.) onto Scripture robs Scripture of its intrinsic authority and distorts its intended meaning. Rather we should produce a *biblical* liberation theology – there is a strong biblical case against racism and in favour of unity of the human race
- Shouldn’t base our relationship with God or our understanding of God on our cultural heritage
- A biblical theology of liberation but emphasise reconciliation – bringing black and white people together. This can only happen if we are equal – all seen as created in the image of God. We need to move beyond race in order to be truly liberated

New movements in theology: Evangelicalism

- a) *The global development of Evangelicalism, and of the nature and influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the US and beyond, migration as a factor in the spread of a variety of forms of Christian worship, notably in the African Christian diaspora*
- b) *The development of these ideas and their impact on the lives of believers and communities in Christianity today.*

Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism is a worldwide, trans-denominational movement within Protestant Christianity which maintains the belief that the essence of the Gospel consists of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus’ atonement.

The term originates in the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning “the good news” or the gospel.

Evangelicals believe in the centrality of the conversion or the “born again” experience of receiving salvation, in the authority of the Bible as God’s revelation to humanity, and in spreading the Christian message.

Evangelicalism has become of major importance in the mainline Protestant churches since 1945. Although some new Protestant denominations have been formed which are explicitly evangelical in orientation, the general pattern which has emerged is that evangelicalism is a movement within the mainline denominations.

Four distinctive features of the evangelical ethos are:

1. Strongly biblical – preaching, Bible study groups, regular reading
2. Emphasis on the cross of Jesus – Jesus’ saving death on the cross, reflected in evangelical hymns and songs
3. The need for personal conversion and for Christians to be “born again”
4. Converting others to the faith

The Americas, Africa, and Asia are home to the majority of evangelicals. The United States has the largest concentration of evangelicals in the world; its community forms a quarter of the population, is politically important, and is based mostly in the Bible Belt. In the United Kingdom, evangelicals are represented mostly in the Methodist Church, Baptist communities, and among evangelical Anglicans.

Evangelicalism, a major part of popular Protestantism, is among the most dynamic religious movements in the contemporary world. While evangelicalism is on the rise globally, developing countries have particularly embraced it; there it is the fastest growing portion of Christianity.

History

During the Reformation, Martin Luther used the term to refer to his breakaway movement – *evangelische kirke*, or evangelical church, a term generally still applied to the Lutheran Church in Germany.

The First Great Awakening was a Protestant religious revival that swept Protestant Europe and British America in the 1730s and 1740s. Jonathan Edwards was deeply influencing American religious life, while John Wesley, George Whitefield and the Methodist movement were renewing British Christianity. Much of this religious fervour was a reaction to Enlightenment thinking and the deistic writings of many western philosophers.

At first, evangelicalism was a hybrid of the Reformed emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy (the Bible as the word of God) and an emphasis on a “personal relationship” with God. Strong preaching, personal conversion and evangelism were common features.

Modern evangelical beliefs

While there is no established set of beliefs which define one as an evangelical, in general evangelicals believe in:

- An orthodox Christology – emphasis Christ’s atoning work and bodily resurrection
- Salvation as the result of God’s grace (undeserved love) through Christ rather than any human works
- The authority and inspiration of Scripture – inerrancy of the Bible
- Emphasis on biblical preaching and teaching
- Emphasis on the conversion experience – “born again”
- Evangelism and missionary work

Two sub-groups of Evangelicalism are Pentecostals and Charismatic Christians.

Pentecostal Christianity

Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity that emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer.

Began among poor and disadvantaged people in the USA. It can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, when Charles Parham’s students at Bethel Bible College in Kansas experienced “speaking in tongues”.

Pentecostals believe that faith must be powerfully experiential, and not something found merely through ritual or thinking.

Pentecostalism is energetic and dynamic. Its members believe they are driven by the power of God moving within them.

Pentecostal churches stress the importance of conversions that amount to a *Baptism in the Spirit*. This fills the believer with the Holy Spirit, which gives the believer the strength to live a truly Christian life.

The direct experience of God is revealed by *gifts of the Spirit* such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing.

Pentecostalism is based on a key event in the life of the early Christians: the baptism of the twelve disciples by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Pentecostalism gets its name from the day of Pentecost, when, according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus’ disciples, leading them to speak in

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

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

Acts 2:1-4

many languages as evidence that they had been baptised in the Spirit. Pentecostals believe that this was not a one-off event, but something that can and does happen every day.

Most Pentecostals think that their movement is returning Christianity to a pure and simple form of Christianity that has much in common with the very earliest stage in the life of the Christian church.

Pentecostalism is not a church in itself, but a movement that includes many different churches. It is also a movement of renewal or revival within other denominations. In the West, Pentecostalism is strong in the Black churches and the American and Australian 'mega-churches' such as Hillsong Church.

Although Pentecostalism is often said to be rooted in experience rather than theology, Pentecostals base their theology on the text of the Bible which they believe to be the word of God and totally without error.

During the last three decades of the twentieth century Pentecostalism grew very strongly and there are now over 250 million Pentecostals around the world, who make up more than 10% of all Christians.

Pentecostalism is particularly strong in the developing world where it poses a serious challenge to other, more established, denominations.

Key beliefs

- Bible is the inerrant word of God
- Importance of the believer's direct experience of God through the work of the Holy Spirit
- Sanctification / holiness – dedicating their lives to God and separating themselves from their past sinful life. A person is sanctified when they are born again to Christ through the Holy Spirit
- Water baptism – full immersion of adults
- Do not baptise children as they cannot make the choice to follow Christ – instead children are dedicated to God and blessed
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit – must already have converted, received salvation before one can be baptised.
- Through Baptism in the Holy Spirit believers become totally immersed in the Holy Spirit – proof of having been baptised in the Spirit is speaking the tongues: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" **Acts 2:4**
- Gifts of the Spirit – supernatural abilities given to believers by God, used to heal the sick etc.
- Avoid sacraments – communion and baptism are ceremonies or ordinances, not ways of achieving God's grace
- Some practice foot washing, following the instructions of Jesus, who washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper
- Believe that God can and does work miracles today
- Snake handling – being able to handle dangerous snakes successfully was a gift from the Spirit. Based on Mark 16:18: "they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all". However this practice is rare and largely disproved of by the larger Pentecostal denominations
- Spontaneous and emotionally expressive worship – active congregational involvement, e.g. singing, dancing and clapping.



Impact

According to Robin Arnaud, "Pentecostalism has become the largest and fastest-growing form of Christianity on earth! Yet in its wake it leaves broken lives, false hopes, a warped view of God and man, and often, especially in the United States, financial ruin. An exodus of believers from such churches began a few years ago and have now become a torrent! Former Pentecostals and ex-Charismatics may soon become the second-largest and second fastest growing Christian groups on earth."

Pentecostalism is attractive in a world where religious truths are under attack, because a direct experience of God is unarguable to those who receive it: "if it happens to you, you know it's true".

It began among the poor and disadvantaged in North America. Its growth is partly rooted in continuing anger at widespread poverty and inequality. It is particularly appealing in South America and Africa, being a tradition both *of* the poor and *for* the poor.

Pentecostalism adapts easily to local traditions and incorporates local music and other cultural elements in worship, enabling people to retain elements of their own spirituality when they move to a Pentecostal church.

Stresses the direct, immediate experience of God and avoids the dry and cerebral forms of Christianity which many find unattractive and unintelligible.

Political impact: originated with poor communities and has not forgotten these roots. Approaches predicaments of the poor very practically, e.g. churches work as 'mutual aid communities' to deal with poverty and sickness.

Because Pentecostal worship is very flexible, spontaneous and mostly oral, it allows all people to play their part without fear of saying the wrong thing. Important for non-literate people – very inclusive.

In some cases it seems Pentecostal groups may almost worship a different Jesus and some are apparently heretical according to Christian scholars. For example, the so-called "Oneness" or "Jesus Only" Pentecostals, which are largely comprised by the denomination known as the United Pentecostal Church. Just because the words Jesus, God and Holy Spirit are used constantly in sermons doesn't necessarily mean their teachings are biblically sound and/or historically consistent with established Christian doctrines and beliefs such as the Trinity.

Charismatic Christianity

Charismatic Christianity (also known as Spirit-filled Christianity) is a form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and modern-day miracles as an everyday part of a believer's life.

Although there is considerable overlap with Pentecostal, it is generally accepted that the charismatic movement began in the late 1960s, when it was evident that some form of renewal based on charismatic gifts (e.g. speaking in tongues) was gaining a hold within Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian circles, as well as the Roman Catholic Church. The term "charismatic" was used to refer to movements within the mainline churches based upon the ideas and experiences of the Pentecostal movement.

While early Pentecostals were often marginalised within the larger Christian community, Pentecostal beliefs began penetrating the mainline Protestant denominations from 1960 onward and the Catholic Church from 1967. This adoption of Pentecostal beliefs by those in the historic churches became known as the charismatic movement.

Charismatic Christianity is diverse, and it is not defined by acceptance of any particular doctrines, practices, or denominational structures. However, they share a spirituality characterised by:

- Miracles
- Signs and wonders
- Spiritual gifts such as prophecy and healing

Charismatic Christians believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in the New Testament are available to contemporary Christians through the infilling or baptism of the Holy Spirit, with-or-without the laying on of hands. Although the Bible lists many **gifts from God through His Holy Spirit**, there are nine specific gifts listed in **1 Corinthians 12:8–10** that are Supernatural in nature and are the focus of and distinguishing feature of the Charismatic Movement: Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Faith, Gifts of Healing, Miraculous Powers, Prophecy, Distinguishing between Spirits, Speaking in different Tongues (Languages), and Interpretation of Tongues.

Charismatics are defined as Christians who share with Pentecostals an emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit but who remain a part of a mainline church. Also, charismatics are more likely than Pentecostals to believe that glossolalia is not a necessary evidence of Spirit baptism.

In contrast to Pentecostals, charismatics tend to accept a range of supernatural experiences (such as prophecy, miracles, healing, or "physical manifestations of an altered state of consciousness") as evidence of having been baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit – not just baptism / speaking in tongues.

Examples of charismatic churches:

- Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, California
- Jesus Army, UK – founded in 1969

A multitude of denominations have been influenced by the charismatic movement, including Anglican, Lutheran, evangelical, Methodist, Roman Catholic (since 1967).

Case study: Jesus Army / Fellowship

The Jesus Army is a neo-charismatic evangelical Christian movement based in the UK. It was founded in 1969 when Noel Stanton was inspired by a charismatic experience which led him to successfully expand the congregation, largely appealing to a younger generation of worshippers.

The Jesus Army frequently engages in evangelism in public places, seeking through outreach to demonstrate the love of Jesus and the moving of the Holy Spirit.

The Jesus Army engages in what has been called "aggressive and effective street evangelism among the marginalized sections of society". The Jesus Army's mission has been described as "essentially one to the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized".

The Jesus Fellowship is the only new church stream that advocates and practices celibacy, claiming it leads to a full life for single people. Within the Jesus Fellowship there are couples and there are male and female celibates. The Jesus Fellowship claims both as high callings. The main justification used for advocating celibacy is that it frees a member for ministry, particularly in the unsocial hours that Jesus Army campaigning requires. Some critics have maintained that the Jesus Fellowship teaches celibacy as a better or higher way, and that single members have felt pressured into making the vow. Others deny this and insist that both marriage and family life, and celibacy are held in high regard in the Jesus Fellowship. Celibacy is, however, described by the Jesus Fellowship as "a precious gem".

The Jesus Fellowship believe in the baptism in water and the Holy Spirit, in the Bible as the Word of God, and in acceptance of charismatic gifts.

Impact

Charismatic renewal within the mainstream churches has led to new and informal worship styles, an explosion in "worship songs", a new concern for the dynamics of worship, and an increasing dislike of the traditionalism of formal liturgical worship.

Since WWII there has been a massive surge in growth – it is now estimated that there are 500 million Pentecostals and charismatics in the world, with a very wide geographical distribution.

Charismatic Christians certainly appear to be zealous in their attempts to gain converts and create miracles. But by acting too extreme the net result may be a judgmental attitude and causing division in the church rather than edifying it. Many Charismatics seem to love showing mainstream Christians how things should be done. Again, the example stated previously, "We're baptized in the spirit, we speak in tongues so that means you should learn from us."

Charismatic Christians also tend to focus perhaps too much on feelings and personal experiences rather than the Bible. They place their emphasis largely upon "spiritual gifts" rather than on Christ, who He was, what He said and did. As a result, they often become inward thinking and self-centred rather than focused on Christ and what He wants us to be.

Similarities and differences between Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians

Pentecostal refers to the historical groups that began in the early 1900s which emphasized speaking in tongues as the evidence of the "baptism of the Holy Ghost."

Charismatic refers to groups which arose from 1960 which believe they have manifestations among them of the more "supernatural" of the "spiritual gifts" described in the Bible.

The term Hyper-Charismatic designates those Charismatic teachers and groups in recent decades which attribute extremely unusual, non-biblical manifestations in their meetings to the action of the Holy Spirit. This would include individuals being "glued to the floor" for a period by a supernatural force for no apparent reason, people uncontrollably making animal sounds such as crowing like a rooster or barking like a dog in the midst of a worship service, and other such phenomena. Hyper-Charismatic is also used to designate those teachings which make vaunted claims that the average Christian can control with absolute certainty his circumstances, including his health and physical prosperity, through the power that he can obtain by mastering certain "keys" allegedly found in the Bible.

Specifically in the matter of "speaking in tongues," a number of groups (but not all) which are historically defined as Pentecostal have made this manifestation an absolute **prerequisite to salvation**. They do not view it as merely one of the spiritual gifts which may be given to a Christian. They believe it to be **the "sign" of conversion**.

On the other hand, most Charismatic groups believe that it is **the privilege of all Christians to speak in tongues**, but it is a gift which is given **subsequent to the conversion experience**. Thus a person who has not yet spoken in tongues but who has professed Christ, and perhaps even been baptized in water, would still be considered a brother or sister in Christ.

Migration and African Christian diaspora

Diaspora: the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland (taken from the Biblical term for Jewish people expelled from their homeland).

A massive growth in Christian presence in the southern continents meant that by the middle of the 20th century, the Christian faith had developed into a non-Western religion. The rise of churches and prophet movements in Africa meant that Christianity grew quickly in sub-Saharan Africa during the 20th century.

These developments, together with the emergence of Pentecostal / charismatic varieties of Christianity, led to huge changes in the African Christian landscape.

Today, some of the largest congregations in Europe are either founded by Africans or are led by people of African descent.

African diaspora Christianity is at the forefront of new missionary and evangelisation initiatives. African churches have emerged as the beacon of Christian mission and evangelisation in the global spread of the faith, especially considering declining numbers of Christians in the western world.

Although African churches in Western Churches do not attract many Europeans, many African diaspora communities believe that the "witness of presence" is significant – the presence of African-led churches in Europe is testimony to the dynamic quality and significance of the African evangelical witness.

African members of mainstream denominations in their home countries initially joined similar denominations in Europe, meaning that Methodist, Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism have all acquired new ecclesial identities, liturgical structures and styles of worship.

Questions of ethnic and cultural identities are important for people in the diaspora – the churches founded in Europe provided members a safe space from harsh immigration conditions. Religion helped them to achieve a level of security and inner strength. Some even see parallels between the pains of being "aliens" in a foreign land and the experiences of Jesus.

Reflection...

The essential point to note here is that Christianity is not "frozen." Instead it is undergoing growth, adaptation and development as it moves into new contexts.

There is little doubt however as to where the future of Christianity lies – the developing world. Christianity in 2050 is likely to be predominantly the faith of poor non-whites living south of Europe and the United States. It can be predicted to show substantial interest in healing and prophecy as its adherents identify themselves with the poor and oppressed who first embraced Jesus' promise of healing and redemption.

Unit 5. Works of scholars

5.1. Atonement theory

- a) *An analysis of the key terms atonement and soteriology.*
- b) *Models of atonement, including sacrifice, victory, substitution and moral exemplar.*

With reference to the ideas of Anselm and G Aulén.

What is atonement?

Atonement is one of the central doctrines of Christianity. In the Bible, all humanity is deemed to be sinful and has failed to live up to the standards laid down by God. Sin prevents humanity from receiving God's blessings.

The doctrine of atonement is about God's love, justice and mercy. Humanity cannot be freed from sin without divine help. God sent Christ to die as a sacrifice and a ransom to pay the price of sin so that humanity could be forgiven and set free – Christ died in the place of sinners; he is 'at one' with them – that is Atonement.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (Romans 3:25)

Atonement brings reconciliation and peace between God and humanity, and the beginning of a new covenant: *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises (Hebrews 8:6).*

There is much theological dispute as to whom exactly Christ died for. Some theologians have argued that he died only for the 'elect' – those whom God had predestined for eternal life (this is called limited atonement and is based on John 17:9 *I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

Others have argued that Christ died for all humanity and that all humans are, therefore, saved. His atoning death makes salvation possible for all people who choose to believe in him - this is called universal salvation. It is the view taken by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).*

What is salvation?

Salvation means to be saved from sin – being able to go to eternal paradise. Christ's atoning death makes it possible for us to achieve salvation. Salvation is found in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The Bible teaches that people live in a state of sin which separates God from humanity. It stems from Genesis 3 and the story of Adam's disobedience towards God – 'original sin', which then afflicted all humanity: *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5).*

The debate regarding salvation is about when it happens: some argue it has already happened or is happening in the present, others see it as happening in the future.

Futuristic eschatology:

- Judgement and salvation will come on the last day, when the dead will be raised
- Grand conclusion of history, the defeat of Satan and the return of Christ
- *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11)*

Present eschatology:

- Expectations of the future are realised in the believer's present relationship with Jesus
- Eternal life is something to be enjoyed in the present, a peculiar quality of life that results from belief in Jesus, which will not be destroyed by physical death in the future
- *...to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18)*

Heavenly eschatology:

- Jesus has gone to prepare the heavenly home for Christians
- Salvation will occur after in heaven
- *May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Thessalonians 5:23)*

Soteriology

Theories of salvation and atonement are called soteriology. It is the study of what salvation actually is, what it means and how it relates to Jesus Christ.

Justification by faith

Justification is the way in which humanity is freed from the guilt and condemnation of sin.

Justification is based on faith in Jesus and is available to all who believe (Galatians 2:21).

Martin Luther argued that justification has nothing to do with 'being good' or 'doing good works'. It is about believing in Christ and his atoning sacrifice.

The doctrine of justification was put forward by Paul, who argued that the death of Jesus meant that sin had been vanquished, and the Resurrection was God's judgement that all who accepted and believed in Jesus were 'justified' before him.

Sacrifice / Ransom theory

Christ sacrifices himself in order to enable humanity to be restored to God, offering himself as the Lamb of God. Athanasius notes: *Christ offers a sacrifice which is trustworthy, of permanent effect, and which is unailing in its nature... Christ, being truly of God the Father, became incarnate for our sakes, so that he might offer himself to the Father in our place, and redeem us through his offering and sacrifice.*

The New Testament speaks of Christ as giving his life as a ransom for sinners. Christ gives his life as a ransom for sinners. Jesus liberates humanity from slavery to sin and Satan and thus death by giving his own life as a ransom sacrifice. Matthew 20:28: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Early scholars such as Origen and Gregory the Great argued that the ransom that Christ was providing was paid to the Devil. They argued that the devil had control over sinful humanity and the only way we could be freed would be for the Devil to exceed his authority, and he did this when he claimed authority over Christ. The Devil had wrongly seized Christ, who was sinless, thus being caught in God's trap.

Criticisms: Other scholars argued against the notion of sacrifice.

- John Locke claimed that the most important factor in salvation was the Messiahship of Christ.
- Recently, the image of Christ as a sacrifice became more difficult to accept, especially after the horrors of two world wars where people had 'sacrificed' themselves for their country.
- Many modern scholars have questioned why the devil would have any influence over an all-powerful God.
- Ransom also rests upon the notion of original sin as inherited guilt affecting the entire human race – most now accept that sin is just a part of the natural order, a product of humans' universal struggle for survival.

Christus Victor theory: Gustaf Aulen (1879-1978)

Aulen was the Bishop of Strangnas in the Church of Sweden. His work, *Christus Victor: An historical study of the three main types of the idea of atonement*, analyses the doctrine of the atonement of Jesus, suggesting that the three main interpretations in Christian history are:

1. Christus Victor (victory) theory
2. Satisfaction theory
3. Moral influence

Aulen describes Christ's actions as a battle. Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself. Christus Victor is a motif of divine rescue and liberation from the bondage of sin, death and the devil.

Central to its understanding are the ideas of the Incarnation and the Lordship of Christ. In this sense of liberation and rescue it is parallel to the Ransom Theory however it also stresses Christ's victory over sin and is thus centred in the idea of the Resurrection.

"Ransom" should not be seen as a transaction, but more of a rescue or liberation of humanity from the slavery of sin. Unlike the Satisfaction or Penal-substitution views of the atonement rooted in the idea of Christ paying the penalty of sin to satisfy the demands of justice, the Christus Victor view is rooted in the incarnation and how Christ entered into human misery and wickedness and thus redeemed it.

Victor is a variation of Ransom theory – Christ was the victor over the devil; the ransomer is attacked and defeated instead of being paid off.

Christ reconciled God and humanity – he had atoned for the sins of humanity and restored the divine relationship.

Aulen's emphasis was on spiritual, rather than physical bondage. Aulen claimed that people were 'spiritually imprisoned by hidden forces' which lay in the subconscious mind. This view was well received by people who had seen and experienced the suffering caused by humans in WWI.

C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* further illustrated this. The book tells the story of Narnia, a land discovered by accident by four children as they rummage in an old wardrobe. In the book we encounter the White Witch, who keeps the land of Narnia covered in perpetual snow, where it is "always winter, but never Christmas." The White Witch rules the land of Narnia, not as a matter of right, but by stealth. The true ruler is absent; in his absence, the witch subjects the land to oppression. In the midst of this land of winter stands the witch's castle, within which many of the original inhabitants have been imprisoned as stone statues.

As the narrative continues, we discover the rightful ruler of the land is Aslan, a lion. As Aslan advances into Narnia, winter gives way to spring and the snow begins to melt. The witch realises that her power is starting to fade and moves to eliminate the threat posed by Aslan. Aslan surrenders himself to the forces of evil and allows them to do their worst to him – yet by doing so he disarms them. Lewis then goes on to describe how Aslan, who has burst his chains – breaks into the castle, breathes upon the statues, and restores them to life before leading the liberated army to freedom.

Criticisms: Critics of Aulen claimed that he had failed to explain exactly how, through the Cross, Christ had defeated the forces of evil. The rise of the Enlightenment, led to the Christus victor approach increasingly being seen as outmoded and unsophisticated. As popular as the harrowing of hell may have been in medieval times, it was regarded as utterly primitive by the more sophisticated standards of the Enlightenment. Criticism of the resurrection, raised doubts whether we could speak of a "victory" over death. Existence of a devil and the domination of satanic forces was dismissed as superstition.

Strengths: Modern writers generally have been supportive for Aulen's position. Bultmann argued that the victory of the cross could be seen as a victory over 'inauthentic existence and unbelief', which Paul Tillich saw it as a 'victory over existential forces which threaten to deprive us of authentic existence'.

Forgiveness / Satisfaction theory

Put forward by **Anselm of Canterbury**: Christ's death enabled God to forgive human sin.

What is required to cancel out disobedience is appropriate penance or gift in satisfaction. It is necessary to restore the moral balance. Christ's voluntary death on the cross constituted a full satisfaction for the sins of the world.

Anselm did not accept the notion of Christ's ransom, believing that there were no 'rights of the devil' which needed to be paid off. He analysed salvation as follows:

1. God created humanity in a state of original righteousness
2. God's aim was to bring humanity to eternal blessedness
3. This required humanity to obey God
4. Sin prevented humanity from obeying God
5. To get rid of sin, a 'satisfaction' had to be made, to purge sin
6. Humanity could not provide this satisfaction
7. Only God could provide it
8. A 'God-man' (Christ) would possess the ability (as God) and the obligation (as a human) to pay the satisfaction
9. Therefore God became incarnate, paid the satisfaction through the Cross, and humanity was saved

Aquinas developed this notion further, claiming that there were three considerations in understanding the adequacy of the 'satisfaction of Christ' to compensate for human sin:

1. The greatness of Christ's love for humanity
2. The supreme worth of Christ's life that he laid down
3. The great sorrow and passion that Christ endured for humanity

For Aquinas, therefore, Christ's death was the ultimate offering or satisfaction: 'the worth of Christ's flesh is to be reckoned, not just according to the nature of the flesh, but according to the person who assumed it, in that it was the flesh of God, from whom it gained infinite worth'.

However, this view had its critics. In particular, it rested on the notion of original sin – that humans were born sinful as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. Moreover, some believers were uncomfortable with the view that Christ was able to bear the guilt and the punishment that should have been given to sinners – was this the right thing to do, morally speaking?

Criticisms: Modern writers have questioned the notions of original sin and guilt. Freud regarded these aspects as the 'psychosocial projections' that existed only in people's minds, rather than in Scripture. Some have also said that satisfaction theory was a product of its time – when the social order demanded justice and satisfaction / penance of sin.

Moral exemplar theory

For many Christians, the Cross is the ultimate sign of God's love for humanity. God took on human form and human nature, in order to teach humanity about God and, in his death, to save humanity. This view was taken up by scholars such as Karl Bretschneider, who argued that the Cross demonstrated God's love for humanity and that salvation was a moral, rather than a religious act – based on love.

The moral exemplar theory of atonement holds that the purpose and work of Jesus was to bring positive moral change to humanity. This moral change came through the teachings and example of Jesus and the inspiring effect of his martyrdom and resurrection.

It rules out the biblical idea of vicarious sufferings and substitution, and looks upon the Atonement as a mere influence which persuades men to do right.

Jesus did not *have* to do in order for us to gain salvation. It was his life and work that provided the atoning sacrifice. There is no need of a sacrifice for sin since the loving God Who dwells in Heaven will not be severe with His creatures here below. The moral influence theory holds that God is the Father of all men, and that He does not hold man accountable for sin.

The moral exemplar theory was supported by Augustine in many of his writings.

Advocates of moral exemplar theory believe their position is taught in the Bible, pointing to:

- The large volume of teaching in the Gospels focused on morality
- The various passages in the NT letters which speak of the effect of Jesus' life and death on us in terms of moral change

It tends to emphasise the following aspects of Christ' work:

- Teacher - a majority of the Gospel accounts focuses on Jesus' teachings. These teachings focus largely on individual and social morality, and encourage love.
- Example - many New Testament passages speak of imitating Christ and following his example. The Gospel accounts provide a rich body of material from which early Christians drew examples.
- Founder and Leader - the Church movement has a large role in the moral influence view, as its purpose is to continue to morally transform individuals and societies.
- Martyr - Jesus' crucifixion is viewed as a martyrdom, in which he was killed as a consequence of his claim to divinity.

However, opponents will point out the various passages throughout the NT that teach the impossibility of salvation through moral work.

Critics have also argued that Christ did not die to endorse a moral system. Schliermacher believed that the value of the Cross was religious, not moral – in his view, Christ died in order that the supremacy of God's consciousness could be shown to humanity. God is a supreme leader who communicates to his people through words and actions, transforms them and gives them new life. He does this through Jesus, who is 'an absolutely powerful God-consciousness'. It is seen as un-Scriptural in its conception of Christ as a mere man of exceptional qualities; in its view of sin, in which the character of sin as guilt, so strongly emphasized by the Word of God, is entirely ignored.

Penal Substitution theory

During the Reformation, the majority of reformers strongly rejected the moral influence view in favour of penal substitution.

Penal substitution theory is a theory of atonement that argues that Christ, by his own sacrificial choice, was punished (penalised) in the place of sinners (substitution), thus satisfying the demands of justice so God can justly forgive sins.

If the death of Christ deals with sin and injustice, his resurrection is the renewal and restoration of righteousness.

It derives from the idea that God is not willing or able to simply forgive sin without first requiring a satisfaction for it. It states that God gave himself in the person of his Son, Jesus, to suffer the death, punishment and curse due to fallen humanity as the penalty for our sin.

Defenses of penal substitution have typically focused on passages in the Bible that describe salvation as the result of faith, and speak of the effects of Christ's death. They argue that they teach salvation by faith not works, and that Christ's death had a supernatural effect.

For example: Romans 3:23-26 – "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are not justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus".

Penal substitution is a distinctively Protestant understanding of the atonement that differs from both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox understandings of the atonement. Many trace its origin to Calvin, but it was more concretely formulated by the Reformed theologian Charles Hodge. Traditionally a belief in penal substitution is often regarded as a hallmark of the evangelical faith and is included as an article of faith by many (but not all) evangelical organizations today.

The moral influence view has historically come into conflict with a penal substitutionary view of atonement, as the two systems propose radically different criteria of salvation and judgment. The moral influence paradigm focuses on the moral change of people, leading to a positive final judgment for which the criteria focuses on inner moral character. By contrast, a penal substitutionary paradigm denies the saving value of human moral change. It focuses on faith in Christ and on his death on our behalf, leading to a positive final judgment based on what Christ has done for us and our trust in that - not on any positive moral qualities that we ourselves possess.

Criticisms: Faustus Socinus argued that penal substitution was "irrational, incoherent, immoral and impossible". His objections were:

1. Perfect satisfaction for sin, even by way of substitution, leaves no room for divine forgiveness or pardon
2. It is unjust both to punish the innocent and to allow the guilty to go free
3. The finite suffering and temporary death of one is disproportionate to the infinite suffering and permanent death of many
4. The grace of perfect satisfaction would appear to confer on its beneficiaries a freedom to sin without consequence

Counter criticisms: Proponents of penal substitution contend that critics overlook the repeated declarations of Jesus that he intended to die on the cross, and that his death was the very purpose for which he was born on the Earth (John 12:27). Jesus himself taught that "greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13) and repeatedly announced that he was intentionally going to Jerusalem, knowing that he was heading to his death (Mark 8:31).

5.2. A comparison of key ideas in the work of Karl Barth and John Hick

- a) *Barth's work on Jesus' death as a substitution for sinful humanity and taking God's judgment on himself, the idea of 'the Judge Judged in Our Place', biblical background, context of the Reformed tradition, the context of the language and traditional imagery of guilt, judgment and forgiveness.*
- b) *Hick's work on the role of Jesus as a moral exemplar, divinity and resurrection of Jesus as myth and metaphor, implications for doctrines of incarnation and Trinity, notions of sin, the role of the cross in the modern age, context of 20th century atrocities for an understanding of sin and human nature, the impact of Hick's ideas for interfaith dialogue.*
- c) *The strengths and weaknesses of these views, their meaning and significance for Christians and the impact of these views on Christianity in the modern age.*

Barth anthology – Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation

Hick anthology – The Metaphor of God Incarnate

John Hick – The metaphor of God

In *The Metaphor of God* Hick argues that the historical Jesus of Nazareth did not teach or apparently believe that he was God, or God the Son, the second person of a Holy Trinity, incarnate or the Son of God.

Hick believes that the reason why Church attendance is on the decline is because of the presentation of Jesus as the saviour of the whole world, and Christianity as the one and only true religion, including the deity of Jesus as God incarnate, the Holy Trinity, atonement for the sins of the world through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, and his bodily resurrection and ascension. For many non-church goers, these claims are unbelievable.

Hick's work on the role of Jesus as a moral exemplar

In his *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973), Hick attempts to pinpoint the essence of Christianity. He first cites the Sermon on the Mount as being the basic Christian teaching, as it provides a practical way of living out the Christian faith. He says that "Christian essence is not to be found in beliefs about God...but in living as the disciples who in his name feed the hungry, heal the sick and create justice in the world." However, all of the teachings, including the Sermon on the Mount, that form what Hick calls the essence of Christianity, flow directly from Jesus' ministry. In turn, this means that the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus form the permanent basis of the Christian tradition.

Demythologising the incarnation does not undermine Jesus. The metaphor of divine incarnation, according to which Jesus embodied an overwhelming awareness of the goodness and love of God, is intelligible, believable and morally challenging. When we remove the barriers of the later church doctrines, what is revealed is the heart of Jesus' life and teaching: the challenging moral teaching summarised in the sermon on the mount, preaching an indiscriminate love for all, his parables of the love of God, his powerful criticisms of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and his identifying with the poor and marginalised, and his treatment of women, welcoming them as disciples.

Hick says "The Jesus of history then, I suggest, minus the impressive but today unbelievable theological structure that the church has built round him, is rightly our lord, guru, role model."

Divinity and resurrection of Jesus as myth and metaphor

Hick continues in this work to examine the manner in which the deification of Jesus took place in corporate Christianity following his crucifixion and questions whether or not Jesus actually thought of himself as the Messiah and the literal Son of God.

In several places (e.g. his contributions to *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, and his book *The Myth of God Incarnate*) Hick proposes a reinterpretation of traditional Christology—particularly the doctrine of the Incarnation. Hick contends "that the historical Jesus of Nazareth did not teach or apparently believe that he was God, or God the Son, Second Person of a Holy Trinity, incarnate, or the son of God in a unique sense."

Hick argues that the earliest understanding of Jesus expressed by his first disciples and to a large extent portrayed in the synoptic Gospels and the book of Acts is that of a man "intensely and overwhelmingly conscious of the reality of God" (JWR, 172). Because of Jesus's intimate relationship with God, he possessed a stunning spiritual authority that included the ability to forgive sins, heal diseases, and speak on behalf of God. Jesus was thus given honorific titles by his followers, such as Messiah, Lord, and Son of God. Over time these poetic images attributed to Jesus took on more than the symbolic or metaphorical value in which they were originally intended and instead became metaphysical statements. Hick finds this development already in the Gospel of John and finally formalized in the two-natures Christology of Nicea and Chalcedon.

Hick proposes a metaphorical approach to incarnation. That is, Jesus was not literally God in the flesh (incarnate), but was metaphorically speaking, the presence of God. "Jesus was so open to divine inspiration, so responsive to the divine spirit, so obedient to God's will, that God was able to act on earth in and through him. This, I (Hick) believe, is the true Christian doctrine of the incarnation."

Hick disputes the absolute claims of Christianity – for him, Christianity cannot be the only way by which salvation is given to humanity. This involves denial of the literal divinity and physical resurrection of Christ. He seeks to recognise the role of other religions in salvation, and claims that all religions are equal – a form of religious pluralism.

To Hick, there is a sharp distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of theological postulation, especially the one theorised in the Nicene Creed. Hick argues that "the Nicene definition of God – the Son – incarnate is only one way of conceptualising the lordship of Jesus, the way taken by the Graeco-Roman world of which we are heirs, and that in the new age of world ecumenism which we are entering it is proper for Christians to become conscious of both the optional and the mythological character of this traditional language".

In the ancient world the title of the Son of God was used in the Old Testament for ordinary men (Psalms 2:7). Such titles were used metaphorically, not literally. Hick seeks to draw this Old Testament understanding into the New Testament so that the meaning does not change from metaphor or mythology to literal.

In the case of Jesus, since he came from the royal Davidic line, Mark accorded him Son of God which subsequent development turned it to God the Son as exemplified in the Gospel of John. So the deification of Jesus resulted from believers' experience of divine forgiveness, love and reconciliation with God which they thought the death of Jesus was a sacrifice to achieve in view of human sin and would have made him divine.

The Biblical Virgin Birth story was added to the Bible late, apparently not known to St Paul, or to Mark, the author of the first gospel. For Hick, it is clearly mythological. The Bethlehem Christmas story was created to fulfil supposed Old Testament prophecies.

The resurrection must also be viewed metaphorically. For Hick, there are many contradictions within the Gospels about the resurrection. The disciples claimed that Jesus had appeared to them – meaning they had seen visions of him. However this does not literally mean that Jesus' body rose from the death. The disciples' proclamation of the risen Lord would almost inevitably as time went on have come to be understood to mean that they had seen his literal resurrected body, and the Gospels one and two generations after the event would be likely to have taken this form. Hick argues that surely a bodily resurrection would have been astonishing at the time and we would have some sort of historical record of it.

Implications for doctrines of incarnation and Trinity

Hick believes that a metaphorical view of the incarnation avoids the need for faulty Christian paradoxes such as the duality of Christ (fully God and fully human) and even the Trinity (God is simultaneously one and three).

Hick criticises the fundamental doctrines of the church, namely, the trinity, incarnation and atonement and accuses both the church and Anselm who framed that "Jesus had to be God." Furthermore, the church tagged Jesus, "son of God" and began to find ways of inserting two natures into the person of Christ.

Hick's conclusion that the Nicene definition is one interpretation and a mere conceptualisation unveils his suspicion against the fact of historical reality that traditional Christian theology expresses. It therefore means that the biblical testimony cannot be literally true.

The doctrine of the Trinity is a defensive doctrine to protect the Incarnation. But without the starting point of Jesus as the Son of God on earth, the idea of a divine Trinity does not arise.

Atonement also presupposes the literally understood Incarnation doctrine. The main atonement theory presents Jesus as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity. The idea is that God is a loving God but also a just God, and the penalty that his justice demands is paid on our behalf by the agonising death of Jesus on the cross. But it is only because Jesus is God the Son that his death was sufficient to atone for the sins of the world. And so the atonement doctrine does not arise when we have re-understood divine incarnation as a metaphorical idea.

Notions of sin

Transactional models of atonement are based on the belief in original sin as an inherited guilt affecting the entire human race, and requiring an adequate atonement to expunge it.

Hick argues that we should cease to think and speak in terms of original sin – except as a mythological way of referring to the fact of universal human imperfection.

Original sin idea presupposes the wilful fall from grace of the first humans and the genetic inheritance by the whole species of a guilty and sinful nature.

Hick criticises this:

- Humans did not evolve from a single specially created pair, but evolved out of lower forms of life over an immensely long period of time. The earliest humans did not live in perfect harmony with God, but probably had a primitive, animalistic outlook. They were already metaphorically “fallen”, in that they were spiritually and morally imperfect. But the idea of the perfect original state never existed, therefore there was never a human fall from an original paradisaal state
- Self-centredness, from which many forms of moral evil flow, is simply an aspect of our nature as animals engaged in the universal struggle for survival
- We cannot be guilty in the sight of God for having been born, within God’s providence, as animals biologically programmed for self-protection and survival within a tough environment

The role of the cross in the modern age

Jesus’ death on the cross should not be understood as a transactional process that atoned for our sins. Rather, salvation must be understood as a beginning of the transformation of men and women in this life from our natural self-centredness towards a less self-centred outlook and a greater concern for others. Salvation is a gradual change, in conscious and unconscious response to the ultimate divine reality, a change which shows itself in our behaviour in relation to our fellow human beings.

This is not just happening among Christians, it is happening equally among people of all faiths, and indeed of no religious beliefs.

Context of 20th century atrocities for an understanding of sin and human nature

Hick wrote *The Metaphor of God* in 1977, after two horrific world wars. This influenced his theory, as it became difficult to continue to claim that Jesus had died to eradicate the sins of the world.

One of the major factors that has driven Hick to claim that there is nothing unique in Christianity that is not found in other religions is the connection between Christian absolutism and historical evils, which depicts fallen human nature that Christianity has been largely powerless to redeem.

It means Christian claims have not only resulted in some of the evils in human history but Christianity has also failed in transforming fallen human nature and all its consequences.

Hick says, “The picture would be very different if Christianity, commensurate with its claim to absolute truth and unique validity, has shown a unique capacity to transform human nature for the better”.

Therefore the image of Jesus as ‘Victor’ who abolished evil and suffering does not work. We continue to sin as much as before.

The impact of Hick’s ideas for interfaith dialogue

Ecumenism: the aim of unity among all Christian churches throughout the world.

Interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (i.e., "faiths") and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels.

For Hick, we have to radically rethink our understanding of the place of Christianity in the global religious picture. And yet we have to face the fact that it is one path amongst others, and then reform the Christian belief-system to be compatible with this.

Hick: “Change comes from the grassroots. Already on the ground, in a multi-faith city like Birmingham, a great many Christians are already implicit pluralists. That is to say they don’t think that their Muslim or Sikh or Jewish or Hindu or Buddhist or Baha’i neighbour has a lower status than themselves in relation to the ultimate divine reality. They don’t think that the souls of these people are in jeopardy. Many of us have friends of other faiths whom we greatly admire. We simply don’t believe that they are religiously disadvantaged, even though our official theologies imply that they must be”.

Christians must become more pluralistic and accepting of other faiths. The impact of this is a suggestion that more interfaith dialogue take place. Hick’s ideas can be described as an attempt to create a 'global theology' because he tries to provide a method of approaching theology which accounts for all religion and which enables creative inter-religious dialogue. Global theology can be contrasted with traditional 'Christian theology' which viewed non-Christian religions from a Christocentric view point.

Strengths

Hick’s argument that the gospels contain myths that reflect outdated world-views is convincing. For Hick, describing the stories as ‘myths’ does not mean that they have no value. Hick argues: 'In the Scriptures we speak about God in true myths, that is to say, descriptions which are not literally true but which nevertheless have the effect of evoking in us an appropriate dispositional response to the ultimate subject-matter of the myths.'

By removing the mythological element of the resurrection, the incarnation, atonement, the Trinity etc. it is possible to rediscover who Jesus actually was and what he taught.

Hick’s reinterpretation of Christianity does make it more appealing to non-Christians, for whom claims about the resurrection of Jesus and his death on the cross to atone for our sins are inaccessible and unbelievable.

Hick believes there are sound historical reasons for rejecting the idea of the Incarnation and therefore also the Trinity.

Weaknesses

Hick’s metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus disconnects the “literal surface” and the deeper meaning. It destroys objectivity and upholds subjectivism.

Many traditional Christians would say that Hick’s views undermine Christianity because he does not believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

- Hick’s response to this is to say that his view of Jesus is a return to Jesus’ actual message. Jesus did not claim to be the Son of God. The gospel writers were not eyewitnesses. The earliest Gospel (Mark) begins with the story of Jesus’ baptism rather than any story about his birth and usually presents him as a prophet rather than God incarnate. The term 'son of God' was widely used to describe people who

behaved like God in some way. It was only when Christianity moved into the gentile (non-Jewish) world that it began to be taken literally rather than metaphorically.

Hick's claim that Christianity has been powerless to redeem human sin is mistaken: perfection is not guaranteed in this life, but in the life to come. The Christian gospel nowhere promises perfection in this life for believers in Christ but rather urges them to work towards it.

The New Testament affirms Christ's holiness which is not said of any other person. Other men may have been called 'son of God' in the Old Testament, but Christ is the only one who *was* the Son of God in the NT. There is evidence to suggest that Jesus *did* believe himself to be more than just a prophet.

If Jesus *did* claim to be the Son of God then according to **C.S. Lewis** he was either mad (i.e. delusional), bad (i.e. lying) or Lord (i.e. he was telling the truth). Lewis suggested that the Jesus of the gospels does not appear either mad or bad - which leaves only one option.

If the resurrection was not literal, then one could argue that the Last Supper, arrest and trial, and crucifixion would also have been non-literal or metaphorical. The resurrection is the final point of the literal, historical narrative, so it is illogical to grant one side of the same historical event literal meaning while the other metaphorical (Philip Tachin).

Harold Netland argues that in Hick's theology Jesus becomes 'simply one of many great religious leaders who have been used by God to provide salvation for humankind'. Jesus loses his uniqueness in Hick's theory.

Hick's interpretation of Christianity undermines the essence of the religion and reduces the Bible to a set of fictional stories with some nice morals.

Many Christians regard believing in the **incarnation** to be a central tenant of Christianity (it is, afterall, affirmed in the **creed 'we believe in one God, father almighty and in his Son, Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit...'** etc.). Theologians like Barth who emphasised the centrality of Jesus as God's self-revelation would almost certainly consider Hick's depiction of a fully human Jesus as damaging to Christianity.

Impact

Hick argues that the supremacy of Christianity through the missionary commission is not only unrealistic but also religiously and theologically mistaken.

Does Hick's work go some way to challenging the decline in traditional Christianity? Hick's view of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus may be a necessary When his book was published it was very controversial, but is there now more acceptance of his views?

Hick argues that in the end reality will inevitably prevail over traditional dogma – "at least for all who are not encased in the impenetrable armour of a rigid fundamentalism". It will take a long time, but it will inevitably happen, though quite possibly with a division into two Christianities, one fundamentalist and the other progressive.

Is it possible to create a workable 'global theology'?

- Hick believes it is: God is 'greater and more many-sided' than one religion can do justice to. Therefore apparently contradictory beliefs about God may actually be different ways of experiencing the same thing
- Global theology will not abolish the diversity of religion that exists because different religions exist as they suit different people with different needs

Hick believes a global theology is necessary because it is essential that religious people respect each other.

Karl Barth – Church Dogmatics

Karl Barth was a Swiss Reformed theologian who is often regarded as the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century.

Beginning with his experience as a pastor, Barth rejected his training in the predominant liberal theology typical of 19th-century European Protestantism. He also rejected more conservative forms of Christianity. Instead he embarked on a new theological path initially called dialectical theology due to its stress on the paradoxical nature of divine truth (e.g., God's relationship to humanity embodies both grace and judgment). Many critics have referred to Barth as the father of neo-orthodoxy – a term that Barth emphatically rejected. A more charitable description of his work might be "a theology of the Word".

Barth emphasised: sovereignty of God, particularly through his reinterpretation of the Calvinistic doctrine of election, the sinfulness of humanity, and the "infinite qualitative distinction between God and mankind".

He borrowed Enlightenment critiques of reason – for Barth, God cannot be known through reason. Our knowledge of God must come from revelation. God *is* revelation – through Jesus. It is only through Jesus that God can truly be known.

Barth's substitutionary theory of atonement in brief:

- Founded primarily on the narrative of the synoptic Gospels
- Jesus' mission entailed declaring God's final judgement on the world
- Pilate's judgement on Jesus, leading to the cross, was actually God's own judgement on Jesus
- The passion story is therefore Jesus undergoing God's judgement in place of humans
- Jesus is therefore both the Judge and the judged

Barth's work on Jesus' death as a substitution for sinful humanity and taking God's judgement on himself

Barth defined sin as 'nothingness' and an 'impossible possibility' – the contradiction of God's will, the breaking of the covenant and a rejection of Christ. Grace is God's love that is given to undeserving humanity, a love that comes through Jesus Christ: '...just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 5:21).

For Barth, the doctrine of reconciliation stresses the point that God is with man in the fulfilment of the covenant of grace. For Barth, God has become man in Jesus Christ and thus has made man's situation his own. He declares that "God in Jesus Christ has taken our place" in that Christ is not only our Brother and Helper but also our Saviour and Judge.

Jesus' death is a substitution for sinful humanity. In suffering the punishment humankind deserves, Jesus Christ frees everyone from the divine judgement, and Christ is thus the substitutionary "reprobate" upon whom the severity of God's judgement has fallen. Barth calls Christ "our Representative and Substitute".

For Barth, the context and meaning of Jesus' coming is not sin, but the eternal will of God for man. Jesus was an event of self-determination, not the side-effect of sin and death.

Barth has made certain that sin is not defined in a vacuum, but only as it is found in relation to Jesus Christ, the victor over sin. It is therefore only in Christ's defeat of sin that Barth claims we can know sin at all. "The reality of sin cannot be known or described except in relation to the One who has vanquished it." Only in light of Jesus' redemption can we truly understand the depravity of our existence. In this way, preaching sin also means preaching the grace of God for all mankind, because sin cannot be preached a part from the conqueror of sin, Jesus Christ.

Even though humanity's sin is deep, God's grace is deeper and it is poured out on us in the life of Christ.

God turns all judgement and authority over to Jesus himself. Jesus, who freely offered himself for the sins of the world, will return to judge the living and the dead. The Saviour is the Judge.

The idea of 'the Judge judged in our place'

"To say atonement is to say Jesus Christ." ... "He took our place as Judge. He took our place as the judged. He was judged in our place. And He acted justly in our place" Barth, Church Dogmatics.

In Church Dogmatics, Karl Barth spoke of Christ as the judge who: '...has represented me before the judgement of God, and has taken away all condemnation from me'. He claimed that the Cross was the method by which God, as the righteous judge, makes known his judgement of sinful humanity and, at the same time, takes that judgement on himself:

Why did God become a human being? So that God as a human being might do and accomplish and achieve and complete all this for us wrongdoers, in order that in this way there might be brought about by him our reconciliation with him, and our conversion to him.

At the cross, God not only judges sins; he takes upon himself the verdict and judgement that should have been humans. He is "the judge judged in our place". Jesus himself stood in the place of humans and made our just punishment his own. Therefore Jesus takes away the sin of the world. Therefore when we are judged by Christ, we no longer stand before him as condemned sinners. He has borne our judgement upon the Cross and has taken our sin upon himself.

In his love for humanity, the Word of God takes on human flesh (John 1:14) and, on behalf of all, lives the life of perfect faith and obedience. Jesus is the new Adam – all die in the old Adam, all are made alive in Christ (Romans 5:12-20). In Christ, God has reconciled the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

1. Barth believes that the counter-action of man is healed in Christ's redemption:
2. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. In freedom, God became man for our sakes
3. Jesus is our Lord as a servant. Jesus came not to be served but to serve, and this reveals the nature of God as the Lord. He humbles himself and becomes the servant of sinful man. Mankind wants to be Lord over all, to proudly command all things. Yet Jesus comes to heal our evil fixation with this illusory Lordship, by revealing that true Lordship is servanthood
4. Jesus is the judge in our place. He alone is the righteous Judge of man, and He has, as this judge, suffered and died in the judgement we deserved. He is the Judge who steps down and dies the judgement He proclaims in the place of the unjust. Yet we, in our proud humanity, desire to be our own judge. We desire to be the masters of our own lives and to judge for ourselves what is right and wrong. Yet Jesus reveals the high price of the Judge, and unveils the truth that only God's judgement is truly righteous.
5. Jesus dies helpless and in complete abandonment on the cross. He was crucified and buried in full trust that despite His helplessness, God, His dear Father, would come to help. Humanity, in our pride, attempts self-help, self-salvation. We try to be our own hero. But God in Christ shows that it is only when we are helpless and fully abandoned to His salvation, that we are free from our illusion, and He saves us.

Biblical background

Barth's major contribution was a radical change in the direction of theology from a 19th century orientated towards progress to an orthodoxy that had to cope with the grim realities of the 20th century. His rejection of liberal theology led to an emphasis on the eschatological and supernatural in Christianity. Barth thought that the openness to culture of liberal theologians had made them turn their backs on the gospel.

Thus started a period of theological study, particularly of the Bible. He discovered in the Bible a "strange new world": the Bible was not about our religion or morality or history, but about the Kingdom of God. This biblical reality can be understood only by inhabiting it.

Disillusioned with the liberal theology of his youth, Barth sought a completely new theological foundation for rereading scripture. By 1919, Barth's research on Paul's Letter to the Romans yielded the first edition of his *Epistle to the Romans*. This work draws heavily on the existentialist philosophy of Kierkegaard, with his characteristic on the infinitely qualitative distinction between God and humanity.

Barth's commentary stresses the "otherness" of God and the importance therefore of revelation and salvation as acts of God, not humanity. God *is* revelation – we can only know Him through the Bible.

God is not known through spiritual striving, moral reason or historical experiences. God is known solely through God himself. Knowledge begins with objects of experience and since God is no mere object, our knowledge of God must conform to what he provides – i.e. the Bible. For Barth, it was therefore misguided to reflect on God from a standpoint outside faith in divine revelation.

This led him to ground his theology entirely within Christ – God's self-expression in history.

Revelation does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ... To say revelation is to say 'The Word became Flesh'.

He therefore attempted to interpret everything from the Biblical story of salvation.

In discussing the meaning of the death of Christ, Barth refers to Isa 53, from where, in his view, the concept of punishment has entered Christian theology

“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed... Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand!

Context of the Reformed tradition

In the early phases of its development, Barth’s theology was “Reformed” theology. That is to say, it stood self-consciously in that stream of the Reformation whose originating impulses were given by Huldrych Zwingli in Zürich and John Calvin in Geneva. Barth understood himself as accountable to this Reformed tradition in his efforts to further develop and think beyond it.

It was during WWI that Barth reviewed his theology. He began working through the problems posed by the war and the failure of liberal theology to account for such a dark episode in human history.

He initiated a radical change in theology, stressing the “wholly otherness of God” over the anthropocentrism of 19th-century liberal theology. He questioned the liberal theology of his German teachers and its dependence on the rationalist, historicist, and dualist thought that stemmed from the Enlightenment. Barth believed that liberal theology had accommodated Christianity to modern culture, and it had to be changed.

His theology came to be known as “dialectical theology,” or “the theology of crisis”; it initiated a trend toward neo-orthodoxy in Protestant theology.

The context of the language and traditional imagery of guilt

Judgement and forgiveness

Salvation is the notion that, by believing in Jesus, a person can be ‘saved’ from the power of sin and gain eternal life: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16). Salvation involves a response to Jesus that is made in this life. The Bible teaches that as soon as a person makes that decision, they enter into eternal life.

Jesus is the only one and only way to salvation, as no other way can lead to God: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). This is an uncompromising claim. No other decision and no works are required for humanity to enter into eternal life, the gift that follows from salvation.

With salvation comes eternal life as a gift from God, mediated to the believer through Christ. Eternal life is only possible in so far as it derives from God through Christ by the Spirit. Salvation means that humanity can pass from darkness into light and from death to life: ‘And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’ (John 3:19).

Barth argues that humans have been unwilling to take seriously the biblical truth that Jesus, the Lamb of God, has taken away the sin of the world. For centuries, the free salvation given to us by the incarnate Son who died and the loving Father who gave him up for us in the Spirit has been buried under humanly imposed conditions for salvation, so that we are heavily laden with rules and requirements for entrance to heaven. We don’t realise that we are no longer sinners in the sight of God, so we preoccupy ourselves with performing “works” to gain salvation.

For Barth, forgiveness has become available through Christ. Our judgement has already taken place through Christ’s death on the Cross.

Beyond judgement was the resurrection. An autonomous, new act of God. The resurrection is the verdict of God. The resurrection gives a positive intention to the death of Jesus – it shows that the death of Jesus is not an end but a beginning.

The two acts (crucifixion and resurrection) are one act of one God – the goal of reconciliation. There is a unity of the two in Jesus.

Strengths

Has the advantage of Kierkegaardian Fideism (faith is independent of reason): faith is paramount in life and religion. Draws parallels to William James’ idea of faith as a genuine option – access to the evidence for whether or not certain beliefs are true depends crucially upon first adopting those beliefs without evidence.

Barth was clever in interpreting his theology in line with Enlightenment ideas. He borrowed key critiques of reason, claiming that knowledge of God can only come from God himself – rationality has no place in our knowledge of God. Barth agreed with the Enlightenment insistence on the historical and empirical conditions of our knowledge – from this he insisted that God himself became historical and empirical. The Incarnation therefore moved past the critical arguments of Descartes, Hume and Kant – in Christ, God becomes present to us from within.

Made huge contributions to Christology and Trinitarian theology.

Weaknesses

- Barth failed to liberate theology from modernity’s captivity.
- Inaccessibility of his language reduces chances for interfaith dialogue.
- Incompatibility with a rationalist view of religion reduces chance of dialogue with liberal Christians e.g. Schleiermacher.
- If rationality has no place in understanding God, it would not be possible to know what ‘revelations’ are true and which are false. If God lives in and through his self-revelation, there can be no natural knowledge of God.
- Dissolved the classical synthesis of faith and reason – therefore all theological understanding collapses into an exercise of faith. Truth is only known through Jesus.
- Very Christocentric and so unhelpful in terms of interfaith dialogue.
- Relevant only in the post-world war one context which caused him to depart from liberal theology – some may argue that this is not relevant today (however there have been greater horrors since e.g. Hiroshima and Nagasaki so perhaps this is still valid).
- The Holy Spirit is required to illuminate it. If an unbeliever reads the Bible it is not the word of God, if a believer reads it incorrectly it is also not the word of God. Hence Barth’s theology can seem very exclusive and inaccessible for non-Christians/liberal Christians.

Unit 6. Religion and society

6.1. Pluralism and diversity

- a) *The sociological reality of multicultural societies and the philosophical sense of pluralism in terms of equally valid routes to the same ultimate reality.*
- b) *Key concepts, including particularism, inclusivism and pluralism.*
- c) *A study of the context and content of modern Christian thought on other religions.*
- d) *The relative strengths and weaknesses of these views and their significance for Christians today.*
- e) *The work of the Ecumenical movement and its impact on the unity of Christianity.*

With reference to the ideas of K Rahner and J Hick.

The sociological reality of multicultural societies and the philosophical sense of pluralism in terms of equally valid routes to the same ultimate reality

Multiculturalism refers to ethnic pluralism. It describes a mixed ethnic community area where multiple cultural and religious traditions exist. In reference to sociology, multiculturalism is the end state of either a natural or artificial process (e.g. legally controlled immigration) and occurs on either a large national scale or a smaller scale within a nation's communities. Multiculturalism promotes the maintenance of distinct cultures – often described as a “salad bowl”.

Religious pluralism is an attitude regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. It includes the acknowledgement that one religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth, and therefore the acceptance that some truths exist in other religions.

Religious pluralism may include:

- The acceptance of religious diversity
- The acceptance of other truth claims
- The equal validity of two or more religions with mutually exclusive truth claims
- The understanding that the “exclusive” claims of different religions may just be variations of universal truths
- Co-operation and improved understanding between religions
- Harmonious coexistence between adherents of different religions or denominations

Religious pluralism holds that various world religions are limited by their distinctive historical and cultural contexts and thus there is no single, universal truth. There are only many equally valid religions. Each religion is a direct result of humanity's attempt to grasp and understand the incomprehensible divine reality. Therefore, each religion has an authentic but ultimately inadequate perception of divine reality, producing a partial understanding of the universal truth, which requires syncretism to achieve a completely understanding as well as a path towards salvation or spiritual enlightenment.

Perennial philosophy is a perspective that views each of the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth or origin from which all knowledge and doctrine has grown from. Like religious pluralism, it also holds that there is no single true religion, but it differs when discussing divine reality. Perennial philosophy states that the divine reality is what allows the universal truth to be understood. Each religion provides its own interpretation of the universal truth, based on its historical and cultural context. Therefore, each religion provides everything required to observe the divine reality and achieve a state in which one will be able to confirm the universal truth and achieve salvation or spiritual enlightenment.

Universalism is the idea that all religions, underneath seeming differences point to the same Truth. Universalists may emphasise the universal principles of most religions and accept other religions in an inclusive manner, believing in a universal reconciliation between humanity and the divine. Universalists also believe in one fundamental truth. The living truth is seen as more far-reaching than national, cultural or religious boundaries or interpretations of that truth. As the Hindu scripture *Rig Veda* states, “Truth is one; sages call it by various names”. Hinduism is a naturally pluralistic religion – it emphasises that everyone actually worships the same God, whether one knows it or not.

In Bahá'í belief, a single God has sent all the historic founders of the world religions in a process of progressive revelation. Within this universal view, the unity of humanity is one of the central teachings of the Bahá'í faith. All humans have been created in the image of God, therefore the unity of humanity should be promoted.

Within Christianity there is a Universalist movement that emphasises universal reconciliation – that all humans will eventually be saved and enter heaven, through the grace and work of Jesus Christ. Universalists cite numerous Biblical passages which reference the salvation of all beings, e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:22: *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Key concepts: particularism, inclusivism and pluralism

Christian approaches and attitudes towards other religions can be broadly grouped as:

1. Particularism (Barth / Kraemer)
2. Inclusivism (Rahner)
3. Pluralism (Hick)

Particularism

Particularism says that:

- The revelation of Christianity is in a category of its own. It is a unique and distinctive faith
- The “revelations” found in other religions are inauthentic, purely human inventions
- Another term for particularism is exclusivism
- Hendrik Kraemer: “God has revealed *the Way* and *the Truth* and *the Life* in Jesus Christ, and wills this to be known throughout the world

There are two types of particularists:

1. Those who say there is no knowledge of God to be found outside of Christ (Karl Barth)

2. Those who say that God's self-revelation may occur outside of Christianity, but can only be interpreted correctly in the light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Hendrik Kraemer)

Criticisms of Particularism:

- It is inconsistent with God's desire to save all human beings
- Suggests that all non-Christians will be condemned to eternal hell, which is incompatible with God's loving nature
- Hick argues that the doctrine that salvation is only possible through Christ is inconsistent with belief in the universal saving will of God

Counter-criticism:

In Karl Barth's theology, particularism is still compatible with universal salvation:

- Knowledge of God and salvation are possible only through Christ
- At the end of history, grace will triumph over unbelief, and all will come to faith in Christ
- The particularity of God's revelation through Christ is thus compatible with belief in universal salvation

Inclusivism

Inclusivism says:

- Christianity and Christ have a *unique and exclusive* status that other religions do not share
- Nevertheless:
 - o Knowledge of God (God's self-revelation) may be present in other religions
 - o The grace of God and even salvation may be present in other religions (grace may be mediated by the lifestyle they evoke – e.g. selfless love, non-violence)

Karl Rahner's argument for Inclusivism:

1. "Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all people, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right."
2. Revelation of God in Christ took place at a specific time in history. Those who lived before, or who have not yet heard of it, would seem excluded from salvation. This is incompatible with God's will to save all.
3. Knowledge of God, and God's saving grace must therefore be available outside Christianity, including other religions, despite their errors and shortcomings
4. Faithful adherents of non-Christians religions should be regarded as "anonymous Christians": "Somehow all people must be able to be members of the church."
5. Religious pluralism will always be part of human existence

Rahner justifies his position by considering the Old Testament, which was the outlook of a non-Christian religion, Judaism. He said we discard some practices of the OT (e.g. dietary laws) but we retain others as valid (e.g. moral laws). Therefore we must do the same with other religions.

Strengths and impact of Rahner:

- His ideas follow logically from central Christian beliefs, e.g. the belief that God desires salvation for all
- Retains a central role for Jesus and emphasise the crucifixion and resurrection
- Explains the presence of miracles, good moral values and religious experiences found in non-Christian religions without losing the distinctiveness of Christianity
- Rahner's theology is an example of the middle way that avoids the intolerance of exclusivism whilst also maintaining the distinctiveness of Christianity which pluralism loses

Criticisms of Inclusivism:

- The term "anonymous Christians" has been widely criticised. John Hick says it is an "honorary status granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it". Hans Kung says "It would be impossible to find anywhere in the world a sincere Jew, Muslim or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an 'anonymous Christian' as presumptuous"
- If God's grace is available outside the Church then is the Church actually necessary at all?
- Is there any justification for the claim that Christianity is superior? Barth thinks so but people like Hick argue that the term 'Son of God' is a metaphor

Counter-criticism:

- The term 'anonymous Christian' was perhaps intended to suggest that Christians should give the faithful adherents of non-Christian religions to same "status" in their reflections on the People of God as they give to their fellow Christians

Pluralism

Pluralism posits that each religion is a *distinctive yet equally valid* understanding of God / ultimate reality. The most significant advocate of pluralism is John Hick:

"...we need a Copernican revolution in our understanding of religion. The traditional dogma has been that Christianity is the centre of the universe of faiths, with all other religions seen as revolving at various removes around the revelation in Christ and being graded according to their nearness to or distance from it. But during the last hundred years or so we ... have realized that there is deep devotion to God, true sainthood, and deep spiritual life within these other religions; and so we have created our epicycles of theory, such as notions of anonymous Christianity and of implicit faith. But would it not be more realistic now to make the shift from Christianity at the centre to God at the centre, and to see both our own and the other great world religions as revolving around the same divine reality?"

Hick comes up with several reasons to support the claim that a Copernican revolution in theology is necessary:

- Empirical evidence: non-Christians have produced Saints, have similar ethical teachings etc.
- Practical considerations: a Christocentric approach to non-Christian religions could encourage arrogant and offensive attitudes to people of non-Christian faith
- Philosophical logic: we can never know for certain what God is really like, therefore we have no way of independently testing out beliefs and knowing which religion is most accurate. We have no rational basis for claiming that one religion is superior to another

Hick says we must distinguish between:

- The ultimate spiritual, transcendent reality underlying the various religious systems
- The perception of this reality within the various religions

Hick suggests that the aspect of God's nature of central importance to the question of other faiths is his universal saving will. If God wishes everyone to be saved, it is inconceivable that God should be revealed in such a way that only a small portion of humanity could be saved. Hick argues that Christians have no special access to God, who is universally available through all religious traditions.

Hick's ideas can be described as an attempt to create a 'global theology' because he tries to provide a method of approaching theology which accounts for all religion and which enables creative inter-religious dialogue.

He draws on Immanuel Kant's distinction between:

- The "thing in itself" (never directly knowable)
- Our indirect knowledge of things, always coloured by our subjective experience and our limited ability to conceptualize
- Noumenon vs. phenomenon objects

Following Kant, Hick would argue:

- We have no direct knowledge of "The Real"
- Religions are human responses to "The Real" and are coloured by the historical and social contexts in which the religions evolved

Hick explains the radical differences in beliefs in practices among religions by saying:

- The same spiritual reality lies at the heart of every religion, yet "their differing experiences of that reality, interacting over the centuries with the different thought-forms of different cultures, have led to increasing differentiation and contrasting elaboration"
- Differences should be regarded as "both-and" rather than "either-or" – as complementary rather than contradictory

Strengths and impact of Hick's pluralism:

- Different conceptualisations of "the Real" can lead us to move from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness
- Opens the possibility to appreciate another religion without a priori belief that it is inferior
- Work towards pluralism has begun under the Vatican

Criticisms of Pluralism:

- Some differences between the various religions cannot be reconciled – they are clearly contradictory
- Sets aside a major Christian conviction: that Jesus Christ is a unique revelation of God
- Is Hick actually talking about the Christian God at all? Jesus has to be set aside in order to accept his view – does this mean his claim to speak from a Christian perspective is undermined?
- Is Inclusivism an equally valid (but less radical) way of viewing non-Christian religions in a positive light?
- On the other hand, some might argue that Hick's theology is not radical enough. Given that we have no independent knowledge of what 'the Real' is like perhaps we should reject belief in any type of divine reality. Feuerbach would say that religious belief and experience can be entirely explained anthropologically. There is no need to complicate matters and assume that there is actually something behind it
- There are also practical problems about created a global theology, e.g. what do we do about people who are unwilling to let go of their claims to absolute or superior revelation?

Finally, there are philosophical challenges to Hick:

- S. Mark Heim says that Hick is not a true pluralist. He says that he is an inclusivist in disguise because Hick considers the major world religions to be authentic responses to the Real whilst things like Satanism are not. This is because the world religions lead away from selfishness and anger towards love and altruism. This means that Hick thinks that only certain types of ethical behaviour lead to salvation. True pluralism would not make such judgements. (Heim, Salvation: Truth and Difference in Religion, 1995)
- Keith Ward argued that Hick's 'hard pluralism' is incoherent. He said that if we cannot know what the Real is like then we cannot know that the world's religions are valid interpretations of it.
- Alistair McGrath said that Hick's view of the Real implies that we can say nothing meaningful about it at all. If we cannot know it in itself then we cannot know which of our perceptions about it are meaningful.
- A Muslim critic Adnan Aslan challenges Hick's view of revelation. If 'the Real' is unknowable, then it cannot deliberately reveal itself to humanity. Thus revelation is in the mind of the human who receives it rather than being initiated by God. (i.e. it will always be an aspect of General Revelation and can never be Special Revelation). This undermines the traditional Islamic view of the Qur'an as the Word of God (and fundamentalist Christian views of the Bible). Aslam provides a specific example of how and why Hick's pluralism would be unacceptable to many people of non-Christian faiths.

	The revelation of God in Jesus is unique, revealing most fully the true nature of God	God's self-revelation and grace are present outside of Christianity
Particularism	YES	NO

Inclusivism	YES	YES
Pluralism	NO	YES

A study of the context and content of modern Christian thought on other religions

Relationship with Judaism

Historically the relationship between Christianity and Judaism has been strained. In the past, Christians were often taught that “the Jews” killed Christ, for which “murder” they bear a collective guilt.

In recent years there has been much reconciliation between some Christian groups and the Jewish people. Many modern day Christians have developed a view of the New Testament as an extended covenant; they believe that Jews are still in a valid relationship with God, and that Jews can avoid damnation and earn a heavenly reward. The New Testament extended God’s original covenant to cover non-Jews.

The Jewish conception of the messiah holds certain similarities to that of Christians, yet there are substantial differences. According to Jews, the Hebrew Scriptures contain a small number of prophecies concerning a future descendant of King David, who will be anointed as the Jewish people's new leader and will establish the throne of David in Jerusalem forever. In the Jewish view, this fully human and mortal leader will rebuild the land of Israel and restore the Davidic Kingdom. This subject is covered in the section on Jewish eschatology. Some Christians have a different understanding of the term messiah, and believe that Jesus is the messiah referred to in the Old Testament prophecies; that the kingdom in these prophecies was to be a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one; and that Jesus' words and actions in the New Testament provide evidence of his identity as messiah and that the remainder of messianic prophecy will be fulfilled in the Second Coming. Other Christians acknowledge the Jewish definition of messiah, and hold that Jesus fulfils this, being 'fully man' (in addition to being 'fully God'), and believe that the Second Coming will establish the Kingdom of God on earth, where Jesus, as messiah and descendant from David, will reign from Jerusalem.

Relationship with Islam

For the Catholic Church, there has been a move reconciliation not only with Judaism, but also Islam. The Second Vatican Council states that salvation includes others who acknowledge the same creator, and explicitly lists Muslims among those. The Catholic position is that Jews, Muslims and Christians all acknowledge the same God, though Jews and Muslims have not yet received the gospel.

Islam shares a number of beliefs with Christianity. They share similar views on judgment, heaven, hell, spirits, angels, and a future resurrection. Jesus is acknowledged and respected by Muslims as a great prophet. However, while Islam relegates Jesus to a lesser status than God — "in the company of those nearest to God" in the Qur'an, mainstream (Trinitarian) Christianity teaches without question that Jesus is God the Son, one of the three persons of Christianity's Trinity, divinely co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The religions both share a belief in the virgin birth of Jesus, his miracles and healings, and that he ascended bodily into heaven. However, Jesus is not accepted as the son by Muslims, who strictly maintain that he was a human being who was loved by God and exalted by God to ranks of the most righteous. They believe in God as a single entity, not as the Trinity accepted by the vast majority of Christians. Neither do Muslims accept Jesus' crucifixion. Since Muslims believe only in the worship of a strictly monotheistic God who never assumed human flesh, they do not accept the use of icons, and see this as shirk (idolatry). Muslim influence played a part in the initiation of iconoclasm and their conquests caused the iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire. For the same reason, they do not worship or pray to Muhammad, Jesus, or any other prophets; only to God.

Adherents of Islam have historically referred to themselves, Jews, and Christians (among others) as People of the Book since they all base their religion on books that are considered to have a divine origin. Christians however neither recognize the Qur'an as a genuine book of divine revelation, nor agree with its assessment of Jesus as a mere prophet, on par with Muhammad, nor for that matter accept that Muhammad was a genuine prophet.

Muslims, for their part, believe that parts of the Gospels, Torah and Jewish prophetic books have been forgotten, misinterpreted, or distorted by their followers. Based on that perspective, Muslims view the Qur'an as correcting the errors of Christianity. For example, Muslims reject belief in the Trinity, or any other expression of the divinity of Jesus, as incompatible with monotheism.

The Ecumenical Movement

Ecumenism refers to efforts by Christians of different Church traditions to develop closer relationships and better understandings. The term is also often used to refer to efforts towards the visible and organic unity of different Christian denominations in some form.

The ecumenical vision comprises both the search for the visible unity of the Church (Ephesians 4:3 – “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”) and the “whole inhabited earth” (Matthew 24:14) as the concern of all Christians.

In the sixteenth century the Reformation period saw the Christian Church in the West divide into Roman Catholic and Protestant. For many Christians, this seemed wrong, and contrary to biblical teaching, because they all owed allegiance to the same Jesus Christ, to the same Bible and, in various guises, to the same sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

At the end of the 19th century, a desire grew among Christians on all sides to seek some kind of unity.

The Ecumenical Movement (from the Greek *oikumene*, meaning ‘the whole inhabited earth’) was established in 1910, following the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh. At this conference, three Christian movements came together to seek to establish common truths, work together in harmony and establish unity and ecumenical action:

1. The missionary societies who preached the gospel in remote areas of the world
2. Evangelical and inter-denomination groups, such as the Evangelical Alliance
3. Young people’s societies, such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA)

For a significant part of the Christian world, one of the highest goals to be sought is the reconciliation of the various denominations by overcoming the historical divisions within Christianity. Even where there is broad agreement upon this goal, approaches to ecumenism vary. Generally, Protestants see fulfilment of the

goal of ecumenism as consisting in general agreements on teachings about central issues of faith, with mutual pastoral accountability between the diverse churches regarding the teachings of salvation.

For Catholics and Orthodox on the other hand, the true unity of Christendom is treated in accordance with their more sacramental understanding of the Body of Christ; this ecclesiastical matter for them is closely linked to key theological issues (e.g. regarding the Eucharist and the historical Episcopate), and requires full dogmatic assent to the pastoral authority of the Church for full communion to be considered viable and valid. Thus, there are different answers even to the question of the church, which finally is the goal of the ecumenist movement itself. However, the desire of unity is expressed by many denominations, generally that all who profess faith in Christ in sincerity, would be more fully cooperative and supportive of one another.

Challenges to Ecumenism

Since its establishment, there have been a number of challenges that the Ecumenism movement has faced:

1. There has been a move away from individuals and missionary groups and a greater inclusion of the churches
2. This has led to the movement slowing and getting bogged down in administrative and doctrinal detail
3. The churches are anxious to preserve their traditions and therefore slow to agree to change things
4. The Ecumenism movement is not a priority for most churches
5. Some churches fear that the World Council of Churches may become a ‘super church’

Opposition to Ecumenism

There are some members of the United Methodist Church who oppose ecumenical efforts which are “not grounded in the doctrines of the Church” due to concerns over theological compromise.

Many Orthodox Christians are vehemently opposed to ecumenism with other Christian denominations. They view ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue as being potentially damaging to Orthodox Church tradition; a “weakening” of Orthodoxy. They regard ecumenism as compromising essential doctrinal stands in order to accommodate other Christians, and object to the emphasis on dialogue leading to intercommunion rather than conversion on the part of participants in ecumenical initiatives.

6.2. Equality and Discrimination

- a) *A study of the concept of equality in Christianity, including biblical bases and emphases in Christian teaching across denominations.*
- b) *Views about progress in gender equality in Christianity and reasons for its status, focusing on the debates about the role of women in the ministry of the Church and its relationship with equality debates in society.*
- c) *The significance of these debates for individuals and the community.*

A study of the concept of equality in Christianity, including biblical bases and emphases in Christian teaching across denominations.

Biblical verses	For or against equality?
<p>Galatians 3:23-30 23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. 26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.</p>	FOR
<p>1 Timothy 2:8-15 8 Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. 9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.</p>	AGAINST
<p>Romans 2:9-11 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism.</p>	FOR
<p>Leviticus 19:33-35 33 “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.</p>	FOR
<p>Mark 12:31 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”</p>	FOR
<p>Ephesians 5:21-30 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing[b] her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.</p>	AGAINST
<p>1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.</p>	AGAINST
<p>Romans 16 Paul recommended Phoebe: ‘I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.’</p>	FOR

The Romans 16 text is the most interesting, but also the most ambiguous. The word 'deacon' is diakonos in Greek and means 'servant'. So Paul could just have been describing Phoebe as someone who helps out. However, by the second century (i.e. later than Paul was writing) it was an ordained role within the Church. Therefore, Phoebe might have been a priest (in some form). Even if she did have an ordained ministry we do not know what type of ministry. She might have had a ministry just to other women or she might have had a more universal ministry.

Emphases in Christian teachings across denominations

Evangelicals	Catholics	Liberal Christians
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men and women have separate roles • They do not have equal rights in society or the church • St Paul said women shouldn't speak in church, therefore they cannot be priests • It is the role of the man to work and provide for his family. The woman must look after the household • They do not see this as discrimination because it is what is ordained by God in the New Testament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Against gender prejudice – women should be treated equally in society • God made man and woman in his image, therefore they should have equal rights • However, as far as the ministry, they cannot be priests • They can study the religious texts and teach in theological (studies about God) colleges, they can be extraordinary ministers (people who give out the bread and wine in the Holy Communion) • Only men can be ordained. They believe this because all the apostles (followers of Jesus) were men and Jesus left the community in the care of Peter, who is a man • They believe that this does not affect the equal status of women because it is a special function of a priest to represent Jesus, and since he was a man, only men can do it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal Christians believe that men and women should have equal roles in family/society life AND religion • They have female priests and ministers • This is because there is evidence in the Gospels that Jesus treated men and women equally therefore women should have equal rights • There is also evidence of female priests in the early churches, therefore we should have female priests now

Views about progress in gender equality in Christianity and reasons for its status, focusing on the debates about the role of women in the ministry of the Church and its relationship with equality debates in society.

The current situation

Women cannot become priests in the Roman Catholic Church or the Orthodox Churches. However, they can be ordained within many (though not all) Protestant Churches. Women were first ordained in Methodist Churches in the nineteenth century. The Salvation Army has always ordained women. Some Baptist traditions ordain women, but others do not. The Church of England synod (ruling body) voted in 1992 to ordain women but the winning margin was only two votes. In 2013, the CofE voted to allow the ordination of women bishops.

What is a priest?

In the Old Testament the Israelite tribe of **Levi** were priests of Yahweh. Their role was to act as a **mediator** (go-between) between God and man. They took the people's sacrifices into the sanctuary of the temple (where only a priest was allowed to go) and offered them to God on the people's behalf.

This idea of the priest as a mediator is reflected in the **Roman Catholic** idea of a priest who hears confession and passes absolution as God's representative. In marriage when the priest marries a couple his words are believed to be God's words. The **sacramental** priest (who performs the sacraments) is an essential part of Catholicism.

However, many **Protestants** have a slightly different understanding of the priesthood. They would argue that Jesus is the '**one high priest**' of God who mediates between God and man. Thus no further priest is necessary. However, most Protestants continue to have '**ministers**' who are usually still ordained into that role. The minister's job is to minister to their parishioners, to look after their spiritual needs and to teach them and guide worship.

Summary of the debate

Many people think that the Christian Church is sexist. It does not treat men and women equally.

The teaching of St Paul is often quoted to support the way some churches today treat women. From the extracts below, it would seem that he believed that the role of women was different to that of men, and secondary to it.

Women should remain silent in church (1 Corinthians 14).

The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11).

Jesus, however, always showed by his actions that he respected and valued women. He included them among his closest companions, and sometimes went against the conventions of his time which kept men and women apart. Jesus made it clear in the Parable of the Good Samaritan how his followers should treat people – he made no distinction between men and women.

Some Christian denominations have recently begun to allow women to be priests or ministers (e.g., Church of England and the Methodist church). Some remain opposed to this (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church). Some Christians believe that women are second to men, that men should lead and women should follow (see 1 Timothy 2:8–15).

So although Christianity teaches that everyone should be equal and should be treated the same, this doesn't always happen.

Today, Christianity has differing attitudes to the roles of men and women within its Church.

Christians who hold traditional views believe that men and women are created equal in the sight of God. They believe that whilst being equally important, they are also created to be different with different roles in society and the Christian church. For them, what matters is the authority of the Bible (i.e. 'We must obey God rather than conform to modern trends') and, for Catholics, there is also the authority of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Under traditional roles, women were expected to:

- Bring up children.
- Run a Christian home.
- Submit to their husbands – though husbands were also instructed to love their wives (Ephesians 5:22 – 24,33).
- Take no part in Church leadership.

The Roman Catholic view

The Roman Catholic Church does not allow women priests. This is based on the belief that all priests are successors of Jesus' apostles and as he only appointed men, this role is not open to women.

"The Lord Jesus chose men to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry ... For this reason the ordination of women is not possible.' (Catechism of Catholic Church).

In the *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (subtitled 'on reserving the priestly ordination to men alone') **Pope John Paul II** made the following arguments against female ordination.

- The priesthood has always been just for men.
- Jesus chose only male disciples.
- Women have a different - but equally important - role (motherhood).
- They can also be witnesses, holy martyrs and testify to their faith.

He stressed that Jesus was not restricted by the cultural norms of his day and age but '**chose whom he willed**' and '**acted in a completely free and sovereign manner**'. This means that his choice of only male disciples was deliberate.

There are some Catholic writers who have tried to defend the ordination of women priests from a Catholic perspective.

'In days when exclusively male leadership has been abandoned in other walks of life, it seems undeniable that this representative role of the priest may actually be weakened by a solely male priesthood.'

'I believe there are many women who possess these priestly qualities and whose ability to bring men and women to God is tempered by the kind of tough gentleness which nourishes families and challenges the overbearing.'

'The ordination of women to the priesthood is the logical conclusion of all the recent work of Catholic theology about women and, in particular, about the holiness of all the baptized. It is not an aberration from what the church teaches.'

Lavinia Byrne *Women at the Altar* 1994

In St Mary Magdalene, the "apostle of the apostles", the faithful saw an example of a woman who could do what the men did.

But perhaps the best example of latent tradition is the age-old devotion to Mary (Jesus' mother) as Priest.

People believed held that Mary was, indeed, a priest for **four main reasons**: Mary belonged to a priestly family. Mary exercised priestly functions. Mary gave us the Eucharist and Mary procures forgiveness of sins.

The devotion to Mary Priest has been present **throughout the history of the Church**.

Tradition stressed **Mary's role as a priest** in her offering Jesus during the presentation in the temple and during his crucifixion on Calvary.

Mary fulfils the role of the sacrificial priest; she offers up the sacrifice of her Son, her own flesh and blood to be the Bread of Life and she presents this to the world, as at Jesus' birth, at Jesus' death; Mary can say better than any priest, "**This is my body, this is my blood.**"

The devotion continued until 1927, when it was suddenly suppressed by the Holy Office – **probably because of the implied link to women's ordination!**

However privileged, Jesus' mother was a woman. **If Mary could be a priest, so can any other baptised woman.**

The Catholic Women's Ordination group make the following arguments in favour of women's ordination:

- Jesus did not make women apostles because this would not have been appropriate in that day and age. However, cultures change and the Church has had to rule on many issues for which Jesus did not provide explicit guidance.
- The priest represents Jesus' role as mediator. His maleness is unimportant as that is not the part being represented.
- Just because it has always been that way does not mean that it should continue to be that way. The Church has had to develop on certain issues before.
- There is evidence that women were priests in the Early Church.
- Women served as priests in underground secret churches that existed in Communist Czechoslovakia.

The Protestant view

The majority of Protestant Churches accept the equality of both sexes, many of whom have had women priests for a long time (for example, Baptists, Methodist, and U.R.C). This acceptance is based on the Bible, which states that male and female were both created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), and St Paul's statement that there is 'neither male nor female' (Galatians 3:28). They cite too Jesus' own treatment of women – that of dignity and respect.

The 'Parliament' of the Church of England (called the General Synod) decided to allow women priests in November 1992. This was a momentous decision, the motion having been the root of much controversy for many years, fiercely debated and constantly defeated. The first women priests were ordained into the Church of England in 1994. In 2012, the vote on women bishops failed to get the required two thirds majority. In 2013 the Church voted again, gaining the

majority necessary to make the change. The first woman to be ordained as a bishop in the CofE was Libby Lane, whose appointment as Bishop of Stockport was announced on 17th December 2013.

Not all those within the CofE are happy with the Church's support for female ordination. A group called 'Reform' are an evangelical group of Christians within the CofE who are opposed to female ordination. One of their key issues is the case of women in the Early Church – they argue that whilst women were influential in the early church, their ministries never included leadership of the local congregation.

Key points of the debate

AGAINST	FOR
<p>Traditionalists argue that in a communion service the priest represents Jesus and as Jesus was male only a man can represent Jesus adequately. Furthermore, they argue that leadership and spiritual authority is fitting for a man, but not for a woman as man was created first. The fact that women are expected to obey men within marriage demonstrates this. Specific Biblical teachings seem to be incompatible with women being priests. For example, 1 Corinthians 14 says that women should remain silent in church and in 1 Timothy women are told that they must learn in silence and full submission and may not have authority over a man. Traditionalists often point out that Jesus had only male disciples which implies that he did not think that women would be suited to that task. Traditionalists would usually stress that women are equally valuable to men but that they are better suited to some roles than others.</p>	<p>Those in favour of female ordination would say that women are perfectly capable of performing the functions associated with being a priest. Women can preach, teach, pray, provide pastoral care etc and thus can do the job of priest just as well as a man can. They might argue that women have a right to serve God in this way. The fact that many women feel that they have a vocation (are called by God) to be priests might be further evidence for their suitability to the role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They might respond to the points made by the traditionalists by saying that the priest only <i>represents</i> Jesus - they are not supposed to be identical to him - therefore a woman can do that just as well. They might argue (as Ruether has) that Jesus' maleness was accidental rather than essential to his nature. • The point about man being made first would be seen as <i>irrelevant</i> to many who support women's ordination. In the Genesis 1 story the implication is that both are made together. Tribble has suggested that the language suggests that God made a human and then created gender. Many people do not accept the historical accuracy of the Genesis account anyway. • Whilst it is true that there are some passages in the Bible that do say that women must remain silent in Church, there are others that make it clear that they could speak. It is possible the 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy texts were written in response to <i>specific circumstances</i>. More likely is that they were just <i>a product of their patriarchal time</i> and thus no longer relevant (like the teachings that condone slavery and condemn homosexuality. Most people who support women's ordination would say that the <i>Church has to be willing to modernise</i> and adapt or it will become outdated and irrelevant. • The same argument could be made in reference to the disciples. <i>Jesus was restricted by the age he lived in</i>. If he had chosen women as disciples then perhaps he would have been less likely to have been listened to in that day and age. The indications are that he did have <i>close female followers</i>. Certain women (like Mary of Bethany) are mentioned repeatedly and the resurrection accounts mention 'the women who had followed him from Galilee'. Some feminists have suggested that Jesus did have female disciples but that these were <i>'written out'</i> by the gospel writers. • Finally, those supporting female ordination would argue that the idea of <i>'equal but different' is incoherent</i>. It does not reflect true equality as true equality includes allowing people to do the same thing. To permit the priesthood (an authoritative position) only to men is not in any sense equal.

Relationship of the issues with key equality debates in society

Liberal/equality feminists:

Secular liberal feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor argued that male/female difference was largely down to upbringing. Taylor in particular advocated equal access to jobs to ensure jobs go to those who perform them best. On that basis, female ordination fits with liberal feminist aims.

Liberal feminist theologians like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Phyllis Tribble and the earlier work of Rosemary Radford Ruether tend to stress the idea that the core biblical teachings promote equality. By emphasising the patriarchal nature of the way the stories have been handed down they provide a rationale for ignoring (or re-evaluating) key texts used to oppose the ordination of women.

Reconstructionist/reform feminists:

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether in their later work both promote the search for the overlooked women in the Bible. Schussler Fiorenza's 'creative actualisation' and investigation into women in the Early Church and Ruether's rediscovery of the feminine traditions within the divine both provide justification for the ordination of women.

Radical feminists:

The issue of women's ordination was fundamental to Mary Daly's eventual rejection of Christianity. In her first book 'The Church and the Second Sex' (1968) she had argued that women needed to be given equality within the Church, but she eventually came to the conclusion that Christianity was inherently and irredeemably patriarchal and should be rejected. She stated that: *'...a woman asking for equality within the Church would be comparable to a black person demanding equality in the Klu Klux Klan.*

Evaluation questions

- Can a female priest represent a male Jesus?
- Does it matter that Jesus only chose male disciples?
- Should the Church always do what the Church has always done?
- Is it a woman's 'right' to be ordained?
- Did Jesus stand up for women's rights?
- Can a woman fulfil the role of priest?
- If the Bible says women should remain silent in Church then should they?
- Are Phoebe, Prisca/Priscilla, Mary, Euodia and Syntyche significant?

Significance of these debates

The Church of England is the established church in England, with the Queen as its supreme governor. It is central to many state occasions and other ceremonies across the country. Many believe that the high profile of the CofE mean it has a responsibility to adapt to changing attitudes in the country.

Women bishops' approval by the CofE encourages those who are starting to call for the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

The move towards the ordination of women has split many churches because some of its members dispute the authority of its women priests.

With women bishops now able to ordain priests, many have claims that the church is not merely unacceptable but theologically impossible.

Many Anglo-Catholic opponents of women bishops have already left to join the Roman Catholic Ordinariate.

Now some Evangelicals have suggested they may start to seek a more independent Church structure, citing the worldwide split between conservative and liberal Anglicans.