



Revision Summaries for AS and A Level Year 1

Component 3: Developments in Religious Thought: Christianity

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Teacher's Introduction

The revision summaries in this series are designed to support your students as they study the OCR AS and A Level Religious Studies specification, and have been designed to cover the major themes and concepts of each topic point accordingly. This revision summary supports the A Level Year 1 Developments in Christian Thought part of the specification.

All students, whether they are academically strong, average or weak, can benefit from a concise and clearly explained set of notes to revise from, both as they work through the OCR course and also when preparing for their end-of-course exams. It is recommended, therefore, that students be given each relevant summary after learning a topic so that they can clearly understand the summaries and refer back to them when needed. However the summaries can also function well as a pack given to students in the run-up to their exams.

Each topic follows a set structure detailed below:

- ✓ **Glossary:** A clear list of important terminology students need to know when studying the topic.
- ✓ **Overview:** A look at the major themes of the topic, with a brief introduction to the major points of discussion and disagreement.
- ✓ **Key Points:** The main body of the summaries for each topic, they are a clear and concise set of notes that help students support their own knowledge and understanding of the topic.
- ✓ **Key Figures:** An important overview of any major philosophical or theological figures students are required to know.
- ✓ **Key Texts:** A set of notes around any important theological or biblical texts students may require background information and understanding of.
- ✓ **Year 2 Advanced Considerations:** A brief look at how students may incorporate Year 2 knowledge and understanding into Year 1 topics.
- ✓ **Student Checklist:** A helpful guide to what students need to know by the end of the revision summary and a way to check their understanding and progress through a particular topic.
 - ! **Note:** The checklist is presented in question format and these questions would be ideal to set for homework or revision so that students can build the skills they need in order to progress to longer exam-style questions.
- ✓ **Exam-style Question:** A practice essay question with helpful assessment objectives, complete with levelled mark schemes and indicative content at the end of the resource. Mark allocations are not given by the questions because these differ from AS to A Level. These are useful for students approaching their end-of-year exams or wishing to improve their essay technique on a particular topic.

NB Depending on the figures studied and the required reading, not all topics will have a Key Figures or Key Texts section.

This structure clearly ensures students have not only a grasp on the key themes of each topic, but also a way to understand their place within the specification as a whole. Students who may have missed lessons or not made detailed notes may benefit greatly from these revision summaries, especially in helping their recollection of key topics closer to their end-of-course exams.

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Augustine and Human Nature

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The Fall	The wounding of the nature of men and women after Adam ate from the forbidden tree, disobeying God.
Manichaeism	An ancient Christian religious movement containing pagan elements, a dualistic conflict between light and dark.
Pelagianism	A subset of Christian belief that human beings are not guilty of original sin and are able to freely choose between good and evil without the aid of God's grace.
Concupiscence	Normally defined as lust or passion, but is often used by Augustine to refer to a template for all baser human desires and to mean the proclivity to sin.
Privation	An absence of something. Augustine regarded sin or badness as a privation of good.
Original Sin	The Christian doctrine that all people are born with the nature of sin.
Massa Peccati	Means 'Mass of Sin' and was a term used by Calvin to brood the nature of humanity.
Supererogatory	Moral actions that go beyond the call of duty.
Single Predestination	The idea that God chooses or determines prior to creation who will be saved and go to heaven.
Double Predestination	The idea that God chooses or determines prior to creation who will be saved but also who will be condemned.
Metaphysics	Philosophy that deals with abstract, fundamental concepts.
Allegory	The hidden meaning behind a story.
Total Depravity	Calvin's teaching that human beings are totally corrupt as a result of original sin.
Authenticity	The philosophical distinction between those actions which are self-determined and those determined by outside influences (inauthentic).
Grace	The benevolence and mercy of God given to human beings.
Universalism	The Christian idea that every human being will eventually be saved.

Overview

St Augustine of Hippo was one of the most prominent early Church fathers. He developed important future Church doctrines on sin, grace and human nature, as well as defended orthodoxy against the perceived heresies of Manichaeism and Pelagianism. However, he has been accused of being broadly pessimistic, and his teachings on original sin especially the idea of a compassionate God, invested in the future salvation of humanity. His interpretation of Genesis 2–3 and the Fall as a metaphysical reality affecting all of humanity, an allegorical tale of the potential of all human beings to morally stray from God. His core teachings have survived throughout the years and can be observed as central doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church today.

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Key Points

Background

Augustine was born in 354 CE in Thagaste into a Berber family. His father Patricius and adhered to paganism until his deathbed. Monica, his mother, was conversely a Christian. In his early life, he acquired a liberal, classical education, being schooled in grammar, philosophy, rhetoric, before travelling to Carthage, Rome and finally Hippo, where he died in 430 CE. As a young man, he was influenced strongly by Manichaeism, possibly as a result of the death of his friend and his strong interest in the problem of evil. However, he eventually converted to Christianity in 386 CE and baptised by Ambrose shortly afterwards, and he vigorously opposed all forms of Manichaeism and Pelagianism, concentrating on developing his own theology of sin and grace that denied the natural ability of people to overcome their own concupiscence.

Teachings on the Fall

- Augustine's doctrine of sin particularly focuses on a distinctly metaphysical interpretation of Genesis 2–3 and how the Fall impacted on human nature and relationships for all people. The Fall is, therefore, identified not simply as just a myth or symbol, but also as a historic reality that has a continuing impact in the present.

Pre-Fall

- Before the Fall, humanity existed in a state of perfection, with a unity between the body and the will of the soul. There was, therefore, complete control of mind over body.
 - Actions such as procreation were rational, passionless tasks performed to 'be fruitful and multiply' (NRSV) in Genesis 1:28. Friendship instead was the most important relationship.
 - Augustine divides between the human will that enjoys oneself and others in the light of God (caritas), and the love of oneself and others in the light of God (cupiditas), and the love of oneself and others in the light of God (cupiditas), and the love of oneself and others in the light of God (cupiditas). After the Fall, human nature was in a state of balance, after the Fall human nature was in a state of imbalance, cupiditas, love of the world, leading to greed and sin.
 - Furthermore, before the Fall there was a general absence of lust and passion, which is often referred to by Augustine as 'concupiscence'.

Post-Fall

- Adam's eating of the fruit, in Augustine's view, was a foolish act of pride. The body was not part of God's creation, and Adam and Eve's disobedience was a failure in turn to respect God's creation.
 - Upon biting the fruit, human nature was wounded and developed concupiscence by a weakening and dividing of the human will (akrasia).
 - There became a division of the body and soul, with the latter submitting to the former. Sexuality, therefore, not at the act of sex itself, is the evil result of the Fall.
 - Real love, therefore, is different from lust as it is only achieved by a denial of selfish pleasures and allowing one's desire to be subjugated to God's will.
 - Both sexes are complicit in this. Adam's betrayal was no less than Eve's and Augustine argues both had already decided in their hearts to eat the fruit. Coercion does not play a significant role in the Fall.

Concupiscence is the evil passion that Augustine provides a framework for understanding the fall of man.

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Original Sin

- Original sin comes from the Fall. All of humanity was present in the moment humanity is affected by the consequences.
 - In particular, original sin is passed on through procreation so that every human has an inclination to sin. This, demonstrated in concupiscence, is an ontological condition, the lack of free will for human beings and the general lack of stability.
 - Humans are therefore effectively born into 'massa peccati' (mass of sin) and are continually subject to their passions and desires, causing their rebellion.
 - Augustine, however, envisions the existence of what he terms the 'city of God', the source of good, which emanates from God. This is only achievable for those who receive God's grace, and who maintain faith in their lives. Those who fall prey to their passions draw themselves further away from this highest good.

Grace

- To be freed from sin and damnation, humanity relies upon the supererogatory grace bestowed on those who have the capacity and inclination to receive it. This grace is God's grace, who are determined to go to hell.
 - Humankind, therefore, does not have the ability to freely act because free will for Augustine is only free when pertaining to what is good, as a will is often constrained by desires.
 - Grace is particularly tied in with Augustine's idea of predestination. God chooses those who will be accepting of God's grace. Some theologians believe in predestination accepting double predestination, whereby God also determines who will be damned.

Original Sin and Human Society

- Augustine argued that it is possible to see the effects of original sin in human society as a whole, where human beings naturally express their greedy and violent nature on a grander scale.
 - Practices such as slavery and war are examples of this widespread expression of original sin and would not have been present pre-Fall.
 - Augustine further argues that societies are self-destructive because of original sin, unless controlled by a forceful political authority which reins in the worst excesses of human beings.
 - However, Augustine argues the primary focus of human beings should be on their relationship with God and society and the world, but rather to look towards eternal life in the city of God.

Issues with Augustine, the Fall and Original Sin

- Augustine's account of original sin is contradictory to the idea of moral responsibility. If humans are once free yet also wounded, such that they cannot freely do good acts without God's grace, almost seems to argue when a person does a good act it is because of God's grace. If humans act it is freely done but also a result of original sin.
 - Some argue that Augustine's conception of sin as such is pessimistic or even fatalistic. If human beings are completely beholden to their sinful desires, then many might excuse their actions as simply being unavoidable rather than work to be better people.

Augustine's account of original sin is often seen as optimistic as it offers a path to salvation through God's grace, despite the condemnation of sin.

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- Evolution and other scientific theories challenge both the historicity of the Adam and Eve story and the idea that humans have a metaphysical or natural inclination towards evil. Humans may argue instead that humans equally have an inbuilt tendency towards corruption.
 - Richard Dawkins, for example, argues that a large amount of human suffering is caused by the doctrine of original sin as it encourages psychological obsession with one's sins.
 - Steven Pinker identifies the humanitarian principle, which puts forward that if all humans share a joint moral understanding that unselfishness is the best way to live. He argues that gradually over the last 200 years this principle has become more evident, with religious interpretations of sin becoming less prevalent.
 - Rousseau challenges the idea that human beings in a state of nature are corrupted. Rather society and civilisation distorts the natural instructions towards goodness within human beings in an optimal state of nature. This means that Adam's original sin is reflected in human society as it may be instead caused by corrupting societal structures.
- Critics have often viewed the idea of original sin as unfair. Why should the rest of humanity suffer from Adam's actions?
 - If the tendency to sin was created at the moment of Adam and Eve's fall, why should Adam in a state of complete unity of body and will of soul in his natural state disobey God? Augustine struggles to explain how he, in a state of perfect innocence, was tempted by Satan if he was acting out of pure rationality or understanding.
 - There are numerous present-day debates about the biblical evidence for original sin. Romans 5:12, where it is unclear whether Paul is putting forward that death came from one man (Adam) or whether death spread to people by their own sins.

Key Figures

Manichaeism

- A religious movement founded by the prophet Mani in the mid-third century AD, it became one of the main rivals to Christianity across the world.
- It provided a solution to the problem of evil in postulating an evil (dark) power in contrast with a good (light) but not omnipotent God.
- The human soul and the world was where this battle took place, with people being a mixture of light and dark within themselves.
- Augustine as a young man took a strong interest in Manichaeism as a solution to the problem of evil, but eventually found it unsatisfactory.
- Manichaeans held Christ to be wholly God and therefore unable to have had a physical body, considering the potential evil in matter.
- Similarly, Augustine did not believe the path to salvation lay in knowledge alone, but also in good works as necessary.
- However, elements of Manichean thought, the dualism between good and evil, were influential in Augustine's thought.

Pelagianism

- Pelagius was an ascetic who advocated alternative doctrines of free will and grace in the fourth and early fifth centuries.
- Contrary to Augustine, he argued that human beings possess the autonomy to choose good and freedom gave people the ability to fulfil God's word and law without his direct intervention.
- He therefore also denied Augustine's doctrine of original sin and that human beings were corrupted by Adam's sin and the Fall.
- In a similar vein, grace for Pelagius is simply the teachings of Jesus and the power to perform good deeds.
- Augustine regarded Pelagius's views as removing the necessity of God in salvation, leaving humans against the saving power of Christ himself.
- On the other hand, Pelagius regarded original sin as fatalistic and giving Christ too much credit for human salvation.

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Calvin and Total Depravity

- Leading on from Augustine's concept of original sin, Calvin put forward an even stronger concept of human nature, arguing all human actions, even ones that seem morally good, are tainted by original sin.
- All good in turn comes from God only and even things such as compassionate actions are seen as a mere place of human egoism.
- Many also believe that entails predestination and an even stronger commitment to the idea that human beings are not really free in their actions. They choose between alternatives but are not free to make moral decisions.

Sartre and Human Existence

- In contrast to Augustine, Sartre denies that humans have a specific nature. He argues that existence precedes essence.
- This means that human beings, while born with biological dispositions, are not determined by them or truth about the way they should act.
- Therefore, humans are radically free and not tainted by concepts such as original sin. The only way to be judged is in how 'authentic' they are, that is, how much one freely and knowingly takes responsibility for them.

Barth and Grace

- One particular criticism some theologians have made of Augustine's idea of grace is that it implies double predestination. God knows who possesses the grace to be saved and so knows equally who will be damned along with those who will be saved.
 - Counter to this, Karl Barth presents a more Christological view on grace. He argues that the election and election of mankind have already taken place through the saving work of Christ. He also disagrees with a knowable or comprehensible idea of the reason for election, arguing that any system based on election or salvation is placing artificial limits on God's grace.
 - Some critics have argued that Barth is advocating universalism, that everyone will be saved, but in response he points out he is simply arguing that God's grace ultimately overcomes all human beings are not in the position to know or deny whether universalism is true.
 - Therefore, Augustine's idea of grace is countered by an appeal to the freedom of God's actions. If they are undertaken from God's will then human beings cannot be held responsible for what will be saved, let alone to what extent. All they can do is have faith in God and follow through Christ as God's son.

Key Texts

Romans 7:15–20

This passage is often seen as particularly important in providing biblical support for the concept of akrasia; that although human beings will to do good things, their weakness can prevent them from acting on their good impulses.

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not have the power to do it. (NRSV)

This not only supports the idea that there is a distinct part of human nature that is full of weakness, but also the concept of akrasia; that although human beings will to do good things, their weakness can prevent them from acting on their good impulses.

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Can the idea of original sin be adapted within the idea of Christ or God as a liberator? Original sin can be argued in a political way to be the natural, human, sinful response to the social structures that keep them in poverty and sin. Human beings as such are predisposed to sin, not in a metaphysical way, but in a real, coerced way by the harsh conditions and unequal political structures of wider society. What issues might there be with such an interpretation?

Feminist Theology

Feminist theologians have identified Christian ideas of sin as often being contained within patriarchal structures limiting the self-liberation of women within the Christian faith. Daly even describes original sin as an internalisation of her guilt.

Many critics have also seen Augustine's judgements on sexuality as a reflection of the secondary status of women in relation to male desire. Can an objective idea of sexuality and original sin be developed within Augustinian thought without recourse to male-centred ideas of sin and desire?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
How did Augustine's background shape his theological beliefs?	
What is Manichaeism and how did it potentially influence Augustine?	
What is the difference between humanity pre- and post-Fall under Augustine's theology?	
How does Augustine employ the concept of concupiscence to develop ideas about human sin?	
What is original sin and how is it present in every newborn person?	
How does original sin impact on human societies and civilisation as a whole?	
What is the significance of God's grace in Augustine's teachings on sin?	
Do Augustine's ideas about sin lead him into accepting double predestination?	
Why did Augustine oppose Pelagianism?	
What are a number of potential theological and philosophical issues in Augustine's thought?	
How does Calvin build upon Augustine's theology?	
How does Augustine's theology compare to modern-day philosophical conceptions of human nature?	
Why does Barth emphasise the freedom of God and its implications on predestination and salvation?	
(Year 2) Can Augustine's ideas around sexuality, concupiscence and original sin be reformulated within feminist theological structures?	
(Year 2) Do Augustine's ideas around original sin cause Christianity to have an obsession with sin and guilt, leading it possibly towards encouraging exclusionary violence?	

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Practice Exam-style Question

1. 'Augustine presents an overly pessimistic view of human nature.' Discuss.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

show a consistent knowledge and understanding of Augustine's thought, including:

- the significance of his works in influencing modern theology, society and culture
- the reasons why other philosophers and theologians diverge from or complement his thought
- different perspectives and approaches to the questions surrounding human nature

Analyse and evaluate different approaches to the questions surrounding human nature, and whether Augustine's thought on original sin is too pessimistic.

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Death and the Afterlife

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Kingdom of God	A varied Christian term that has often been used to refer to judgement and eschatological events.
Parousia	Greek word meaning 'arrival' and used to refer to the returning to earth.
Empyrean	The highest part of heaven, where God resides, in Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i> .
Beatific Vision	The moment when a person directly communicates with God. Often thought to be the moment of salvation for a human.
Theosis	The process whereby a human being becomes divine.
Eschatology	Theological teaching and doctrine associated with death and the afterlife.
The Parable of the Sheep and Goats	A parable in the Gospel of Matthew widely interpreted as a correct moral life and God's judgement of humanity.
Second Coming	A belief that Christ will one day return to earth.
Particular Judgement	The individual judgement by God a person undergoes after death.
General Judgement	The judgement of all humanity that will occur on the last day to earth.
Millenarianism	A belief in some Christian groups that there will be a thousand year age of the Kingdom of God before or after Christ's return.
Preterism	A theological view that the prophecies of Revelation have already been fulfilled.
<i>The Divine Comedy</i>	An epic, allegorical poem by Dante Alighieri about his journey through hell and heaven before finally meeting God.
Recidivism	The tendency for someone to recommit a sin or crime after repentance.
Apostasy	The renunciation of or leaving from a religion or set of beliefs.
Sheol	The Hebrew word for hades and sometimes translated as 'hell'.
Hades	A Greek word, generally thought to refer to the abode of the souls of humans go after death.
Gehenna	A Greek word commonly translated as 'hell' in the Bible, based on descriptions in the New Testament.
Predestination	The idea that God chooses or determines the course of a person's life before they are born.
Contrapasso	The ironic punishment souls undergo in Dante's <i>Inferno</i> .
Purgatory	Often translated as 'purification', the place where impure souls of sin and prepared to ascend to heaven.
Election	The doctrine that God chooses particular people to be saved.
Limited Election	The idea that God only chooses to save a select number of people.
Unlimited Election	The idea that God grants all human beings the possibility of salvation, and all are saved.
Principle of Accommodation	The idea that God manifests himself only in ways that humans can understand.
Universalism	The Christian doctrine that all human beings will eventually be saved.

Christian Teaching on Heaven

Overview

While there have been numerous different conceptions of heaven, a point of convergence is that it is always the place where God, or the Kingdom of God, is generally seen as the place for those who have done good deeds and kept up good lives. However, how heaven has been conceived has varied greatly. Some see it as the coming of the general resurrection and establishing of the New Jerusalem or as the point where one is reconciled with God and achieves eternal life. Across Christian thought there has been: a physical place; a state of mind; a moral symbol; a new realm of divinity. Overall, therefore, it is important to separate the physical conception of heaven from its eschatological or theological purpose, at the same time considering how language is used metaphorically in the descriptions given of it.

Key Points

General Points

- Heaven is generally seen as somewhere transcendent from earth, where God dwells. Christians have less commonly seen it as a symbol or representation of a fully realised life on earth.
 - How one interprets heaven depends greatly on how one envisions Jesus' return and the Kingdom of God' in the Gospels.
 - Parousia means 'arrival' in Greek and is the term used to describe Christ's coming of the Kingdom of God.
 - Different denominations have approached the process of entering heaven differently: some believe it occurs at the moment of death, others at a general judgement and resurrection.
 - Christology often plays a central role in New Testament writings on heaven, suggesting that through Christ and ascension testament to an equal possibility of humans achieving heaven.

Heaven as a Place/Location

- Within the Bible, there are numerous instances where if interpreted literally, heaven can be conceived of as a physical place.
 - (NT) In 2 Corinthians 5:1–2 Paul compares the 'earthly tent' of the world humans live in to the 'building from God... eternal in the heavens' (NRSV).
 - (OT and NT) Ezekiel (40–48) and Revelation (3:12 and 21:2) speak of the New Jerusalem, a spiritual rebuilding or restoration of Jerusalem, with the latter giving dimensions and details of its structure. This can be seen as an earthly interpretation or conception of heaven.
- Complex conceptions of heaven have been given throughout history. Dante's allegorical account of the soul's ascent to heaven in *Paradiso*, focusing in the form in Empyrean.
- Some scholars, such as N T Wright, argue that the Gospels do not give an account of when people ascend after death. Rather, the Gospels support that there will be the Second Coming of Jesus and there will be the creation and transformation of the world.

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Issues and Criticisms

- Varying accounts or conceptions in form and themes suggest human beings see heaven as a place, only its relation through God and Christ to them as people, the final end in which a human being attains a vision of God and heaven, indicating appreciating heaven before this point.
 - Viewing heaven simply as a place does not emphasise it as the end of a relationship beginning with one's faith in God on earth.
 - The idea of a transcendent realm or reality stands possibly in contradiction to location. If one achieves theosis or total divinisation in heaven, it would be beyond the imperfect realities of matter and structure behind.
 - Some scholars, such as N T Wright, have argued that concepts such as heaven support an eternal state of heaven after death, but rather the creation of the Second Coming of Jesus, where all are raised from the dead.

Heaven as a Spiritual State

- Interpreting physical descriptions of heaven metaphorically, one can view heaven as a spiritual state, being in direct relationship with God after death.
 - (NT) Revelation 22:5 speaks of those in heaven as not needing 'light or sun' as physical conditions are irrelevant to those in God's presence.
 - (NT) Similarly Hebrews 9:24 says Christ 'did not enter a sanctuary made with hands, implying that the realm of heaven is one separate to the human, physical world.'
- Pope John Paul II described heaven as not being '*a physical place in the clouds*' but a relationship and meeting with the Trinity after one's death.
- Aquinas describes the concept of the beatific vision, the 'final end' of human beings, of God where one achieves full knowledge, understanding and union with God. The focus of this vision strongly stresses the mental and spiritual aspects of salvation, so heaven should be considered a state more than a place or location.

Heaven as a Present/Realised Moral Symbol

- Many of Jesus's teachings focus on the moral betterment and reform of human beings and some scholars have interpreted in this an 'inaugurated eschatology' where part of the coming of the Kingdom of God was instigated in his ministry and death.
 - Prophets in the Old Testament such as Isaiah foretold of Jesus coming as the Messiah and his restoration of the world. It is possible to interpret Jesus's miracles, such as healing and feeding the 5,000, as symbols of the present-day Kingdom of God becoming realised, with humanity's growth in the world as part of his teachings contributing to this process.
 - Some theologians, such as C H Dodd, have even argued for a 'realised eschatology' in which messianic expectations about Jesus and ideas about heaven are insignificant compared to Jesus's moral teaching and example.
 - Others have simply argued the language of heaven is a metaphorical expression of joy of human beings living a good moral life, reconciled with God.

Parousia in Christian Thought

- Early Christians could have interpreted the Second Coming differently, with many expecting Christ's return in their lifetimes. Their views on heaven may then have shifted from an expectation or eternal state as a result of this anticipated Second Coming not being immediately realised.
 - This is supported by a number of teachings of Jesus on the coming of the Kingdom of God, which seem to directly state an immediate return. In Luke 21:32, for example, he says 'Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place' (NRSV).
 - However, passages in the New Testament also naturally indicate a date of return beyond any immediate date. Matthew 24:36, for example, states 'But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only' (NRSV).

Some religions believe in millennialism, an event where society becomes a Christian society from the time of the Second Coming, lasting 1,000 years before the final, general resurrection.

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Judgement

- There are different forms of judgement presented throughout the New Testament, ranging from personal judgements to the more general judgement that occurs at the Second Coming.
 - This general judgement can be seen in Matthew 25:31–46, The Parable of the Sheep and Goats, and in teachings such as Luke 13:23–28, where there is an allusion to a time when the righteous and the wicked will stand before God and the prophets in judgement. Similarly, John 5:28–29 mentions that 'all who are in the graves' (NRSV) will arise at God's call, implying a total resurrection.
 - There are other passages, though, that suggest personal judgement is also a part of the Christian faith. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, it is indicated that both characters will receive their rewards or punishments immediately after death. Similarly, in the Gospel of Luke, it is mentioned that a criminal crucified next to him will reach paradise that same day, implying a personal judgement.
 - The Catholic Church in particular teaches that both forms of judgement exist. It believes in particular judgement, where individuals are morally assessed in their lives, and in the general judgement, when Christ will return to the world and judge all.

Key Figures

Dante Alighieri

In the third book of the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradiso*, Dante presents heaven as nine circles, each representing a different level of heaven. On his journey through, with each soul finding its appropriate place depending on its merits. At the top of this there is the tenth non-material heaven, the Empyrean, where God rests and the souls experience the beatific vision. Dante converses with the souls along the way and teachings on predestination and free will are discussed. Overall, however, a key conceptual element is heaven itself, which is described or put into words.

Key Texts

Matthew 25:31–46 – The Parable of the Sheep and Goats

- This is one of the main biblical passages in the Gospels outlining the concept of judgement within Christianity.
- A key point is that those who are righteous are not those who have simply been good, but those who have been charitable and helped the oppressed.
- Similarly, there is an emphasis on the universality of salvation for the righteous, which is particularly interpreted this to mean God will save all who are good, even non-Christians.
- The requirements for heaven are those exemplified by Christ's earthly ministry. In the parable, and sickest, all Christians have the same responsibility to care for everyone, not just the poor and sick.
- This can be seen in verse 45, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of these least of these, so you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven' (NRSV).
- The final verse, verse 46, provides strong evidence for the concepts of heaven as a reward or punishment.

Revelation

- This is a heavily symbolic book of the New Testament and often thought to be written between 70 and 90 CE by an unknown author 'John'.
- It deals largely with a vision of the end times and within this details the arrival of the future heavenly kingdom of God on earth.
- This is seen in 21:1–8, where heaven is described as a place where there is no more pain, death, or sorrow.
- 20:2–6 has also been responsible for the belief in millenarianism; that upon the return of Christ, he will rule over the world for a thousand years, before the general judgement happens.
- Others, however, view Revelation historically, identifying in its prophecies different events in the future. Some people, Preterists, argue that it refers to events purely within the first century AD.
- One other popular idea is that Revelation is purely symbolic of the struggle between good and evil, an allegorical representation of Christian teaching against cosmological ideas.

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Catechism of the Catholic Church

- The Catechism outlines heaven as 'communion of life and love with the Trinity, definitive happiness' (n. 1024). This takes place at the time of God revealing the individual as part of the beatific vision.
- It also reaffirms both the existence of a particular and general judgement, and speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ. It repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with 'faith' (n. 1021).

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology emphasises the importance of ending unjust economic and social structures in human society, which critics argue has at times lost track of the more important goal of people reconciling with God and going to heaven.

Does a Marxist understanding of sin and a view of Jesus as a social liberator change the way heaven is viewed within Christianity? Does it support an idea of heaven as a realised state on earth beyond a spiritual reconciliation with God after death?

Exclusivism/Pluralism

Does strong exclusivism in Christianity promote an idea of heaven too far removed from the ordinary concerns and beliefs of many non-Christians? Or is the idea of heaven necessarily tied to an understanding of Jesus Christ as the only path to salvation?

Equally consider whether Hick's emphasis on a 'global theology' may well help to develop an idea of heaven as part of the 'The Real' lying in the noumena. Could Christianity stand to refine its conception of heaven from input from other religions?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
How is the concept of heaven connected to the Kingdom of God in the Bible?	
What is the concept of parousia and how is it present within early Christian thought?	
Why might some Christians interpret heaven as a physical place or location?	
How does Dante describe heaven in <i>Paradiso</i> and what allegorical function does this have?	
What theological issues are there with ascribing a specific location or place to heaven?	
How can heaven be interpreted as a spiritual state or relationship?	
What is the beatific vision and how does it fit into the theology of Aquinas and the Catholic Church?	
Why might some theologians prefer to view heaven as a 'realised' moral symbol?	
What is the difference between particular judgement and general judgement?	
What insight might the Parable of the Sheep and Goats give to a Christian's understanding of judgement and heaven?	
In what ways can Revelation be understood as a prophecy or symbol?	
What is the Catholic Church teaching on judgement and heaven?	
(Year 2) How do exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralistic models of Christian belief have an impact on an understanding of heaven?	
(Year 2) Does secularism effectively explain away Christian concepts of heaven?	
(Year 2) Does liberation theology make the case for heaven being a realised state on earth, or is this a misreading of liberation theologians' use of Marx?	

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Christian Teaching on Hell

Overview

Throughout the history of Christianity the concept of hell has played a significant role in shaping moral standards and discouraging recidivism or even apostasy. Yet there has been disagreement over what form hell takes, with literalist views especially giving way to more symbolic ones over the years. One of the main issues identified with taking a literal view of hell as a place is how to reconcile the idea of a benevolent God condemning human beings who have sinned. The contradictions between the God who grants salvation and the God who punishes have led theologians and other religious thinkers to put forward hell as a state of freely chosen punishment. However, there are difficulties identifying such an interpretation in scripture and many believe such a state of hell is only meaningful to those who already regard a relationship with God as essential.

Key Points

General Points

- Within the Old and New Testaments there are a number of different words used to describe a similar concept.
 - (OT) *Sheol* is sometimes translated as 'hell', but a closer meaning is 'underworld'. Modern commentators refer to the temporary underworld, not a place of punishment.
 - (NT) *Hades*, similar to the Hebrew word 'Sheol', is generally used to refer to the underworld where souls await judgement and resurrection.
 - (NT) *Gehenna* is more often translated as 'hell' and a place where both the body and soul are punished. For example, Matthew 10:28: 'rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell'.
- The idea of hell as a place has not been static in its conception. From the descriptions of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' and 'unquenchable fire' to the literal interpretation, the belief of hell as a specific location has contained a wide variety of beliefs as to what it is.

Hell as a Place/Location

- The idea of hell as a specific place can be interpreted from many points in scripture.
 - The Parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:41) describes the 'eternal fire' prepared for the accursed.
 - Revelation 20:15 also details hell as a 'lake of fire', and 14:10 argues sinners will be 'tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels'.
 - Many argue these descriptions only make sense from a literal perspective, as they describe actual physical sufferings.
- It can be juxtaposed with a literal interpretation of heaven. If in Christianity the Kingdom of God is a real place it can be accordingly justified that hell must have a similar form of existence.
- It fits the idea of the resurrection of the body. If hell is not a physical place then the punishment can be argued to be meaningless.
- Similarly, if heaven is a place of reward for those who have been faithful and obedient, then punishment for those who have sinned.

Issues and Criticisms

- How can a good and loving God, caring about the salvation of humanity, create a place of torment for others?
- The idea of eternal suffering seems indifferent to how one grades punishment. Is it fair to condemn someone to eternal punishment for a single sin, or even a series of sins, such as petty theft? How can one repent if sins have such eternal consequences?
- Some theologians argue that physical punishment doesn't make sense as it doesn't change the heart. Only repentance and good deeds do. Therefore the idea of hell is contradictory to a God who is to be benevolent and concerned with salvation.

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Hell as a Spiritual State

- The idea of hell as a spiritual state can equally be interpreted in scripture:
 - Revelation is a highly symbolic text and references to fire could be interpreted as depicting the intensity of suffering when separated from God's presence.
 - The parabolic nature of Matthew 25:31–46 invites an artistic or allegorical interpretation of separating the sheep and goats as a distinction between those who choose eternal life and those who face what exact kind of physical punishment they face.
 - Pope John Paul II in 1999 stated that talk of hell as a place uses a 'symbolic language' which indicates more the 'state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God'.
- Such an interpretation makes it easier to reconcile an idea of a benevolent God with the concept of hell. Rather than a strict punishment, it is the place of those who freely choose to separate themselves from eternal life in the presence of God.
- If the Kingdom of God is interpreted as a spiritual state or kingdom, then equating hell with human alienation from that reality, not a physical punishment.

Hell as a Symbol

- The idea of hell within scripture can be seen as symbolic of a person's moral life.
 - Matthew 25:31–46 is primarily about the separation of those who are righteous from those who are immoral. The ideas of eternal life and punishment symbolically reflect the moral state and virtues of people and their actions.
 - The idea of 'fire' in the Bible is often symbolic; for example, Jesus coming to baptise with 'the Holy Spirit and fire'. Therefore punishment is spiritual and not physical.
- If the Kingdom of God is interpreted as a moral reality on Earth, then ideas of hell become symbolic of the relationship between people as reconciled or alienated from God. Hell simply becomes symbols of God's anger and judgement.

Some theologians, such as John Hick, refute the concept of hell entirely, believing that God is reconciled with a benevolent God. Other theists have even viewed it as a way to coerce ordinary believers.

Key Figures

St Augustine of Hippo

- One of the most prominent early Church theologians, Augustine advocated a hell as a physical place with no purpose but the torment of those who had sinned.
- This was fair, as, since the Fall of Adam, every person had been born with original sin. Only those who followed the prescriptions of Christianity were saved by God except for those who followed the prescriptions of Christianity.
- He believed in predestination, such that those who reached salvation did so through God's grace alone. However, there is debate as to whether he subscribed to double predestination, where all human beings are automatically damned.
- Importantly, however, hell as a physical place is still secondary to hell as separation from God. If the former is unknowable and indeterminable, it is more important to focus on the latter.

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Dante Alighieri

- Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy*, an epic poem allegorically detailing through a soul's journey towards reconciliation with God.
- The first part, *Inferno*, deals with Satan, hell and the nine circles of suffering.
- Each circle represents a different sin, within which historical and religious figures are placed, but each is an instance of contrapasso (poetic justice).
- As an allegorical text, it contains elements of both literal and symbolic and metaphorical.
- Dante in particular uses a 'fourfold method' of interpretation, connecting past, present, future both symbolically and historically.
- *Inferno*, therefore, focuses both on the physical aspects of punishment and also on the spiritual transgressions and separation from God.

Key Texts

Matthew 25:31–46: The Parable of the Sheep and Goats

This is a key passage outlining the eschatological views of Christ, and how it is interpreted. One perceives hell within the Bible. In the first mention, in verse 41, hell is described as a place for the devil and his angels' (NRSV), implying that there was a possible act of creation or rebellion against God. The second, in verse 46, mentions eternal punishment, implying a retributive or causal element between sinning and a potential everlasting suffering.

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church

- The Catholic Church for a long time endorsed primarily a literal interpretation of hell. At the beginning of the twentieth century its position changed to emphasise hell as a spiritual rather than a physical place. The catechism states: 'The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he is made capable. Hell is the state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed. Hell is "eternal fire" because the suffering is eternal for those who die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting the mercy of God through the sacrament of Reconciliation. This teaching is in accord with the teaching of the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians: "We are afflicted in this way, that the glory of God may be revealed in us" (2 Cor 4:18). Many theologians have seen this as downplaying the physical aspects of hell, viewing it as primarily a state; however, it is important to note that the Catholic Church does not rule out the possibility that hell exists existence as a realm or a place.'

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Is the idea of God as liberator contradictory to ideas of hell as physical punishment? If elements of moral luck exist (e.g. upbringing) and matter to how one is good or virtuous, then is it just for God to punish those who are poorer and more likely to sin out of necessity? Does a vengeful God fit in with the compassion to sinners shown by Jesus?

Feminist Theology

Does God as a being responsible for physical punishment towards sinners fit into a patriarchal model of retributive violence?

Is the emphasis on affliction and suffering one bound within masculine ideas of justice, rather than a commitment towards generally equality, salvation and compassion?

Is hell a physical place or a state of mind? Does the idea of hell fit with the concept of God as a loving father? Does the idea of hell fit with the concept of God as a liberator?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
How have different interpretations of hell been developed throughout history?	
What are different Hebrew and Greek terms that are often translated as 'hell'?	
What biblical evidence is there for hell being a physical place?	
What theological arguments are there for and against hell being a physical place or realm?	
How can hell be interpreted as a spiritual state? Explain.	
What potential issues may arise when denying the physical existence of hell?	
Is it enough for hell to simply be a moral symbol? Give reasons for and against this proposition.	
What is the significance of Matthew 25:31–46, the parable of the sheep and goats, within discussions of hell?	
In what way does the Catholic Church hold a nuanced position on the existence of hell?	
How did St Augustine interpret hell?	
What is the connection between punishment and the concept of hell? Explain.	
Are there issues between a human being's understanding of sin and its relation to hell?	
Is it a contradiction for a benevolent God to condemn human beings to eternal punishment?	
How does Dante's conception of hell succeed on both literal and allegorical levels? Explain.	
Could Dante's conception of hell ever be a physical reality?	
(Year 2) How does liberation and feminist theology possibly view the idea of hell? Does God as a liberator contradict the idea of God as a blind punisher?	
(Year 2) How might secular critics view hell as little more than a method of control or delusion?	

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Christian Teaching on Purgatory

Overview

The word purgatory itself means 'purification' and refers to the place between heaven and hell where people who have died within the faith go to be purified before entering heaven. It is a concept most commonly associated with the Roman Catholic Church. In the Eastern Orthodox Church a place or state of change for the soul after death is also a metaphysical possibility.

Purgatory itself does not appear as a distinct concept in the New Testament. It is the irregularities or confusions in the ideas of the particular and general judgement of good people could fit the moral requirements to be placed in neither heaven nor hell. The particular distinguishes between the mortal sins of people, ones that result in eternal punishment, which only result in temporal punishment. The former will be the force behind a person's entry into the latter will simply require time in purgatory.

Key Points

General Points

- While some critics have argued there is no solid biblical evidence for purgatory, there has been offered in support.
 - In 1 Corinthians 3:10–15, St Paul uses the metaphor of a builder for evaluating the faith, with the final line reading: 'the builder will be saved, but only as if by fire'. Some have interpreted this to be an allusion to the purifying process of purgatory.
 - Matthew 12:30–32, in its discussion of forgiveness, refers to the 'age to come'. Gregory in the sixth century and others since have argued that forgiveness after death and developed conceptions of purgatory accordingly.
 - It is thought in the Catholic Church that most people who have been saved pass through purgatory to cleanse them of venial sins, and mortal sins they have committed. Only some saints are thought to maybe go straight to heaven, and the rest are thought to go to hell.

Early Christian Conceptions

- Many early Church theologians developed conceptions of purgatory that were not the doctrine today found in the Catholic Church.
 - Clement and Origen saw purgatory as a place of 'spiritual fire' and punishment, drawing on God's use of fire in the Old Testament in light of New Testament teachings from St Paul.
 - Augustine was more indecisive about purgatory, but admitted the possibility of an intermediate stage between death and the afterlife. He distinguished, for example, between purgatorial and eternal punishment, and described the pain of purgatorial fire as greater than any suffering people experience in their lives.

Dante's Conception of Purgatory

- Dante describes purgatory in Book Two of *The Divine Comedy* (*Purgatorio*) as a place for those who only half-heartedly committed themselves to God and humanity as opposed to the beatific vision.
 - On the mountain, there are seven terraces, each one representing one of the seven deadly sins. This is an allegory of the struggles the soul faces on its journey toward heaven.
 - In particular Dante outlines the theory that all sin is the result of excessive love of things, and on each terrace, individuals are punished in ironic ways for their sins in their lives.

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Catholicism and Purgatory

- The Catholic Church acknowledges there isn't huge scriptural grounding for this, but argues it is a result of reasoned insight into scripture and the nature of God.
 - However, there isn't an elaborate conception of purgatory. The most common view is that there is an intermediate stage of purification between life and death, where angels help and assist them through their journey in purgatory.
 - Pope John Paul II in 1999 described purgatory as a 'condition of existence'. If it is being a physical place, it is a state which people enter after death who have unrepented physical imperfections.

Key Figures

John Hick

- He is one of the more prominent Protestant theologians who has redeveloped the idea of purgatory as a continuation of a person's moral or spiritual development towards God.
- Rather than the traditional Catholic focus on judgement and punishment, purgatory consists of many intermediate stages of each person's journey of maturation.
- Purgatory therefore bridges the gap between a person's imperfect life in the earthly realm and the perfect state in heaven.
- However, some critics have argued this devalues Christ's call to repentance in the context of salvation in the coming of the Kingdom of God only makes sense in the context of judgement.

Karl Rahner

- Rahner develops purgatory as a metaphor for an individual person's recognition of their imperfect state.
- Rather than concentrating on purgatory as punishment or a place of physical suffering, it is a person's conscious reflection on their own sin between their death and the final judgement.
- Whatever pain is personal, as the individual recalls and comes to terms with their sins, and the ways they have to repent in light of a loving, infinite God.
- Therefore, while ideas of fire and purification are useful metaphors, they should not be taken literally. One can advocate the concept of purgatory without the traditional physical connotations associated with it.

Key Texts

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The sections 1030–1032 of the Catechism primarily deal with purgatory. Reference is made to it at 1031:

'As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, the souls of the deceased who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offences are forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come'

Therefore it distinguishes between mortal and venial sins, reaffirming that imperfections can be forgiven through salvation through purgatory.

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Does the idea of purgatory work against moral principles in combating unjust political and social structures on earth? It can be discussed whether the eventual absolving of venial sins presents an issue for a theology that wants to encourage ethical participation on earth.

Inclusivism/Pluralism

Do inclusivist or pluralist forms of Christianity necessarily require the concept of purgatory as being more universalist in their approach towards salvation? Consider Hick's idea of purgatory and whether it could ever fit in with an exclusivist understanding of salvation.

Consider the good and bad effects of purgatory.

Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
What is purgatory and how has it been traditionally understood within the Christian faith?	
Is there any biblical evidence for purgatory?	
How does Dante describe purgatory and how does this relate to his conception of sin?	
What is the Catholic Church's teaching on purgatory?	
How did early Church theologians' concept of purgatory differ from that of modern-day theologians?	
How does the Catechism of the Catholic Church describe the concept of purgatory and its purpose?	
Why does Hick, a Protestant theologian, find value in the concept of purgatory?	
How is purgatory a metaphor for Rahner?	
What possible theological difficulties are there with purgatory as a Christian concept?	
(Year 2) Does viewing Christianity as exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist have an effect on a Christian idea of purgatory?	
(Year 2) Does purgatory possibly present an obstacle to theologies looking to emphasise the importance of moral action and change in the present-day world?	

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Christian Teaching on Election

Overview

The word 'elect' means choice and the idea of election stipulates people chosen by God to be saved. For many Christians, this salvation can only be achieved if there is great debate about whether all human beings will eventually be saved, or if some are destined to be damned. Election, therefore, ties in greatly with the concept of God's omniscience has a plan or determines who will be saved.

Both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches traditionally believe in predestination, split as to whether double predestination exists and God chooses equally who will be saved. Nevertheless, there are Christian beliefs that do not follow these doctrines. Some theologians and Christians have supported the idea of a universalist doctrine of election, where God's benevolence is enacted in the world in such a way that eventually every human being will be saved.

Key Points

General Points

- There are a number of positions that have been taken across the history of the Christian Church:
 - **Limited election** – God only chooses some people to be saved, everyone else is damned.
 - **Unlimited election** – God grants all human beings the possibility of receiving salvation.
- Similar concepts are also found in the split between traditionally Calvinist and Arminian Christians. The former are based on the life and writings of John Calvin, the latter on the teachings of Jacobus Arminius:
 - **unconditional election** – God determined of his own will some people would be saved from the creation of the world, leaving others to fall into sin and perdition.
 - This often leads to the doctrine of **limited atonement**; that Christ died only for those who have been elected.
 - **conditional election** – God determines who will receive salvation based on whether they have faith in Christ – the view of most Arminians.
 - This generally leads to the doctrine of **unlimited atonement**; that Jesus died for all humanity's sins without exception.
- There is also often debate about when God chooses people to be saved. Primarily there are two different strains of thought:
 - **antelapsarianism** (supralapsarianism) – God determined those who would be saved and/or condemned before the Fall.
 - **postlapsarianism** (sublapsarianism) – God determined those who would be saved and/or condemned after the Fall.

Single and Double Predestination

- Historically, most Christian denominations have believed in predestination in the course of events such that he has foreknowledge over who will be saved. This has led to two different doctrines:
 - **single predestination** – God only foresees those who will be saved and determines who will be condemned.
 - **double predestination** – God both foresees and determines who will be saved and who will be condemned.
- Augustine in particular uses Romans 8:28–30 to justify his position on predestination, arguing that God's foreknowledge of those who would live in the example of Jesus.

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Calvin and Salvation

- Traditionally, Calvinism as a movement is associated with the doctrine of predestination. The 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, which set out in 1646 a confession of the principles of Christianity, declared that:
 - 'Some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life; and others to everlasting death.'
- Calvin's theology itself is a bit more complex. He affirms predestination near to the idea of predestination, where some are preordained to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. For many, he argues he believes in double predestination.
 - Nevertheless, he also argues that, since there is no way for people to earn salvation, any reasons God has for electing some human beings are hidden from himself. In other words, human beings cannot comprehend the real grounds for God's election.
 - Calvin's principle of accommodation similarly means that God only reveals what is suitable for humanity and its reason. The real grounds God has for predestination are beyond human reason; whatever is displayed to human beings is in terms of what is suitable to people's perceptive capacities.
 - Even if God limits election, human beings should still treat it as unlimited. They should not presume to know what God's plans are for themselves or for others.

Universalism

- Universalism, or apokatastasis, is the theological doctrine that eventually all things, including evil, will be reconciled with God and achieve salvation.
 - Despite some early Church theologians endorsing it, such as Origen, it was unpopular within traditional Christianity, with its popularity only increasing with the rise of more liberal forms of Christianity.
 - It is often seen as a response to the issue of why a benevolent God would allow evil. In universalist views, hell is not seen as eternal, rather a step for sinful souls towards complete eschatological perfection and a restoring of the world.
 - Such views often stress the importance of free will and the importance of reaching of salvation more than doctrines of predestination, which stress the nature and the supererogatory nature of God's grace.

Key Figures

John Hick

- Hick advocates a universalist position on salvation on the basis that a benevolent God would not allow any human to eternal punishment.
- Rather, the afterlife and its intermediate stages provide new ways for people to renew faith in God. If earthly existence is oriented around moral and spiritual growth, the afterlife is likely to be similar.
- He also advocates a pluralistic view of religion. This means that other religions offer different perspectives on the same God or ultimate reality.
- Nevertheless, some theologians, such as Cardinal Ratzinger, criticise Hick's undervaluing the importance of Christ's sacrifice and atonement.

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Karl Barth

- On the other hand, Barth attempts to avoid universalism while explaining how predestination is not a crude doctrine of salvation and condemnation.
- Election itself is always concerned with the free and revelatory actions of God through Christ. This means that Christ himself is 'both the electing God and elected man in One'.
- Salvation comes through Christ, but human beings cannot speculate accurately about God's intentions about who will be saved.
- Thus, while God inevitably chooses through his grace who will and won't be saved, it is inclusive of the possibility of all being saved or some condemned. Nothing is a certainty and will only be revealed at the end time.

Critics of Barth's theology claim that he never did intend for all people to respond to God *must* respond and so is still about the limited regarding e

Key Texts

John 15:16

In this verse, Jesus declares: 'You did not choose me but I chose you' (NRSV). For Calvinists, this is strong evidence to suggest predestination and possibly even limited election. However, in the latter part of 'go and bear fruit' it is referring to people simply acting

Romans 11:1–3

Here St Paul points out directly that 'God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew'. It is an indication that God foreordained those going to be saved, others argue it is God's choice through Christ to fulfil the Old Testament prophecy and bring new light to the Jewish people.

Acts 17

In Acts 17, Paul preaches to the Athenians that their 'unknown God' is actually the God of Christians so that they would search for him accordingly. This has often been interpreted as election, or even universalism, as it implies the human search and reconciliation with God from the start of creation and that not just a few people have been selected for salvation.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

- The Catechism states specifically that only single predestination applies, deciding who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. However, at 1040, it also states it is only at the Last Judgment that we can understand the entire 'economy of salvation' and God's plan for humanity.

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Do doctrines of limited election go against the principles of liberation theology, which views sin as being partially the result of imbalanced political and social structures?

The doctrine of election as a whole can be considered to go against the grain of Marxist thought, which through liberation theology places a greater emphasis on the unfairness of many human societies over the ideas of predestination.

Exclusivism/Pluralism

The idea of limited election has often been connected with exclusivism in Christianity, and universalism with a pluralistic perspective on religion.

Is there any way of reconciling election with pluralism and equally universalism with exclusivism? Consider especially whether Barth's theology of grace and salvation allows the possibility of all being saved within an exclusivist framework.

Are there any ways of reconciling election with pluralism and equally universalism with exclusivism? Consider especially whether Barth's theology of grace and salvation allows the possibility of all being saved within an exclusivist framework.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
What is the difference between limited and unlimited election?	
How is the Arminian conception of election different from that of Calvinists?	
How does the concept of election relate to the Fall?	
What did the Westminster Confession of Faith set out?	
How does Calvin's doctrine of election differ from later Calvinists inspired by his work?	
What is universalism and why do some Christians view it as the logical result of a benevolent God?	
What biblical evidence is there for limited election?	
What is the meaning of the 'unknown God' in Acts 17?	
How does the Catechism of the Catholic Church interpret election?	
Why does Hick advocate a universalist position on election?	
Why are Barth's arguments for predestination potentially more nuanced than the traditional single/double conception?	
Does Barth's conception of election avoid becoming universalist?	
(Year 2) Do the aims and ethics of liberation theology contradict the idea of election?	
(Year 2) How might the concept of election in Christianity be an example of the exclusionary attitudes propagating violence between religions?	

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Practice Exam-style Question

2. Assess whether Christian concepts of the afterlife should be viewed as essential to spiritual life.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

show a consistent knowledge and understanding of the Christian concepts of the afterlife

- the significance of heaven, hell and purgatory in Christian faith and theology
- the reasons why theologians diverge from or disagree with viewing the afterlife as essential to spiritual life
- different perspectives and approaches to the questions surrounding judgement and the afterlife

Analyse and evaluate different approaches to the questions surrounding Christian concepts of the afterlife, and what reasons there may be for abandoning orthodox conceptions of heaven, hell and purgatory.

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Knowledge of God's Existence

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Natural Theology	The theological idea that information or knowledge of God can be discovered through reason and from the natural world (general revelation).
Revealed Theology	The theological idea that knowledge of God can be discovered through revelation.
Sensus Divinitatis	The sense of God that each human being possesses.
Semen Religionis	An innate religious sense which predisposes humans to religious activity.
Sparks of Glory	The ways Calvin argues that God is perceptible in the natural world.
Omnipotence	All-powerful, usually a characteristic given to God.
Benevolence	Loving, a characteristic given to God.
Unknown God	The entity Paul encounters the Athenians worshipping as evidence for Christian beliefs that human beings can discover partial information about God in the natural world.
Imago Dei	The image of God, which human beings were created in the likeness of.
Process Theology	A type of theology that depicts God as being in process, acting through it, in contrast to his traditional transcendence and immutability.
Dialectical Theism	John Macquarrie's defence of natural theology as a (discourse) between two different, opposing positions.
Immediate Revelation	Revelation that is presented directly to the recipient.
Mediate Revelation	Revelation that is mediated, translated or filtered through a medium or writing.
Reformed Epistemology	A theological school of thought that seeks to justify beliefs can be justified without reference to external evidence.
Basic Beliefs	A foundational belief that does not require external justification from other beliefs.
Double Grace	The two different forms of grace, justification and sanctification, which a person receives upon entering a relationship with Christ.

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Natural Theology

Overview

Natural theology puts forward that there are points of contact between the natural world and the divine, which allow individuals to gather knowledge about, through reason and observation, of an innate human sense of the divine. God reveals himself in various ways which are predisposed to be discovered. Through such faculties therefore, such as consciousness, human beings are able to learn about his nature and perfection.

However, the scope of knowledge that natural theology provides is greatly debated. Some denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, see natural theology as a complement to revealed theology. Christians accept Christ and therefore embrace truths developed as a consequence. On the other hand, some are traditionally more sceptical of the validity of natural theology and, while humans may be able to know God in a certain sense, these capacities are greatly fallible as a result of human nature being damaged by the Fall.

Key Points

General Points

- The question of what constitutes knowledge has been a subject of constant debate in natural theology.
 - A common theory, often attributed to Plato, is that it is 'justified true belief'.
 - However, Christians may argue this doesn't quite capture the knowledge of God, which may be more personal and innate, similar to knowing a friend or a relative.
- Supporters of natural theology have pointed towards the widespread practice of religion as evidence that human beings are naturally religious and have the ability to reason about them.
 - Certain Bible passages, such as Acts 17:16–34, affirm such an idea, with Paul affirming the existence of a natural human capacity to know God in the face of the 'unknown God'.
 - The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes a similar case that, despite differences between different religions, one can still refer to people as 'religious'.

Innate Knowledge of God

- Most Christians affirm the idea of there being an innate human sense of God.
 - The Catechism of the Catholic Church states this concept as the 'imago Dei' doctrine, arguing that, because man is created by and in the image of God, 'the desire for God is written in the human heart'.
 - Calvin similarly argues that human beings have a 'sensus divinitatis', a sense of God, or a 'semen religionis', a seed of religion that predisposes them towards religious activity.
 - However, the idea of epistemic distance has sometimes been affirmed, for example, by the Protestant theologian John Hick, which puts forward that God intentionally created a gap in knowledge between human beings and God, so that humans may fully enact their free choice to have or to deny faith in God during their lives.
- This human sense for many Christians also encompasses the perceptions of morality in the world.
 - Both Catholicism and Calvin argue that conscience is important to understanding goodness. It is a faculty that enables joint knowledge between God and human beings to respond to God's will in their judgement of moral situations.
 - Catholicism, however, also emphasises the importance of natural law, because humans have an innate goodness or virtue, reasoning on this basis.

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the world and God. In particular Aquinas identifies the first, and prime, principle as 'Good is to be sought, evil avoided.'

Knowledge of God from Intellect and Reason

- Natural theology has led some theologians to argue that it is possible to direct knowledge of God from the natural world.
 - Aquinas in particular set out the Five Ways; arguments that sought to prove the existence of God from first principles. These are:
 - the unmoved mover
 - the argument from first cause
 - the argument from contingency
 - the argument from degree
 - the argument from design/teleological argument
 - These are not convincing for many, but together provide strong evidence for the reasonable possibility and they help to define exactly what kind of being God is or first cause.
 - However, some critics have pointed out even if one can intellectually know the nature of God, it is not necessarily enough for trust in him. It is argued that we can develop meaning about God's purpose and intentions from natural theology. We truly have faith in a benevolent, personal God with the insights from natural theology.

Order and Creation

- Calvin argues that humans have a twofold knowledge of God (duplex cognitio) of God: as the creator of the world, and the other as the redeemer of humanity.
 - This forms the background to his argument that, within the order and beauty of the world, we can contemplate God, in what he terms 'sparks of glory'.
 - This revealing in nature is filtered through the principle of accommodation: God accommodates himself to humanity in appropriate ways people can understand, due to the fact that human beings only finite.
 - Therefore creation becomes the 'mirror' of God. What human beings see in the world is a reflection of his nature and being. By seeing this appearance of God (as the creator), human beings can therefore develop ideas about God's characteristics, such as his power and wisdom.

The Argument from Design

- The argument from design takes a step further beyond Calvin's discussion of order and design in the world cannot be coincidental and in itself is evidence of God's existence.
 - This is an argument commonly attributed to William Paley, who drew an analogy between the natural world, saying that both seeming to have a particular purpose and design shows that they both must have had a designer.
 - However, there are many problems with such arguments. Critics often argue that we are biased towards seeing patterns in nature, even if they don't exist. Nature is brutal and chaotic through some people's eyes and so be evidence against design.
 - Hume specifically criticised such arguments for making an invalid comparison between the world. While one might have experience of watches in one's observation of their products, human beings have no experience of world-building and so cannot accurately know to any degree whether a particular world was designed.

Process Theology

- Process theology argues that God is not above or beyond the natural world, but within it. In this God is therefore wholly temporal and influences the state of the world by interacting with and evoking free human responses.
 - For process theologians, therefore, God is not simply just a being, but a process, as 'becoming'. The differences between natural and revealed theology are seen as an instance of time being revelatory of God's participation in the natural world.

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Key Figures

John Calvin

- There are often seen to be difficulties in Calvin's outlining of natural theology, his 'sparks of glory' are truly points of contact with God that human beings can perceive.
- For Calvin, human beings are truly damaged by the Fall, such that they remain in a state of ignorance if God is not revealed in the natural world, then for those who are not witnesses, individuals to perceive or be prompted into perceiving God.

INFLUENCES

Emil Brunner

- Brunner proposes that Calvin's 'sparks of glory' are realised in general revelation of God through an innate sense of the divine and human conscience.
- Human beings as made in the 'imago dei' are materially corrupted but still possess a formal connection to God that allows a limited understanding of his being.
- However, any knowledge is restricted by humanity's material corruption, and true understanding of God only comes through revelation in Christ.

Karl Barth

- Barth proposes that human beings, damaged by the Fall, cannot know God through natural ways human beings can perceive.
- The corruption of the human mind means that points of contact have been lost, but human conscience or other faculties can be formed after receiving revelation.
- The order of the natural world is not perceived after revelation.

John Macquarrie and Dialectical Theism

- Macquarrie presents a defence of natural theology, arguing that, when conceived in this way, it has not been guilty of viewing him as 'just another object in the world', meaning a mechanical depiction of God was not formed.
 - In contrast to this conception, Macquarrie argues that God lies in a 'dialectic' between two naturally opposing attributes. One example is being and nothingness. In the conventional way as an object, he is also the source of all beings, and thus, in the dialectic between people's concepts of being and nothingness.
 - Similarly, a dialectic exists between knowability and unknowability. God is the recognisable presence across the whole of his creation, whereas nothingness is beyond comprehension.
 - Through this examining of dialectics, one can form an idea of God without relying solely on revealed theology for inspiration. Rather than taking God's 'revelation' as the only source, human beings' removal from him, it allows humanity's intellect to develop a personal relationship with God while giving room for a personal relationship to be developed.

Key Texts

Romans 1:19–20

This passage in St Paul's letter to the Romans is commonly used to support the idea of natural theology, that God's eternal power 'has been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, within the order of nature. Specifically it declares that God's eternal power 'has been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, through the things he has made' (NRSV) such that, for any individuals, there is no excuse or ignorance.

Acts 17:16–34

An important passage in natural theology, for here Paul speaks to the Athenians about the 'unknown God'. For some, this passage indicates the natural ability for human beings to perceive God, but for others, it also demonstrates humankind's wounded ability to perceive God, damaged by the Fall.

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Feminist Theology

Feminist theologians may argue that beliefs about the natural knowledge of God have led to arbitrary divisions between genders based on what patriarchal elements of society have deemed 'natural'. Is there an inherent bias prevalent in general revelation and how could this lead to discrimination in the human world?

Exclusivism/Pluralism

Does a pluralist or inclusivist model of religious belief necessarily have to include general revelation as a way for different religions to be able to convene around different truths about God? Or could it be there is simply revelatory experience springing from the same being or source?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
What is natural theology?	
What are some examples of possible points of contact between God and the world?	
How is the 'unknown God' in Acts 17 evidence for the validity of natural theology?	
What is the 'sensus divinitatis' that Calvin describes?	
What is the Catholic Church's position on natural theology and natural law?	
How have some theologians used reason to justify the existence of God?	
What are 'sparks of glory' and how is creation a 'mirror' of God for Calvin?	
What is the argument from design and how is Paley's watch a classic example of it?	
Why might atheistic critics be sceptical about the claims of the design argument?	
What is process theology and how does it relate to natural theology?	
How does Romans 1:19–20 support belief in natural theology?	
What are the different theological interpretations of Calvin and why do critics disagree regarding the importance of natural theology within his thought?	
How does John Macquarrie's dialectical theism give a defence of natural theology?	
(Year 2) Is general revelation and natural knowledge of God little more than wish fulfilment for order in the universe?	
(Year 2) How do models of Christian exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism fit in with natural theology?	

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Revealed Theology

Overview

Revealed theology is the study of God through means of special revelation deliberately chosen to show himself to humanity. This can come in many forms, such as scripture or prayer but it holds specifically that there is knowledge of God which is not available in the natural world as a whole.

The broad distinction between revealed and natural theology was formed primarily in the 17th century in response to issues about to what extent human reason was damaged by the Fall were at the heart of the debate. While the Roman Catholic Church puts revealed theology at the centre of its beliefs, it also places a great importance of natural theology as building upon its insights. On the other hand, many Protestant theologians took a much more sceptical stance on human intellect after the Fall and argue that natural theology is not a revelation excuse human ignorance and cannot reveal anything meaningful compared to special revelation.

Key Points

General Points

- Revealed theology emphasises the importance of knowledge of God through special revelation and direct revealing of himself at particular times and places. For many Christians, the most significant instance of special revelation is the Christ-event.
 - This is in contrast to general revelation in natural theology, which refers to knowledge of God gathered through everyday reason and observation.
 - Whereas general revelation is arguably available to all human beings, special revelation is available to a few; however, humanity is able to witness those times and respond to them.
- Whereas the Roman Catholic Church believes the Fall distracted, or greatly negatively impacted on the capacity for humans to perceive God, Calvin argues that it irreparably damaged humanity's capacity to the point where only the freely given grace of God through Christ is able to give true knowledge.
 - Nothing in the natural world by itself, therefore, can grant true knowledge of God; only through Christ as a mediator and a form of special revelation can humanity be 'regenerated' or reconciled with their corrupted natures and God himself.
- Theologians often distinguish between:
 - **immediate revelation** – where God reveals himself directly to people. This includes things such as prophets having visions of God or people witnessing Christ.
 - **mediate revelation** – where people gain knowledge of God indirectly, such as through the Bible or by hearing the words of prophets.

Faith

- Part of revealed theology is belief that does not rely on reason by itself. In the 17th century, faith was central to understanding the importance of how Christians engage with special revelation gathered from it.
 - Aquinas distinguishes faith from 'scientia' (science). Whereas the latter is based on an individual's everyday experience of the outside world, the former is not. It is in the same way. Rather it is a voluntary assent towards beliefs one cannot prove.
 - Calvin on the other hand, argues that faith has to be understood through special revelation directed towards God, it is also when human beings voluntarily accept God's word and become assured of his guidance and presence in their lives.

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Scripture and Revelation

- Within revealed theology the Bible is not just a historical document, but a witness to the world. It reveals his actions in the person of Christ as well as the wisdom of God, inspired by visions or experiences of God. Overall, this means scripture reveals truth that reason or experience cannot.
 - Many argue the Bible has to also be interpreted in the light of its incompleteness. The Catechism of the Catholic Church warns against Christianity simply being reduced to a set of rules, arguing that it cannot be reduced to one source.
 - In natural theology, where the Bible might be seen as more fallible, it is seen as a witness to the experiences of God, as well as a document testifying to the divinity of Christ.

Christ and Revelation

- For Christians, Jesus is one of the most significant examples of special revelation. On earth, he is the most direct contact with the divine experienced in history and the centre of all discussion of Christianity.
 - Calvin believed that through the incarnation Christ was God; however, he also argued for the principle of accommodation. God appears in a way that humanity, as finite beings, can understand. Christ becomes a mediator between God and the world, mirroring his character so that humans otherwise have no knowledge of.
 - It is through Christ, then, that human beings discover God the Redeemer, the true knowledge of. Specifically, he argues that when human beings are in Christ, they receive double grace.
 - The first is that of justification, becoming righteous in the eyes of God and not simply Judge. The second is sanctification, whereby human beings cultivate purity and goodness in their lives in line with the will of God.
- Whereas Christ is the focal point of revelation for Calvin, with the significance being contained within his coming and testimony, the Catholic Church argues that Christians to reflect upon this revelation over time.
 - The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, while revelation made through Christ, 'it has not been completely explicit'. This opens, then, the need for the Church to draw out doctrine through reason and analysis.
 - The Church in particular is regarded as 'the body of Christ', responsible for bringing Jesus into the modern era. Sacraments such as the Eucharist, therefore, for many, helping Christians separated historically from Jesus himself to experience his nature and teachings.

Are Natural and Revealed Theology the Same?

- It has been argued, that if God is the source of all knowledge about his being, then it matters whether that knowledge arises from natural means, such as human reason, or from God himself.
 - This arguably is particularly true if humankind is created in God's image, with a particular natural ability to know God, which lets one realise God's intention.
 - However, such an argument relies on a weaker interpretation of the fact that humankind's wounded nature prevents them from ever developing a full knowledge of God through reason alone.
 - Similarly, many assert there is something unique to knowledge received through revelation that captures truths that the human reason simply isn't capable of comprehending.

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Key Figures

Alvin Plantinga

- One argument often levelled against revealed theology is that it is irrational for comparison to natural theology, which appeals to a broader idea of human reason.
 - However, Plantinga contrarily argues that natural theology can never provide justification for belief in God, as well as failing to accommodate Christianity.
 - Under what is often termed as reformed epistemology, Plantinga puts forward the 'sensus divinitatis' there is a general religious sense among human beings. Knowledge of God is properly 'basic'.
 - Basic knowledge here means something that is certain and cannot be doubted. One's ordinary perceptions of the outside world may often be classified as basic. We do not regularly doubt their senses unless given reason to.
 - However, it is only to the Christian that knowledge of God is basic. For the atheist, knowledge of God is not basic. For the atheist, knowledge of God is damaged the 'sensus divinitatis', such that, without salvation through Christ, knowledge of God cannot be held or appreciated.
- However, for atheistic critics, Plantinga's arguments for 'basic' knowledge cannot be held beliefs. One could even argue a person could hold a properly basic belief in the creator of the world.
 - Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church challenges such positions as fallible. It is known for certain without revelation. Rather, it argues that reason is used to moderate and analyse competing religious beliefs.

Key Texts

John Calvin – *Institutes* 1.11.1

Here Calvin sets out how the Fall has affected humanity and reaffirms how reconciliation is possible. In particular he declares 'no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of life, any way, until Christ the mediator comes forward to reconcile him to us'. Theology is seen as this as advocating revealed theology as the only true path to knowledge in Christ.

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

To what extent does knowledge from revelation ignore human experience of injustice on earth? It can be argued that the faith encouraged in revealed theology ignores the important general revelations that come from insight into the earthly world. On the other hand, it may be that special revelation from scripture illuminates the struggles of the poor and marginalised in new ways not previously considered.

Exclusivism/Pluralism

To what extent does special revelation support exclusivism within Christianity? If the path to salvation is only revealed to some then this may lead to ideas about limited election.

On the other hand, it may be that within models of pluralism, each religion has accessed special revelation in its own particular way, with the differences in beliefs simply differences from fallible human interpretation.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
What are the differences between revealed theology and natural theology?	
What is special revelation?	
Why does Calvin argue that real or meaningful knowledge of God can only come through special revelation?	
What is the difference between mediate and immediate revelation?	
How does faith play an important role in revealed theology?	
Why does scripture in revealed theology have to play a greater role than simply being a historical account of Christ and other prophets?	
What significance does Christ have as the primary example of special revelation?	
What is Calvin's principle of accommodation and what is its relation to his Christology?	
How do human beings receive double grace on entering a union with Christ?	
What is the position of the Catholic Church on revealed theology?	
What are the core principles behind reformed epistemology?	
Why does Plantinga give religious belief the status of basic belief?	
What criticisms might one have of the idea of religious basic beliefs?	
(Year 2) What views might secular critics have of truths seemingly coming from special revelation?	
(Year 2) How can special revelation be understood within exclusivist and pluralist models of Christianity?	

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Practice Exam-style Question

3. 'Natural theology cannot develop consistent or coherent knowledge'

HINTS

In your answer you should:

show a consistent knowledge and understanding of both natural and revealed theology

- the significance of reason and observation in natural theology
- the reasons why theologians diverge from or disagree with the use of natural theology
- attempting to discover truths about the divine
- different perspectives and approaches to the question of whether natural theology can provide a consistent and coherent knowledge of the natural world

Analyse and evaluate different approaches to the questions surrounding natural theology. Consider the reasons there may be for regarding revealed theology as a better method of knowing God.

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The Person of Jesus Christ

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Christology from Above	Christology that begins with the idea of Jesus as the Son of God and analyses scripture from that belief.
Christology from Below	Christology that begins with the Jesus of history, and analyses the human aspects of the Gospels prior to making any theological claims.
Christos	‘The anointed one’, a title for Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.
Messiah	The one chosen to lead and save the world in the Jewish tradition.
Son of God	A title given to Jesus in the Gospels; sometimes also used to describe other figures in the Old Testament.
Son of Man	An ambiguous title Jesus uses to describe himself.
The Nicene Creed	A profession of faith in a number of Christian theologies established at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE and the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.
The Chalcedonian Definition	A declaration affirming Christ as both fully God and fully human, agreed upon at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.
Homoousios	A Greek term meaning ‘in one being’, used in the Nicene Creed to describe the relationship between Jesus and God the Father.
Christ-event	The term used by John Macquarrie to describe the historical Jesus and his continuing influence in the modern-day world.
Good News	Another term for the Gospel, the message and signs of Jesus.
New Covenant	The new agreement forged between God and humanity through the life and death of Jesus Christ.
The Beatitudes	The list of blessings given by Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount.
Metanoia	Another word for repentance, or the changes one makes in their life of penitence and spirituality.
Liberator	A term used to describe Jesus as freeing humanity from sin and spiritual oppression.
Zealots	A group of political radicals aiming at restoring the Jewish kingdom and overthrowing the Roman occupation.

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Jesus as Son of God

Overview

Often regarded as one of the most important titles given to Jesus, Son of God is often seen as an affirmation of the intimate relationship between Jesus and God, a confirmation of his divinity and authority. In the early Christian Church, the nature of God and his relation to Christ as Son were greatly debated, with many alternative views emerging, many of which were later branded as heretical. Part of the difficulty lies in the Gospels. Jesus does not directly call himself the Son of God, preferring alternative titles, only affirming the title in the third person in the Gospel of John, yet the unique relationship between God and Jesus is regularly stressed through Father–Son terminology.

Furthermore the idea of Jesus as the Son of God is often reinforced through his actions and teachings, which indicate for many that Jesus has divine power. On the other hand, with the authenticity of such accounts has been questioned and the significance of the title has been put down in comparison to Jesus as a teacher or liberator.

Key Points

General Points

- There are numerous Gospel passages where the unique relationship between God and Jesus is expressed:
 - In key narrative moments such as Jesus's baptism and Transfiguration, God calls down from the heavens to announce Jesus as his son.
 - In the nature miracles, Jesus is described as wielding divine power. One example is Mark 6:47–52, where Jesus walks on water and calms the winds, in a similar fashion to how God commands over nature in Genesis 1:2–5.
 - Throughout the Gospels Jesus heals many, even raising people from the dead. One example is the healing of the man born blind in John 9:1–41. The power to perform miracles along with the power to forgive sins, was traditionally an authority only granted to God, further reinforcing Jesus as the Son of God.
 - The most important section of the Gospels, however, is the resurrection. For many this is the fullest revelation of God in Jesus and the salvation in Christ for everyday Christians.

Jesus's Humanity and Divinity

- The question to what extent Jesus was human and to what extent he was divine was a central issue in the early Church. The use of the Son of God title. In the early Church many Christians thought Jesus was literally God, but others stressed his humanity and looked towards the metaphorical nature of the Father. As the concept of the Trinity was further developed as well, more questions arose as to how God was mediating the possible incarnation of God in Jesus.
 - Jesus's humanity is visibly affirmed at times in the Gospels. For example, he experiences pain and suffering, whereas pain would be something a divine being surely would not feel. This emphasizes that Jesus is human so that salvation can extend properly to other humans, rather than a distant concept beyond the reach of ordinary people.
- These issues form the basis of Christology, the study of the relationship between God and Jesus. Two approaches can be argued:
 - **Christology from above**, which focuses on the divine nature of Jesus.
 - **Christology from below**, which focuses more on the human Jesus in the Gospels.

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Jesus and Self-knowledge

- If Jesus was truly the Son of God, it can be asked to what extent he was aware of this. Mark 5:30, if Jesus was truly divine, it would seem that he had pretended to be human when the bleeding woman touched his cloak. Yet in John the 'I am' statement suggests Jesus was aware of his divine nature to some extent.
 - Medieval theology proposed a number of solutions to such issues. One was that Jesus' knowledge of the divine was different from that of the human, suggesting that Jesus might not have always had access to both divine and human knowledge at the same time.
 - Karl Rahner proposes a more nuanced solution, that Jesus as human was aware of the divine in a way that his awareness of the divine was buried in his actions and his human nature. He can have an understanding of things they do not immediately call for self-consciousness, but deeper within his psyche.

Miracles

- The miracles play an important role in understanding the authority of Jesus and his relationship with God.
 - Many of his miracles are symbolic. For example, his healings through the power of the Spirit, fulfilling the prophecies of the Messiah in Isaiah and as such his unique relationship with God.
 - N T Wright, in particular, identifies in the healing miracles Jesus reuniting himself with God, symbolising his authority to both forgive and gather people into a new covenant.
- However, others question the miracle accounts. Hume famously argues that miracles can never be trusted more than people's everyday experiences of the laws of nature.
 - Such criticisms mean the literal significance of many of the miracles is questioned in Christian theology, in favour of analysing them in their relationship to the Kingdom of God.
 - This is reinforced by there being no fixed word for 'miracle' in the Gospels, which are generally referred to as 'mighty works' or 'signs'.

The Resurrection

- The resurrection of Christ is seen as central to understanding his nature and his relationship with God. It is a breaking or miraculous affirmation of Jesus's relationship with God, distinguishing him from other prophets or religious leaders at the time.
 - In 1 Corinthians 15:13–15, St Paul states this plainly, declaring that if Jesus had not risen, then faith and life would be in vain.
 - For Christians, God letting his only Son die and atone for humanity's sin is the ultimate act of love in the Gospels, allowing all individuals to form a new relationship with God.
 - Wolfhart Pannenberg reaffirms this, describing the resurrection, in its decisive moment at which Jesus is 'visibly and unambiguously' revealed as the Son of God.

Key Figures

John Macquarrie

- Macquarrie argues Jesus as the Son of God is unique. However, this comes from his understanding of Jesus's life, influence and place in history as the 'Christ-event'.
- Rather than taking moments of his life to demonstrate his uniqueness, his whole life is a defining moment for humanity that, while not maybe exclusive as religious revelation, is a defining moment through Jesus Christ as a person.
- Therefore, Jesus is not simply another prophet. He, as a defining moment in human history, lives until the present day, is unique as an individual and as a continuing religious figure.

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E P Sanders

- Sanders argues that it is impossible to know whether the relationship Jesus has with the Father can be known from analysing historical evidence.
- The idea of a 'unique' relationship is one born out of faith rather than a conclusion.
- The miracles and teachings of Jesus, therefore, support him being a person of divine origin.
- However, this approach is emblematic of Christology from below, and other events such as the resurrection are significant enough to argue the Son of God relationship.

Gerard O'Collins

- O'Collins examines the questions around whether Jesus could have had self-consciousness. He argues that it is impossible to answer them in any satisfactory manner.
 - The inner realms of a person's mind are very difficult, if not impossible, to know. It is even more difficult to be alive, let alone in the case of Jesus, who left no written testimony after his death.
 - Any analysis of Jesus's consciousness would have to have a complex understanding of the human mind, the ability to experience and gain knowledge of the outside world, combined with the ability to be aware of one's intuition and instinct, a field largely underdeveloped in science.
 - Consciousness is different to that of straightforward knowledge. Being aware of one's own existence can be done uncritically, while being conscious of something requires a critical understanding of that thing itself.
- However, he concludes it is possible to give one answer; that Jesus, in knowing his relationship with the Father, and being responsible for saving humankind, was aware of his self-consciousness of his divinity. The awareness he possessed, therefore, in knowing his relationship with the Father, necessarily mean holding direct knowledge of a divine presence within himself, and thus the significance and meaning of the Father–Son relationship.

Key Texts

The Nicene Creed

- This was written in 325 CE at the First Council of Nicaea, in response to the Arian controversy, and was amended at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.
- It declared that the Father and the Son are of the same substance (homoousios) and are co-eternal with the Father.
- This was in response to Arius, a priest who had suggested that, because the Father created the Son, the Son must have had a beginning.
- However, this indicated that Christ was not eternal and just a creature, meaning that the Son was not God. This was an idea many considered to be a heresy.

The Chalcedonian Definition

- This was written in 451 CE at the Council of Chalcedon as an attempt to resolve the controversy over the nature of Christ.
- This began when Nestorius put forward that there were two separate natures of Christ, one divine, coming together in one will.
- However, Cyril of Alexandria criticised this idea for implying that Christ was not God, but a creature, being co-eternal.
- The definition, therefore, set out that Christ possessed both a truly divine and a truly human nature.

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Feminist Theology

To what extent have the categories of Jesus being the Son and God being the Father emphasised maleness as an essential part of Jesus's character? It can be debated whether such language is indicative of the cultural attitudes of the Gospel writers themselves, or whether such familial notions really apply to Jesus himself.

Exclusivism/Pluralism

Does identifying Jesus as first and foremost the Son of God tie in to a model of exclusivism within Christianity? Or is there a way of understanding the Son of God title in a non-unique way, such that it could retain relevance for other religions while not implicitly denying their claims to truth?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
What are the various levels of meaning in the Son of God title and how is it used to describe Jesus in the Gospels?	
How was Jesus's divinity asserted in the early Church compared to Christianity today?	
What is the difference between Christology from above and below?	
Why are there potential issues with Jesus's humanity in the Gospels?	
Could Jesus have possessed self-knowledge about his own divinity?	
How does O'Collins approach the issue of Jesus's self-knowledge?	
What role do the miracle stories play in understanding Jesus's relationship to God?	
Why might critics question the validity of the miracle accounts?	
Are the miracle stories necessary to assert the importance of Jesus's ministry?	
Why is the resurrection often seen as the central point or crux of the Gospels?	
Is the resurrection essential to understanding the divinity of Christ?	
What do the Nicene Creed and Chalcedonian Definition assert?	
What importance does Macquarrie identify in the idea of the 'Christ-event'?	
Did Jesus have a unique relationship with God, or could it simply be classed as special or significant?	
(Year 2) What significance does Jesus's reluctance to use the Son of God title to describe himself have for secular perspectives on Christianity?	
(Year 2) Is the Son of God title used wrongly to assert patriarchal ideas about Jesus's essential maleness?	
(Year 2) Does asserting Jesus as the unique Son of God commit oneself to an exclusivist model of Christianity?	

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Jesus as Teacher of Wisdom

Overview

Jesus as a moral teacher holds a great appeal for many Christians. However, some place less emphasis on his divinity. Throughout the Gospel Jesus presents many of teachings, parables and sayings and he is often referred to as a 'Rabbi', a teacher who were educated and respected.

However, the importance of Jesus's wisdom in the Gospels can be interpreted in different ways. Liberal Christians might view his teachings of compassion and love as significant in that they only carry authority when examined in the context of his wider divinity of God. Without placing Jesus as a teacher alongside other titles such as Son of God, Christianity is secularised, and Christ as a figure becomes reduced to simply an individual more unique than other prophets or religious thinkers. On the other hand, some interpret this as an issue, arguing for a more pluralistic conception of Christianity among other world religions.

Key Points

Repentance and Forgiveness

- Throughout the Gospels, Jesus presents the 'Good News' as being centred around repentance and forgiveness of sin. Only God can judge and so people in their lifetimes should seek to help those around them, regardless of their social standing or actions.
 - This can be seen in the crowds he attracted throughout the Gospels, often composed of people who were marginalised in society at the time, such as sinners, tax collectors or the sick.
 - The parable of the prodigal and his brother in Luke 15:11–32 is often used as an example of the psychological requirements of the forgiving attitude Jesus encourages. The father welcoming his son back exemplifies the radical nature of Jesus's teachings on forgiveness and provides a moral template for those who wish to emulate him.

Reversal and the New Covenant

- There is great debate as to what extent Jesus sought to overturn the teaching of the Old Testament, reforming them for a new audience.
 - Parts of the Gospels seem to emphasise a revolutionary aspect to his teaching. The Sermon on the Mount recall Moses in Exodus ascending Mount Sinai, presenting Jesus as a moral prophet in the same vein.
 - Throughout Matthew 5:17–48, Jesus presents a selection of the Ten Commandments from the Torah, only to elaborate and overturn many people's thoughts or practices, developing in turn new teachings on reversal and the new covenant between God and his people.
 - Here there is ambiguity in Jesus's statement of 'I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfil it' in Matthew 5:17. Some have interpreted here Jesus as advocating a new moral order, the Kingdom of God, whereas others have simply put forward that Jesus was criticising religious leaders for not practising the law correctly.

Motivation and Purity

- Jesus is critical of those he identifies as hypocritical, and often the targets of his criticism were the Pharisees and religious authorities, who he argued were merely observing religious customs without the heart of moral goodness and purity.
 - In these criticisms, he often overturned not only ideas about how people should live, but also the social importance placed upon ideas of wealth and power.
 - In contrast to ideas of moral purity based on religious custom, he stressed that the most important part of a person to keep pure was their heart. People should act out of sacrificial love and not with the expectation of reward or divine favour.
 - The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12 exemplify this attitude, blessing the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, who are marginalised or maligned by the prevailing moral order.

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Key Figures

John Hick

- In his 1977 collection of essays, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Hick argues that Jesus is not unique to him as a figure and is seen in many different religious figures across the world.
- If the idea of the incarnation is therefore removed from Jesus, he becomes one of many God in different forms, and accordingly seeks to transform moral opinions from Christianity as well as opening up a dialogue with other world religions pointing to a common ground.
- Jesus may lose his uniqueness, but still retains authority in the power of his moral teachings with the pressing moral and religious issues that concern humanity.

Key Texts

Matthew 5:17–48

- This set of passages occurs just after the Beatitudes, where Jesus addresses a new set of commandments, before subverting them and putting forward a new imperative.
- One important example is his rejection of a common view of justice at the time 'an eye for a tooth for a tooth' (Deuteronomy 19:21 NRSV). Instead he puts forward that love is the motivation behind one's actions, even when one has been wronged.
- Therefore if one is hit, one should turn the other cheek. Later he pushes this further by listening to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matthew 5:44).
- Throughout, this is establishing a fulfilling of the Jewish law and setting a higher standard with this final command: 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48).

Luke 15:11–32

- This passage contains the parable of the prodigal and his brother, a teaching on the circumstance the ideal of forgiveness within the Christian faith.
- Furthermore, it identifies the idea that anyone who repents and admits their wrongdoing can be forgiven.
- The example of the elder brother protesting is also noted as having the wrong reward as his younger brother he demonstrates the old moral law of working for a spiritual reward.
- The radicalness of Jesus's teachings, however, is presented here and can be seen as a fulfilment of old Jewish law.
- Metanoia, or repentance, requires dramatic psychological effort and can only be achieved with pure intentions.

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

To what extent have Jesus's teachings on purity of intention and forgiveness overshadowed his more radical opposition to social and political injustice? Consider whether in liberation theology there can be room for a traditional depiction of Jesus as a wisdom teacher as well as a social liberator.

Exclusivism/Pluralism

To what extent does Hick's identification of Jesus simply as a teacher of wisdom necessarily support a pluralistic idea of Christianity? Could an exclusivist model of Christian truth be possible with believing Jesus possessed divine authority?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹
What is the significance of Jesus's ministry and teachings if taken separately to his possible status as the Son of God?	
What is the nature of Jesus's teachings on repentance and forgiveness?	
Does Jesus present a reversal of old Jewish values or a reformation of them for a new audience?	
What is the significance of Jesus's teaching on the Ten Commandments, the Law and the new covenant in Matthew 5:17-48?	
Why does Jesus emphasise the importance of good intentions and motivations behind moral acts?	
What motivation should people act out of when helping others, according to Jesus?	
To what extent does the parable of the prodigal son and his brother present a radical moral thesis of forgiveness?	
How does John Hick's view of Jesus influence the way Christians should interpret his ministry?	
(Year 2) Can the wisdom teachings of Jesus on forgiveness be reconciled with the more radical elements of liberation theology?	
(Year 2) To what extent can secular critics still endorse a picture of Jesus as a great moral or wise teacher?	

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Jesus as Liberator

Overview

The idea of Jesus as liberator started to gain more traction in the publication of S G F Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots* and the rise of liberation theology. The traditional belief of Jesus being a centrally spiritual figure gave way to a more political figure, one who was defending the poor and sick from persecution, as well as resisting the religious authorities. Jesus's teachings here, beyond being historical narratives, apply to all forms of oppression throughout time, meaning theology becomes tied up with all situations of injustice.

However, some critics have argued this depiction of Christ is too narrow in scope, focusing only on the religious circumstances of his time, as well as the wider spiritual liberation. Nevertheless, the image of Jesus as a liberator is an appealing one and many historical issues may just simply lie in how this concept is interpreted and not whether it is the Christ himself.

Key Points

General Points

- During Jesus's life and for long afterwards, Jewish people lived under Roman rule, with high levels of messianic expectations. People regularly prophesied and hoped for the coming of a messiah who would free them from Roman rule.
 - One of the groups leading a resistance was the Zealots, who, while not a formal group, were loosely people who called for violent resistance against the Romans. Modern studies of the Gospels in recent years have occasionally drawn Jesus as more of a revolutionary than a spiritual man of peace.

Jesus as a Political Liberator

- Throughout his ministry Jesus can be said to generally show preferential treatment to the typically marginalised:
 - In the parable of the good samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, Jesus draws an example of compassion using a Samaritan, who were often decried as religious heretics.
 - Similarly in Mark 1:40–45 and 8:1–4, Jesus heals individuals with leprosy, who would be classed as unclean and unfit to be seen with, let alone touch.
- However, these examples, while setting up Jesus to be a champion of the poor, do not necessarily paint him as a political liberator. Some have argued he should be seen as a revolutionary. However, some argue this is evidence to suggest that Jesus was a political liberator:
 - In Matthew 10:34, Jesus declares 'I did not come to bring peace, but a sword'.
 - When Jesus was arrested he was tried as King of the Jews and sentenced to death for a civic/political crime by Pilate. Many theologians argue that this was a conspiracy by the high priests, with Pilate simply ordering the death of Jesus to keep them happy. However, others argue this explanation overlooks the possibility of Jesus being a figure of social resistance, with the Gospels being biased towards a theological depiction of his death over its potential political context.
 - Jesus's triumphal entry to Jerusalem recalls Zechariah's prophecy in 9:9, which states Israel's coming king will ride into Jerusalem victorious on a donkey. This arguably sets up Jesus as a character of messianic expectation and, for many people at the time, a potential liberator of the Jewish people from Roman occupation.
 - Other people have argued that the teaching of Jesus is not only social but economically radical, supporting the beliefs of liberation theology and the redistribution of wealth. For example, in Luke 18:18–22, Jesus states that to receive eternal life from God if one sells one's possessions and gives to the poor.

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Jesus as Religious Liberator

- On the other hand, there is a lot of evidence that Jesus challenged religious and political authorities, regularly denouncing the Pharisees and priests of his time with the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.
 - In Mark 14:57, witnesses at Jesus's trial testify that he claimed he would replace it. While this testimony may be false, it supports the idea that Jesus was seen as a legitimate threat.
 - Many times in the Gospels, Jesus criticises the practices of the Pharisees, such as handwashing and Luke 18:12 on tithing.
 - O'Collins points out the conflict seems to lie most in Jesus's challenge to the religious establishment in his eyes, separated ordinary people from true reconciliation with God.
 - Matthew 23:1–4 and 13 provide strong examples of Jesus's challenges. In 13 especially he proclaims 'woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites who shut the kingdom of heaven' (NRSV).

Jesus as Liberator from Sin

- The more traditional theological view of Christ depicts him as a liberator from humanity's sin through his death on the cross liberated human beings, both by his sacrifice and also by granting a new freedom to be reconciled with God and receive his grace.
 - One particular verse supporting this idea is Romans 6:23, which declares 'the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (NRSV).
 - However other theologians have criticised this spiritual interpretation arguing that it removes the historical context of Christ's liberation of people.

Key Figures

E P Sanders

- Sanders argues that, while in the Gospels Jesus is narratively placed against the Pharisees, that he was closer to Judaism than is believed by much of modern Christianity.
- Rather than Jesus being purely a liberator, he possibly sought to simply modify Jewish law. Sanders suggests that the authors of the Gospels may have embellished his actions for dramatic effect, such as the Pharisees surprising the disciples picking corn (Mark 2:23–26) whose accuracy can be realistically doubted.
- Furthermore, it can be contended that Jesus only criticised the application of the law, not what could be considered to be a movement for the renewal of the Jewish faith.
- Therefore, Jesus as liberator has to be carefully tied in, not with an aggressive resistance to authority, but rather with a nuanced portrayal of his perspective on the interpretations of the time.

Key Texts

Luke 4:16–21

- This passage is sometimes called the 'mission statement' and involves Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth.
- Within it he proclaims he has come as prophesied to 'proclaim release to the oppressed to go free' (NRSV).
- While many theologians read this pledge to fulfil scripture as a connection to the expectation of Isaiah and Jesus as Christ, liberation theologians see a more immediate social meaning in the 'Good News' as explicitly intended for the poor and oppressed.
- To read only a spiritual meaning into this statement is to ignore its place as a challenge to the social, religious and political structures of the time.

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Does Jesus's role as a liberator provide a basis for liberation theology or does his commitment to atoning for humanity's sin mean there is an overarching emphasis on salvation and the afterlife? How might liberation theology reconcile these aspects of Jesus's ministry?

Feminist Theology

Can Jesus in addition to being a social or political liberator also be a liberator of women? Consider whether this is a strong enough position to hold from his encounters with women in the Gospel, or whether other titles provide a more rounded picture of Jesus's ministry.

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹
How has Jesus been interpreted as a liberator?	
How might the concept of Jesus as a liberator be pertinent considering the historical context of Judaea in the first century CE?	
What evidence is there to suggest that there was a political context to Jesus's actions?	
Is the title of social liberator more fitting to his actions and character than political liberator?	
Is there any historical evidence to suggest that Jesus sought to liberate Jewish people from Roman occupation?	
Does Jesus challenge the religious authorities of his time in a significant manner, or were his actions simply seeking to reform certain aspects of Jewish tradition?	
Is Sanders correct in suggesting that the Gospel writers might have embellished parts of the Gospels, painting Jesus as a firebrand for dramatic effect?	
Is the most important aspect of Jesus his role as a liberator from sin rather than from oppressive social structures?	
What importance does Luke 4:16–21 have in identifying the purpose of Jesus's ministry?	
(Year 2) How does the idea of Jesus as a liberator form the basis for liberation theology?	
(Year 2) Could Jesus also be regarded as a liberator of women?	

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Practice Exam-style Question

4. Is Jesus best understood as a political liberator, or a liberator from sin?

HINTS

In your answer you should:

show a consistent knowledge and understanding of the person of Jesus in the

- the significance of roles as a teacher of wisdom, divine saviour, social reformer
- the reasons why theologians disagree about the way Jesus is portrayed
- a way that might correspond to the culture and traditions of first-century Palestine
- different perspectives and approaches to the question of whether the political or spiritual aspects of Jesus should be emphasised more when describing his ministry

Analyse and evaluate different approaches to the questions surrounding the reasons there may be for prioritising one aspect of his ministry over another.

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Christian Moral Principles

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Biblical Authority	The extent to which the Bible and scripture influence beliefs and practices.
Theonomous Ethics	The idea that ethics is determined or given by God.
Sola Scriptura	Means 'by Scripture alone' and is a Christian doctrine that the Bible is the supreme authority in faith and ethical practice.
Hermeneutical Circle	A method of interpretation that focuses on a continual understanding of individual passages or sentences in the light of the whole.
The Magisterium	The authority of the Pope and Bishops within the Catholic Church to interpret doctrine and teachings.
Natural Law	The basic moral principles discoverable by reasoning about the human natural world.
Post-Liberal Theology	A modern school of theological thought, focusing on a return to the historical, communal and social aspects of Christianity.
Agape	A universal, unconditional, sacrificial love originating from God, serving as a motivation for moral action.
Sacred Tradition	The idea that both scripture and the Church are authoritative sources of the revelation of Christ.

The Bible in Christian Ethics

Overview

The Bible is generally seen as one of the most important, if not the most important, texts in Christianity. Providing both a source of moral guidance as well as accounts of Jesus's life and teachings, it is invaluable in developing and instructing everyday Christian practices. However, there are different ways of viewing the Bible. While some Christians look to place it within its historical context, others focus on modern ethical developments, others are committed to viewing it as an undisputed authority. This partly depends on whether one adopts a propositional or non-propositional approach. The former puts forward that the Bible should be seen as pure revelation, with any given text being messages from God. Teachings such as the Ten Commandments, therefore, are seen as inflexible, applied to one's life without question. On the other hand, the latter, a non-propositional approach, looks towards the Bible as an account of Jesus's life, in which his life, ministry and teachings are seen relationally to a Christian's own life, with his example and virtues ones to embody in their own lives. Such an approach in turn may well be more flexible and unwilling to reveal a set of specific laws and practices.

Key Points

Biblical Authority

- Theonomous ethics is the idea that all ethics and morality are determined by God.
- For some Christians, especially in the Protestant tradition, this is best exemplified by the sola scriptura approach to Christian morality, with the Bible being the supreme authority in faith and practice.
 - Biblical laws, such as the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17, should be followed.
 - The writers of the Bible should not be seen as authors, but rather scribes who have recorded what God has commanded or told. This is also known as amanuensis.
 - Scripture, therefore, is self-authenticating and does not require interpretation. The meaning is able to infer the meaning clearly from the text itself.

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- Passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16, which states: 'All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that one may attain to maturity, being full of good works, and of the fruit of the Spirit, which are love, peace, and gentleness; against such things the good fight is fought, and such things as these are the goal of our combat, that we may attain to life everlasting.' support such a position.

Strengths of Sola Scriptura

- Taking Scripture as being inerrant offers clear guidance on moral matters and their actions being right in difficult ethical dilemmas.
- Mouw makes the point that if love is the only guiding principle then scripture provides instruction on a number of other important practices, so one stays between biblical revelation and ethical affairs in any human life.
 - It is equally important to note, on the other hand, that not all of the Bible is equally clear. Taking scripture to be inerrant does not mean replicating it wholly without obeying the important commandments.

Criticisms of Sola Scriptura

- Theologians have criticised this approach by pointing at the impossible task of reading the Bible without bias creeping in. All interpretation naturally happens in line with each person's own experience, there is no completely objective way of reading any text.
- Others have pointed to the different styles of writing in the Bible. Although the Gospels present accounts of Jesus's life, they vary greatly in tone. John, for example, presents a greatly mystical depiction of Jesus and his life, while Matthew is more concerned with how Jesus's life fits in with Jewish scripture and culture.
 - A similar issue can also be seen in how the Bible possesses its own internal conflicts. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus seems to present an overturning of Old Testament commandments, making it impossible for Christians to effectively follow them.
 - Similarly, there are many rules and practices in the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, not planting two crops in the same field in Leviticus 19:19, or not wearing mixed fabrics in Leviticus 19:19.
 - Jesus at times also warns against blindly following tradition, exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount. This is an indication that the Bible should not be approached as inerrant but rather as a guide to one's own conscience, reason and ethical insight.
 - Lastly, many have pointed out that the Bible is not very helpful or clear on many modern ethical issues, from nuclear weapons to IVF. Therefore, following scripture alone isn't enough, reason is required to interpret and apply scripture to technological developments in the modern world.

The Hermeneutical Circle

- The hermeneutical circle is a concept originally developed by the theologian Hans-Georg Gadamer. He puts forward that one's interpretation of a text is never-ending and circular.
 - In understanding the meaning of the Bible, one has to first read the passage and how it functions within the sentence or paragraph.
 - From there one can place the passage within the overall meaning of the Bible and how that meaning to one's life.
 - This process happens continually, as one's understanding of the text of the Bible bringing new meaning and interpretations to the fore.
 - This approach is often contrasted and set against the concept of the Bible as self-authenticating. If there can never be a fixed interpretation or meaning to a text then it cannot be self-authenticating.

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Key Figures

Karl Barth

- Barth warned against regarding scripture as inerrant, despite giving it huge importance.
- God's Word cannot fully be captured in any human language, meaning that the Bible cannot fully represent his message.
- As such, giving the Bible an elevated, divine status is equivalent to bibliolatry, which is regarded as divine.
- The Bible instead is a witness to the words and accounts of people who have experienced the self-revelation of God.

Key Texts

2 Peter 1:20–21

- This passage is often used to support a literal interpretation of the Bible.
 - The key part is the affirmation that 'No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation' (NRSV), which implies there is a distinct meaning behind each passage.
 - However, this may also be seen as arguing that one person's interpretation is the only valid one, the meaning of any prophecy, pointing towards the inability of human beings to determine purpose or actions.

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Scriptural Reasoning

To what extent does one's biblical approach influence how one could engage in inter-faith dialogue?

Would a commitment to sola scriptura prohibit sharing of truth between religions, or would it just encourage religions to clearly share their differences with Christianity when appropriate?

Feminist Theology

Does an overreliance on biblical ethics possibly contribute to patriarchal influences upon Christianity, especially considering their primarily male authorship? Is there any way of reconciling an approach of sola scriptura with a more egalitarian approach to gender in theology?

What are the implications of this for the role of women in the church?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
What are the different ways in which the Bible is interpreted and authoritative in Christian tradition?	
What is theonomous ethics?	
Why might some Christians identify the Bible as the only source of ethics?	
Is there any way of reading the Bible that does not involve personal interpretation in some manner?	
What are the strengths of a sola scriptura approach to Christianity?	
Why might the internal conflicts in ethical practice be evidence against a sola scriptura approach?	
Does Jesus himself oppose blind faith in scripture and tradition as identified in the Pharisees?	
How might one resolve differences in ethics between the Old Testament and the New Testament from a Christian perspective?	
What is the hermeneutical circle and what is its role in interpreting the Bible?	
What issues may there be with a hermeneutical approach to scripture?	
How does Karl Barth warn against bibliolatry?	
(Year 2) How does an overemphasis on the Bible as a source of truth possibly encourage sexism within Christianity?	
(Year 2) Does scriptural reasoning and inter-faith dialogue require a particular approach to biblical ethics?	

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The Church and Reason in Christianity

Overview

Most Christian denominations look further than the Bible for guidance. As the Church grew, it was pointed out that much of the New Testament was written after Jesus's death and his teachings were passed down through the small Christian community. Therefore the Church and many came to regard the Church as the living expression of Jesus's mission and Christ himself.

This means that the Church becomes a source of revelation for many, providing and cultivating traditions that allow individuals to become closer to God and salvation. The Church is linked to the belief that interpretation of scripture can never be complete. The Church contains important insights contained in its historical context, which the Church seeks to preserve as human beings and culture develop through time.

This continued interpretation is practised in many different ways. Many churches develop up new ideas and developments on Christian doctrine, while identifying core rituals and practices for churchgoers, so that Christians may connect to the revelations and experiences of Jesus and his message.

Key Points

Denominational Approaches to the Church and Tradition

- Different Christian denominations approach the Church and its authority differently.
 - The Catholic Church gives sacred tradition equivalent authority to the Bible. It believes that it comes from Jesus himself and a continuing function of the Holy Spirit. The Church provides a summary of many of the traditions and doctrines in its history. It holds Church Councils and provides moral guidance on many different moral issues.
 - The Anglican Church, on the other hand, maintains the primacy of the Bible. It sees tradition instead as an important and continuing debate on how to apply the Bible through shifting times and circumstances.

The Magisterium

- An important part of the Catholic Church's understanding of sacred tradition is the Magisterium; the wisdom of the Pope, bishops and Church Councils.
 - These are the centre of ethical decision-making in the Catholic Church and provide unambiguous moral guidance for ordinary Catholics.
 - The importance of conscience is still stressed, with sacred tradition and the Bible guiding choices, but declarations by the Magisterium, such as the Catechism, are seen as important sources of authority in any Catholic's life.

Reason in Christian Ethics

- The value of reason and rationality has changed over time. Whereas, during the Middle Ages, reason was seen as an objective source of information, modern-day perspectives tend to be more subjective, conditioned by one's own culture and circumstances.
 - Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, notes how rationality is always developed within a tradition. There can be as many forms of reason as there are traditions.
- However, reason is often still seen as necessary in Christian ethics as a bridge between the Bible and one's present-day ethical dilemmas and circumstances.
 - How one arrives at a decision in any situation depends on how one uses the Bible and teachings from the Bible and sacred tradition.
 - However, many churches provide their own doctrines on current social issues. Church leaders and councils using reason and interpretation of the Bible.
 - Approaches from reason can be collective as well as personal, with people coming to their own moral conclusions. One example is the Quakers who refused to fight in the army during wartime.

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Natural Law

- In the Catholic tradition, ethical principles can be found in the natural world, reason and conscience, which when examined together can be described as natural law.
 - This is based on the idea that as God created the world and each living thing to have a purpose, how one should act can be derived from an analysis of one's purpose as a human being.
 - Thomas Aquinas is responsible for developing a lot of the natural law within the Catholic Church and he argued that reason is the primary characteristic that distinguishes human beings from animals. This reason allows human beings to understand the will of God as well as grow and learn from their knowledge of the world around themselves as created by God.
 - In particular, he argued that reason can be embodied in primary precepts that apply to all living beings, the most universal precept being that 'Good is to be sought, evil avoided'.
 - Natural law, therefore, provides guiding principles in ethical and purpose for Christians. Analysis of primary precepts such as self-preservation can help understand why acts such as suicide contradict the will of God.

Criticisms of the Church and Reason

- There can be seen to be a conflict between Jesus's teachings in the Gospels, the traditions of the Jewish elders and Pharisees, and the equal authority of sacred tradition. For example, Jesus directly equates the Pharisees' traditions with transgression.
 - These contradictions can be seen to underlie Protestant suspicion of Catholicism to sacred tradition, which has been seen at times to conflict with Luther's call for reformation, for example, partly came out of the abuse of Church authorities' own gain.
 - Tradition is arguably also susceptible to bias, especially if the opinions of women's experiences are excluded. Rosemary Radford Ruether, the feminist theologian, argues that Christian tradition as it is shaped almost completely by male perspectives from women's experiences are excluded.

Key Figures

Stanley Hauerwas

- Hauerwas is a well-known American theologian who wrote extensively under the influence of his Christian faith.
- This emphasised greatly the importance of the Christian community and Hauerwas argued that ethics can only be understood within the narrative and situation of Christianity.
- In contrast to the individualism emphasised by many secular approaches to ethics, he argued that moral values can only be credibly formed as the response of a community to ethical issues, and communities must face new challenges and dilemmas.
- One example he gives is Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, which he argued that the values of Judaism, are only illuminated when understood in the context of the communities of the time.

Key Texts

Catechism of the Catholic Church

- The Catechism is a summary of the doctrines of the Catholic Church and provides guidance for ordinary Catholics in their everyday lives.
 - One important point it reinforces is the importance of the Church. In paragraph 816, it states 'To the church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce the Gospel in relation to all questions related to salvation and reinforces the authority of the church in evaluating ethical issues within the Catholic faith.'

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Exclusivism/Pluralism Does considering natural law, the Church and the context of early Christian belief push Christianity towards being inclusivist, or is there a way to reconcile these doctrines with Jesus being the only path to salvation?	Feminist Theology How might natural law lead to patriarchal attitudes about human nature becoming ingrained in Christian thought? Could beliefs about the purpose and nature of women be linked to this thought rather than to revelation from Jesus himself? If so, could Christianity survive without natural law as an ethical system?	Sec nat con arg ess pur one Is na form or is pur
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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹
How has the Church influenced Christian thought and what justification is given for reason playing an important part in interpreting Jesus's ministry?	
How have the Anglican and Catholic Churches differed in their approach in giving authority to the Church over scriptural insight?	
What is the importance of the Magisterium in generating new doctrine?	
What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church assert regarding the Church and reason as sources of authority and knowledge?	
Why do many Christians regard reason as an important source of insight into ethics?	
What issues might arise when relying on reason as a source of ethical knowledge?	
How might reason differ between personal and collective use?	
What role does natural law play in the Catholic tradition?	
How did Aquinas develop universal ethical principles based on natural law?	
What authority should reason be given within Christian thought?	
What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of using reason to evaluate Christian teaching?	
How does Hauerwas's approach focusing on narrative, community and history differ from Christian traditions about reason?	
(Year 2) Does feminist criticism of Christian beliefs undermine the truths potentially gained from reason and natural law?	
(Year 2) Is theological truth from reason and natural law capable of being reconciled with Christianity being an exclusivist religion?	

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Agape in Christian Ethics

Overview

Agape has long played a huge part in Christian ethics, as springing from the commandments in Mark 12:28–31 to 'Love the Lord thy God' and 'love thy neighbour as yourself'. What is emphasised is the self-sacrifice involved in agape love, as displayed in God's sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Therefore, when agape is mentioned within the framework of ethics, the demands it makes of human life and action are often stressed more than anything else.

The all-encompassing nature of agape has led some modern theologians to identify it as a guiding principle in Christians' lives. Reinhold Niebuhr, a famous American theologian, distinguished between orthodox Christianity, which emphasised morality as tradition or law, and later Protestantism, which saw agape as an ideal within the moral interactions of all humankind. In this ideal, the complications about how moral laws might fit in with agape as an ideal, if laws are seen as such an unconditional principle. Nevertheless, others have stressed the importance of an emphasis on agape love brings. Rather than people simply following the traditions, beings grow and come of age in their moral improvement and act in line with Christianity as a result.

Key Points

Agape in the New Testament

- Throughout the Bible, numerous references are made to the importance of love, and it persists as a central theme and guiding force behind moral action, opposed to the Jewish elders and Pharisees as depicted in the Gospels.
 - In Matthew 5:43–46, Jesus, in contrast to the Old Testament instruction to love your enemies. This particularly emphasises the sacrificial nature of Christianity.
 - In 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, one of the most well-known passages in the New Testament, Paul elaborates on the Christian ideal of love, while comparing it as eternal, pure, and knowledge, prophecy, language and knowledge.

Justice, Love and Wisdom

- Three ethical norms to govern Christianity were suggested by the theologian Paul Tillich, being love guided by justice and wisdom.
 - For Tillich, all the different forms of love, from friendship to sexual, were part of agape, and that beyond traditional, puritanical conceptions of Christianity, moral thinking should instead concern itself with one's relations to others in the most loving way in any situation.
 - Rather, therefore, than the Church or Bible holding the ultimate authority, the human intellect should be consulted, with agape as the motivating factor behind the process, to be subject to this ethical process and adjusted or rejected at times when necessary.

Is Agape the Only Guiding Principle?

- Some theologians have criticised relying on agape within moral decisions as being too narrow or vague a concept to apply to everyday ethical dilemmas.
 - It is possible to point to the fallible nature of man. It could be very possible that a Christian could act, thinking they are doing so out of love, when in fact they might be breaking rules for distorted or selfish reasons.
 - Others argue that, if love can determine all moral actions, then Christian ethics is reduced to secular ethics and God's word or will becomes little more than a religious curiosity.
 - One can also look at other fundamental concepts in the Bible, such as the Kingdom of God and redemption, arguing that these are important in influencing how ethics is practised. The idea of abstract love, on the other hand, has little content in the context of how

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- The theologian Richard Mouw makes the important point that, simply put, love is not a commandment. The commandments are not commandments on other important theological matters. If the commandments are not commandments, then the question behind understanding why love should be the primary moral principle is not why love should be the primary moral principle if the commandments are not commandments considered in the same way?

Key Figures

Joseph Fletcher

- Fletcher is a liberal Protestant theologian who in the 1960s developed a radical form of Christianity that focused on the maximising of agape love as its primary goal.
 - In particular he argued there were no strictly or objectively good or bad decisions. A decision is only good or bad depending on the context or situation it is made in.
 - This was termed Situation Ethics and commanded those following that the person should aim to make the most loving decision possible.
 - He argued this is justified by the figure of Christ in the Gospels, who, in his life and death, embodied the legalistic moral thinking of figures such as the Pharisees and emphasized judgemental and loving morality above all else.
 - He proposed four working principles to govern moral action: Pragmatism, Relativism, Focalism and Personalism.

Key Texts

John 15:12–13

Here Jesus states that the only command he has towards humanity is that they love each other as he has towards them. From this authoritative statement, it is argued that love is the central Christian principle governing all moral actions. It also identifies it involving 'greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (NRSV).

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

One of St Paul's most famous passages, it details the virtues of the kind of love Christians are called to. It describes agape as encompassing aspects of human hope and endurance. From this passage, love is identified as the virtue and moral action love as the motivating factor, expanding this into a Christian context of love on agape.

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Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

<p>Liberation Theology</p> <p>Is regarding love as the sole guiding ethical principle enough to lead to real change for those who are poor and marginalised, or does there need to be a greater emphasis on the structures of inequality and injustice?</p> <p>Consider whether Fletcher's or Tillich's conceptions of justice are wide-ranging and pertinent enough to be adopted within the context of liberation theology.</p>	<p>Feminist Theology</p> <p>Does regarding ethics as love ignore the patriarchal or sexist elements of Christianity, or allow for a new ethical Christian theory that promotes gender equality?</p> <p>Consider situation ethics and whether the idea of love will inevitably be misconstrued by male power structures in the Church and whether there can ever be a neutral conception of love in human psychology that does not involve gender.</p>	<p>Is regarding love as the sole guiding ethical principle enough to lead to real change for those who are poor and marginalised, or does there need to be a greater emphasis on the structures of inequality and injustice?</p> <p>Consider whether Fletcher's or Tillich's conceptions of justice are wide-ranging and pertinent enough to be adopted within the context of liberation theology.</p> <p>Does regarding ethics as love ignore the patriarchal or sexist elements of Christianity, or allow for a new ethical Christian theory that promotes gender equality?</p> <p>Consider situation ethics and whether the idea of love will inevitably be misconstrued by male power structures in the Church and whether there can ever be a neutral conception of love in human psychology that does not involve gender.</p>
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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹️
How did Fletcher propose agape love to be capable of the sole guiding principle within a Christian moral system? What biblical evidence is there for this?	
Why does Tillich argue that wisdom is the backbone of the Christian principle of agape?	
What role does justice have in guiding decisions based on agape love?	
Why have some theologians criticised the idea of agape as not being effectively action-guiding?	
Is situation ethics, relying on agape to guide conduct, effectively a form of secular ethics?	
Why does Mouw argue other God-given commandments might have a role to play in Christian ethics beyond love?	
How does eschatology influence Christian ethics and what relation does this have to ethics based on agape?	
(Year 2) Can liberation theology successfully adopt a Christian ethic based only on love, or are broader notions of justice more important?	
(Year 2) Has the Christian principle of agape been applied universally? Or in practice has it only been applied to other Christians?	

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Practice Exam-style Question

5. 'Church tradition has an essential part to play in developing Christian ethics'

HINTS

In your answer you should:

show a consistent knowledge and understanding of the different ways Christians develop Christian ethics, including:

- the significance of the Bible, Church and reason in the development of Christian ethics
- the reasons why theologians disagree about the way Christian ethics are decided upon
- different perspectives and approaches to the question of whether there should be Christian ethical practices other than the Bible

Analyse and evaluate different approaches to the questions surrounding Church tradition and ethics, and consider the arguments there may be for giving Church tradition a role in deciding upon Christian ethics

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Christian Moral Action

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The Confessing Church	A movement of German Protestants that opposed the Protestant churches in support of Nazi ideals.
Civil Disobedience	A symbolic process of opposing a government's laws.
Visible Community	The importance of the Church for Bonhoeffer in being a community but also in politics and other social issues.
Finkenwalde	An illegal seminary directed by Bonhoeffer between 1934 and 1935 to train pastors and put the principles of the Confessing Church into practice.
'No Rusty Swords'	Bonhoeffer's call to the Church to continually be active in the world.
Cheap Grace	Grace without discipleship, the easy route of Christianity that neither reflected Christ's command nor embodied his teachings.
Costly Grace	The difficult path of true Christian discipleship that involves sacrifice.
'The Church and the Jewish Question'	A 1933 essay by Bonhoeffer addressing the problems the Church faced under Nazi rule and how they should act towards Jewish people.
Discipleship	Bonhoeffer's 1937 book that focuses on how Christian demands placed upon them by Christianity.
Letters and Papers from Prison	Bonhoeffer's final selection of letters and works from his time in prison in 1944.
Barmen Declaration	A 1934 theological document that rejected the idea that the state was God and became the focal point for the Confessing Church.
Solidarity	A moral commitment to stand up alongside those who are oppressed.

The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Overview

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the most prominent theologians of the 20th century. He was a Christian who thought and as an example of how Christian moral principles should be put into practice. His Christian theology that should be altogether radical in challenging the State and traditional Christianity, which historically has regarded obedience to the State as a duty. His concept of civil disobedience sprang from a reinterpretation of Luther, who was typically obedient to the State and State as equivalent in many ways, as well as a resistance to much of the Nazi ideology growing in influence in Germany in the run-up to World War II.

Bonhoeffer rejected Nazi beliefs and ethics and as a founding member of the Confessing Church and protested against many of their practices. He argued particularly that the Church should be a system of support for people, but also a place to assist with spiritual discipline in the world. It was primarily an ethic placing others first before the self. The Church should therefore be about performing rituals and rites, or comfortable adherence to a set of theological beliefs, but about with playing an active part in shaping the ethical environment of the world it ended.

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Key Points

Background

- Bonhoeffer lived through the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party and during a time when the Christian Church was thrust into crisis through some Protestant churches merging with politics and anthropology.
 - Others, however, stood against such attempts to incorporate Nazi ideology. The Confessing Church was formed in an attempt to keep Christianity authentic and free from political ideals of the Nazi Party. Bonhoeffer, on 1st February 1933, delivered a sermon on authentic Christianity with a radio broadcast titled 'The Younger Generation and the Concept of the Führer', which was heavily critical of the Nazi Party and its policies.
 - These activities brought Bonhoeffer into conflict with the State. However, and as the prospect of war began to loom over Europe, he resolved to stay in Germany. His brother helped him avoid arrest for his political stance by passing on information to German military intelligence, but during the war he regularly fed back information to the resistance.
 - On 5th April 1943, he was arrested and imprisoned for helping Jewish people. However, he was later identified as playing a part in the 20th July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, which led to him being moved in February 1945 to Flossenbürg concentration camp. He was executed on 4th April 1945, shortly before the area was liberated by the approaching American forces.

Obedience and Leadership

- Bonhoeffer saw within the call to discipleship a complete obedience only to Christ, rather than from a rational evaluation and Bonhoeffer even discredits the idea that Christians should be obedient to the State. Rather, it is concerned fundamentally with the surrendering of one's will to God.
 - Life therefore for a Christian cannot be concerned with what one finds to be reasonable or conscionable. One's duty to God is not a convenience or a choice. 'Obedience', as Bonhoeffer describes it, is the only true act of faith.
 - This means one has no obligation to the State that rests outside of one's faith.

Civil Disobedience

- If Christians are only required to serve God then any ideal propagated by the State that contradicts the will of God should be resisted. Bonhoeffer effectively argues that civil disobedience is acceptable where the ethics and will of the Christian God would be contradicted.
 - This is a break from many of the traditional Lutheran ideals that saw the State as a necessary part of the same coin, particularly from Romans 13:1–7, which states that people should submit to the governing authority as it has been instituted by God. However, it was clear to Bonhoeffer that Christianity was required to be a separate entity from the State.
 - Christians, as affirmed by the will of God, are required to stand up to injustice. In the case where a state is unfairly persecuting people it is a moral requirement of any Christian to disobey and stand up against such acts.
 - This endorsement of civil disobedience can be seen in Bonhoeffer's own life. He lost his job for speaking out against the Nazi party, but equally also criticised the Confessing Church for not doing enough to help Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.



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The Confessing Church

- Bonhoeffer stressed the importance of the Church as a 'visible community'. It should not only be a source of spiritual discipline to Christians, but also act as a sign or light to the world.
- This formed part of the principles of the Confessing Church, set up as an authority to oppose the Nazi-aligned Protestant churches during the 1930s. In 1934, it released the Barmen, which asserted the importance and centrality of Jesus Christ and denied the church to possess authority.
 - One particularly important principle of the Confessing Church was the refusal to take the oath towards Hitler, which was required of the military and civil service. This principle ended up costing Karl Barth his professorship.
 - Bonhoeffer, at the request of the leaders, led and directed a secret seminary at Finkenwalde until it was shut down by the Nazi government in 1937.
 - Its main function was to train new pastors, free of Nazi influence. Bonhoeffer viewed the Church as a challenging of nationalist ideologies and a commitment to spiritual discipline, Bible study, meditation and brotherhood.
 - This arguably follows Jesus's teaching in Luke 10:38–42 to Martha, who was being absorbed in her spiritual life. Here the tasks of Martha are distracted by her material concerns, and the seminary at Finkenwalde is potentially Bonhoeffer's response to these important tasks in the face of social and political difficulties in the outside world, as emphasising the importance of costly grace – one must commit to discipleship and not be concerned with one's own material circumstances.
- Bonhoeffer viewed the ideal Church as being a place of refuge for those who were being persecuted, and a lack of action for this ideal led to his eventual dissatisfaction with the Confessing Church.
 - One turning point was at a synod meeting where the Confessing Church refused to oppose as a matter of course the requirement for pastors to take the civil oath. This, combined with what he perceived to be a reluctance to speak up on behalf of persecuted Jewish people, led to Bonhoeffer feeling the Church was avoiding its Christian responsibilities.
 - This disillusionment formed from his argument that there should be 'no rusty swords' in the Christian Church. Where there was injustice, the Church is required to speak out and take action.
- In his final letters while in prison in 1944, Bonhoeffer questions the place of religion in an increasingly secular world. While his ideas contained weren't elaborate, they reflected his disillusionment with the still practising Christian church during the Nazi regime.
 - He ponders in particular the possibility of a 'religionless Christianity', where secular people participating in the sufferings of God without the trap of religious ritual.
 - This holds similarities to Barth's view that religion is a human construction, and that the utmost faith in Christ. Bonhoeffer debates what he perceives to be the difference between those who can declare themselves 'religious' yet display none of its requirements, and those who can declare themselves 'religious' yet display none of its requirements, therefore, whether religion itself is metaphysically meaningless or whether it is meaningful in the modern world.

Cheap and Costly Grace

- Bonhoeffer's views on discipleship led to him dividing between the ideas of cheap and costly grace.
 - He argued Christians should look to the latter, costly grace, as authentic Christianity. There should be the expectation of struggle and hardship. It requires changes to their life and cannot be simply a case of quietly following a set of rules.
 - On the other hand, cheap grace is the comfortable, unchallenging form of Christianity. It is not truly committed to discipleship. Sins are forgiven without struggle. Many church practitioners believe that simply having faith in Jesus and going through the motions of church means that they will get into heaven. Bonhoeffer believed this devalues not only the death of Christ for humanity's sin, but also denies the need for repentance and transformation.

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Sacrifice, Suffering and Solidarity

- Bonhoeffer's ideas about cheap and costly grace are linked to the notion that Christians should focus on others. True discipleship means being in existence for others and only when one places the importance of one's neighbours above oneself.
 - He links discipleship to the Passion. Just how Jesus suffered and sacrificed, Christians are expected to do the same, taking on the guilt of the world.
 - This connects to Bonhoeffer's idea of solidarity. The Christian lives in solidarity and becomes an experience of transcendence with God himself.
 - These ideas can be seen in his 1933 essay, 'The Church and the Jewish Question'. The Church is obligated to fight against the injustice towards Jewish people, even the persecution.

Issues in Bonhoeffer's Theology

- Some have viewed Bonhoeffer's theology as placing too much emphasis on suffering, which is relevant during Nazi rule, but during peaceful times it may well be excessive to focus on the behalf of others. However, others identify his ideas about solidarity to be more relevant. Existence for others as a path to peace and justice rather than conflict.
- Others have found issue with Bonhoeffer's writings on civil disobedience. In times when clearly unjust acts were taking place, it is easy to endorse civil resistance, but in times of euthanasia, where the true good is more difficult to determine, it may be too difficult to know when to disobey or resist the State in their lives and actions.
- One final difficulty is how to reconcile Bonhoeffer's idea of discipleship with the uncertainty of knowing the will of God. If it is possible that human beings might interpret God's will through the Bible or personal revelation, then it is possible that Bonhoeffer's ideas could be used to act violently or irresponsibly on behalf of God. Despite this issue, many view his ideas of community and discipline as essential to erasing these fringe cases. This difficulty highlights the idea of religion as a personal crusade and ignores the part the Church has to play in regulating, the actions of ordinary Christians.

The Relevancy of Bonhoeffer's Theology Today

- Some theologians have viewed Bonhoeffer's ideas as a more extreme response to the World War II, and as such have argued his calls for strict discipleship no longer apply outside of this context.
 - However, others argue that the continued suffering of many poor and oppressed in the world means Bonhoeffer's ideas still carry weight. Modern capitalism, with its reinforcing material inequality, can be seen to work through unjust means that Bonhoeffer's theology would oppose.
 - Similarly, the overextending of many states' powers, both domestically and internationally, means Bonhoeffer's teachings can still hold contextual relevancy on issues of power and justice.
 - Therefore his message of solidarity may well be timeless and, although there is pressure to modernise and adapt to modern moral values, it is still possible that the presence of injustice and over-extension of political power in the world validate his ideas for Christianity and the world.

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Key Texts

Discipleship

- Bonhoeffer's 1937 book is focused around the Sermon on the Mount and speaks of what it truly involves to follow Christ.
- He also details how the Church, in attempting to match the demands of modern society, has become secularised and in doing so placed cheap ritual over real obedience to Christ.
- It contains Bonhoeffer's meditations on the Beatitudes, which he saw as aimed at the Christian sermon and that, while they are often seen as an unattainable ideal, in fact that is how Christians should live. Obedience to Christ means denying oneself and taking up the cross.

Year 2 – Advanced Considerations

Liberation Theology

Does Bonhoeffer's theology, in committing to strict Christian moral principles and ideas about costly grace, have parallels to the socio-economic and moral arguments of liberation theology?

Consider whether Bonhoeffer, with his strict emphasis on committed discipleship and opposition to unjust political systems, could find favour in the socialist and Marxist theories behind thinkers such as Gutierrez.

Exclusivism/Inclusivism

Is Bonhoeffer's theology, with its unyielding emphasis on obedience to God and revelation through Christ, exclusivist in nature?

Could a Christian following Bonhoeffer's thought naturally find themselves in conflict with other religions and their different belief systems?

Or does Bonhoeffer's commitment to helping Jewish people under the Nazis demonstrate an inclusivity in his theology?

Consider whether Bonhoeffer's theology, with its unyielding emphasis on obedience to God and revelation through Christ, exclusivist in nature? Could a Christian following Bonhoeffer's thought naturally find themselves in conflict with other religions and their different belief systems? Or does Bonhoeffer's commitment to helping Jewish people under the Nazis demonstrate an inclusivity in his theology?

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Student Checklist

What Do I Know?	No Idea ☹
What is the background to Bonhoeffer's life and struggle against the Nazi party?	
Why did Bonhoeffer stress that human beings should only be obedient to God and not any political state or party?	
How did Bonhoeffer resist and oppose the Nazi party before the beginning of World War II?	
How does Bonhoeffer's theology allow for civil disobedience by committed Christians?	
What role did Bonhoeffer play in the Confessing Church?	
What was the purpose of the seminary that Bonhoeffer set up at Finkenwalde?	
What is the difference between cheap and costly grace?	
Why did Bonhoeffer place such a great emphasis on suffering, sacrifice and solidarity?	
How is committed discipleship important in Bonhoeffer's theology?	
In what way did Bonhoeffer in his letters ponder the existence of a 'religionless Christianity'?	
What issues are there potentially in Bonhoeffer's theology surrounding civil disobedience, suffering and discipline?	
Why have some theologians argued Bonhoeffer's theology is not relevant outside of the political circumstances it was developed within?	
(Year 2) What parallels are there potentially with liberation theology and Bonhoeffer?	
(Year 2) How does Bonhoeffer's 'religionless Christianity' possibly support secularist arguments?	

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Practice Exam-style Question

6. Critically assess whether Bonhoeffer's theology is still relevant in present-day Christianity.

HINTS

In your answer you should:

show a consistent knowledge and understanding of Bonhoeffer's theology and

- the significance of obedience to God, and why Christians should prioritise this
- the reasons why theologians disagree about whether Bonhoeffer's theology is applicable to modern-day theological issues
- different perspectives and approaches to the question of whether Bonhoeffer's theology is more than a historical relic

Analyse and evaluate different approaches to the questions surrounding Bonhoeffer's theology, and give reasons there may be to believe the issues he was addressing during his life are still relevant today.

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Mark Schemes

Levels of Response (AS Level)

Level	Levels of Response (AO1)
5 (13–15 marks)	The student's answer will display very good knowledge and understanding of the question, and contain a great amount of applicable content applied with a deep understanding of the relevant issues with very good breadth or depth. There will be a good use of technical language and substantial references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
4 (10–12 marks)	The student's answer will display good knowledge and understanding of the question, and contain a good amount of applicable content generally showing on the whole a solid understanding of the relevant issues with more than a fair amount of technical language and a good number of references to scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
3 (7–9 marks)	The student's answer will display adequate knowledge and understanding of the question, contain a fair amount of applicable content and show a general understanding of the relevant issues, though without depth or breadth. There will be some technical language and a number of references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
2 (4–6 marks)	The student's answer will display a rudimentary knowledge and understanding of the question, contain some applicable content and show a limited understanding of the relevant issues. There will be some technical language and a few references to scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
1 (1–3 marks)	The student's answer will display a poor knowledge and understanding of the question, disregard the question, contain little applicable content and show a very limited understanding of the relevant issues. There will be minimal technical language and very few references to scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.

Level	Levels of Response (AO2)
5 (13–15 marks)	The student's answer will give a very good analysis and evaluation. It will contain a predominantly persuasive and coherent argument, with well-developed views presented, and will fully and skilfully answer the question. There will be a good use of technical language and substantial references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom which enhance the answer.
4 (10–12 marks)	The student's answer will give a good analysis and evaluation. It will have to give a coherent argument, with some well-developed justification and evidence presented, and will pertinently address the question. There will be a moderate use of technical language and a good number of references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom which enhance the argument.
3 (7–9 marks)	The student's answer will give an adequate analysis and evaluation. It will show some successful efforts to give a coherent argument, though it will lack full justification and evidence presented, and will generally address the question. There will be some technical language and an adequate number of partly effective references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
2 (4–6 marks)	The student's answer will give a rudimentary analysis and evaluation. It will show unsuccessful efforts to give a coherent argument, but with minimal justification and evidence presented, and will only partly address the question. There will be some technical language and ineffective references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
1 (1–3 marks)	The student's answer will give a poor analysis and evaluation. It will have to give a coherent argument, lack justification and evidence for the views presented, and will not address the question. There will be minimal technical language and very few, if any, references to scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.

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Levels of Response (A Level)

Level	Levels of Response (AO1)
6 (14–16 marks)	The student's answer will display excellent knowledge and understanding, strong and nuanced focus on the question, and will contain a pertinent and applicable content applied with flair. It will show a very detailed understanding of the relevant issues with comprehensive breadth and depth. There will be a rigorous use of technical language and substantial references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
5 (11–13 marks)	The student's answer will display very good knowledge and understanding of the question, and will contain a great amount of applicable content applied with a good understanding of the relevant issues with very good breadth or depth. There will be a good use of technical language and substantial references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
4 (8–10 marks)	The student's answer will display good knowledge and understanding of the question, and will contain a good amount of applicable content generally showing on the whole a solid understanding of the relevant issues with moderate use of technical language and a good number of references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
3 (5–7 marks)	The student's answer will display adequate knowledge and understanding of the question, contain a fair amount of applicable content and show a general understanding of the relevant issues, though without depth or breadth. There will be some technical language and a number of references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
2 (3–4 marks)	The student's answer will display a rudimentary knowledge and understanding of the question, contain some applicable content and show a limited understanding of the relevant issues. There will be some technical language and a few references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
1 (1–2 marks)	The student's answer will display a poor knowledge and understanding of the question, disregard the question, contain little applicable content and show a very limited understanding of the relevant issues. There will be minimal technical language and very few references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.

Level	Levels of Response (AO2)
6 (21–24 marks)	The student's answer will give an excellent analysis and evaluation. It will contain a persuasive and coherent argument, with clear, well-developed and independent views presented, and will thoroughly and skilfully answer the question. There will be an extensive use of technical language and significant and substantial references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom which enhance the answer.
5 (17–20 marks)	The student's answer will give a very good analysis and evaluation. It will contain a predominantly persuasive and coherent argument, with well-developed views presented, and will fully and skilfully answer the question. There will be a good use of technical language and substantial references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom which enhance the answer.
4 (13–16 marks)	The student's answer will give a good analysis and evaluation. It will have to give a coherent argument, with some well-developed justification and views presented, and will pertinently address the question. There will be a moderate use of technical language and a good number of references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom which enhance the argument.
3 (9–12 marks)	The student's answer will give an adequate analysis and evaluation. It will show some efforts to give a coherent argument, though it will lack full justification and views presented, and will generally address the question. There will be some technical language and an adequate number of partly effective references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
2 (5–8 marks)	The student's answer will give a rudimentary analysis and evaluation. It will show unsuccessful efforts to give a coherent argument, but with minimal justification and views presented, and will only partly address the question. There will be some technical language and ineffective references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.
1 (1–4 marks)	The student's answer will give a poor analysis and evaluation. It will have no coherent argument, lack justification and evidence for the views presented, and will not address the question. There will be minimal technical language and very few, if any, references to appropriate scholars, academic opinions or sources of wisdom.

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Indicative Content

1. 'Augustine presents an overly pessimistic view of human nature.' D

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Augustine uses the Bible to justify his beliefs about original sin, using Genesis's description of the Fall to identify human nature as ontologically corrupt and sinful.
- This sinful nature of human beings is reflected in both their individual actions and the violence, corruption and indecency that plague human societies.
- Human nature as wounded is subject to **concupiscence**, and the weakness of the flesh prevents human beings from being consistently morally good.
- Pre-Fall the body, the source of concupiscence, was in harmony with the soul, but after the Fall lost control and became divided.
- Human beings after the Fall lost the balance between love directed towards God (**caritas**) and love directed towards material, temporal things (**cupiditas**).
- Each human being is therefore focused on the material world, and this is the result of the Fall and original sin. This leads to human beings sinning because they are selfish and seeking their own material pleasure above all else.
- Original sin is passed down through intercourse, meaning each newborn individual carries original sin as part of their human nature.
- Augustine views original sin as a negative thing, but also as a simple theological concept that should be grateful for the possibility of salvation in God at all so Christian doctrine is positive.
- Humanists argue Augustine is unfairly pessimistic, arguing that human beings have the potential to be moral genetically, possessing knowledge or intuitive understanding of good.
- Thinkers such as Sartre argue Augustine is both pessimistic and wrong, as human beings have essence/nature, instead only the radical freedom of existence.

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Augustine is too pessimistic, wrong or unconvincing:

- There is little to no scientific or historical evidence for the Fall, or for human beings having an ontological affliction of original sin as part of their human nature (evolutionary biology).
- There have been general moral improvements throughout the history of human societies. Practices in Augustine's era, such as slavery, are less practised now.
- There is greater evidence to suggest human beings are shaped by their environment. Philosophers such as Rousseau contend human beings are good in a state of nature.
- Augustine's view downplays the importance of free will (Pelagius). If human beings are automatically going to be sinful, and God predestines who will be saved, then free will is irrelevant. Augustine may present a fatalistic view of human nature.

Augustine is not pessimistic, or should be interpreted differently:

- History has shown, both in societies and individuals, that people naturally tend to act in their own interests (war, slavery, etc.).
- Original sin does not have to be a description of all human nature, but the way human beings psychologically tend to be selfish and act in their own interests above others.
- It is not pessimistic to simply analyse human behaviour. Augustine is simply describing the way human beings behave.
- Human beings have built political authorities on purpose to control the worst of human and immoral human behaviour, not to let human beings exist in a state of nature.
- There are potentially genetic origins to human beings acting selfishly or immorally. The environment may play a factor. There is less freedom to act morally than human beings have.

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2. Assess whether Christian concepts of the afterlife should be viewed as spiritual life.

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Heaven, hell and purgatory often, throughout Christian history, have been viewed as places or realms of punishment and reward depending on whether a person has committed mortal or venial sins without remorse.
- Key biblical passages such as Matthew 25:31–46 describe hell as a place of wrath and teeth, whereas the righteous are rewarded with eternal life.
- Revelation (14:10, 19:20, 20:10) similarly describes hell in numerous ways, as a place of sulphur, or a place of everlasting torment.
- Different interpretations of these texts result in different ideas about hell. As an idea of heaven and hell as physically satisfying requirements of justice, as seen in Dante in *The Divine Comedy*.
- Many modern Christian traditions and theologians view biblical accounts as not believing in the realms of the afterlife instead as states of being reconciled to God, e.g. the Catholic Church describing hell as 'eternal separation from God'.
- Other thinkers have discussed whether, in the absence of evidence for it being real, Christian concepts of the afterlife should be regarded as symbols of a person's life.
- Heaven, hell and purgatory therefore may have metaphorical meaning as describing a state or relationship with God during their life, but not of a place or state after death.

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Students may agree that Christian concepts of the afterlife should be viewed as spiritual life. Arguments below:

- There has been no fixed agreement about what heaven, hell and purgatory are. They are places or symbols. In the absence of real knowledge, they should be viewed as interpretations of human states or experiences.
- A benevolent God would not create a specific realm of hell as punishment as this is contradictory to his nature. Hell therefore must be symbolic of the pain of being separated from God.
- Tillich's argument that hell is best understood as existential alienation – heaven and hell are metaphors for 'the polar ultimates in the experience of the divine'.
- Descriptions of the Christian afterlife in the Bible are already highly symbolic. There is a need to interpret them as representing distinct states or places in reality.
- Jesus in the Gospels may have been referring to a 'realised eschatology' – his teachings are symbols of the worlds human beings can create on earth in the light of Jesus' teachings.

Students may disagree that Christian concepts of the afterlife should be viewed as spiritual life. Arguments below:

- Descriptions of heaven and hell in the Bible often refer to a literal state or place. It is a jump to assume these must be only symbolic in their use of metaphorical language.
- For Christian moral truths to have meaning, there must be real rewards or punishments for human action on earth, and from the grace of God. Without these the promise of the Christian God has no psychological power.
- Eternal life is promised for the righteous in the Bible, either reconciled with God or transformed state on earth. The logical counter to this is a corresponding state of justice for the unrighteous.
- Hell might be seen as a symbol, but the promise of a benevolent God is a promise of universalism, so heaven is more than a symbol. Students might refer to Hick's argument that human beings undergo moral transformation both in their present lives and in states after death, with all individuals eventually moving towards final divine reconciliation with God.

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3. 'Natural theology cannot develop consistent or coherent knowledge'

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Natural theology looks towards reason and observation of the natural world to know God, believing that as God is creator of the world, he can be known through the world.
- Humans across nearly all societies have had a conception of the divine, and that every human being has the capacity to experience God in nature or the world. This may be the 'sensus divinitatis' of Calvin.
- Christianity teaches that human beings are made in the image of God – this means they have certain attributes, such as intellect that allow them to comprehend him.
- Arguments for the existence of God, such as the design argument, posit that we can determine from the order and design of the world that God must have been the creator.
- Other important ideas, such as beauty, may reveal God, along with a human moral through conscience.
- Some theologians have argued that natural theology relies on faulty human reasoning due to the Fall, or their general fallibility. As such it is not possible to rely on natural knowledge of the existence and nature of God.
- Modern ideas such as process theology put forward a more pantheistic idea of God, immanent within creation while partially sacrificing his transcendence. Such theories mean it is much easier to develop coherent knowledge of God from the world.

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Students may support natural theology with the arguments below:

- The Bible at times (Romans 1:19–20) affirms that the world is good and ordered, and that God should be discoverable through aspects of it.
- Design arguments present good evidence (inference to the best explanation) that the ordered, complex and fine-tuned requires an explanation; a being with the power to create such complexity. That can only be God.
- Experiencing beauty, love, greatness in the world is a window to those characteristics that the Bible and other sources affirm.
- God's transcendence does not cancel out his immanence or prevent human knowledge and understanding through creation – Macquarrie's argument for dialectical theology.

Students may criticise natural theology with the arguments below:

- Arguments from design, and natural theology in general, have not consistently developed coherent knowledge about God beyond that of revelation, and at times have contradicted themselves.
- The human ability to reason is corrupted by the Fall so much that, while natural theology may affirm truths from revelation, it cannot consistently develop them by itself.
- God's transcendence means that his nature and existence are beyond the reach of human reason – the only way God interacts with the world is of his own free will and human beings can understand (Barth, Calvin).
- Jesus Christ is the main source of knowledge and holds priority over human knowledge; without his intervention human beings would only have a vague, conflicting idea of what God is like.
- Some students may argue that natural theology is important, but secondary to revealed theology, and can only know God as Creator, not God as Saviour.
- Some students might argue that natural theology and revealed theology are both sources of knowledge of God, either through creation or revelation, comes from him, so natural theology is not a source of all human knowledge and understanding.

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4. Is Jesus best understood as a political liberator, or a liberator from sin?

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Each of the four Gospels depicts Jesus in a different fashion, although all also depend on what priority one gives certain passages or events, the image of Jesus through biblical exegesis or eisegesis can change dramatically.
- Some modern theologians have argued traditional biblical reading has ignored politically and socially revolutionary aspects of Jesus's ministry.
- Certain passages (e.g. Matthew 10:34, Luke 4:16–21) seem to suggest Jesus was politically active or forceful leader than he was purely spiritual. Some scholars argue these political aspects were also overlooked by the Gospel writers themselves.
- Throughout the Gospels, Jesus challenges religious authorities and it can be argued he was eventually tried by Pilate for a political/civic crime rather than a religious one.
- Other theologians have criticised such portrayals as diminishing the importance of Jesus as the divine Son of God, who liberated human beings from their sin at the atonement.
- Throughout the Gospels, it has been argued Jesus is asserted much more as a spiritual saviour than a political one, with the resurrection the key moment in the Gospels the spiritual saviour of humankind, not just an earthly one.
- Modern-day doubt, however, has been placed on Jesus's miracles, such that it is difficult to tell historically what the genuine actions of Jesus are, and what are embellishments by Gospel authors.

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Students may agree Jesus is best understood as a political liberator with the arguments below:

- Jesus throughout the Gospels regularly challenges all forms of authority, particularly the poor and dispossessed. It is unlikely this would have gone unnoticed by the authorities of his day.
- Certain acts of Jesus, such as his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey during Passover, have messianic overtones (Zechariah 9:9) and imply there was a greater political context to Jesus's ministry (Aslan).
- Jesus advocated redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, and this radical outlook would have made him political enemies who wanted to hold onto the power (Luke 18:18–22).
- The concept of reversal in the Gospels (e.g. the parable of the rich man and the poor man) suggests a future in which political authority and power will not matter, and only those who are humble will receive fortune.

Students may disagree Jesus is best understood as a political liberator with the arguments below:

- The greatest emphasis in the Gospels is on the resurrection and Jesus as the saviour of humankind, a truth reflected in the aims of the early apostles and Church. There is no evidence to suggest Jesus in this way did not fulfil traditional messianic expectations.
- There is evidence in the Gospels to suggest Jesus was aware of his divinity, and the ramifications of his actions were potentially more important in granting eternal life than an improved material life.
- Passages such as Romans 9:23 affirm that the sacrifice Jesus made in the atonement was for humanity first and foremost of sin and enabled reconciliation with God.
- Scholars such as E P Sanders have questioned whether the Gospels embellish Jesus's actions for dramatic effect, arguing Jesus may have sought to lead a movement in Jewish law rather than political opposition.
- Some students may argue that all aspects to the person of Jesus and his ministry are intertwined and it is not possible to separate and highlight one over another – they are all part of the same whole.

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5. 'Church tradition has an essential part to play in developing Christianity'

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Most Christian traditions believe the Bible is the primary source of Christian ethics, either the Word of God, or witness to the prophets and Jesus as messengers.
- Within some Christian denominations (e.g. Catholic) Church tradition is perceived as an important source in developing Christian ethics, especially in interpreting the Bible and the Bible for modern-day audiences.
- Reason has helped shape Church tradition also, and the way it is carried through to the modern-day Church.
- Traditions such as natural law in Christian traditions (especially Catholicism) suggest that moral law is discoverable from reasoning about the purpose and nature of the world.
- In the Catholic Church, the Magisterium issues important encyclicals that address issues not covered explicitly by the Bible, and allow insights from wisdom and reason to inform Christian doctrine.
- Other Christian thinkers and traditions have advocated more strictly sola scriptura, that the Bible is infallible and the Bible should be the only source of ethics.
- Ethics developed from reason or tradition, for some Christians, is human ideology, not the Word of God. If divinely inspired, the Bible should contain all the ethical guidance for Christians.

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments below:

Students may agree that Church tradition is important with the arguments below:

- Church tradition, especially that of the Catholic Church, which identifies a continuous apostolic succession, has preserved the teachings of Jesus throughout its history. It is another important source of moral information on a par with the Bible.
- Hauerwas – Christian ethics is best understood with the Christian community. An individual set of ethics outside tradition and culture results in loss of meaning.
- Church tradition is built on the insights of human reason, a God-given gift. This provides insight, not only into revelation, but into the moral law behind the natural world.
- It is impossible to read the Bible in its original context. Church tradition provides context and allows an understanding of the Bible's true meaning rather than modern-day interpretations.
- Church tradition has encouraged insight into many traditional theological problems and contradictions in the Bible itself. This means a single, coherent set of biblical teachings out of a document where there may be multiple conflicting teachings on a particular issue.

Students may disagree that Church tradition is important with the arguments below:

- Church tradition has encouraged and does encourage ethical practices that are not in the Bible (e.g. indulgences). The role of tradition, therefore, should be advisory, not binding, as it can easily become a distraction.
- Jesus is often critical of religious authorities, who stick blindly to tradition and dogma. In the same way Christians should be sceptical about tradition themselves.
- Church tradition can obscure the importance of faith in the Bible and Jesus Christ. It focuses much on the ways human beings look to comprehend God, rather than on the revelation of God himself.
- Agape love is a more important source of Christian ethics, and Christians should focus on this about any form of legalistic ethics encouraged by the Church or tradition.
- Church tradition can encourage the exclusion of dissenting voices, and marginalise underrepresented groups such as women.
- Some students may make the Protestant case – tradition is important but not essential.

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6. Critically assess whether Bonhoeffer's theology is still relevant in p

(AO1) Students may describe and explain the ideas below:

- Bonhoeffer's theology was partially formed in response to his objections to the party and elements of the German Protestant Church's complicity in the fur and political aims.
- He argued that Christians should be obedient to God above all else, including went against the traditional interpretation of Romans 13:1–7. This also mean may be encouraged towards immoral political states.
- Bonhoeffer distinguishes between cheap and costly grace, arguing that Christians recognise the importance of sacrifice and suffering in their own lives as part of discipleship.
- Christians should live in solidarity for others for Bonhoeffer, and it is not enough simply visit church every week and profess faith in God. They have to undertake action to help others in need.
- Bonhoeffer argues similarly in the Church there should be 'no rusty swords' of refuge for those who are being persecuted and a source of discipline for Christians lives in sacrifice to others.
- It has been argued that Bonhoeffer's theology is too extreme and demanding and is only relevant during times of severe persecution and injustice, such as War II.

(AO2) Students may analyse and evaluate the question through the arguments

Students may put forward that Bonhoeffer is still relevant with the arguments

- There is still widespread injustice and persecution of people across the world. In this case, Bonhoeffer's call for sacrifice and solidarity from Christians should not be ignored.
- Through the Gospels, Jesus speaks of the heavy sacrifice discipleship involves. Christianity that has underestimated the responsibilities of a committed Christian. Bonhoeffer who has overestimated them.
- It is the case that modern-day theological movements, such as liberation theology, show that moral action may be more important than simple ritual, especially with regards towards Jesus and his help of the poor and dispossessed.
- There have been too many occurrences where the Church has sided with the wrong practices (e.g. slavery) and Christians should be encouraged to be more discerning about the inequality of the modern world.

Students may disagree that Bonhoeffer is still relevant with the arguments below

- Bonhoeffer puts too much emphasis on suffering; there is not always the need for a hard led Christian life in terms of struggle, especially in peaceful societies.
- It downplays the joy of the resurrection, and the way Jesus died for humanity makes human work in a different manner the focus of a Christian's life.
- His call for civil disobedience may lead to fanaticism and more suffering and Christians always look to disobey the State in favour of their own principles. This is true if it is impossible to always clearly know God's will.
- Bonhoeffer's theology ignores the other ways in which Christian communities can help change society beyond politics and political sacrifice.
- Bonhoeffer's views may oppose Christianity becoming more inclusive, and as a result the reasonableness behind other people's beliefs. In turn this may lead in peace to Christianity becoming intolerant.

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