



Anthology Study Guide

Paper 4: Christianity

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Teacher's Introduction

This anthology guide is a tool designed to help you deliver the A Level Edexcel Christianity specification, helping students not only understand the core ideas within each of the extracts, but also develop a broader understanding of their context and meaning within wider philosophical discussion. Each section covers one extract comprehensively, first examining a summary of its major concepts and arguments before moving on to a critical analysis of its strengths and weaknesses.

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

Throughout the guide, there are also 'Discussion Points' boxes and 'Activities' designed to invite students into deeper critical analysis, as well as an extension section for each extract, looking deeper into the extract's ideas and their place within wider issues of Christian theology. The resource can, therefore, be adapted to focus purely on students' core understanding of the extracts or expanded to include wider theological knowledge that may be useful in an exam situation.

While this resource is primarily oriented to preparing students for Section B of their A Level exam, the information contained within this anthology guide is also relevant to Section A and Section C, and in each section's introduction, the relevant areas of the specification are noted to help students draw on their previous studies and knowledge.

Contents

- **What you need to know before starting...**
This section details some of the philosophical ideas students should know before beginning reading through the guide. While not essential, prior knowledge of the relevant sections of the specification may prove useful in understanding specific terminology and concepts.
- **Overview**
This section introduces the extract and outlines its form and content, as well as connecting it with the relevant topic in the curriculum.
- **Summary of Ideas**
This section deconstructs the main ideas within the extract, pointing students to some of the key philosophical issues and providing a step-by-step breakdown of difficult concepts.
- **Theological Context**
This section details some of the important theologians and their ideas within the context of the extract. It also gives some useful information on the time and background in which it was written, noting where historical events may have influenced the discussions within.
- **Detailed Analysis**
This section provides a full analysis of the extract, breaking down criticisms and exploring the various ways theologians have responded to the challenges they present.
- **Taking It Further**
This section gives an overview of the way in which conclusions reached within the extract might impact on wider philosophical arguments, and draws out further nuances of the text and how it fits in with the author's wider philosophical position.
- **Form and Justify an Argument**
This final section details some of the questions students should be able to answer having read through the guide, before they move on to essay practice and further study.
- **Summary Activities and Exam-style Questions**
A variety of exercises are presented at the end of the extract for students to complete, and sample questions are given to assist with essay practice and technique.
- **Glossary**
This section gives a list of the key terms for the extract and their meaning.

Notes for Using this Resource

- Quotes given are taken from the Edexcel anthology, unless otherwise specified.
- This resource is tailored both to students who have and students who have not covered the full A Level course for Christianity. Where students have studied the topic relevant to the extract, they may be familiar with some of the content.
- Throughout the guide, students are encouraged to extend their knowledge beyond the course where appropriate. Any such information is marked as a 'Discussion Point' or has a note to indicate it is not essential knowledge within the syllabus.
- Throughout the guide, there are also activities students can engage in as they work their way through. Some of these are suitable for students to work through themselves, while others are more suited to classroom work involving groups or pairs. All of the activities are designed to highlight important areas of the anthology and help students consolidate their knowledge of the issues explored in the Summary of Ideas, Theological Context and Detailed Analysis sections.
- The decision has been taken to cover Extract 4 (Hick) before Extract 3 (Barth), as the ideas and concepts that connect both are more easily accessible in Hick's writings, and form a helpful introduction to Barth's analysis of atonement and reconciliation.
- Page numbers are given next to key quotes to show the location of them within the anthology, available on the Edexcel website.

June 2018

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Extract 1: Jürgen Moltmann, 'The Suffering'

What you need to know before starting...

1. A core understanding of how theologians have traditionally defined the divine attributes of immutability, impassibility and perfection.
2. The issues theologians have faced in trying to understand how such divine attributes can be embodied in the human Jesus, especially in light of the suffering Jesus underwent.
3. Why modern theologians have supposed there are grounds for re-examining these attributes, and whether an impassible God can be capable of love.

Overview

This extract by Jürgen Moltmann draws on Section 2.2: The Nature and Role of Jesus. You are advised to read and revise this part of the anthology alongside this topic. The question 'Does God Suffer?' with the extract itself being drawn from a wider discussion in McGrath's *The Christian Theology Reader*, (2nd Edition).

Moltmann's theology surrounding the suffering of God has been highly influential. It reflects a gradual shift in modern theology from ideas about the complete impassibility of God to ones focusing on the ways God might change, experience emotion and stand in pain with the suffering of human beings. This guide will begin by highlighting the major ideas before scrutinising them in light of recent criticism and analysing their ramifications within contemporary theology.

Summary of Ideas

The Background to Apatheia and God's Inability to Suffer

For much of the history of Christian theology, the idea of God suffering was not only considered impossible, but also contradictory. This arose from the combination of many attributes were believed to belong to both the Father and the Son in orthodox Christianity. The heresies of Arianism, which supposed that God the Father was almighty and eternal, while Jesus was the product of creation by God, with everything else being created through the Son, was rejected. Instead he had a beginning, and was therefore lesser compared to the Father.

There were a number of issues to this, the primary one being that such distinction destroys the idea of the unity of the Father and Son, and the Trinity as a whole. Biblical passages such as the prologue in John put forward that 'the Word was God' (NRSV), and this implies that the Son and God are coeternal. Arian theology was, therefore, criticised greatly at the time, especially by the bishop Athanasius and within the Nicene Creed, and various ideas were established about the Father and Son. The most important for this extract are that the Son was argued to be of one being (homoousios) with the Father, and that God (including in this the Father and Son), was **impassible**. God therefore could not suffer, feel pain or experience emotions, for these would be reacting to, and changing, factors in the external world.

This idea of impassibility can be seen particularly in the thought of Philo (20 BCE – 50 CE), who brought together many different Hellenistic and Jewish ideas that many scholars believe influenced early Christianity. In Greek thought, divine impassibility is described as **apatheia**, and God was characterised as being transcendent, unchanging and stable. Emotions are indicative of people who are subject to them are naturally imperfect. Therefore, were a being impassible, they would be devoid of emotion. Rather, they would be completely perfect and unified being that nothing can influence or sway. In fact, many Greek philosophers, the Stoics, thought human beings should aim themselves to embody apatheia in their lives, to rule what should be a life dictated by reason.

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Moltmann's Reinterpretation of Impassibility

This background to the concept of *apatheia* is where Moltmann begins his discussion of the extract. However, instead of completely accepting that God is unchangeable, the change in God that could be brought about by outside influences, and change in particular he states:

We cannot deduce from the relative statement of Nicaea that God is unchangeable – that he is unchangeable. (144)

Moltmann arguably is justified in making this inference. The statement from the Council of Nicaea (**anathema** (formally denouncing a heresy) that the Son of God is subject to change, but that God could not will to change of himself if he so wished. Furthermore, this anathema was introduced to communicate Arius and declare his thought heresy, and the wider change God undergo perhaps were not considered by a council implicitly co-eternal Son and the Father as co-eternal.

Therefore, Moltmann is justified in defining how God might suffer from a voluntary relationships that carry the possibility of suffering and hurt. In this he argues that

Active suffering, the suffering of love, a voluntary openness to the possibility of being affected. Whoever is capable of love is also capable of suffering, because he is open to the suffering of others.

Therefore, God can will engagements in the world that bring about suffering, and the point of God's divine suffering comes at the crucifixion. The next part details how this is approached from a Trinitarian perspective to understand the context and importance.

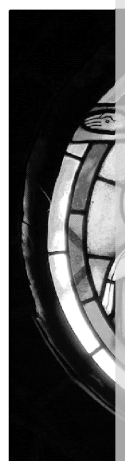
Discussion Point 1

Research the Arian controversy discussed at the Council of Nicaea, particularly the claim that Jesus the Son was begotten at a specific point in time from the Father. Did the Council settle the debate by declaring the Son to be co-substantial with the Father, or did they simply state a theological point Arius was making?

Mark 15:34 and the Aporia of the Crucifixion

The Gospel narratives each portray the crucifixion in different ways. In Luke, for example, Jesus is steadfast in the suffering of the crucifixion, and on death cries out that he is committing his spirit to God. However, for some New Testament scholars, even, the crucifixion in Luke is an almost perfunctory matter of material necessity in order to reach the wider divine act of the resurrection.

However, the crucifixion in Mark is more difficult to comprehend, and it is his narrative that Moltmann focuses on, particularly 15:34, where Jesus cries out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (NRSV)). This is a notable difficulty in the Bible when analysing it with the belief that Jesus has both a fully divine and a fully human nature, for in it Jesus seems to be directly talking to God and implying that God has abandoned him on the cross. It is then it being a decision of Jesus's made in full awareness, as Gospels such as John particularly emphasise. Therefore, in Jesus's cry, there is 'a profound **aporia**', a philosophical puzzle of why the divine Jesus would declare that God had forsaken him and emphasise his suffering on the cross.



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Moltmann outlines a number of answers that have been traditionally provided by from 'Christian humanists', who, in viewing Jesus as having an unchangeable, perfect nature, argued that he only suffered on a human level, emptying himself of divinity and, therefore, was not the Father. Therefore, the cross is understood not as a matter of divine demonstration of the **ataraxia** (a steadfast, tranquil state of being) of Jesus. However, Moltmann argues that 'aporia is not overcome'. If Jesus is meant to be God incarnate, and coeternal with the Father, it makes sense to separate the two at the moment of the crucifixion. The cry on the cross, therefore, is a moment where there is a distinct and important moment between Jesus and the Father in the cross.

This Moltmann emphasises strongly that the crucified Christ is the decisive moment in which God separates the Christian from others. He argues that the way one has faith is not through biblical descriptions or theologies in the New Testament (e.g. the continuing life of the passion culminating in the crucifixion). Therefore, the cry on the cross, as a whole, have to be analysed in Trinitarian terms, not separating the unity of the Father and Son suffering that this relationship brings in light of the cross.

Activity 1

The cry of Jesus in Mark 15:34 is vital to understanding why Moltmann develops his argument. It is essential to have a good understanding of the key concepts of aporia and ataraxia. The following activities to help develop your knowledge of this important area of debate:

1. Read through the passion and crucifixion narratives of Mark. Write down a paragraph explaining how the cry in Mark 15:34 can be contrasted with the ataraxia of Jesus in the preceding passion narrative.
2. Read through the crucifixion narratives of Luke and John. How do these gospels contrast with Mark? Consider why much more emphasis is placed on the ataraxia of Jesus, and how other theologians would have interpreted the crucifixion as a 'self-emptying' of Jesus.
3. In groups or pairs, discuss why it may be seen necessary for Jesus to cry out on the cross. Give an example of aporia, designed to show the relationship and suffering between Jesus and the Father. Can you offer a better explanation?

St Paul and paradidomi

Moltmann first turns to St Paul to analyse the cry in Mark, noting a number of passages that suggest an abandonment of Jesus by God, particularly in his use of the term **paradidomi**. This term is generally used in the gospels in a negative way, one key example being the moment where Jesus is handed over to the authorities. However, this translation of paradidomi as betrayal has been challenged by many noting that prior to its use in the gospels, it generally meant to hand over or give up. Moltmann similarly notes initially that within Paul **paredoken** (the past tense of paradidomi) is used, for example, in Romans 1:18–21, where God is supposed to have abandoned those who do not believe. Having noted this use, he then argues that Paul equally introduces a new way of understanding the cross in the context of the crucifixion at Romans 8:32, where God is declared to have 'given up his Son'. In this way, Moltmann argues for Paul, Jesus suffers in his relationship with the Father as the Father suffers from his love for the Son as he is given up or abandoned by the Father.

Discussion Point 2

Is it an issue for Moltmann that the idea of God being crucified is not one that appears to have been simply a theological concept overlooked by the early Church?

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The Unity of Jesus and God's Will

Therefore, for Moltmann, there is a difference between the suffering of Jesus in his death and the suffering of God in his giving up of the Son. He argues that understanding this difference is essential to understanding the universal idea of God, as the Greek concept of *apatheia* would indicate. Rather, it is the unity of the Father and Son in the Trinity.

He notes first Galatians 2:20, where *paredoken* is used referring to how the Son 'gave up' himself. Moltmann argues that the will of both the Father and the Son was the same. Therefore, the giving up of Jesus's life on the cross and the suffering it entailed. This is why the Father and Son being separated by the abandonment on the cross, they are equal in their will to see through the 'giving up' of the cross, which for Moltmann is the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed's statement that the Father and Son as being of one substance (*homoousia*) is maintained even at a moment when there seems to be a separation between the two.

Importantly still, Moltmann argues that, through Paul, it can be understood that the cross is an act of love. The Father, through love, gives up his Son and suffers as a result. This is from an earlier passage in the extract:

He is always able to surmount that suffering because of love. (144)

Therefore, for Moltmann, understanding this decisive act of giving up as generating suffering is not in opposition to the statements of the Nicene Creed. Rather, it is possible to understand the relationship between the Son and the Father a distinct unity in their identical acts of giving up. Moltmann understands divine impassibility to not be an absolute state of being, but one relative to the world. In this world, God is still able to suffer through his voluntary and free acts of love, and the most important act from which one can understand the suffering he undergoes.

The Necessity of the Trinity in Understanding the Crucifixion

Moltmann contends that trying to understand the crucifixion in relation to the two natures, divine and human, of Jesus inevitably results in a paradox, as one has to try to divide the unity of God and this means one is forced to draw counterintuitive conclusions about the crucifixion, such as relating the death of Jesus only to his human nature. However, if one accepts that divine impassibility does not have to apply to God, then the abandonment of Jesus can be understood as the proceeding Holy Spirit, that in Moltmann's words, 'raise the abandoned men'.

What are the other advantages that Moltmann sees in his doctrine beyond this resolution of the dilemma that has traditionally faced theologians in the crucifixion? Notably he states:

1. It becomes possible 'to understand the crucifixion non-theistically'. Even if one moves away from Moltmann's idea of the crucifixion, it isn't primarily an exercise in divine impassibility, rather a unique act of love in Jesus giving up his life in what he perceives as a necessary sacrifice. Such an act can have meaning for theists and non-theists alike.
2. 'The old dichotomy between the universal nature of God and the inner trinitarian nature of God'. Here Moltmann notes how, typically, the paradox of the Trinity (one in three, three in one) leads to one developing an idea of the crucifixion that does not emphasise the impassibility of God. The oneness that ancient Greek theologians believed was necessary.
3. 'The distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity becomes clearer'. This arises from the fact that, traditionally, Christianity puts forward that the Trinity has different actions, for it could not be only be one otherwise. However, equally one has to understand the actions of the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit to understand the Trinity's actions. Theologians have often distinguished between the immanent Trinity – who God is in himself – and the economic Trinity – what God does through the Trinity. This is often to make sense of the Trinity have different roles in creation, redemption and salvation while they are unified. However, what Moltmann proposes is that in his understanding of the crucifixion, it is possible to identify the unity in the separation of the persons, and the divide between the actions and being of the Trinity. It is all revealed in the crucifixion.

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Overall, therefore, what Moltmann argues is that his understanding of the crucifixion is not a move away from the Trinity, but means one can understand the Trinity as more than a divine and incomprehensible paradox, it can be directly perceived and realised in the death of Jesus, the heart of Christianity that follows. As Moltmann states:

It can be seen as the tersest way of expressing the story of Christ's passion. It preserves faith in the Trinity, because it keeps it close to the crucified Christ. It reveals the cross in God's being.

God, therefore, for Moltmann is not an abstract concept on the basis of which human beings are created, but is a being revealed in the historical event of the crucifixion. The death of Jesus reveals the Son and the Holy Spirit, and human beings understand how God suffers from his 'giving up' of him for humanity, but it is an act of love that establishes the possibility of human beings and God for the rest of time, and lets human beings realise how God is not a distant, transcendent, impassible being. Furthermore, this view prevents what can be termed 'monarchical monotheism' (see quote above), a view of God as a sole ruler, and instead reasserts the importance of the Trinity at the most crucial stage of Christian thought.

Theological Context

The Change in Theological Approach to the Suffering of God

The idea that God could suffer is a relatively recent development in Christian theology, emerging in the late nineteenth century, when theologians began to question whether the traditional view of God made sense in light of the gospel and New Testament narratives. One particularly important work was the publishing of Kazoh Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God*, which emphasised how God's suffering was necessary for him to stand in solidarity with the suffering of human beings. In this, God is radically different from the traditional view of God. Kitamori takes Jeremiah 31:20, with its talk of God's 'pained heart' (although in the original context it is about God being 'deeply' moved) as indicative of a God who is connected in suffering to the suffering of humanity.

However, beyond Kitamori's analysis, McGrath notes a number of factors that point to the change in the way of why God might suffer alongside humanity:

1. The First (and Second) World War's impact on the way many Westerners viewed the world. The optimism of scientific progress was replaced, especially in light of the Holocaust and Nagasaki, and the Nazi concentration camps, with a more fatalistic or pessimistic view of humanity. This led to a renewed focus on how a benevolent God could allow suffering, and the theological view of a suffering God was, therefore, developed partially as a response to the challenges posed by God at the heart of traditional Christianity.
2. A new edition of Luther's works, which were previously unpublished, allowed access to his ideas, in particular his writings on a 'theology of the cross'. Luther's view of the crucifixion is the primary source of knowledge regarding God's being and salvation, and his view was influential, especially in German circles.
3. Movements under the 'history of dogma' title argued that in early Christianity, many philosophical ideas had been adopted without due criticism, one of them being the idea of God. Therefore, it was seen as necessary by some theologians to revisit the patristic period with the aim of redeveloping the idea of God and the Trinity, and the dogmas present in pre-Christian and early Christian thought.

McGrath also notes a few more important influences, particularly in the way concepts of love, God's being in creation, and the place of the Old Testament began to be analysed differently at the start of the twentieth century, but these will be explored further in the **Detailed Analysis** section. It is important to note is that Moltmann was writing about a gradual change in the way the Christian God was being approached, and how the demand for a more personal, suffering God began a process of reanalysing Scripture away from many of the traditional attributes that had been given to God since the early patristic period.



Could it be that the suffering of humanity is a response to the way God is being approached, at least in the way we believe?

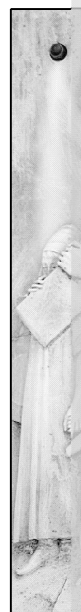
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The Crucified God

First published in 1972, this was Moltmann's first and main work that dealt with how God chose to willingly suffer and was built upon in his 1981 work, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. Moltmann was influenced here by a wide variety of other theologians, particularly Luther in his theology of the cross, and Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God*, which is referenced throughout. However, other factors likely played a part, one of them being Moltmann's interest and in commitment to social ethics, drawing on the writings of Bonhoeffer and moving away from systematic theology that developed a new understanding of God as removed from the political and ethical actions of human beings. In this way, the suffering of God is as important as an act of solidarity with human beings who are oppressed. God's love for humanity persists despite the evil actions of some, and from this love he willingly shares in the pain that humanity constantly faces.

Therefore, while the suffering of God is an answer to distinct theological problems, for Moltmann it is also a way through to newer forms of social politics and action, understanding God as being alongside those who are facing oppression and persecution and recognising how the death of Christ can make sense of suffering throughout history. However, equally, it is the case that human beings are not required for salvation. The sufferings of humans are important to God, but they are not the only way in which God can be known; there can be an alternative to the suffering human beings face; a potentially peaceful and better world is possible with God. This, ultimately, is where the resurrection plays its greatest role for Moltmann, offering liberation from suffering and the hope of a joyous eschatological future for those who have been forsaken by God.



Activity 2

Many different reasons have been given as to why many modern theologians have an opinion on why the world can suffer. Complete the activities below to develop a context and understand the reasons given for a suffering God.

1. The Jewish scholar Richard Rubenstein wrote in 1966 about the effects of the Holocaust. Read the quote below and, in pairs or groups, discuss why such a view might have arisen and why many people might have perceived a change in the perception of God after the Holocaust.

No man can really say that God is dead. How can we know that? Nevertheless, I am living in the time of the 'death of God'. This is more a statement about man and his culture than about God. It is a cultural fact ... When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the old world, heaven and earth, has been broken... (Rubenstein, Richard (1966), After Auschwitz)

2. In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann writes:

God in Auschwitz and Auschwitz in the crucified God – that is the basis for real hope. God overcomes the world. (Jürgen Moltmann (1993), The Crucified God)

Discuss why Moltmann believes that his understanding of the crucified God offers a new appreciation and hope for humanity in the face of evil. Does such a view offer a challenge to Rubenstein?

3. Lastly, discuss whether belief in God should be affected by the presence of evil in the world. Give a specific instance of evil that warrants a change in the way how we view God or how the continual presence of evil always been a challenge to traditional theology.

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Detailed Analysis

The Greater Context of the Question Concerning the Suffering of God

One of the main questions that can be asked is: why does it matter whether God suffers? One line of argument, so long as God is benevolent and looks to intervene and save humanity, is that if God is benevolent, should it matter whether he is capable of suffering in a similar way? As long as reconciliation with the divine God is possible, it can't bear the answer to the question. From another perspective, the question of whether God suffers unveils a grander debate about whether Christians are choosing to place their faith in a God who is an overarching, transcendent being with a connection with humanity miraculously, or in a God who, despite the differences in ontology, ontology, or even within creation, expresses a direct solidarity with the lives and sufferings of human beings? In this context, the question of whether God suffers arguably retains a much greater significance in the realms of systematic theology, and influences the way Christians have faith in God. It is either an omnipotent being, or one who voluntarily chooses to understand and undergo suffering.

However, despite the inclination of some theologians to outline the suffering of God as a way of understanding one's own suffering, there are those who argue that the temptation to identify one's own suffering with that of God should be resisted. Thomas Weinandy, in his well-known 2001 book *Does God Suffer?*, argues that the idea of God as suffering being appealing, it is wrong, not only theologically and philosophically, but also an important public task of proclaiming and communicating the gospel to ordinary people. He argues that the idea of the suffering God to be a 'new orthodoxy' in Christianity, and argues that it is the primary way of showing solidarity with humankind, not suffering. Rather than being simply experiencing generic suffering, one should be consoled by the idea of a transcendent God who is intervening in the world to reconcile humanity with himself with the promise of salvation through his Son, who he sent down to Earth. In this way, Weinandy argues for a much more robust understanding of God, but also reiterates why this shouldn't stand in the way of human beings having faith in God.

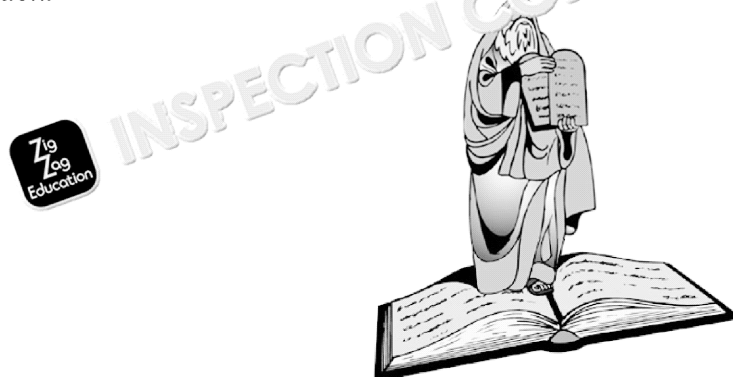
Should One Abandon the Idea of Divine Impassibility?

The main thrust behind Weinandy's argument is twofold. The first point is that the idea of divine impassibility does not prevent God from loving human beings, and he criticises Moltmann for arguing that if God is incapable of suffering, he would be incapable of love. The second is that, despite the fact that God is omnipotent and powerful, it is unreasonable and not backed up when one considers the idea of God as present in the Bible that set him apart from the world. When one extra-terrestrially considers what God cannot be subject to from these biblical characteristics, one arrives at the conclusion that the Church Fathers: God is immutable and impassible. It is this aspect of Weinandy's argument that is the most controversial.

Understanding Impassibility from the Bible

The question of how to interpret the character of God from biblical narratives is present throughout the history of theology, but a major focus of much of modern biblical scholarship. The actions of God in the Old Testament in light of his emotional reactions to events in the world have led to the static lawgiver the God of the Old Testament has traditionally been interpreted as being radically affected by human actions, in particular human suffering. Fretheim, for example, in his 1984 book *The Suffering of God* contends that 'metaphorically' in the Old Testament, and rather than interpret the cases when God is said to express emotions as being metaphorical, one should interpret these occurrences in light of a creator God who is affected by his creation.

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Similarly, Abraham Heschel in his work *The Prophets* (1962) argues that Old Testament of what he terms the 'divine pathos', the feelings of God, typically wrath or sorrow for the nation of Israel. For example, in Amos 6, God expresses feelings of anger and indignation at those who have become indulgent and lazy, failing to live their lives in accordance with the law, particularly be seen in passages such as Amos 6:8 (NRSV):

*The Lord God has sworn by himself
(says the Lord, the God of hosts):
I abhor the pride of Jacob
and hate his strongholds;
and I will deliver up the citadel that is in it.*

Here, the pathos attributed to God are, for Heschel, not ones that are simply human emotions, but have been called by the prophet Amos and are, therefore, reflective of God's character.

Yet Weinandy is critical of such interpretations. He acknowledges that the Old Testament does show God's emotional state, and does not definitely put forward that he is either impassible or not. He shows God to be characterised by his transcendence, and a reasoned move from transcendence and his radical immanence can reveal why he should be conceived of as impassible. He argues there are four primary characteristics that can be deduced from the Old Testament:

1. His complete and unique **oneness**, distinct from all of the created order.
2. His role and actions as **saviour**, which are not limited by any parts of the created order.
3. His power and actions as **creator**, from which he is both intimately connected to and distinct from the created order.
4. His **holiness**, which separates him from all things sinful, such that even when he interacts with the created order, God himself is not affected.

These four characteristics, Weinandy argues, establish God implicitly as a completely impassible being, and far from the early Church Fathers simply adopting Platonic concepts within a Christian framework, he contends that the ascription of impassibility to God as a perfectly good and loving being is a necessary part of the Old Testament narratives that describe God as unchanging. Therefore, these should not be interpreted literally, and rather reveal the more important truth of God's commitment to love and justice as the transcendent creator of the world.

Was Divine Impassibility Uncritically Adopted by the Early Church Theologians?

Despite Weinandy arguing that impassibility as a concept can be reasonably inferred from God in the Bible, many have equally contended that the God of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament does not fit the Greek conception of *apatheia*. While it may be possible to understand God as an unchanging being by using a certain line of reasoning, one can still ask whether it is the correct interpretation from reading the New Testament gospels, especially in light of the cross, where there does seem to be a strong element of sacrificial love. For theologians such as Moltmann, a proper dwelling on the significance and meaning of the cross indicates God is not an unchanging being, and recognising this truth in turn solves many traditional theological problems concerning the crucifixion that have long had unsatisfactory conclusions.

This is especially true concerning the early days of the Church, as the orthodox bishops and theologians were concerned with what might be heretical. Sabellius was excommunicated in 220 CE for advancing that the Trinity was not three distinct persons, but one God working through the world. Therefore, critics accused him of modalism, a heresy: that God the Father suffered on the cross rather than the Son. Similarly, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, were greatly concerned with the distinction between the divine and human, yet with little reflection on how this may be understood in light of the cross.

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In this way, Richard Bauckham argues that the concept of divine impassibility was philosophy by early Church theologians. While Weinandy can possibly justify it from the New Testament, the early Church failed to examine the concept in light of the insights from the Old Testament into the divine nature of God. They simply characterised suffering as being emblematic of a deficient nature, rather than contending how God might have willingly undergone suffering for the sake of benevolence towards the created world. As Moltmann states:

If we are to speak as Christians about God, then, we have to tell the story of Jesus as the historical event which took place between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and in which God is, not only for man, but in his very essence. (146)

Is this way, when Moltmann speaks of the overcoming of suffering through God's suffering, God's suffering on giving the Son up is no longer a weakness but a triumph. The conclusion also hinges on how one interprets the action of God's love and the way that love for something inevitably entails suffering, especially if it has to be that God's love does not require suffering in order to be perfectly actualised, and liberating because it is free of the suffering human beings normally experience. The text which explores how love can be understood in both a divine and a human context.

Discussion Point 4

Is it an issue that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament death is predicated by God, with God's action effectively seeming to counteract death? If God suffers or takes death up into his own being, a contradiction of his own nature and of 'Death in God' in the Taking It Further section)

The Concept of Divine Love and Transcendence

Why does Weinandy believe theologians are not abandoning the concept of divine love, as explained previously, in its foundational foundation in the Bible, but also because it is incorrect in stating there is a contradiction at the heart of examining the cross from the perspective of God. In the context, Weinandy states:

If all that is the concept of one God, we are inevitably inclined to apply it to the Father exclusively to the human person of Jesus, so that the cross is 'emptied' of its divinity. (146)

While for Moltmann here this separation of natures at the cross is strange, considering the theology on their unity in one person, Weinandy argues it is perfectly reasonable that a human was being deprived of life and suffering on the cross while holding that his divine nature was not. This view, God experienced human suffering, but this was not a divine suffering, and this human suffering had a divine aspect, if would mitigate and prevent God from experiencing human suffering that defined the cross.

But, further than this, Weinandy reasons that it is not necessary for God to suffer. More importantly, that human beings' personal connection to God's love is not predicated on God suffering. He quotes the theologian Michael J Dodd in support:

If it were my friend's compassionate suffering which brought me consolation, then I would be reacting in quite the opposite way to that of a friend suffering from the way that he reacts to suffering. I would find joy in his suffering rather than with sadness at my own.¹

In this way, Weinandy argues, human beings do not, or at least should not find joy in their own suffering. True comfort rather is found in God's perfect love, regardless of events in the material world and human beings are attracted to God's love and reality of completely actualised love between each of the three persons.

¹ Michael J Dodds *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology* OUP

God is not inert, as the doctrine of impassibility would hold, for Moltmann but rather being of actualised love. The fact that God is the transcendent other yet chooses the truth that should be celebrated, not whether God potentially suffers alongside

So why does Moltmann argue God's love should be viewed as entailing suffering? covered in the extract apart from the second paragraph, where Moltmann argues

If God were incapable of suffering, he would also be incapable of loving as the God of Aristotle, who was loved by all, but could not love. (144)

One can argue that God's love for humanity is only unique and meaningful if it encompasses some reciprocal relationship between the state of God's being and the state of humanity. Otherwise, if God's love is forever completely directionless, it is equally directionless. God may love a cliff completely in the same way that he loves humanity. If the cliff crumbles, God would not be expected to feel, yet if the same is true for the fate of humanity, it can be asked what connection God has with the created world at all. This is especially revealed in the cross; if God's love persists, fully actualised, no matter what, why is the giving up of the Son uniquely significant to human beings?

The classical theologians such as Aquinas and Anselm, who Weinandy sticks by, hold God impassibly, without being affected by the situation at hand. Yet for Moltmann, while an intellectual possibility, in light of the way God is recorded as interacting with humanity in the New Testaments, it seems highly counterintuitive. If human beings' ideal of love is based out of human beings' creation in the image of God, and from the morality handed down by messengers and the teachings of Jesus during his ministry, should it not be a reflection of how God feels towards human beings? Furthermore, if this love entails a solidarity with the one who experiences suffering when one voluntarily chooses to suffer, why would God's love be radically different from the divine love of Weinandy and Moltmann? It is radically different, but it can be held together unless it entails some reciprocal connection where there is a mutual, empathetic understanding of each party's plight.

Yet Weinandy argues that most theologians who do argue that God suffers put forward a conception of God whose being is radically constituted by the cosmos itself, and that God's transcendence are committing a logical fallacy; a being cannot be truly separated from the events within. Being the creator of the universe for Weinandy requires that God cannot be contained in any particular way within the created world, and those who argue that God is dangerously close to Gnosticism, with God simply becoming a powerful, divine force

But equally it can be argued that this is a one-sided depiction of transcendence created by Weinandy to suit his argument for the impassibility of God. Simply because God is radically outside the world does not necessarily entail that God cannot be affected by the creation he willed into existence. In the same fashion that God voluntarily created the world, God can possibly voluntarily choose to suffer alongside creation as a measure of both his love and power. As Richard Bauckham states:

His transcendence does not keep him aloof from the world, for his transcendent love appears in the depth of his self-sacrificing involvement in the world.²

² Richard Bauckham "Only the Suffering God Can Help", Divine Passibility in Modern Theology,

It occasionally has been argued that the shift in theology to favour divine passibility is a reflection of humanity's changing conception of love, and that the concept of God should not be based on human ideas about what love entails. However, it can be contended equally that the idea of divine suffering is derived from Greek ideas about *apatheia* as a human ideal; for example, Stoics viewing it as the ideal being one where a human being is not affected by passionate responses to the world. This view particularly emphasises that the early Church Fathers only conceived of two particular ways in which God could suffer: '... either essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful submission to suffering'³ and have opened up the avenue to understanding how God could voluntarily allow himself to suffer.

There is another way of looking at divine suffering. The theologian Anastasia Scrutton argues that if God is omniscient, then he must have an understanding or knowledge of experiential states. This is in contrast to the belief that emotions are simply involuntary reflexes. If emotions are important to our understanding of the world, particularly with love, which affects directly the right or true action in a particular situation. Therefore, if God is to carry the passion that accompanies emotional states and responses, then he must equally feel them. This proposition may argue that emotional or experiential states don't carry knowledge, but for a completely good and rational God, but it is another way of viewing why a divine being would have the framework to engage in voluntary loving acts that could result in suffering.

Activity 3

The discussion about what love is, and the differences between human love and divine love, has led to a debate around whether God suffers. Complete the following activities to develop your understanding of this issue:

1. Note down a few different ways in which human beings express love to others. Consider ways between them involving an empathetic connection to the plight of another person. Can you show love without being emotionally involved in the suffering of the recipient?
2. In Luke 19:41–44, Jesus weeps at the sight of Jerusalem, which he knows will be destroyed as a consequence. Does this example of Jesus's empathy provide evidence for the divine love of God? Does it simply the action of the human Jesus?
3. In groups of three, discuss whether the idea of non-empathetic love could be a more realistic, if it is an out-of-reach ideal, how are human beings supposed to understand God's love? Is Weinandy's interpretation a concept fundamentally alien to human experience?

The Cross and the Suffering of God

The final consideration is how Moltmann in *The Crucified God* identifies Mark 15:34 as the foundation of Christian theology. It can be argued that much of patristic theology was based on what Christ was, looked towards the incarnation (and the prologue of John) as a more important nature of the Son than the cross itself, which was viewed as important only when it was necessary. However, much of the discussion revolved around the logical foundations for the pre-existence of Christ. Moltmann favours, the Trinitarian relationship revealed by the crucifixion itself.

However, Weinandy contends that analysing the cross in this way can lead to illogical conclusions, arguing that God may have suffered simply from Jesus's cry on the cross for Weinandy. This is a myth, drawing conclusions about Trinitarian relationship that aren't warranted from the suffering within a divine individual. Rather, he argues that the bodily resurrection of the crucified Jesus is essential to the resurrection, and attributing suffering to the crucifixion is of less importance than the human suffering, which can already be understood as an act of love. He notes 1 Corinthians 1:5 in particular, which states, 'For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.' (NRSV), and that there is already a framework from which Christians can understand the suffering Jesus underwent on behalf of

³ Jürgen Moltmann *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 23

But these considerations don't necessarily answer the fundamental point Moltmann wants to make. The point is that the analysis of the crucifixion is the way one can understand how Jesus might have been able to give up his life. The wider question of the relationship between the Father and Son and what implications the Father's giving up of the Son by the Father, and the Son's giving up of himself, are for Moltmann, are not fully understood unless there is some relational change that occurs in the cross itself. In this sense, the cross reveals the wider divine suffering that occurs between the Father and Son. But the one who regards the Father and Son as unchanging in the absolute way. There might be something behind the crucifixion, but it becomes difficult to understand why Jesus's sacrifice is necessary in its setting within the wider context of humanity's salvation. The cross doesn't become a necessary process for the redemption to come.

Naturally, it has been criticised that Moltmann places too much of an emphasis on the cross. Some have argued the most significant part of the gospel narratives is the resurrection, and the implications of the cross for the salvation of humanity, and the true divinity of Jesus. The cross and resurrection are equally important, and do not separate between the cross and resurrection, noting that:

Without the resurrection, the cross really is simply a tragedy and nothing more than the death of a man.

While the cross reveals a unique act of suffering by God, the resurrection is the fulfilment of the promise of the liberation from suffering for those who equally identify with Jesus. Noting the importance of the resurrection does not preclude revisiting the cross for its significance. The cross reveals the divine nature, and considering how Jesus's death and resurrection are commonly understood as the fulfilment, a hermeneutical approach which constantly examines the cross based on the Bible may well help develop an understanding of the significance of the cross.

Discussion Point 5

Does Moltmann's analysis of the crucifixion in the Bible rely too much on a small part of the Bible (Mark 15:34) and ignore other interpretations of this event? Could the cry, as Hilmar, be seen as a human sacrifice Jesus made and not carry transcendental implications?

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⁴ Jürgen Moltmann *The Crucified God*, p. 46

Taking It Further

Where Does a Suffering God Lead?

It has been noted in the Detailed Analysis section that Weinandy claims that a suffering pantheistic conception of the divine, and in some cases he is correct. One way of looking at this is within process theology, where God is not understood as being, but rather becoming. Within this world and, while still eternal and benevolent, does not have the same power to effect change. Rather, the world characterised by process theology is ruled by self-determining actions of human beings play a much greater role. In this way, God's will as creator and his actions and decisions individually make a difference, but they are not determined by his will, and are affected by decisions of individuals, but his benevolent nature remains unchanged.

This way of thinking about God is fairly radical, and process theology no longer has the force of the traditional faith of the twentieth century, but it draws together a common problem for those who accept the suffering of God, namely that while one can accept why God might suffer in the giving up of the Son for the sake of solidarity with ordinary human beings? This is arguably separating the question of the desired suffering from solidarity that can be partially seen as a response to the horrors of the First World War and Second World War, when many began to question whether a God could exist. But there can be argued to be a gap between the connection some theologians make between the voluntary love of God for the Son and the voluntary love of humankind. While there is a connection between the two, there is not necessarily a logical connection. God could well love the Son and the world, reserving impassible love for humanity in general, a distinction that may well highlight the cross in Christian theology if one takes it to be the decisive event of God's love. But this is a particular, arguing:

Further clarification is still needed as to how the cross, understood in this way as a unique event, relates to God's suffering at other times.⁵

For process theology, this clarification comes from God's becoming within creation, rather than the unlimited omnipotence traditional theology ascribes to his nature. With God's becoming, immutable in many areas, there is less reason to think of him feeling or suffering at the suffering of the world, yet, equally, process theology struggles to explain its model of the divine. It often stresses God as transcendent and almighty.

This meant that in the 1960s, that there was increased writing on the 'Death of God', as a result not only to the unsuitability of the traditional concept of God within theological circles, but also to the difficulty of understanding a God who could radically suffer within creation. Many scholars, both theist and atheist, contemplated whether there was still a place for God in twentieth-century belief, with some contending that modernisation inevitably led to secularisation. In turn, theologians from Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Paul van Buren began to discuss whether it was possible to understand the Bible and message of Jesus in a way that was religionless. The book *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* sought even to remove the idea of a transcendent God from the gospels, focusing on atheological interpretation of Scripture to focus purely on a human perspective. On the cross therefore, was not only a suffering God, but for some the death of God. The gap grew between modern humankind and the earliest figures in the Christian religion. A God-oriented view of the world diminished.

However, Moltmann answers such concerns by talking of 'death in God', with the death of the Fatherhood in God. In this surrender God aligns himself with all the suffering of the world, and allows for the possibility of solidarity within humanity. Salvation and new life. The connection, therefore, is formed between the suffering of God and the suffering of humankind as a whole, although it can be argued that the death of God in Moltmann is only a little cryptic, but also gives God a narrative that is relevant to people's observations of the cross itself. In fact Moltmann writes:

Only if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation, the death of God himself, is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible life.

⁵ Richard Bauckham "Only the Suffering God Can Help", *Divine Passibility in Modern Theology*, p. 207

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann *The Crucified God* 1974, p. 207

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Other theologians such as Eberhard Jüngel, similarly to Moltmann, have seen the way of understanding how God experiences suffering alongside humanity. Whether they extend the possible suffering of God in the cross into the continual suffering of God is a difficult question. Within the realms of traditional theological enquiry, it is likely that such as Weinandy it draws attention away from the salvatory power of God's love to process theologians' idea of God as Whitehead describes him: 'the fellow-sufferer'.

In particular, depending on how one interprets the salvific power of the resurrection, the suffering of God may seem unnecessary to the grand scheme of God's saving work. It may be stretching the narrative of the cross too far, and while it may be possible to maintain a Trinitarian relationship, the central symbol is the resurrection and the continuing work of God day through day. The God who has the potential to suffer is, therefore, a prerequisite for the cross, and not the necessary focus of any person looking to be reconciled. It is not important in any discussion of the impassibility of God to ask not only 'Does God suffer?' but also 'What significance does the suffering of God have in Christian theology?'

Is There Still Room for an Orthodox Concept of God in the Modern Age?

While views such as Moltmann's have become increasingly common, there are still those who advocate a model of God as impassible and immutable, closer in vision to that of the early Church. This is based on perception of what suffering entails, as explored previously, and the general belief that God does not need to suffer in order to be immanent and engaged with the personal lives of his people.

Yet part of the reason this depiction of God seems to falter are the ways that humans have demonstrated their ability to not only inflict suffering, but suffer themselves. The First World War planted seeds of doubt in many scholars' minds that the free will of humans created a world which would be naturally good and ordered by itself. With the rise of modernism and similar philosophies which emphasised that human beings have no essence, and that the terrifying radical freedoms, the ability to act so far from any individual's nature. Furthermore, the idea of suffering became more ominous. No longer was pain simply a part of the struggles of human life, but a universal, dissatisfying existential presence that hovered over all.

The futile, meaningless nature of life was highlighted by Albert Camus in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, where the struggles were compared to Sisyphus himself rolling a giant boulder up a hill each day, only to watch it roll down at night. At this point, the idea of a static, benevolent God was viewed as weak in the face of the existential dilemmas people were facing, such that if God were omniscient, one would expect him to solve these dilemmas and manifest himself in a way that answered them. The unsatisfactory nature of Christianity for many people lay not in the necessary falsity of its promise of salvation, but in the fact that the salvation it promised in its traditional concept of God seemed worlds apart from the philosophical issues of the modern era.

Therefore, as noted before, the issue with the idea of God in an important way lay not with its credibility, or logical coherency, but with the fact that it did not provide an answer to the questions and dilemmas of humankind, dilemmas that arguably were born out of the increased complexity of the world for human beings to comprehend the world, not a misleading impulse of subconscious desire. Even if the traditional, patristic concept of God can retain its significance and relevance, if God as a suffering being, it may still struggle to remain relevant. Weinandy's central question in *Suffer?* is defending an orthodox concept of God in order that the gospel may be understood. Weinandy is correct in detailing the facts of a suffering God within Christian belief, but whether such a defence helps Christians reach those who can't identify with the traditional concept of God is another advocate. Therefore, while Weinandy might succeed in a metaphysical defence of God's impassibility, it is perhaps more uncertain whether an implication of this is that Christianity becomes ill-equipped to answer modern philosophical and existential issues among people.

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Form and Justify an Argument

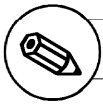
Throughout this section, the themes and ideas behind the question of whether God suffers and it is now time for you to form your own opinion. You are not expected to be an expert yourself, but you are required to be able to identify its core ideas and develop a critical analysis of the secondary authors and sources. If encountering a section of this extract in an exam:

- Is the concept of God as impassible (and immortal) a relic from older Greek philosophy or from interpretation of the Old Testament?
- Does the pathos of God in the Old Testament support a picture of the divine who suffers along with humanity?
- Is Moltmann correct in identifying the suffering God experiences as a product of the relationship between God the Father and Son and humanity?
- Is Weinandy correct in suggesting that a proper appreciation of God as transcendent requires God to be impassible?
- How might the idea of a suffering God be influenced by wider historical and cultural contexts beyond theological discourse?
- Is it necessary to view the crucifixion from a Trinitarian perspective, and what does this imply about the relationship between the Father and Son?
- What way might there be to understand the cross along the orthodox conception of God?
- Is it possible for an impassible God to love in a meaningful way?
- Is Moltmann guilty of reading into the cross a narrative not supported by the available evidence or reasoning on God and the Trinity?
- What implications are there for religious belief if one accepts that God suffers?

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Summary Activity – Moltmann

Below is a table summarising Moltmann's arguments within 'The Suffering of God' column and, using your own interpretation of the anthology, the extract and any blank sections of the table.

'The Suffering of God' Jürgen Moltmann	
Moltmann argues:	Argument
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional concepts of God, which focus on divine impassibility, have too many internal inconsistencies and do not adequately explain the words and actions of Jesus during the crucifixion event. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divine impassibility does not have a solid biblical foundation. It is a remnant of Greek philosophy, and when one examines both the Old Testament and the New Testament, it is possible to see God as potentially suffering or feeling emotion through his connection to the human world. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This suffering God can be best seen in the giving up of his life, as promised in Jesus's call in Mark 15:34. The act of giving up, as part of the atonement, shows that God freely chooses to suffer as part of his love for humanity. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cross has to be understood from a Trinitarian perspective, with the Holy Spirit present in the act of giving up that unites the Son and the Father. Traditional Christian theories struggle to explain the crucifixion as an act of a truly triune God. 	
<p>Conclusion: Traditional explanations for Jesus's suffering on the cross, such as a divine self-emptying, are unsatisfactory. Rather, it should be accepted that God suffers through his own free actions of love, and as a whole God suffers in solidarity with human beings undergoing hardship.</p>	

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Exam-style Questions

Read the extract below and answer the questions that follow.

Any attempt to interpret the event of Jesus's crucifixion according to the doctrine of the Trinity result in a paradox, because of the concept of the one God and the one nature of God. If all we have is the concept of one God, we are naturally inclined to apply it to the death exclusively to the human person of Jesus, so that the cross is 'emptied' of God. On the other hand, this concept of God is not a static one, we have at once to speak of persons in the particular event, the Father as the one who abandons and 'gives up' the Son, and the Father who gives himself up. What proceeds from this event is the Spirit who gives life to those who raises up abandoned men.

1. Outline and clarify the different ideas about the crucifixion and the suffering of God presented in the extract.
2. Analyse whether the argument for a suffering God overcomes traditional difficulties associated with Jesus's divinity and the cross.

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Mark Scheme

Level	Descriptor
Level 1	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language inaccurately or inappropriately. Only a surface level knowledge of important and concepts is displayed, and religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a and not always correct or sufficiently connected to the extract.
Level 2	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language presented, although with a few mistakes. A thorough knowledge and comprehension of important and concepts is displayed but with room for further development. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a limited variety, but generally correct, and connected to the extract.
Level 3	There is a broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language rigorously presented throughout an appropriate and justified response to the thorough and fully developed knowledge and comprehension of important and concepts is displayed. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a wide and pertinently connected to the extract.

Question No.	Indicative Content (10 marks AO1)
1.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terminology, when responding to the question.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionally, God is said to have been impassible; it is not possible for him to suffer or alter his being or substance. For God to suffer would mean a change in the external world, and so this possibility was ruled out at the crucifixion. The emphasis on an impassible God has led to difficulties in understanding the declaration at the Council of Chalcedon – that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. It is difficult to see how Jesus suffered on the cross without accidentally suffering himself. One traditional argument is that there was a divine self-emptying on the cross. Jesus suffered but at the moment of the crucifixion Jesus's divinity was not affected. It is difficult to support through scriptural study, and the process of how Jesus could only for a short period of time, is difficult to define if one subscribes to the idea of a self-emptying. Moltmann therefore, argues it is easier to simply hold that the Father gave up of the Son on the cross – this is not God being affected by the suffering, but the Son undergoing suffering as an act of love. This giving up has to be understood within a Trinitarian context – the Father is not suffering as giving up – this giving up can be identified as the Holy Spirit's love in this free action.

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Level	Descriptor	Mark
Level 1	There is a very limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, often inaccurately or inappropriately. Some topics and details are chosen with rudimentary links between a small variety of aspects of the question. Any criticisms or judgements are not substantiated by general or non-specific evidence.	
Level 2	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, sometimes presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed and links are made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements on some aspects are made, but with little substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 3	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, generally presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed and a basic progression of reasoned arguments is shown throughout the answer. Links are made between some aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, with some attempt at substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 4	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented, with few mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments developed throughout the answer. Links are made between a broad range of aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements are made of almost all of the aspects of the question and are substantiated by a reasoned evaluation of some supporting evidence.	
Level 5	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented, rigorously, throughout a justified response. Relevant topics and details are critically deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments strongly developed. Criticisms, judgements and links are made of/between all of the aspects of the question and are completely substantiated by a thorough and reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	

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Question No.	Indicative Content (5 marks AO1, 15 marks AO2)
2.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding using specialist language and terminology in the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been many traditional theological difficulties in explaining the crucifixion that God the Father suffered or died. Increasingly in the last two hundred years, put forward the idea that God can suffer so long as it is from his own free action • Other theologians have argued that a suffering God is less supportable from scripture internally inconsistent when analysing the relationship of God as creator. <p>AO2 requires candidates to develop their answers showing analytical and evaluative question. Such responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of a suffering God means that one does not have to posit a divine self-erucifixion – which is difficult to support if one accepts a Trinitarian understanding as pre-existent of creation and fully God. • The idea of an impassible God ignores the pathos of God in the Old Testament, and concern God shows for humanity by the sending of the Son. God in his free action represented in the giving up of the Son in the cross. • Identifying the cross as a free giving up for both Father and Son allows for an understanding that the crucifixion was an act of selfless love rather than an act of simple necessity, and to occupy a more central position in Christian theology than simply a necessary event for resurrection. • The distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity is designed so that events such as the cross are no longer necessary. The being and work of the Trinity is understood in the crucifixion. Similarly, the oneness of God can be maintained in the Son on the cross. • Allowing God to suffer on the cross is a step towards understanding how God can love human beings by suffering in solidarity. It opens new roads to realising how God can love personal, not just an abstract, transcendent force, particularly in the figure of Jesus. • Other theologians argue that it does not solve issues with the cross, and simply a new conception of a transcendent God and thus moves the importance of Jesus as a man in the human and divine world. • Weinandy's argument that it is possible for God to love without suffering – that there is a difference between human and divine love. It is not necessary for God to suffer in order to love, and thus a significant free act of salvation and love. • It is possible to criticise Moltmann for focusing on a personal aspect of God and ignoring that a changeable or passible God has for understanding the Christian God in Scripture and the Old Testament. • It can be argued that Moltmann's explanation is unnecessary and that the theological difficulties are due to his failure to appreciate the distinction on the cross between human natures. The significance of his sacrifice can be contained within his suffering and doesn't need to be extended to his divine nature. • It can be argued that Moltmann does not solve the problems of the cross, but simply submitting them to human ideology, using reason to answer a question whose solution is the mystery of God and the Trinity.

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Mark Schemes – Discussion Points

Discussion Point 1:

- Students may note Church politics did play a large part, with no clear orthodox views of the First Council of Nicaea (e.g. Constantine's desire to unite the empire theologically). They may attempt to reconstruct Arius's thought, but that the central idea that everything is begotten from the Father is not a reconstruction of Arius's thought, but that the central idea that everything is begotten from the Father is not a reconstruction of Arius's thought, but that the central idea that everything is begotten from the Father is not a reconstruction of Arius's thought.
- Some students might argue there is a fundamental issue with identifying Jesus as God. However, others might contend this is not the case based on a particular understanding of the Trinity and there is a solid case when analysing the life of Jesus from a historical-critical perspective. Jesus as a human being given divine power through the Holy Spirit (e.g. Jesus' baptism) is a valid argument, and not always based on clear and pure theological debate.

Discussion Point 2:

Some students might argue that there could be clear indications that Jesus was still God after his death (e.g. the tearing of the Temple curtain) but, equally, the idea of a crucified God is a complex theological concept that could not have been developed by the early Church. More specifically, the identification of the atoning sacrifice Jesus made on the cross in light of the resurrection, and how this can be interpreted through the human actions of Jesus.

Discussion Point 3:

Some students might argue, as Barth does, that God should not be subject to human ideology. However, suffering God, Barth agreed with Moltmann's conclusion, and it can be contended that ideas of suffering God come from a clear reading of Scripture and its implications, not from the liberalisation of the concept of God.

Discussion Point 4:

Some students might contend death is a fate purely for contingent or material beings – it is not a fate for a necessary being. In the same way, however, other students might contend that the resurrection – God does not simply die; instead, the resurrection marks victory over death and the potential for new life for all beings. God accepts death into his being as part of a soteriological process, and does not reject it – see Taking It Further section).

Discussion Point 5:

Some students might contend that, in more closely analysing Scripture, the cry of Mark 15:34, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' is evidence of Jesus realising the consequences of his actions. This can be seen to broadly follow an analysis of demythologisation, and a real examination of the human Jesus would provide evidence to support this. However, what, despite Moltmann's proposition being attractive, the selection of suffering God as his thesis of a crucified God is far from substantial.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Impassibility	The Christian doctrine that God does not feel emotion, including pain.
Immutability	The Christian doctrine that God is unchanging, in both his being and his attributes.
Apatheia	A state of mind favoured by Stoic philosophers where an individual is not affected by their passions and emotions. Best described by Seneca.
Aporia	A Greek form of rhetoric where the protagonist expresses doubt about something someone else or illuminate the speaker's position. In philosophy, it refers to inquiry, caused by competing or inconsistent premises.
Ataraxia	A Greek term meaning a state of calmness or serenity.
Paradidomi	A Greek term meaning giving up or handing over. In some contexts, it can mean betrayal.
Pathos	A Greek form of rhetoric which appeals to emotion in order to persuade.
Solidarity	The act of standing by someone in unity, against a common enemy or interest or cause.
Death of God	A movement in theology and philosophy inspired by Nietzsche, which analysed whether God was still relevant and what consequences this might have for society.
Patricianism	The belief that the Trinity is not three distinct persons, and that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all the one Christian God. A heresy rejected by the Christian Church.

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Extract 2: Alister McGrath, 'Deluded about'

What you need to know before starting...

1. The different forms of argument that have been developed to prove, or give evidence for, the existence of God, in particular, the teleological, cosmological and ontological arguments.
2. Atheistic criticisms of these different arguments, and the different ways of attempting to show faith in God to be rational and unjustified.
3. The different ways in which religion still influences society in the present day, conflict and violence, and how its influence should be curtailed.

Overview

This extract by Alister McGrath draws on Section 4.2: Secularisation on the syllabus, revise this part of the anthology alongside this topic. In particular, it focuses on the the New Atheism movement have valid foundations for their opposition to religion, towards religion which McGrath argues is common to certain atheistic thinkers such

McGrath has long been a defender of religious belief, particularly Christianity, in the face of prominent atheists, and this extract comes from Chapter 1 of his book *The Dawkins Delusion: Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, which criticises Richard Dawkins for his 'dogmatic conviction' of an atheistic fundamentalism that is neither reasonable nor rational. The extract will begin by highlighting the major arguments McGrath makes against New Atheism, and then move on to discuss the disillusionment with traditional religion in the modern world and discuss the future of faith and religious belief in future society.

Summary of Ideas

The Issue of Faith for Dawkins

One of the issues McGrath takes up in his first chapter of *The Dawkins Delusion* is the idea of faith in religious belief. In the very first paragraph of the extract, he notes that faith is 'trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence' and that concept of Christianity is very much underdeveloped, or even wrongly defined, in Dawkins' hands so far as to say that for Dawkins this poor definition is upheld primarily because it serves the purpose of discrediting religious belief. By setting it next to an elevated ideal of the grounding on empirical evidence, Dawkins can effectively argue that if someone claims to believe in God, then they are deluded, although McGrath even argues that 'Dawkins does not suffer from a delusion'.

In the first section of the extract, McGrath details a story of how after a lecture in which he appeared to undermine the faith of an audience member, whose belief in atheism was seemingly accepting Dawkins' 'inadequate worldview' without fully analysing what the foundations. In this way, McGrath points out initially that faith and belief are important to religion, and that while it is important that people do not base their lives uncritically on religious belief, it is important that one has the humility to recognise what delusions may underlie one's own fundamentalist atheism, being so certain that religion is a delusion, may miss the danger of falling into their own outlook. Throughout the extract (and his book), McGrath is concerned to show that it is reasonable to have religious belief, but showing how the wider arguments about religion are often unwittingly undermined by his lack of knowledge and insight on religious matters.

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Is Faith Infantile and Irrational?

The first issue that McGrath addresses is Dawkins' contention that faith is infantile, partially from the wider contention by Dawkins that faith is irrational at heart. McGrath regularly uses argument from analogy to argue against the validity of faith, comparing belief in Santa Claus, or more famously still, belief in a flying spaghetti monster. The basis of the argument is that if all that is required to believe in God, then one could have faith in any other entity's existence and still be justified in one's own belief.

Yet McGrath notes that much of religious belief is not really infantile in nature, often involving sophisticated reasoning on life and the nature of the universe. In fact, he argues Dawkins conflates the immature religious belief of children with the sincere and considered religious belief of adults, arguing they are both different. Since belief is not the same, McGrath notes, children might believe in ideas based on emotion, but this does not mean the ideas are true or false, or that the ideas a child believes in are not more rational than those of an adult. An example not included is that a child might believe everything is made of atoms without knowing what an atom is, or understanding the complex physics behind it. In the same way, a child might uncritically believe in God without being aware of the arguments and evidence for God developed by modern theology.

McGrath doesn't therefore, disagree with Dawkins' argument that there should not be religious indoctrination, but rather discounts it as evidence that religious belief is uncritical and infantile in adults. Rather, he turns this charge around, arguing that in Dawkins' selection of quotes from Luther, he displays a worrying lack of critical engagement with the source material, effectively disclosing that Dawkins is not seeking to portray an accurate depiction of religious belief, but using source material out of context in a way common to fundamentalism: to provide fuel for propaganda. One particular example he brings up is Dawkins' use of Tertullian, which he argues he used to provide a quote as evidence of early Christianity's irrationality, until it was shown not to have been uttered by Tertullian at all. As McGrath questions:

Are you only abusive of the religious, but not antireligious, dogmas and delusions of the world?

While Dawkins is sure religious belief is irrational and infantile, calling it 'a persistence of strong contradictory evidence', McGrath contends that he refuses to admit the same of his atheistic beliefs, meaning that, ironically, his own atheistic beliefs are fundamental. Partly, McGrath ascribes this to Dawkins' perceived tendency to analyse Christianity on its fringe, often extreme beliefs, rather than the moderate beliefs of most ordinary Christians. Of beliefs, McGrath contends, it would be possible to discredit them based on the same criteria. If we uncritically take them to their extreme limits, including people who are atheists.

The Criticisms of Traditional Arguments for the Existence of God

Dawkins, throughout his writings, has criticised a number of traditional arguments for the existence of God, but not only does he take aim at easily disprovable arguments, such as Paley's watchmaker analogy, but he also misses the point of the approaches such as the Five Ways by Aquinas, which do not rely on empirical evidence. How he could be consistent with an ordered and rational world were he to exist.

Overall, McGrath contends that Dawkins does not really engage with philosophy of religion in a serious way, erecting a barrier to entry that is easily taken down and replaced in place of real discussion around deep and complex theological issues. In the case of Paley and the watchmaker argument he advances, many Christian writers did not agree with Paley's conclusions, and the flaws in his argument have been pointed out by many philosophers and theologians before Dawkins' criticism.



Useful

A term used to describe a statement that is intentionally false or propositionally false, often used in difficult analysis.

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Similarly, McGrath argues that Aquinas, in supposing certain rational qualities of God (cause and effect), means that God can be inferred as existing from this order, not that God exists because it is true that Aquinas conceived of God as primarily realised through revelation, which is what McGrath proposes that this secondary appreciation of God through reason is mistaken for an 'a priori proof of faith'. Rather, McGrath notes that many things in the world are not explained, including major scientific theories, and not only does Darwin develop a straw man argument by judging it by standards he does not accord to his own beliefs.

Can the Probability of God be Measured?

The last two arguments that McGrath refers to come to criticising in the extract are that the existence of God is extremely improbable and that religious figures are too guilty of using probabilistic arguments in response to the advances in scientific knowledge. The former, McGrath refers to the "where's God when?" question' and Dawkins simply wishes to paint belief in God as an explanation. Such an argument, McGrath reasons, is misleading, for all things have explanations, and the infinite regress Dawkins identifies in theology has no bearing on epistemology and the philosophy of science. The example McGrath gives is that of quantum science wishes to eventually discover, which, in his view, is equally billed as the end of the world. If Dawkins were correct in his attacks on God, it could equally be asked why there is no sought theory of everything in scientific enquiry.

The other argument Dawkins uses to point out the improbability of God is a criticism of the 'anthropic principle', the belief that the universe must have been built in a way to accommodate and sustain human life, which has led to the fine-tuning argument for the existence of God. However, McGrath proposes that Dawkins simply argues that because of how improbable human existence is, the existence of an even more complex God is even more improbable. Such an argument, McGrath reasons, is fallacious, as just because something is complex, doesn't mean it is necessarily more improbable. He uses the example of a theory of everything, but it is equally easy to point to a more complex scientific argument as being more complex than the one that historically preceded it; for example, the theory of relativity versus Newton's static understanding of the universe.

One further point McGrath notes with Dawkins' argument is that it is very difficult to measure the probability of the existence of humanity and the world. Human beings have no experience of the universe or its cause, only certain theories about it, and so it is not directly possible (yet) to measure the probability of alternative conditions could have been possible. It is only known that an imbalance of matter and antimatter at the Big Bang could have produced a vastly different environment from the one we have. McGrath reasons here that the puzzling aspects about the universe are only complex because human beings exist to reflect upon them, and McGrath notes further that 'improbability does not entail nonexistence'. While it may serve to help one appreciate the fine-tuning of the universe, a theory that the universe and human life are improbable is inherently untestable. McGrath argues that universes that can be observed and judged against the one human beings currently inhabit, which diverts such criticism of God, arguing:

The issue, then, is not whether God is probable but whether God is actual. (152)

The God of the Gaps

Dawkins in *The God Delusion* criticises the beliefs of some theologians that God, or gods, exist to explain the gaps in scientific understanding. This is an approach which McGrath agrees with, and he refers to it as a 'good example of the dialogue between science and Christian theology'. However, both Dawkins and McGrath accept also that it is all right to accept that there are gaps in our understanding of the world, yet McGrath argues that Dawkins' argument that the kinds of explanation that Christians and other religions seek as 'God of the gaps' argument is wrong. Religious people are altogether responsible for stopping scientists making progress. McGrath acknowledges, in perhaps more fundamentalist forms of Christianity, the validity of modern science, and the kinds of explanation they seek in their understanding of the world are different from the kind that Dawkins ascribes.

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McGrath in particular here cites Swinburne, who argues that one's intelligent conclusion that the whole requires explanation, not simply the missing parts of one's knowledge. The more we learn about the world with increasing success still does not answer the question of where the world came from and how it arrived at truth in the first place. Therefore, the strained relationship between religious explanation and scientific enquiry that Dawkins is guilty in McGrath's eyes of selective bias: picking out elements of religion and its history to suit his point of view without considering the wider debate about how to explain the universe in science.

Discussion Point 6

Are arguments from fine-tuning or cosmological constants guilty of being 'God of the gaps' arguments? Could it be the case that all Dawkins requires is that scientific endeavour has grown to a point where religion is no longer needed in order to accuse religion of being misguided and irrelevant?

Final Considerations

The extract does not dwell any more on the various arguments of Dawkins that McGrath finds misguided, but, to sum up, there are a number of general criticisms he makes of Dawkins' argument, always clearly spelt out, and supposedly show his beliefs to be a fundamentalism rather than critical form of atheism:

1. Dawkins regularly cherry-picks elements of religious belief and argument, which are accepted, or even true, to support his view that religious belief and faith are a delusion (selective bias). This cherry-picking is a practice common to fundamentalism: to pick out parts of the Bible to support their own beliefs in the face of scientific evidence.
2. Dawkins fails to consider wider academic theological discussions on important intersections between science, philosophy and theology, as well as the core arguments of theism and why these may be soundly reasonable. In this way, he could also be seen as a Christian apologist to comment on areas of advanced cosmology only using the language of physics.
3. Dawkins does not apply the same standards of criticism to his own beliefs as he applies to religion. For example, he may question the basis of faith as belief without justification, but his own beliefs cannot be justified. This is a similar problem for fundamentalism: to criticise the gaps in scientific enquiry while ignoring gaps in their theory or understanding.

Whether or not these criticisms are completely correct, McGrath seeks to show that Christianity as fundamentalist and deluded, is guilty of displaying characteristics that it accuses other religions of being deluded and fundamentalist in regard to his own beliefs.

Ultimately, Dawkins' aim is not just to show how religious belief is misguided, but also to show why people should advocate modern secular society free of religious influence. He argues that children be subject to what he terms religious indoctrination or allowing churches to present religion as an equally valid way of understanding the world as science and instead of a critical analysis of the faults of religion. This is similar to Dawkins' view of seeing the growth of secularisation as a result of modernisations but a growth in intellectual confidence which, he argues, leads to the dismissal of religion as superstition. Neither is it important to him in keeping up the moral standards of society, for he argues morality has no divine origin, and that it is possible to develop a functioning, humanist moral system similar to what might produce the most welfare and happiness for all human beings.

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What does this mean? Well, while McGrath views Dawkins as primarily developing further his secularist, atheist agenda, Dawkins argues he is simply criticising entrenched in his view, for most of history has prevented real scientific progress and encouraged beings and societies. It may well be that both parties have correct arguments, and not be completely helpful in creating a peaceful, productive society. But equally if people use religion as a reason for their actions is not reflective of the religion as it may equally be responsible for violent and destructive actions inspired by their own nature of existence and reality.

Activity 4

McGrath has a lot of different arguments, and it's worth taking time to wrap up the points he is making, and how they contribute to his conclusion that Dawkins displays his own when criticising religion.

1. Briefly write down your own views on the religious arguments below. Do you think any perspective on them is valid?
 - i) The Reasonability of Faith
 - ii) The Argument from Design
 - iii) The Cosmological Argument
 - iv) The God of the Gaps
2. In groups or pairs, discuss whether any of these arguments can support belief in God. Is it correct in saying that faith is irrational, or are there arguments for God that would lend support to McGrath's views?
3. In potentially overlooking the harms of religious belief, and dismissing Dawkins as someone who displays irrational religious belief and faith, is McGrath guilty of the same indiscretions he accuses Dawkins of performing? Discuss this in groups, or write your response.

Theological Context

The Incredible Secularisation of the Western World

It has been argued that in the last few hundred years, religious belief has declined and many more people are committed atheists. Concurrently, there has been a removal of much of the political sphere in many Western countries, with a separation of Church and State. If religious figures might advocate certain laws or social changes, their power to direct has been greatly curtailed. However, despite this being the case in some Western countries, it is countered that religious belief is on the rise in many other areas of the world, especially in South America and Africa. Furthermore, despite organised religion being perhaps in decline in the Western world, especially Europe, there has not necessarily been a reduction in spiritual or religious lives, with new religious movements that do not ascribe to one traditional religion becoming increasingly popular. Therefore, while people such as Dawkins might seek great reduction in organised religion, secularisation does not necessarily correlate with an overall decline in religious belief.

Nevertheless, debates about the progress of secularisation have been proceeding since the Enlightenment, when many more people began to see reason as the primary way of understanding the world, separate from faith and other religious traditions. In many ways, this emphasis on reason and investigating the outside world, along with the technological progress that has come with it, has led to a better understanding of the world. Many thinkers have identified secularisation as the inevitable result of modernisation. With many debates about issues such as the freedom of religious expression, ideas and frameworks about what constitutes a modern and progressive society. For example, debates on whether Islamic dress should be banned in public spaces are often related to the issue of the liberation of women, whether an individual woman personally chooses or not to wear it.

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Even major religions such as Christianity which may have once expressed exclusive salvation, now advocate more inclusive policies that are seen as more tolerant of other religions but insights from atheistic and secular perspectives.



Yet while secularisation and atheism aren't new, argue against religion, perceiving it as responsible McGrath argues, partially in response to 9/11 and itself is irreducibly violent at its core. Certainly, a renewed focus on Islam, particularly on what was 'authentic' or 'fundamentalist' Islam, even if these forms of belief are held by an overwhelming majority of Muslim people. Yet in the context of globalisation, and the increased emphasis given to religion in the modern world, that religion at times has fused with modernity to new orthodox, fundamentalist movements in the presence of evangelical Christianity in the US to the growth of Hinduism in India, for all the growth in secularism and decline in religion across the world, there is an equal surge in people embracing fundamentalist religious movements that are often far from traditional form or practice. While, for example, many high-profile Muslims claim to be authentically Islamic, many high-profile Muslims are far from representing the traditional or orthodox

This vast array of interconnected religious movements and a new emphasis on personal, organised religion make it difficult to measure how secularisation could be defined, developed or grown around the world. However, Bryan S Turner, a leading sociologist, lists a number of key factors that secularisation involves:

1. The dividing of society into different spheres, one of which religion is only for its followers, rather than religion being an integrated part of politics and social life. It contends that fundamentalism aims to restore this integration of religion into society.
2. A decline in the authority and power of religious authorities and specialists, so that 'rational' sources of information such as scientists are looked towards for expert advice. This does not mean an overall reduction of religious beliefs in a particular society.
3. A modernisation of society and politics, incorporating individualism, democracy and human rights. These undermine elements of tradition, such that the community-oriented aspects of religion that supported its integration are sidelined, and, although religion might play a supportive role in communities, and even provide a sense of identity among a group of people, it is no longer the foundation of morality and beliefs in a particular society.

Therefore, it may be that a secularised society has a strong religious sense, but religion is not centralised in institutions and traditions that form part of the foundations of society. Religion is in the private sphere, away from the political process, and is at least partially subject to the control of the secular state. Therefore, it is important to consider when discussing Dawkins and whether he is truly arguing for a secularised state, where religious freedom is allowed, or whether he is campaigning against religious belief in general, envisioning a society where no religion exists. For it is certainly possible, depending on the definition, for a secular society to have a sense of spirituality informing its beliefs and decisions, and the cosmopolitanism that comes with allowing the growth and development of new religious movements.

Discussion Point 7

Many have argued that in societies with greater welfare and education, atheism becomes more prevalent. Could this analysis be used as a general argument against the irrationality of religion being replaced by other fixations or enterprises in people's lives?

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New Religious Movements and Advances in Theology

The question of how to define religious beliefs and movements outside the scope is consistently difficult to many sociologists. Often the term 'New Religious Movement' is used rather than pejorative terms such as 'cult', which are thought to be loaded. One issue with *The God Delusion* that many critics have noted is his tendency to homogenise religion as an easily disprovable theory while focusing primarily on Christianity as the target for criticism. While he might show that the Five Ways of Aquinas don't prove the existence of God, the wider issue is that newer religious beliefs have never used or ascribed to the Five Ways. In fact, there are many Christianities currently, such as United Methodist, which hold strongly pluralistic views. Dawkins wishes to paint religion in general as denying.

So what do New Religious Movements potentially prove? Well, while McGrath, an Anglican theologian, is keen to show that Dawkins is fundamentalist himself, he is also keen to show that organised religion is not the evil that Dawkins presents it as being. Yet at the same time, the declining church attendance in many parts of the Western world and the rise in alternative spirituality and religious movements potentially demonstrates that there is a wider sense of disillusionment with many orthodox forms of religion, a disillusionment that Dawkins might at least partially capture with his criticisms of Christianity. In particular, the static idea of a benevolent but transcendent Christian God has been questioned not only by those with more secular attitudes, but also by theologians themselves and movements such as process theology, or the 'Death of God' theologies that sprung up in the 1960s demonstrating that at heart there may be fundamental characteristics of orthodox Christianity that rely on blind faith or superstition, even if these aren't present in higher academic circles. There may be New Religious Movements that also bolster Dawkins' criticisms of faith as erratic or unconventional behaviour. There have been examples in past, with groups where self-destructive or even violent behaviour has come out of ordinary followers' beliefs of their religious movements. New religions such as Scientology, although they see themselves as such, have also come under criticism for their practices and treatment of members. All these examples potentially bolster Dawkins' argument that ordinary religion, before evidence of its truth, is no better than a widespread cult.

On the other hand, New Religious Movements on the whole are peaceful, and do not harm their community, despite scare stories that have often been promoted by the news and media. They have, perhaps ironically, been led more by Christian groups than atheist ones, often especially, New Religious Movements hold alternative views on Scripture and interpretation. The big issue for Dawkins is that New Religious Movements cannot be generalised to all religions, as they have different underlying beliefs or principles, in the same way that it is not necessarily possible to generalise all religions in the same way. While Dawkins might be able to criticise core tenets of religion, he cannot necessarily characterise faith or spirituality as wrong, but simply elements of the culture of the world today, and it may well be the case that secularisation. In this way, simply gives rise to a new form of religion. Any perceived crackdown on these would potentially expose Dawkins' position as being as fundamentalist and intolerant in its outlook in the same way that he criticises organised religion. New Religious Movements potentially expose Dawkins' position as one not based on religious belief, but a blind distrust of religion and spirituality in general. They can demonstrate why these are harmful as a way of life.

New Atheism

New Atheism is a term created by the journalist Gary Wolf in 2006 to describe a group of atheist thinkers who were strongly for the rational criticism of theism, often putting forward a case for myth or superstition, but also that its prominence in society opposed essential principles of ethics. Within this movement, the title 'The Four Horsemen' was given to the four most prominent figures: Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett. Between their books and contributed greatly to the growth of hard-line atheist attitudes around the world, not just mere tolerance of religion, but its removal from wider political and social life.

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However, New Atheism has also been criticised as 'evangelical atheism', in part because it focuses on the negative aspects of organised religion above its positive contributions to society, and because, like Christianity and Islam, it does not give weight to the theological discussions that have shaped Western thought. Questions about the existence, nature and purpose of God. Furthermore, while they emphasise the importance of scientific enquiry, many contend they don't fully appreciate the philosophical implications of concepts such as the inductive method, but also with basing one's entire worldview on the observable world directly coheres with how the world actually is, and not simply a convenient fiction. Engagement with serious philosophical difficulties, therefore, led critics to note that New Atheism's view of religion is based more on the engagement of ordinary believers than on a deeper understanding of what important religious scholars have said about the place of religion in society.

Nevertheless, not all thinkers within New Atheism fully reject the benefits of religion. For example, prominent New Atheist mystic schools, with practices such as meditation possibly forming part of a broader life, and Daniel Dennett arguably goes less far with his criticism of religion than others. He argues that religion should be studied as a scientific phenomenon rather than on its own terms. On the other side are Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who in particular argues that religion is a bad thing and that it is a complete obstacle to human decency, which precedes religion and

Activity 5

The large numbers of religions that have developed and been followed throughout history make it difficult to identify a single form of faith or belief that can be argued against, and an appreciation of the religious landscape of the twenty-first century can help shed light on the issues in McGrath's book. Complete the activities below in groups or pairs:

1. Does the rise in the secularisation of the Western world reveal any truths about the nature of belief? Is a pragmatic or scientific outlook in a society naturally in tension with religious belief?
2. Does the rise in New Religious Movements mean that Dawkins is only arguing against traditional, orthodox religion? Do his criticisms apply to all forms of faith?
3. Draw a scale, with 'rationalist theist' on one end, 'fundamentalist atheist' on the other. Where on the scale would you place Dawkins and McGrath? List other thinkers you have studied, and compare results. Is this a valid way of judging individuals?

Detailed Analysis

Is Faith in God Justified?

The first point McGrath addresses in response to Dawkins is his suggestion that faith is an inadequate way of looking at the world. This arises partly as Dawkins argues that the world should be determined by scientific analysis, and so the question of God he terms the 'God hypothesis'. In posing the question, he does not aim to disprove God, but simply to show that through observation, religion has been overtaken in its ability to explain the world, and general application of Occam's razor leads to the simple, probable theory that the world likely does not have a God. This he considers a strong argument, and any response that counters this argument through an appeal to God's existence through observation is an example of irrational faith discounting scientific evidence available.

Yet one can immediately question whether this requires the rejection of evidence. McGrath responds to Dawkins by scholars and theologians. He argues that this is a distorted, simplistic version of the world, not only with the Christian understanding of it, but also with the way that faith often operates. One particular philosophical criticism arises when considering Hume's analysis of the inductive process of reasoning. A number of observations and drawing a conclusion about patterns in the world from observations. These conclusions that human beings draw, Hume argues, are contingent on the nature of the world; things that human beings analyse as effects have causes and the conditions are kept the same. So when an individual strikes a billiard ball, they get a sense of its direction from their previous observations of billiard balls, as well as their knowledge of how things interact when struck.

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Yet Hume noted there is a logical gap in this reasoning. The idea that nature is uniform, that cause and effect is true, is not something a person can deductively know. It is not a logical proposition, nor is it true by definition. It is only believed because of a person's observations of causes and their effects in the past. This means the idea of cause and effect is a proposition which the individual striking the billiard ball then uses in their inductive reasoning to move in a certain direction. This reasoning ultimately is circular. One is justifying inductive reasoning itself. Hume concludes that there is a logical gap in inductive reasoning. One can never prove why one thing necessarily has to be caused by another. One might have observed it every morning, but there is no logical reason, only observation, to suggest that it will continue.

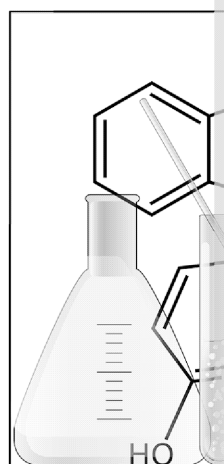
Why is this important? What does it mean? It means underlying human beings' every day life is a faith that things will be uniform, the kind of faith one cannot prove with the empirical method. It favours, and it means, perhaps, that the scientific method is not as grounded in reality as we think. It argues that despite the logical gap at the heart of inductive reasoning, one should still assume it is a natural response to assume the uniformity of things, but it still hints that the people have faith in things beyond reasonable evidence. A person unjustly in jail one day without evidence that might be the case, or, equally, an individual might believe the stock market will turn a profit despite plenty of evidence showing there is no correlation. The belief that science can provide answers to questions about the external world is a faith from being part of an ordinary person's life.

This potentially means that faith in God can be argued to be a similar proposition. A person is devoted to making sense of how God might act in the world, and what kind of belief might necessarily be required faith in the gaps in human understanding of his existence. In a way that one cannot logically prove the truth of cause and effect, one cannot prove the truth of God. It might simply be a framework for understanding the world that is incomplete at best.

Is Faith Naturally Opposed to Empirical Evidence?

Now it has been seen that faith at certain times might be justified, it is possible to turn to the criticism of Dawkins: that while with science, it is the norm for evidence to overturn established theories, religious people do not abandon their beliefs even when evidence indicates it may be wrong. This was an objection particularly favoured by people such as Antony Flew, who put forward from the work of Karl Popper the idea that the mark of whether a theory was meaningful was not whether it could be verified by inductive reasoning, but whether it was falsifiable. If a theory is capable of demonstrating how it might be proved wrong, and allows itself to be proved wrong if the evidence or conditions arise, then it is scientific and meaningful.

On the other hand, if there are no conditions or evidence that could prove a particular theory wrong, then it is meaningless. Nothing can ever prove it wrong, so it has no grounding in reality. A theory is meaningful hinges on whether it can be tested, and, in Flew's eyes, those with faith never let any evidence challenge their belief.



This is a very deep and broad topic, and it cannot be fully covered in depth in this section. Does faith not indeed respond to objection from evidence? Initially, one might be tempted to say yes, but scientific theories such as evolution from many hard-line fundamentalist Christians are not falsifiable. It is wrong to suggest that these Christians are representative of all Christians. There are many moderate Christians who at once accept that there is no scientific proof of God, but they also believe in God, and it can be argued that Christianity should not be understood as a scientific theory. One of the pillars of the Catholic Church is tradition, which holds that although revelation is important, the Church is required to interpret and understand it in light of modern advances. While this certainly has not always occurred in the Catholic Church, it can at least be appreciated that the growth in scientific knowledge has not always been, and is not always required to be, the primary factor in understanding the world.

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Furthermore, it may well be unfair to say that faith is not affected by evidence. In faith in the goodness of a friend would be shaken if that friend performed evil acts. The world consistently shaken religious people's faith in God. In turn, Christianity has theodicies: responses to the problem of evil, and why what human beings perceive as good or purpose behind it. Few regards this still as avoiding falsifiability, referring apologetics of the Church as qualification. He contends they do not admit that even a benevolent God, but rather simply change the definition of evil, or posit another explanation for the analysis of the inconsistencies in the orthodox conception of God. However, Richard Dawkins argues that human beings encounter and understand suffering all the time. He uses the example of a child with a tooth filled; while there might be pain involved, the result is the child does not suffer from tooth decay. In this way, what a child might perceive as mere religious intransigence (refusing to accept a simply another perspective on a set of difficult events).

This issue can be explored even further by distinguishing between general evidence and personal evidence: the experiences and insights that might not easily be relatable to others. For example, if a person has an overwhelming religious experience of God, is it reasonable to completely discount that experience simply because another person tells them that it is not? There are many basic experiences in the world that human beings do not naturally doubt or question. It is very possible that the Sun is simply a mirage that appears every morning, for humans have never been close with the Sun, but it would be hard to convince an individual that the sun was a mirage without impact on the Earth. What is important here is that there are plenty of everyday experiences that we take as personal evidence for certain phenomena. While experiences of God might be contested, it can be contended that Dawkins is willing to accept certain forms of evidence that support his argument and discounts other forms of personal evidence that do not.

Discussion Point 8

At what limit does reason naturally overtake faith? Is it not possible to identify a point where faith is inherently unjustifiable and irrational?

The Potential of Scientific Enquiry

The case for the superiority of scientific enquiry is not airtight either. Thomas Kuhn in his 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, made the argument that there had not been a linear progression of knowledge in scientific enquiry. Rather, there were long periods of time where core beliefs about the nature of the world remained very static, with scientists often building around faults in their ideas and theories rather than searching for new theories to explain them. It was only from bursts of revolution, often caused by factors outside scientific enquiry, that created new paradigms in scientific knowledge and allowed progress to be made. The classic example Kuhn gives of this is the Copernican Revolution, which put forward that the Earth revolved around the Sun, replacing the older Earth-centred Ptolemaic model of the solar system. At first, many people rejected Copernicus's model, noting that in its early stages it did not work any better than the Ptolemaic model. It was only when Galileo and Kepler put forward different propositions about the motions of the planets that the model became more favoured, and the movement was assisted by changes in language, religion and culture outside the scientific community. The particular model of the solar system did not become scientifically accepted.

What does this mean for critics of Kuhn argue nothing. Science still falsified theories and replaced them with different ones than those previously envisioned, while others more sceptical have remained equally guilty of qualification to their theories rather than falsification. To use a current example, the model of the universe developed by Einstein breaks down on the quantum level, but neither model is false. Rather, they seek a unified theory that encompasses both theories. But if Kuhn is right, this may simply be qualification of a scientific paradigm rather than a new paradigm down altogether and be declared unsuitable for describing the wider world.

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There have been many new propositions in theological discourse, from process theology to John Hick's vision of God as an entity in the Kantian noumena from which truths emerge. Christianity has hardly remained static apart from the belief in God, and in the same way that scientific enquiry has rarely been linear, theology has not either. (15)

Philosophers of science have long made the point that there are many scientific theories that may have to be discarded in the future as additional evidence emerges or new theories are developed. There is no difficulty, for example, in believing that Darwin's theory of evolution is presently the best evidence, but that doesn't mean it is correct. (15)

What Kuhn potentially means for theology, and theism in general, is that the idea of a fixed, unchanging truth is and ill-defined, and at the same time it may not be possible to distinguish scientific enquiry from religious belief with blind faith. Theology has shifted and developed with time, and Dawkins is guilty of simply assuming Christianity, from its uniformity in the past, has not changed, developed or altered its beliefs. While the core faith in God has remained, the way it has been worshipped has potentially changed (see Extract 1, Moltmann) and the way it is presented has changed. From the problem of evil to issues of logical consistency, the faith in God has regularly been challenged and has responded to those challenges, often in a new fashion, and not always with the anger or hostility that Dawkins claims. McGrath, however, hard, quoting the reviewer Terry Eagleton on the extent of Dawkins' theological knowledge:

Imagine someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is the Barmy Army's rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on theology. (149)

It certainly is true that Dawkins in *The God Delusion* addresses a huge range of the issues in the space, and many critics argue that, ultimately, he does not really sink his teeth into the core propositions at the heart of belief in God, let alone faith. In this way, it is possible that Dawkins fails to see the way faith might be modified in the face of empirical evidence, and theologians have put into reconciling different elements of faith, reason and empirical evidence.

Is there an issue with the imposition of Faith in Society?

A significant part of *The God Delusion* is dedicated to Dawkins arguing against the teaching of religion in schools, particularly in the context of religious belief, which they are not given the reason or the opportunity to question. This is especially important considering the processes of natural selection and the way that children, in Dawkins' eyes, to uncritically accept what their parents tell them. Faith is often passed on from a young age due to religious parents not giving their children the structural context of theism, and Dawkins argues, therefore, that children being raised in strictly religious environments is a form of child abuse.

Yet, equally, it has to be contended that Dawkins only feels entitled to declare a religion false due to his belief that theism is categorically false. In turn, an education that encourages critical thinking is healthy because this area, in Dawkins' view, leads to truth and greater welfare for humanity. It is not to disagree that scientific knowledge has brought numerous benefits to humanity (despite its negatives; for example, modern biological and nuclear weapons), but at the same time, it is a claim in saying religion is all false, and perhaps an even bigger claim in saying that theism is wholly wrong. Children are taught, for example, the structure of an atom as a nucleus of protons and neutrons with electrons circling around it, but a more advanced scientific enquiry would show that this is as very wrong. Should a child simply not be taught any models of an atom until they have the knowledge to understand how they work? Similarly, the concept of God and theism is a complex, and it may be unreasonable to expect children to at once deal with the complexity of theism has surrounded by complex concepts. McGrath writes:

There is a need for a society to reflect on how it educates its children... They need to be taught what Christianity actually teaches... The God Delusion, more by its failings than its successes, is a high-quality religious education in the public area. (148)

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But there perhaps is a deeper argument underlying Dawkins' analysis of faith here acceptable to put forward an equal, intelligently developed education of religion can be argued Dawkins is also making a descriptive claim about the way religious reality. While McGrath can call for the need for a good religious education, the level perhaps required to evaluate not only God but faith itself may well be above the many adults. In this way, religious education may always be insufficient to allow progress between scientific enquiry and religion where there are conflicts, meaning that despite the efforts of theologians, people may still end up with a simplistic faith in God that is unyielding to moral progress.

Dawkins would argue such progress is on display around the world today, from Western faith schools to secularising Christianity to Muslim countries centring education on Islamic principles. Whatever level academic study might reach, most don't study religion beyond mandatory school level, and so any uncritical inclusion of faith and God can only develop uncritical faith in God among children. McGrath is concerned that Dawkins simply wishes to teach anti-religious dogmas but it can equally be contended that Dawkins simply wishes to teach children things which might enable them to engage in the world in free and enterprising ways. While a basic education in science might not be as critical or developed as higher academic study, it equally gives greater utility, or more world for students that is applicable across all realms of life, not simply the religious. It may be a functional way of introducing children to a critical engagement with the world, but not faith in God or general religious education, unless taught at a high academic level, to developing minds.

McGrath does not address this more complex argument in the extract, and in some ways underestimating the validity of Dawkins' argument, especially in the face of the issue of uncritical faith in religion is a contributing factor. It can be said that McGrath may think religious education is possible, but the important aspect is that for Dawkins, the burden of proof is on those who show that is the case. For Dawkins, uncritical religious education has only led to a lack of scientific progress of humanity, and where more scientifically focused education has taken steps towards understanding the world have been made, as children stop looking for answers to provide for them and instead look towards ways of improving and understanding the world through scientific endeavour.

Discussion Point 9

Is it possible for religion and science to coexist in education if religious texts see science as a threat to faith? If not, does it have to be the case that one is prioritised over the other?

Is it Fair to Ever Compare Christian Belief to Superstition?

While it may be justified that faith on the whole can be rational, the previous section has challenged Dawkins' claim that faith is infantile. While many might have an adult, considered rational, faith is often a product of many people's upbringing and their limited capacity to reason through academic study rather than in a congregation of a Christian church, where the concept of faith is less developed and more preferred in ordinary Christian belief. Much criticism has been made in the US, for example, of televangelists and churches, which leave out complex biblical and historical study in favour of inspiring faith in the Spirit through charismatic preaching. The disconnect from wider academic religious study can lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of people's belief in God's action in the world means that such beliefs are open to being manipulated by opportunists, but it equally becomes difficult to discern what is genuine Christian belief different from mere superstition. If the Westboro Baptist Church, which has been in the media perhaps an undue amount, believes that God punishes homosexuality, how does one divide such belief from the majority of 'reasoned' Christians? The Westboro Baptist Church as unreasonable, but might still identify with the God of the Bible, which perhaps inspires such views.

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Naturally, such an argument does not disprove that there is no middle, reasoned ground to Christian belief between academia and uncritical fundamentalism, but it does mean that McGrath is forced, in a way, to show why Christian belief as a whole is not only reasonable, but also could ever be reasonable across human society such that the welfare as a whole rises from its presence in individual lives. Dawkins at times makes the utilitarian argument that, as a whole, religion reduces happiness and welfare in the world, and while Christians generally subscribe to a different belief in ethics, many would argue that McGrath cannot ignore this argument and has a burden of proof to show why Christianity has an overall positive effect on humanity. If Christian belief as a whole is more similar to superstition than to reasoned belief, and does not improve welfare as a whole, then McGrath is argued, as Dawkins does, that those who are at the mercy of the tyranny of a large group of uncritically minded theists are effectively justified.



Therefore, again, there is a descriptive element to Dawkins' argument. While in the reasonability of Christian belief in educated individuals, Dawkins argues that, on the one hand, it is educated and is infantile in its scope. This is a difficult dispute to resolve, however, the position of memetics, a field that uses evolutionary biology to explain how ideas spread, and the theme of universal salvation from a simple faith in God within Christianity make ideological transfer between different human beings and cultures. The success of Christianity in simplicity, and it is the simple, uncritical form of Christianity that is more widely practised. It can equally be countered that it is nearly impossible to accurately measure the reasonability of the world, nor is it easy to even find out whether every person subscribes to this or any specific religion at all (see above **The Increased Secularisation of the Western World**). Extreme forms of religion might get the most cultural prominence and exclude the moderate Christians from general media and print coverage. This is at least true for McGrath.

One of the most characteristic features of Dawkins's antireligious polemic is to present the fringe as if it were the center, crackpots as if they were mainstream. It generally works, but it's not acceptable. And it's certainly not fair. (149)

The latter part might definitely be true of McGrath's argument; Dawkins is not unreasonable in his variety of religious beliefs in *The God Delusion*, and on the charge of being unscientific in his accusations, yet if McGrath can divide between reasonable elements of religion, he equally has a burden of proof to show why the world is better than superstition, not to show that reasoned Christian belief altogether is better than superstition. As Dawkins argues in *The God Delusion*:

*The take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious extremism – a terrible perversion of real, decent religion. Voltaire got it right long ago: 'Those who can make you commit atrocities.'*⁷

In this sense, it may be that McGrath is not justified simply academically dismissing religion; it may well be a greater issue at heart with the way Christianity as a religion is practised, and how to separate it from ordinary superstitions. Whether such a separation is important, and whether it itself has some intrinsic value are questions that will be explored later.

Does the Existence of God Need to be Rationally Proved?

The second half of McGrath's rebuttal of Dawkins is taken up with discussing his claim that the existence of God, an approach which McGrath contends often misses the point of religion, perhaps guilty of erecting a wall between theism and theology. Rather than engage with the full range of religion, McGrath and Dawkins instead focuses on a select number of arguments, rather than the greater wealth of arguments which he may have more difficulty in defining. This exposes another issue with Dawkins: that most theists don't claim to be able to prove the role for faith in religion.



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⁷ Richard Dawkins *The God Delusion*, (2016) p. 345

McGrath acknowledges that Dawkins' criticism of Paley's watchmaker analogy is valid, but equally notes that Paley's views were 'typical of his age'. In the 200 years since Paley's arguments, the discussion about how the teleological argument for God's existence might have a place in modern thought has developed greatly, beyond the realms of evolutionary science. For example, fine-tuning arguments look at everything from cosmological constants such as the speed of light to the rate of expansion of the universe and argue that these display evidence of a universe potentially created to support life, and not just human life either. One of the most key reasons brought to modern teleological arguments, however, is that they don't attempt to completely prove God created the world; rather, they see God as an inference to the best explanation (IBE) for the order of the world. Whether the world needs explaining is a different matter, but this nuance is important when considering Dawkins' arguments, for most theologians don't consider themselves to have proved God, but rather, through a combination of rational belief and faith, see him as the best explanation for the world.

This distinction is perhaps best demonstrated in Swinburne's book *The Existence of God*, where he uses an inductive argument (employing Bayesian statistics) to evaluate how the different arguments throughout theology add together to make the existence of God more probable than not. This approach, using inference to the best explanation, stands in contrast with Dawkins' assertion that the teleological argument is fallacious, which McGrath regards as fallacious at best, and incomprehensible at worst. McGrath writes:

In a somewhat patchy and derisory account of the 'anthropic principle', Dawkins points out that the existence of the universe is improbable. Yet [his] leap from the recognition of complexity to the assertion of improbability is something complex improbable? (152)

This is a solid objection from McGrath and is perhaps illuminated best by the philosopher John Mellor, who distinguishes between:

- **Physical Probability:** The chance of something physically happening, assuming the laws of physics apply. For example, the chance of an ordinary human being dying before the age of 100 is very low.
- **Epistemic Probability:** The probability of something being true based on the evidence available. For example, if you find footprints in the snow and some books about skiing and holiday photos of the Alps in a house, you might conclude they are a skier.

What Mellor argues is that something's epistemic probability doesn't necessarily reflect its physical probability. For example, if a person suddenly starts levitating in mid-air in front of one's eyes, there might be plenty of epistemic evidence (the visual observation of the levitation) but it would be very physically improbable considering the laws of gravity on Earth. What Mellor argues is that it is impossible to point to elements of the universe that seem physically improbable (like the fine-tuning of the gravitational force to support galaxies) and then argue for God as evidence to reduce this improbability. Because probability claims about the universe fall under physical probability, yet the universe is not subject to the laws and constants of the universe itself. Physical probability is always relative to what we know about the laws of the universe itself, and so cannot be applied to the universe as a whole. Mellor argues that one cannot even talk about probability or improbability, because these are categories through which one understands probability itself.

Therefore, if Mellor is correct, then both Dawkins and Swinburne seem to be making a mistake in applying the probability of God, or at least one, by not understanding the limits of probability and mathematics. Swinburne responds to Mellor's argument in *The Existence of God*, arguing that because one cannot determine the kind of world God would make. This means that we cannot make some probability claim based on the connections between the characteristics of the world. However, equally, this response seems to imagine the existence of God outside their comprehension of the world, and that human beings' idea of God is based out of observations of the world itself. Many would find this claim contentious, especially those who strongly argue that human beings primarily understand the world empirically.

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What such debates serve to show, however, is that many theists don't claim to prove God's existence (or, more importantly, Dawkins does not consider the wider discussions around arguments from experience) and whether such discussions can even be valid depending on one's approach to knowledge. For the primacy of empirical knowledge, naturally his approach to proving God is difficult and the argument for God may well be weaker. But many others, including McGrath, believe that knowledge may come from many different sources (e.g. religious experience, intuition) and that faith may be based on a more varied appreciation of what might count as evidence for God.

Activity 6

Much of the disagreement between McGrath and Dawkins comes from the fundamental question of what sort of evidence can be given and is needed to justify one's beliefs. Dawkins believes that scientific knowledge should be held as most important, while McGrath questions the coherence of considering the many ways human beings have reasoned beliefs about God and the world in an enquiry. Consider and complete the activities below on this issue.

1. Note down a number of fields traditionally thought to be separate from science (e.g. art, ethics, religion, morality). Are there ways of holding justified beliefs about issues in these fields that are not related to empirical/scientific evidence?
2. In pairs, or groups, discuss what criteria would be necessary to distinguish a religious belief from a justified, rational one. Is McGrath correct in suggesting that the coherence of the beliefs represented by the religious arguments Dawkins criticises?
3. To what extent are Dawkins' and McGrath's beliefs on God and the reasonable kind of justification they would accept for beliefs? Does this represent a bias towards or against God or spirituality a natural consequence of accepting the validity of faith in religious knowledge?

Are Dawkins and His Contemporaries Fundamentalists?

The question of whether Dawkins can be regarded as a fundamentalist is a difficult one to answer, primarily on how religion is defined and the argument against. As noted in the **Final Summary of Ideas**, there certainly are a number of ways in which McGrath and Dawkins to employ propaganda-like techniques to discredit religion as a whole, but considering the greater complexity of theology as a whole. In a vacuum, where in a neutral standpoint, it can be strongly argued that Dawkins is a fundamentalist in his uncritical appraisal of Christianity and other religions.

Yet at the same time, it has been noted in the **Detailed Analysis** section that Dawkins arguably isn't examining religion from a neutral standpoint, or even claiming to. For Dawkins, religion has long been a destructive enterprise, encouraging violent and bigoted behaviour among people who perhaps at best, have not been able to intellectually grasp the finer points of what advanced theology suggests. In these cases, the existence of a certainty, and does not justify the behaviour of people historically inspired to violence by other bigoted attitudes by religion itself, and, for Dawkins, religion continues to inspire violent and ignorant behaviour. In this case, a wider appraisal of theology is not going to help bring about the fundamental religionless society he envisages as ultimately more peaceful and prosperous. Analogously, Dawkins, perhaps views himself as defending the world from organised religion rather than viciously attacking it, as McGrath might see it. In accusing Dawkins of fundamentalism, what is exposed at least is that fundamentalism is a term McGrath might seek to use against Dawkins by the use of the term, he equally fails to consider the negative influence on which organised religion has perhaps influenced the world through a middle way. This suggests both McGrath and Dawkins are defending their own position without consideration of the virtues of each other's position and that identifies neither as simply partisan.

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This description may well encapsulate the way that Dawkins believes in the fundamental enquiry above all else, but does not label him a fundamentalist for simply defending his position. Neither does it mean Dawkins is a fundamentalist for simply being uncritical of what he believes. On its own cannot be grounds for fundamentalism or many reasonable but wrong conclusions. In the same way, one could accuse McGrath of being a fundamentalist for his stance on recent progress in quantum physics. Both thinkers are open to different forms of evidence, but are closed to others. Where Dawkins might differ from McGrath is the vehemence with which he argues and in many cases the accusation of fundamentalism may well be driven by tone rather than substance. However, it is always difficult to define a boundary at which partisanship ends and



Discussion Point 10

Do both Dawkins and McGrath attempt to grapple with a set of topics too vast to be evaluated by any one person? Should the incredibly wide scope of scientific and philosophical questions be met with moderate or humble attitudes?



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Taking It Further

Should People be Disillusioned with Modern Religion?

It has been noted throughout this section of the guide that Dawkins deals with a view that is often focused on the major organised world religions, especially Christianity and Islam. In the **Theological Context** section, one of the major trends in many parts of the Western world is the **Religious Movements**, and it can be argued that Dawkins ignores an alternative or removes many of the traditional orthodox ideas of God and spirituality. This is especially true while Dawkins may have a solid argument that religion as a positive social force. His argument against the ontological or epistemological claims of religion as a whole may lead to, especially in the case of religious belief as superstition, is a breakdown of religion which may encourage a homogenisation of belief, and do not accurately represent the sentiments of many ordinary people.

To take Christianity as an example, there are many more informal denominations, such as Quakers or Unitarian Universalism, who do not follow the set practices of the orthodox Christian Churches and instead encourage a much more personal attitude towards God and faith. In these cases, it may be that Dawkins' claim that religion is a social habit and that human beings' attitudes towards religion can potentially adjust to remove superstition and ignorance Dawkins associates with religious belief. It is very fair that people may be disillusioned with organised religion; Dawkins himself notes a wide variety of immoral practices endorsed by various religions, such as FGM, homophobia or the punishment of apostasy. It is arguable that some of these practices exist culturally as well as religiously, and it is possible to reform religion to focus on the positive aspects of human nature that it can encourage.

For example, one can examine John Hick, who through his pluralistic beliefs argues that the idea of God can be formed that does not simply follow orthodox beliefs, but questions the underlying principles and ideas until a better idea is formed of the common ground between different religious experiences. Another theologian, Bonhoeffer, argued that after his death the church should be 'religionless' Christianity, which would hold close the relationship between faith and commitment to God, without the symbolic practices that form an important part of the Church. In particular, this arose from his frustration at the German Protestant Church not doing enough to protest against the rise of Nazism. In this sense, what may be held back from Christianity back is not a superstition underlying their beliefs, but the superstition of the religion itself. It therefore may be possible to be a good Christian without believing in the divine and human, or even partaking in church sacraments. What instead may be a focus on the ethical life it prescribes, and building a closer relationship with God.

In this sense, while it is important to acknowledge how Dawkins importantly criticises religion, his criticism is not exhaustive of all religious belief, and there may be potential for Religious Movements and other developments in religion may be able to accommodate his criticisms or be refuted by them. This may be through a greater appreciation of scientific enquiry and an acknowledgement of the flaws at the heart of orthodox religious belief.

Plantinga and Basic Beliefs

One final consideration that can be made to Dawkins' arguments about religious belief is the problems identified with scientific enquiry. If there is no rational way of justifying the interpretation of the outside world, it can be asked on what basis beliefs are verified by human beings. We naturally accept that their senses are trustworthy unless given a reason to doubt. As such, it is possible to argue that human beings have certain foundational beliefs derived from them. For example, the belief that frogs can jump is based on seeing a frog jump, believing that that the frog is not only there in the pond, but that its movement is caused by its own legs propelling it upwards. The more complex belief about the movement of objects in the simpler beliefs about the existence of objects in the outside world, and the basic

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What Plantinga proposes, from observing how religious belief is extremely common, is that belief in God can be counted as a similar form of foundational belief, or what he terms a 'basic belief'. Human beings' understanding of God in the world is simply an ordinary part of one's sense of the world; it does not require any external justification. Therefore, no independent evidence is required to justify religious beliefs; criticisms that religion is inherently unscientific dissolve. Belief in God, for Plantinga, is a basic belief in a worldview; not only is it sensible to ask why something exists, but it is also sensible to ask why God has created all that exists. The belief in God in particular comes through what Calvin calls 'sensus divinitatis': an innate faculty to sense God, similar to how human beings' innate faculties sense the world.

There have been many criticisms of Plantinga's 'basic beliefs', especially as part of his wider project of 'reformed epistemology'. One in particular has been to argue that belief in God is properly basic, what stops belief in anything else being properly basic? If an individual had a strongly pressing sense a flying spaghetti monster existed (to use Dawkins' creature of choice), even going so far as to see this monster in the everyday world, what differentiates belief in this monster from belief in God? Arguably, there is a strongly naturalistic, visual component to human beings' ordinary sense perceptions of the outside world, not just a certain sense of the divine (which may not be shared by all).

Plantinga here argues that such an argument comes from typical characteristics of a sense experience is foundational or basic if simply self-evident or undoubtable. However, he also argues that belief in God is not basic, but is warranted as part of a wider understanding of the outside world and a functioning worldview. This is not simply based on the nature of a person's experience, but whether one could not fit in with a general worldview common to ordinary working human minds. Therefore, religious belief is superstition, with belief in God being similar to belief in a flying spaghetti monster. With a wide selection of functioning human brains, all equally appreciating and responding to the world, Plantinga, facts can count against a person's basic experiences, but there is nothing that can count against a person's belief in God as a basic belief among many.

Plantinga's argument is not conclusive, but what it does expose in Dawkins is simply being too quick to dismiss religious belief as superstition, but it equally cannot be simply assumed. Instead, a wider investigation into human sense experience, and what one might count as a basic belief, is needed. Either way, there is a solid argument to suggest why religious belief does not require scientific evidence as ordinary propositions about the world, and, arguably, Dawkins to spell out why everything should be subject to scientific justification.

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Form and Justify an Argument

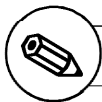
Throughout this section, the themes and ideas behind the arguments of Dawkins, as have been explored, and it is now time for you to form your own opinion. You are not required to memorise the extract itself, but you are required to be able to identify its core ideas based on the work of secondary authors and sources. If encountering a section of text:

- What criticisms does Dawkins make of religious belief, and how does McGrath respond?
- Is faith infantile or superstitious? How does it compare to reason in both the natural and supernatural worlds?
- Are arguments for the existence of God the signs of failed attempts to rationalise the world, or are they a demonstration of the reasonability of a Christian world view?
- Is the increased secularisation in many parts of the world indicative of religious decline, or is it a sign of a more rational and understanding of the external world?
- What problems might there be in arguing for scientific enquiry or justification of religious belief?
- Is Dawkins guilty of being as much of a fundamentalist as those religious people he criticises?
- Does McGrath overlook unsavoury or unjustifiable aspects of religion in arguing for its validity?
- How might New Religious Movements, or developments in theology as a whole, challenge the arguments against religion?
- Is religious belief potentially valid without scientific justification?
- Can religious belief and scientific enquiry ever be successfully reconciled?

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Summary Activity – McGrath

Below is a table summarising McGrath's arguments within 'Deluded About God?' column and, using your own interpretation of the anthology, the extract and any blank sections of the table.

'Deluded about God?' Alister McGrath	
McGrath argues:	Argument
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dawkins is wrong to argue that faith is infantile or irrational. He fails to see that scientific investigation is based on similar assumptions of faith. Furthermore, he bases his investigation on cherry-picked instances of unreasonable, blind faith, ignoring the thoughts and arguments of major theologians and philosophers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dawkins misrepresents the point of cosmological arguments for the existence of God. They are there to prove that God is compatible with a reasonable and ordered world, and as a posteriori arguments they are not intended to provide certain proof of his existence. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dawkins' argument that God is too improbable is not valid. There is no evidence of other universes or scientific evidence from which one could judge the possibility or impossibility of this universe. The probability of God therefore cannot be measured, only his actuality from experience or reasonable argument. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dawkins' argument from God of the gaps is valid, although not new, and the way Dawkins presents it does not represent the way theologians go about showing how God might exist alongside the discoveries of science as a whole. 	
<p>Conclusion: Dawkins misrepresents theological discourse by selectively choosing and misrepresenting Christian views to suit his own agenda. In this way, Dawkins is as fundamentalist as the people of faith he seeks to criticise.</p>	

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Exam-style Questions

Read the extract below and answer the questions that follow.

At no point does Thomas speak of these as being 'proofs' for God's existence; rather, he offers a demonstration of the inner coherence of belief in God. Thomas is interested in the implications of faith in terms of our experience of 'causality' and so forth, which are assumed; it is then shown that this belief makes sense of what may be observed. The appearance of design can offer reasonable 'evidence', not proof, concerning the role of design. Dawkins misunderstands this as an a posteriori demonstration of the coherence of faith. This is a priori proof of faith, which is an entirely understandable mistake for those new to this. Nonetheless, the argument is not a proof.

Where Dawkins sees faith as intellectual nonsense, most of us are aware that it cannot prove to be true but are nonetheless perfectly reasonable to entertain. For example, in believing that Darwin's theory of evolution is presently the best explanation of the evidence, but that doesn't mean it's correct.

1. Outline and clarify the ideas presented here about the reasonability of faith.
2. Analyse the argument that it is necessary for theists to scientifically prove the existence of God.

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Mark Scheme

Level	Descriptor
Level 1	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language presented, inaccurately or inappropriately. Only a surface level knowledge of important ideas and concepts is displayed and religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a limited variety, but generally correct, and not always correct or sufficiently connected to the extract.
Level 2	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language presented, although with a few mistakes. A thorough knowledge and comprehension of important ideas and beliefs is displayed but with room for further development. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a limited variety, but generally correct, and connected to the extract.
Level 3	There is a broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language rigorously presented throughout an appropriate and justified response to the question. A thorough and fully developed knowledge and comprehension of important ideas and concepts is displayed. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a wide variety and pertinently connected to the extract.

Question No.	Indicative Content (10 marks AO1)
1.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the extract, and terminology, when responding to the question.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theologians such as Thomas Aquinas throughout history have made arguments for the existence of God, based on observations of the outside world, which suggest that there are natural laws and a simple order and design in the natural world. Dawkins argues against these arguments for the existence of God, arguing that we cannot prove God through anything resulting from observations of natural phenomena. He argues that God is an object that cannot be explained in the same way as ordinary objects, and is therefore not subject to scientific enquiry. In his view, Dawkins argues that faith in an outside entity or divine being cannot be proved by conventional scientific enquiry, and cannot be shown through observation of the outside world. Against this, McGrath argues that theologians such as Aquinas are not wrong in their arguments for the existence of God, rather simply to show that faith in God can be shown to be consistent with the laws of nature that human beings observe in the external world. Therefore, arguments for the existence of God provide a posteriori support for faith. McGrath argues that such a posteriori arguments are found in many areas of science, such as the theory of evolution. The reasonableness of faith can, in theologians' eyes, be justified by looking at the evidence that may lie in the world, and it is a mistake to assume that this can be proved by the inductive method that Dawkins endorses.

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Level	Descriptor	Mark
Level 1	There is a very limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, often inaccurately or inappropriately. Some topics and details are chosen with rudimentary links made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Any criticisms or judgements are only substantiated by general or non-specific evidence.	
Level 2	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, sometimes presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with links made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, but with little substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 3	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, generally well presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed with a basic progression of reasoned arguments throughout the answer. Links are made between a lot of the aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, with some substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 4	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented with a few mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments developed throughout the answer. Links are made between a broad variety of the aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements are made of almost all of the aspects of the question and are substantiated by a reasoned evaluation of some supporting evidence.	
Level 5	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented, correctly and rigorously, throughout a justified response. Relevant topics and details are critically deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments strongly developed. Criticisms, judgements and links are made of/between all of the aspects of the question and completely substantiated by a thorough and reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	

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Question No.	Indicative Content (5 marks AO1, 15 marks AO2)
2.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding using specialist language and terminology in the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atheists such as Dawkins argue that it is necessary to analyse the existence of God as any other natural phenomenon – through the scientific method. Theism, therefore, is a ‘hypothesis’ – God’s existence cannot be assumed simply through faith. • Theologians argue separately that the existence of God cannot simply be subject to investigation – there are many beliefs that human beings hold without rigorous proof and can be reasonable without proof of his existence. <p>AO2 requires candidates to provide evidence for their answers showing analytical and evaluative skills in relation to the question. Such responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atheists such as Dawkins may argue that it is impossible to differentiate faith from superstition as it is baseless and the result of indoctrination as a child. Therefore, one needs external evidence to differentiate faith from delusion. • Similarly, people regularly judge their ordinary beliefs based on whether they can be scientifically proved. It cannot be held that, thanks to their importance in people’s lives, religious beliefs should be not subject to the same standards of proof as others. • Traditional arguments for the existence of God fail to provide real proof of God, as they avoid scrutiny by appealing to broad concepts such as order or design. If God is to be taken seriously, there should be real, tangible evidence of his existence. • The burden of proof is on theists to prove their beliefs, not on science to prove them wrong. It would be necessary for any person making a hypothesis to prove it correct, not to prove it wrong. • Theists are required to show some way in which the proposition that God exists can be justified, otherwise it cannot be classed as a meaningful proposition. • The increased secularisation and relevancy of science in modern society has provoked the view that scientific enquiry is transformative and valuable, whereas, arguably, religion is losing its relevance. Theists are developing a God of the gaps rather than a more substantial theory of his existence. • Theists, however, can argue that people have faith in many different areas of the world, many of which cannot be proved, nor can theories such as cause and effect, which are all taken for granted. • In this way, God is a framework for understanding the world in ways science cannot provide. It cannot be subject to scientific enquiry in the way that other beliefs are. It can be reasonable from observations of the outside world, but part of faith is beyond reason. • Religious belief can be classed as ‘basic’ – it requires no other form of justification or evidence, the same with many other foundational beliefs. • The existence of God in many circumstances can be thought of as an inference to the best explanation (e.g. argument from design) rather than provable. This is also true for many areas of science where it can be questioned what proof means. • Science has not had a linear progression of knowledge, and in many cases discovery has been a surprise and many other factors outside the scientific method and scientific proof.

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Mark Schemes – Discussion Points

Discussion Point 6:

Students might argue that knowledge about gravity and other cosmological constants indicate that human beings only know about how finely tuned the universe is from scientific enquiry. However, it is only scientific enquiry that can properly speculate about what this means for the future of the universe, whereas religious speculation can only speculate about the past. However, other students might argue that such a divide is unfounded between scientific enquiry and philosophical/theological thought. They might analyse what scientific knowledge means in the grander scope of human existence.

Discussion Point 7:

Students learning about atheism might argue that secularisation is a result of increased scientific knowledge. However, it is not direct proof that religion is false, it is a demonstration of a lack of understanding about the world. Once scientific enquiry explains things that were previously inexplicable, there is less need to invoke a deity to understand them. However, theists might contend that many educated people are still religious, including scientists. They might argue that there has been a reduction of religion in the public, not the private, sphere. They may also argue that scientific knowledge leads to increased secularisation, and potentially what secularisation does to organised religion perhaps oversimplifies the theology and thought behind the beliefs.

Discussion Point 8:

The relationship between reason and faith has been questioned greatly. Students might debate between Flew/Hare/Mitchell about falsifiability (see Philosophy of Religion). In the case of Mitchell and many other theists, there is a line proposed where one has to draw. If a subject's belief is subjected to scrutiny from reason, it may be required to abandon belief in God – for example, the discovery of a grander scientific explanation of the universe, or the point where the concept of God has no explanatory power for happenings in the world.

Discussion Point 9:

- Students might argue that a literal interpretation of religious texts can come from a lack of understanding of the text and does not have to be literal (e.g. John Hick). In these cases, religious/moral teachings can be seen as scientific enquiry, and it is not necessarily an issue that the two contradict. However, a program of demythologisation otherwise guts most religions until they simply cannot be reaffirmed by rational thought. It also might still be an issue if less-educated people take religious texts from a critical perspective, and take them literally, which would lead to conflict with scientific knowledge.
- Therefore, there may be a range of answers over which should be prioritised. Liberal theologians such as Hick might prioritise certain scientific findings over religious beliefs as myth. Those in a more conservative theological position might prioritise belief in God and religion should be the foundation of all belief. Some might contend it is a matter of degree, the other, arguing that science and religion give insight into different areas of human existence and should be directly compared.

Discussion Point 10:

- Some students might argue that in the extract (and in the Grath's/Dawkins' reading), the issues addressed are too complex to be boiled down into a simple argument that religion is false. They might argue that the debate might be reframed into asking what is valuable in each, rather than a simple argument about fundamentalist attitudes. On the other hand, some students might contend that the damage caused by religion is easily visible, and there is no need to complicate the issue.
- How one approaches the scope of the debate, and the damage science or religion causes, is one's approach towards the entire debate. Those arguing that the causes of violence are due to religion, and who do not believe theology is a meaningful discipline, might argue that humility is irrelevant when there is distinct social harm from religions placed in society. However, clear conclusions are difficult to make, and when dealing with religion, ethics and philosophy. In scientific enquiry in society one should not be hasty in demonising particular groups, and a moderate or humble approach to the investigation of religion.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Fundamentalism	A theological or philosophical position that has strong beliefs towards a set of core beliefs, generally viewing truth and viewing anything that disagrees as false.
God of the Gaps	A fallacious argument where a theist takes gaps in knowledge to be proof of the existence of God.
Secularisation	The process through which religion and religious beliefs become less widespread, and lose importance or significance in society.
Humanism	A system of thought that puts rational and empirical evidence at the centre of all matters of philosophical, social and political concern.
Modernisation	A term some thinkers have used to describe the changes in technology, perspective and outlook. Some critics argue it is wrong to term different societies as modern or not.
Selective Bias	A form of prejudice when a person picks out information without truly being random or achieving a full representation of the population being studied.
New Religious Movements	A term used to describe smaller religions or spiritualities that have emerged in modern times that may be considered as new organised religions, or subsets of them.
Falsificationism	The belief that the best way of analysing whether a claim is true and persuasive is to determine the conditions under which it would be false, and test against the argument accordingly.
Memetics	A field of study that analyses how information and ideas spread throughout human populations using evolutionary theory.
Inference to the Best Explanation	A form of reasoning that for any particular issue, the most and most reasonable explanation from the available options is the correct one.
Basic Belief	A term Plantinga uses to describe beliefs that are not subject to no further justification to warrant an individual's belief.

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Extract 4: John Hick, 'Atonement by the Blood'

What you need to know before starting...

1. The importance of atonement in systematic theology and the significance to both early and modern Christians.
2. The different ways in which the atonement has been interpreted, and how Jesus is viewed as a triumph over or a satisfaction for human sin.
3. The issues with traditional theories of atonement, and why satisfaction or moralistic theories are not understood and upheld within present-day Christian views.



Overview

This extract by John Hick draws on Section 5.2: A Comparison of Key Ideas in the V on the syllabus and you are advised to read and revise this part of the anthology and, in particular, the extract focuses on the different theories and theological discussion of atonement in Christian belief, with the passages being drawn from John Hick's large work *Incarnate*, which develops a Christology within his distinctive pluralistic framework.

Hick's theology has both been influential and controversial, especially in its disavowal of certain Christian teachings, such as the Trinity and the Chalcedonian Definition (Christ is both divine and human in one person, or hypostasis), that are seen as central to the religion, and Hick himself has been viewed as much more comprehensible as one of many world religions if certain elements of Christianity are removed from Christian belief. This guide critically examines his approach to a number of the different conceptions of atonement, highlighting the major issues and themes before scrutinising his criticism and analysing their consequences in wider theological discussion.

Note: Section 5.2 directly compares the thought of Hick and Barth, and it is recommended that you read both alongside each other. Furthermore, a basic knowledge of the thought of both is very useful for reading through both Barth and Hick. The beginning of the guide in the Summary of Ideas and the Theological Context sections, but a broad understanding of the views of atonement may help students better understand initially the approaches to atonement theory.

Summary of Ideas

A Historical Overview of the Doctrine of Atonement

The extract begins with Hick outlining the doctrine of atonement, and how it has changed over time while certain Christian teachings such as the Trinity have remained, at heart, similar. While the Church and theology as a whole, the meaning of atonement has shifted, often in ways that theologians have analysed both the external world and human ethical activity.

The word 'atonement' itself literally means to be at one or in harmony with someone, and might be used to refer to actions or steps that have been made to make amends for wrongdoing. While this is not the exact meaning in Christian theology, it heavily blends into the idea of atonement in the belief in a singular atonement through the death of Jesus on the cross (which absolved humanity of sin and enabled reconciliation with God), the mechanical, theological details of how this works are less clear, and it is even possible that from a historical perspective, the Christian doctrine of atonement and the death of Jesus that is ultimately unwarranted.



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This fuzziness around both the definition and the details of atonement means that there are two different meanings:

- **The Broad Meaning:** *'becoming one with God... entering into a right relationship with the process or state of salvation'.* (161)
- **The Narrow Meaning:** *'a specific method of receiving salvation, one presupposing guilt. It is in this context that we find the ideas of penalty, redemption, sacrifice, expiation, satisfaction, substitution, forgiveness, ransom, justification'.*

Why is this split important? Because Hick seeks to show that there is no narrow, transactional meaning of atonement that can be accepted with modern beings' scientific understanding of the world and their modern sensibilities. In his view, there is not much in the Bible that supports the doctrine of atonement in Christian theology, and unless there is a pressing theological, scientific or ethical reason to consider it important, then it is unnecessary to a Christian life that focuses on the moral example of Jesus himself. This is important, as, while he notes that in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, there has been less of a focus on giving the death of Jesus a special significance in the Western Church, where it has commonly been believed that 'salvation' requires an adequate atonement to satisfy the divine righteousness. Hick notes, in common Christian thought it has been believed that human sin has created a debt that must be paid, and that there must be some sort of transaction or punishment that alleviates this debt. The divergence between the Western and Eastern Churches is that the former has tended to see the atonement as a liberation of human sin, whereas the latter has emphasised human **theosis** in light of the spiritual development of the human being until they achieve holiness and union with God. Rather than adopt the transactional model, Christians should move closer to the 'transformational conception of salvation'.



Useful Theology

Hick uses the term 'theosis' to describe any process that involves some form of Jesus' life being in order to bring about actions or sin.

The Ransom Theory of Atonement

Hick notes that in the early post-Easter Church of a community that had changed and been liberated by the death (and resurrection) of Jesus. Throughout his ministry, Jesus performed miracles and exorcised demons, and in light of these miracles, his death became the final victory. In particular, as Hick notes, early Christians focused on Mark 10:45, where the Son of Man 'give his life a ransom for many' (NRSV), and this metaphor, set against the background of slavery and servitude, was understood literally. Therefore, early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus and St Augustine believed that Jesus had given his life as a payment to the devil in order to liberate humanity from its sinful jurisdiction, and while such a view was never included in important Christian theology, it was a view that persisted during the first 900 years of the Church's history until the arrival of the Reformation.

Hick regards such ideas as 'embarrassing' considering humanity's greater knowledge today, but he also notes how these concepts of atonement set up future discussions by orienting atonement around the idea of original sin being an ontological affliction of humankind, for which atonement was a necessary cure. While there may be some value for understanding original sin for Hick as a recognition of the imperfect moral nature of human beings, for the most part he contends that the Christian obsession with Adam and the Fall has been counterproductive to the development of pertinent Christian theology, and he states:

'Today, the idea of an actual human fall resulting in a universal inherited depravity and total inability is totally unacceptable for educated Christians.' (164)

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The concept of early humans from modern evolutionary science is likely to give a different perspective to the Genesis accounts of human beings living in perfect communion with God, and just as the Fall is generally regarded as myth, Hick argues the Fall should be seen as little more than a story. If there may be an issue with guilt, insofar as human beings' free choices conflict with their natural tendencies, it is absurd for Hick that human beings should be born feeling guilty about their existence. The sins human beings may commit are so often geared towards survival that it would be strange for such traits to be a moral failing from a state of perfection rather than a necessary part of an unfair and often harsh world created under the providence of God. Therefore, Hick's difficulty with many of the Western, traditional models of atonement is the belief in a human nature that requires atonement. If there were theology to look beyond early Christian readings of Genesis and similar parts of the letters of St Paul, there would be greater scope for a concept of atonement that has persisted throughout the history of the Christian faith.

Atonement in the Theology of Anselm

Thus, Hick moves towards analysing the concept of atonement within the theology of Anselm, the first to develop what could be called a 'satisfaction' theory of atonement and which primarily comes from the Church's feudal conception of satisfaction at the time, where a vassal owed loyalty against one's lord, an equal penance was required in order to satisfy the injury that was done, whether it be physical or simply to the lord's dignity and honour. In the case of Anselm, 'nothing else than not to render to God his due', human sin as a result of disobedience to God. As such, everyone who sins is required to do penance until this satisfaction has been achieved. It begins the process of reconciliation with human beings, much less save them. So a person must do penance for their sins.

Yet at the same time, as Hick notes, Anselm regards it as impossible for human beings to satisfy God, as God is already due human beings' undying obedience and devotion; therefore, human beings could perform that would fulfil the requirement of a fully satisfying penance. If God is divine, there is no human act that could satisfy because God would require penance for the creation of the created and material world. So, in essence, human beings by themselves are stuck in a cycle of sin. Human beings to give penance, yet human beings cannot do so and cannot do so as beings who are finite.

Therefore, if there is no being who can perform the satisfying act, God freely gives himself as satisfaction and constitutes himself as penance for the dishonouring of God himself by human sin. Nevertheless, it seems to fit into a logical, scholastic theological framework, Hick concludes it is unlikely that this idea of God which identifies him as a lord obsessed with both dignity and righteousness is the Christian conception of God today, which is often focused around his compassion and love. However, reasonably, do most people consider satisfaction to be a good model for restitution? It could even be argued that such a concept does not fit the example Jesus sets in the Gospels, where he teaches that people should turn the other cheek when struck by an adversary, a teaching that is quite different from ideas about satisfaction. Therefore, Hick argues Anselm's view now makes 'little sense' and it would be best to cease altogether to use it in our contemporary theologies and liturgies.

Discussion Point 11

Does the historical failure to identify a core structure of the atonement in the New Testament mean that it is fundamentally a confused topic? Or is it acceptable for Christians to accept the atonement without a fully understanding it?

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The Move towards a Penal-substitutionary Conception of Atonement

The historical doctrine of atonement that Hick examines is that of the 'penal-substitutionary' model, prominent within the Reformist tradition in the sixteenth century, but little followed now. This is similar to Anselm's concept of satisfaction but proposes that a transgression of a ruler and their will as law required a punishment independently of whether the ruler called for it. Therefore, God's law is inflexible, and human beings breaking it need to face a punishment for their sin. Rather than let ordinary people be punished, however, God takes the place of humanity on the cross, and human beings are forgiven for their transgressions against God. Yet, as Hick notes, the idea that it is acceptable to punish another innocent person in the place of someone guilty would be regarded as absurd in the modern era. Hick himself describes it as a 'morally grotesque' view. If God really punished for the transgressions of others' then he can hardly be said to be just or compassionate. The imagery of this substitutionary sacrifice being appealing to some, Hick argues, is a distortion of Christian thought.

Swinburne's Transactional Conception of Atonement

It can be seen so far that Hick ultimately is underwhelmed by the historical proposals of atonement, having been built on what he sees as outdated conceptions of original sin. He takes time to analyse whether in modern Christian thought transactional atonement focusing particularly on Richard Swinburne's work in *Responsibility and Atonement* analyses how atonement can be understood in interpersonal affairs before examining whether atonement in this sense could apply to human beings' relationship with God. The ideas of moral law, original sin or mythological conceptions of good and evil, he believes, are how human beings morally interact, and what general moral truths one can derive from the way human society as a whole.

Hick divides Swinburne's thought roughly into seven steps. His main aim, as he states, is that Swinburne is describing a conception of atonement that is not just logically coherent, but one that is plausible within Christian belief and the life and teachings of Jesus in the gospels.

1. Human sin is the primary obstruction to redemption and salvation in God.
2. Reconciliation with another human being requires repentance, apologising, and an expression of one's heartfelt regret.
3. The way human beings morally engage with each other is the same as the way they engage with God.
4. Sinning against human beings is also sinning against God, for individuals are owed a duty towards him to live a good life.
5. Human beings cannot give adequate reparation and penance to God. Therefore, if they repent and apologise, they cannot reconcile themselves with God through the means that could atone for a sinful human life is a perfect human life.
6. Jesus Christ is the only person who could provide the perfect human life as atonement. He gave his life as an offering of reparation and penance for human sin.
7. Salvation can only come to those who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and recognise his sacrifice. Therefore, coming to faith through participating in the Christian Church, the Eucharist, and other sacraments is essential for salvation.

Hick's Criticisms of Swinburne

Hick admits that a number of aspects of Swinburne's analysis of atonement are familiar to him, but those which pertain to how atonement is understood and practised within Christianity he reserves criticism for a few points in particular that he regards as decisive in showing the heart of transactional concepts of the atonement.

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Agreements between Hick and Swinburne

Swinburne's analysis of atonement within human circles

Swinburne examines in numerous ways how atonement has existed within society, one of the 'elements of truth' within his theory. Chapters 1–7 of *Responsibility and Atonement* look at how atonement is practised, in particular focusing on the importance of moral acts within this framework. One important aspect is that Swinburne argues that within the human realm, one can be atoned without one's victim forgiving the wrongdoer, so long as that the wrongdoer has made substantial atonement. Moreover, it is arguably the case that the victim is encouraged to forgive each other and to accept reparations or penance where reparations or penances are made, the victim equally has a right to seek these and is not obligated to and is free to refer such matters to the state.

These principles stand in contrast with the earlier models of atonement that Hick emphasised satisfaction or punishment as objectively necessary, and ignored the fact that people might be tempted towards sin and how they might seek atonement. In this sense, aspects of Swinburne's analysis of atonement moves away from archaic models and is based on common moral truths he can agree with.

Swinburne's assertion that sins against other human beings are sins against God

This is the second part that Hick agrees within in Swinburne's thought, noting that from a liberal point of view. It might be argued that a Christian conception of the world could ignore the importance of this principle, but in practice it remains difficult to ignore. If one's actions are significant to a person when judged before God, then they need to have significance outside of their relationship to other human beings. Otherwise, one might create laws that allow the persecution of those who are expressing devotion to God, a position that may have been practised in the Christian past but would be disavowed today. Ultimately, for a Christian, the existence and sustenance of the world, God the creator, and future salvation is dependent upon the blessing of God. The fact that one's actions towards other human beings, is showing contempt for God, and Hick thus agrees with Swinburne that 'the relationship to follow human beings is a necessary condition for relationships to God'.

Disagreements between Hick and Swinburne

Swinburne's assertion that atonement between human beings has the same general principle as atonement between human beings and God

Hick argues that Swinburne assumes this point throughout Chapters 8–12 of *Responsibility and Atonement*, ultimately there is an unwarranted jump between the way human beings apply atonement in their everyday lives, and the way that atonement might work between God and human beings. While it might appeal to the personal nature of both kinds of relationship, this doesn't necessarily mean that it works the same way, and Hick contends that to say that God is subject in any way to the same principles as human beings, and that God is confined by what one might identify as Christian history, is 'not only unimaginative to a degree that renders it massively implausible'. In short, for Hick, Swinburne 'assumes without due consideration that human beings from reasoning on the basis of their own experience somehow determine or predict how God has not only freely chosen to conduct his relationship with human beings, but also how God has decided to conduct his 'saving work'.

Hick presses this criticism further in relation to point 5, arguing that although it might be possible to identify a fourfold way in which human beings seek to atone for their actions against other human beings, there is no reason to assume that this model necessarily applies to God in exactly the same way. While it might be easy to identify the importance of reparation and apology in relation to God, it can be argued that this is not the case. As Hick argues, 'if reparations and penance are necessary. If, after wronging another human being, one wholeheartedly atones for one's actions, providing the wronged party with reparation and penance, why does God need further reparation or penance on top of this? This, arguably, is especially true considering point 3; if human beings are judged for their actions towards human beings, then the entire scope of atonement is arguably contained within this arrangement, not on a separate basis with God.

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Hick contends here, therefore, that Swinburne is making an unwarranted claim that in some way outside human affairs, such that a transgression against another human being is a transgression against God, even though there is no way for God to ever be benefited by reparations or penances. In fact, what Jesus and the Spirit prompt human beings to do is reparations to each other, and for Hick these actions satisfy the conditions of atonement simply being groundless additions to fulfil a transactional component of atonement to fulfil on the cross. As Hick states:

The idea that something further... is required by God... Godself... rests upon a category of atonement that is not available to another individual within the same moral community as ourselves... We cannot benefit from our actions in benefitting others by giving our fellow creatures. (168)

Another criticism Hick makes is that even if reparation and penance had to be made, it would suggest that atonement has to come in the form of one perfect life. In fact, if logic pertains to each human life lived sinfully requires one perfect life in return as this is owed by Swinburne's analysis, and so the sacrifice of Jesus would only be enough to atone for one human life. Yet Hick even argues that Swinburne's response to this argument only as Swinburne suggests, God is able to make a free choice to accept one perfect human life. That God himself chose the death of the Son, not just arbitrarily, but in the particular way that possibly suggests that human beings are dealing with a deity who believes that so much blood is required as payment on behalf of humanity, which, considering Hick's view of God as morally repugnant, would suggest God is lacking in moral character. Therefore, either we accept some objective moral law of penal-substitution or accept that for some reason, despite the method of atonement, God willed the violent death of Jesus simply to satisfy imperfectly lived human lives.

The final issue Hick notes later is that Swinburne abandons the traditional belief that the sacrifice of Jesus exceeded the atoning requirements for human sin. It has been noted above that, if atonement is a transaction, it shouldn't match innumerable more sinful lives yet for Swinburne the mercy of God is satisfied by the sacrifice of Jesus without full satisfaction. The problem, however, as Hick notes, is that if God can let off human beings without reparation or penance, what is stopping him from letting off everyone altogether and forgiving them for their sins without the sacrifice of the Son? If one can atone for sin by any means, then the need for a specific kind of transactional atonement, what human beings can give becomes unnecessary. This is an important criticism noted in the **Detailed Analysis** section.

Discussion Point 12

If it is not possible to understand the atonement of Jesus from an analysis of atonement as human beings, is there any hope of understanding what the atonement meant at all for human beings? The radical disconnect between the atonement of Jesus and atonement as human beings is a major issue.

Bonus:

What implications does this have for understanding other aspects of God, such as his love and justice?

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Swinburne's assertion that Jesus gave his life as an offering of reparation and penance. This perhaps is the deepest criticism of Hick's, and can be seen to be part of his 'deconstruction' of the Bible. He notes correctly that biblical scholarship has not been unhelpful in analysing the motives and purpose behind the death of Jesus, and that it is difficult in any sense that his own death would have had religious significance. It is very possible from a historical perspective on the gospels, to see only his resurrection as having primary significance. The crucifixion simply a necessary step in a grander salvation history. Hick in particular

- **E P Sanders:** One of the foremost scholars in analysing the 'historical' Jesus, writing in the context of first-century Judaism. Regarding Jesus as the founder of a Jewish sect, he notes he has a minimalist view of atonement, regarding it as only 'conceivable' if his death as martyrdom. At least in the context that the death of a major religious figure is a vindication of his teachings and identity. However, equally, it is not necessarily the case that his disciples saw his death this way, and it may well be the case that his disciples saw meaning to his death as their own form of vindication of his person. Hick is more and less willing to accept that Jesus had a complex idea of the atoning levels of his death.
- **Joachim Jeremias:** A German theologian, who developed an account of the atonement in the context of the atoning levels of his upcoming death in his influential 1966 book *The Eucharist*. He notes, he connects the Last Supper in the gospels, and Jesus's words at this Passover meal of the lambs in the original Passover in Exodus 12. From God sparing the Israelites from the lambs, God can equally be understood to have spared humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus and brings in the new covenant between God and humanity. This is what Jesus says 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' at Matthew 26:28 'which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (NRSV).

Yet Hick regards Jeremias's approach as implausible for a number of reasons. First, it supposes that Jesus conceived of the doctrine of atonement in advance of the Passover meal itself, which is difficult to accept unless one automatically holds a strong view of Jesus's divinity, which in the quest for the historical Jesus is not usually assumed. There have been suggestions, as Hick notes, that Jesus might have regarded himself as the prophetic fulfilment of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, but it is more likely that this connection was made by the gospel authors themselves as this allusion is never strongly made by Jesus throughout the gospels. Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Jesus did not see himself as divine, eschewing titles such as Son of God and instead orienting his ministry around himself as a messenger or prophet of God foreseeing an immediate eschatological climax. Hick believes that much of the view of Jesus as a wholly divine figure was a later addition by the early Church that was implicitly responding to the lack of fulfilment of Jesus's eschatological promises. He notes that this move:

... made possible the various atonement theories which presuppose his divinity, eventually his death as a perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

Hick argues that even were one to accept that Jesus understood his death as atonement, it would have been within the eschatological outlook he developed during his ministry, an eschatology that was to come to pass. Therefore, whatever atonement Jesus saw in his death would have been contingent and not eternal in scope, a development which would have had to come from later Christianity. Therefore, Hick regards it as unlikely that Jesus saw himself as 'the final prophet of God's rule on earth' or as a wholly divine figure sacrificing himself to atone for the sins of the world.

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Swinburne's assertion that the Christian Church is necessary in atonement and s
 In the final point, 7, Hick notes that Swinburne adheres to the maxim *extra ecclesiam*
 outside the Church), meaning that atonement only comes for those who participa
 through a Church context. However, Swinburne also argues that non-Christians m
 after death, and Hick roundly criticises this as an inclusivist addendum for traditio
 broadly exclusivist doctrine of atonement and salvation, for there is no logical rea
 not save good people from their lives in a different cultural or religion beyond Chri
 explored later, a strict transactional doctrine of atonement is difficult to uphold un
 exclusivist understanding of Christian salvation as a whole.

Activity 7

Hick uses a well-known criticism of Swinburne to highlight a number of what he perceives
 deficiencies in the transactional theories of atonement. Complete the activities below
 own understanding of the potential faults in Swinburne's and Hick's arguments.

1. Revisit the seven-step approach that Hick outlines in Swinburne. Go through
 any objections you might have to add to Hick's criticisms. Is there anything
 in his analysis?
2. In pairs or groups, discuss these objections, and deliberate whether there might be
 a better theory of transactional atonement. If not, should the actual way atonement
 thought of as a divine mystery?
3. Debate whether Hick is fair in criticising Swinburne for relying on human ideas
 his theory. If one cannot start from ordinarily understood conceptions of atonement,
 possible ways of understanding the atonement of the crucified Jesus?

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Theological Context

Gustaf Aulén and the Three Main Types of Atonement

Gustaf Aulén was a Swedish theologian, who wrote an influential analysis of atonement in his book *Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*. In this book, he explores the different interpretations of atonement throughout Christian history:

- **Christus Victor:** This is also known as the ransom theory, and for Aulén was the dominant view of atonement in Christianity until Anselm. Here, Christ's death is seen as a ransom to rescue humanity from the power of the devil. For example, Irenaeus called the victory or ransom of Jesus's death a new shift in creation at the moment of Jesus's death. However, Aulén suggests that Christus Victor views of atonement are less about rational systematic exploration and more about a drama about the power of God, channelled through the Son of Man. Accordingly,
- **Satisfaction:** This is the form proposed by Anselm, where Jesus's death is needed to restore the honour God is due from human sin throughout history. This notably is distinguished from the substitutionary view, as while both involved a transaction, the penal-substitutionary view is concerned with Jesus's death in light of the punishment required by humans to restore God's honour. However, Aulén found both these models of atonement unconvincing as they were based on a view of divine justice that does not align with the modern Christian concept of justice.
- **Moral Exemplar:** This is the third view of atonement Aulén analyses, which proposes that Jesus's death is to improve the moral sensibilities and perspectives of mankind, revealing to them the way of life and leading them to better their own lives and actions towards others. This view was first presented by the twelfth-century theologian Peter Abelard as a counter to Anselm's satisfaction atonement, but has more recently been favoured by liberal theologians, such as Hans Reichenbach, who argued that there is an objective transactional component to atonement, instead focusing on the moral influence of Jesus's death to influence humanity to reconcile with God.
- An overview of Aulén shows that Hick concentrates his criticism on traditional atonement theories, heavily favouring both an objective view of the divine and the necessity of atonement. Hick heavily favours both an objective view of the divine and the necessity of atonement caused by human sin. However, he reveals that Hick has a responsibility to show that atonement can be seen without an assertion of Jesus's divinity, and what Aulén's view of atonement as a whole.

Hick and the Demythologisation of the Bible

One of the main issues with the atonement has been that there is an implicit assumption that Jesus was at least aware of the atoning sacrifice of his actions, and that he carried out his death according to a plan of atonement. Within this assumption, however, it can be put forward that Jesus must, therefore, have been aware of his divinity, and the impact that the sacrifice of his divinity must have had for the fate of humankind. On the traditional Christian Church interpretation of the gospels, this is not an issue. Coloured by the writings of St Paul and other later early Church figures, it became established that Jesus was a divine figure, with the Council of Chalcedon finally ratifying in 451 CE that Jesus possessed both a fully divine and a fully human nature.

For fear of heresy and excommunication, criticisms of this definition were not widespread in the early centuries, but in recent years especially, the search for the 'historical Jesus' has become prominent, as scholars search for the man behind the mythology that has surrounded him. In particular, Rudolf Bultmann called for a 'demythologisation' of the Bible, where the mythological elements are separated from the core of the gospel that modern human beings can plausibly believe in.

*We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medicine and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament.*⁸

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (1984), p. 14

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Hick follows Bultmann in this trend, arguing that human beings' understanding of the whole must be filtered through modern scientific and religious knowledge. The use of metaphor and symbolism, can help understand the world existentially, and Jesus' revelation about God, but Christianity as a whole is not the only way of understanding the world. Hick does not claim Jesus to be the unique Son of God. This means that traditional teachings of incarnation, the Trinity and the traditional atonement all have to be jettisoned from Christianity. It is not enough for Hick that some people who witnessed Jesus, such as the disciples, believed in his divinity, and it is the moral, political and religious teachings of Jesus, examined within the context of the Judaic culture, that have to be considered more important above the myths of the Christ.

Discussion Point 13

Is it possible to contend that demythologisation inevitably means subjecting Christianity to a modern scientific enquiry? Is this fair or even necessary?

Atonement in Religious Pluralism

What is one left with when one demythologises the New Testament? Hick reasons that religious pluralism. While there is still reason to believe that Jesus is a monumental figure with a special relationship to not only God but the deeper existential mysteries of the world, there is no one person with this relationship, and other religions may well have equal access to the Real about what Hick terms 'the Real'.

The Real [*an sich*] (the Real in itself; Hick uses this term to encompass religions such as Christianity that believe in God) lies in the noumenal realm compared to human perception, which is the realm of phenomena, constrained by the limits of one's perception. The noumena/phenomena distinction is borrowed from Kant's project of transcendental idealism, which states that we do not understand not only the world, but the specific ways that we are necessarily active in the world. Human beings experience the noumenal Real through phenomena, which means that our perception is never perfect. It is influenced by social context, psychological bias and epistemological limitations. For each religion might ultimately be perceiving and experiencing the same thing, the Real, but in different ways the Real is manifested in human society.

What does this mean for the atonement? Well, for Hick, Christianity has built up these myths that ultimately don't reflect Jesus's special insight into or presence of the Real and the truths that arise out of it. In this sense, unless these myths are linked to current human perceptions about the Real, then they are separate from belief in the figure and ministry of Jesus. In his book *God and the Universe of Faiths*, for example, Hick tries to analyse what the core or essence of Christianity is, and argues primarily it is in the disciples who continue the work of Jesus by helping the poor, needy and marginalised, not the veneration of Jesus himself as divine. In fact, he argues one should view the incarnation of Jesus was not God himself, but rather metaphorically manifested the presence of the Real. This, importantly, means that Jesus himself did not have to be omniscient or fully aware of the Real. He was human and fallible, and it was only the early Church which elevated his entire ministry to perfection. Therefore, it is perfectly conceivable for Hick and more probable than it is for traditional Christianity that Jesus' death was not an atoning sacrifice, victory over sin or a ransom. Rather, although he may not have known about his death, he saw it within the context of its eschatological and moral significance as initiating a new arrival of God in the world.

Therefore, Jesus was not divine and so simply could not have played the role of the unique Son of God that much of traditional atonement theory requires. Furthermore, the idea of Jesus as the unique Son of the God, the only person capable of satisfying or achieving atonement is upheld within a model of religious pluralism, which would hold that no religion has a monopoly on the Real simply oriented around experience of the Real in the noumena.

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Activity 8

Hick addresses a long tradition of atonement theology, and argues that there are theories of atonement originally identified by Aulén. Complete the activities below to gain a firmer understanding of the theological background to Hick's criticisms.

1. Read through Matthew 26; does this convey Jesus as a figure who understood death in an atoning context? What key passage can you identify supporting atonement?
2. How might these passages justify the three forms of atonement theory Aulén supporting arguments for each, and some weaknesses.
3. In groups of three, discuss how interpretation of the gospels and other parts of the Bible which theory of atonement one subscribes to. Is Hick naturally biased in his demythologisation towards more minimal theories of atonement?

Detailed Analysis

Can Atonement be Understood through an Analysis of Human Interaction?

Hick criticises Swinburne for his anthropomorphic idea of God, with his doctrine of atonement grounded in human interaction rather than a sense of how God might be radically different from human beings. It is ultimately the personal connection between God and humanity through Jesus, that grounds Swinburne's theory of atonement, and it is arguably the same rules of atonement between human beings should also apply to God. The idea that the atonement between humanity and God seems to require a sacrifice that cannot be made alone, which automatically suggests that the model of human atonement can't be applied to God. Hick states:

In relation to God the truly penitent being is humanity, humbly resolving to do better in the future, and accepting the free gift of grace, undeserved and unearned. It may well be Jesus's life and teaching that has enabled this, but it is not, in my view, at all clear to express that fact by depicting his death as an atoning sacrifice that enables humanity.

In essence, it is strange to suppose for critics of Swinburne that human actions, as they are, are thought to really affect a God who is transcendent and metaphysical. It may well be that the future of humanity, and so human actions as a general principle, but the tradition of atonement manifesting this care as a certain form of transaction is at odds with both the ontology of God and his potential benevolence. Hick has argued that many core problems within Christianity arise from examining traditional concepts as having metaphorical rather than literal meaning. The same can be said of the atonement. Rather than viewing Jesus's death as a strict transaction, it can be seen as a metaphorical meaning as an example of God's real love and presence within humanity, leading to the transformation of people towards a greater religious and moral way of life.

Yet, equally, it can be suggested that Hick naturally tends towards a sceptical view of God, and from a more orthodox perspective, it can be argued that Swinburne's analysis is a more logical conception of what God might be, but that it is not a holistic Christian conception of the tradition of the Church. In Swinburne's overall thought, God is not a powerless spirit, and the world is built according to a general anthropic principle (that is, designed for life to survive but flourish in particular conditions), and so this makes it more likely that one's life should mirror the interaction between God and humankind. Going further, the idea of human beings created in the imago dei, as put forward in Genesis, at best may be a metaphorical principle God holds, and atonement, as a matter of conscience arising from the love of human beings to make good in light of the divine presence in the world.

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Nevertheless, such considerations, while making logical sense within the traditional framework of orthodox Christianity, aren't necessarily plausible, and, ultimately, Hick's criticism is one of plausibility. Would a divine God, transcendent and benevolent in every way, plausibly require reparation and penance from material human beings beyond their repentance and apology? Eleonore Stump even argues that aspects of Swinburne's theory of atonement don't necessarily chime with Jesus's teaching in the gospels about the kingdom of God. For example, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father on receiving the son he thought lost does not ask for reparation or penance from him, but rather forgives him, and this behaviour is presented as being the morally correct approach to someone who has previously sinned. Is it, therefore, even right for Swinburne to always view atonement as a transaction, especially when the Father seemingly demands nothing from their wrongdoer?

While one may argue that it could be a matter of faith in believing that some special interaction exists between God and humanity to absolve them of their sins, this interaction is not needed for a logical analysis. Rather, it simply notes that this absolution does not have to come from an external source. Theologians have attempted to build on Swinburne's analysis to remove this idea of a special interaction. For example, in 'Atonement without Satisfaction' argues that the sacrifice of Jesus could be seen as sheer merit that brings God round through its altruistic nature to bestow his free forgiveness on humankind. Yet while this may resolve the issues with sacrifice, it does not make sense of Jesus being God incarnate, for then God is performing an act of sheer merit he could perform without the cross and death of the Son. It has to ultimately be answered why the cross is necessary if there is no strict requirement for the death of the Son, then it can be argued any atonement is superfluous.

So, there appears to be a fundamental issue at the heart of the concept of atonement. If we have a different understanding of atonement to God, then numerous logical issues arise with his transcendent nature. If the concept of atonement from the starting point of God's transcendence or benevolence is flawed, then it is at all necessary in the first place. For this reason, this fork shows that fundamentally the concept of atonement cannot be reconciled with the Christian God, while for others it may be either that there is a fundamental mystery behind atonement or that the personal atonement of humanity and God cannot be fully boiled down to one's understanding of human interaction.

Is Atonement Always a Fourfold Process?

One issue that Hick could potentially touch on but does not is whether atonement is always a fourfold process. This is, perhaps, the most difficult issue to evaluate because Swinburne's analysis is based on a mundane human interaction, and can potentially be interpreted differently depending on the context of common morality, but there are certain situations where reparation or penance may not be required. For example, if a child steals from his parent before he is of the age to earn money, it may be that a sincere apology and repentance is enough, beyond reparation and penance (although the latter may be more chores as a punishment). Similarly, if someone in abject poverty steals to feed their family, they may be repentant but ultimately unable to provide reparation let alone penance, and may not deserve punishment in these sorts of scenario. Lastly, if one considers a priest dealing with someone who has accidentally blasphemed, in modern society they would surely not demand reparation or penance, extra money to the church?

These scenarios aren't perfect, but they do illuminate a deeper issue in Swinburne's analysis: that simply because reparation and penance form part of human beings' atoning interactions doesn't necessarily mean they actually are part of atonement. This may well simply be an imperfect system of forgiving interactions. Perhaps human beings have not found a morally better way of expressing sincere apology than the trading of material goods. In the gospels, even Jesus often encourages followers to give up their material belongings, and not seek arbitrary justice for wrongs. In this way, it can be argued that moral perfection in atonement consists in the victim being able to accept sincere repentance and apology and not seek reparation or penance.

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What does this mean? Well, rather than, as Hick notes, Swinburne building his case on human interaction and then directing it towards God, it may be that the model of atonement should be identified in God as a combination of repentance and apology without reparation. This makes even less sense to argue that God would demand reparation, because a benevolent person on Earth would never demand reparation. In this way, Jesus on the cross is not just giving himself up to death with no desire for material gain, and so, in Hick's model, God as benevolent on Earth at that moment of giving up. Therefore, it is possible to see the analysis of atonement at its core, let alone its applicability to God as a transcendent being.

Does Christian Theology Have to be Historically Grounded?

The question around whether historical Jesus was is a deep and complex area of study, and how it influences Christian theology. Should the New Testament be viewed as a document containing historical truths, or should it, as in Hick's view, be seen as an inspirational, deeply spiritual man and the rise of the early Church? Numerous analyses have ultimately, Hick's analysis of Swinburne in an important way depends on the gospel account of the way Jesus perceived his death. For Hick, it has to be the case that the covenants promised, were not referring to an eternal redemption of human sin but an incoming apocalyptic or eschatological event. There are certain indications that the Gospel of Luke, for example, contains very little atonement theology, and it cannot be greatly responsible for developing atonement as a major theme in the early Church. New Testament historians have overanalysed the gospels to the point of featureless interpretation potentially ignores the importance of tradition and the Church in determining the meaning of the Bible, and instead, through a strict process of demythologisation, reduces the unique about Christian theology as a whole.

The biblical scholar N T Wright makes this point quite forcefully, arguing that the historical Jesus has most of the time simply reflected his contemporaries' own biases, and that competing perspectives on the gospels has not produced much in the way of revealing about the true character and scope of Jesus' teaching. For Wright, most scholars' admissions about the lack of veridical sources, and the noting of alternate possible development of the gospel, all undermine the overall historicity of the gospels. Counter to many scholars that the gospels have more than they differ and can, overall, reliably be said to represent Jesus as the one that many supposed him to be. This is especially true in the case of the resurrection. Wright argues is more historically supported than not, and the zealousness of the early Church in the importance and care people took in preserving the memory and actions of Jesus through the gospels and history of Christianity only make sense if the bodily resurrection was a historical occurrence rather than a mystical addition added by later gospel authors.

This conclusion means that it is not only reasonable to argue that Jesus was divine, but that his awareness of his actions was more than the gospels may well allude to. In some way, it may be not only what the gospels do say but what they don't say, and the kind of victory Christ had over sin may not be something directly translatable to human understanding. Hick identifies at the bottom of atonement may not be relatable to human ideas of justice. In an important sense, may be attested to by revelation and the Bible. Thus, Hick may be right that the starting point of atonement theology must not be a historical and logical analysis but rather makes sense as a transaction, but instead an analysis of the divine figure of Christ as manifested through him on the cross. This will be examined further in Barth's theology and in Extract 3.

Nevertheless, though these conclusions are not accepted by many, and arguably ignore the scientific enquiry to scientific possibility. While the historical evidence of the gospels may be seen as a resurrection and miracles of Jesus being a reality, that does not necessarily mean that these considerations are the only things that matter in New Testament scholarship. For example, documents affirming that Winston Churchill simultaneously was present in Berlin and London, saying he was in the Houses of Parliament in Britain on the same day, one's instinct would be that he possessed the magic ability to be in two places at once, even if the documents all

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One would either look for some clarifying external account to verify which place he was in or chalk up some people's information as being false. Churchill being in two places at once is automatically counted as a logical impossibility, irrespective of historical evidence. In the same way, for neutral historians, the possibility of an individual turning water into wine or resurrecting another simply breaks the laws of nature in a way that it is all the more likely that historical evidence is inaccurate. This might especially be the case with the gospels, which are documents directly concerned with showing Jesus to be the Son of God, and are not neutral, observational accounts of his life in first-century Judea.

One prevalent issue as such in historical analysis of the gospels is that many biblical scholars, this has led to a suggestion that biblical scholarship as a whole has a natural bias towards the narratives, and that, for example, may be more likely to look for coherency rather than discrepancy or teachings, they might perhaps view them as more historically reliable than the sayings. This may be particularly true if Jesus and his actions are not placed within the first-century Jewish beliefs, and the gospels and their narratives given an accidental universal significance. E P Sanders, a Christian theologian and one figure Hick quotes, is part of what is sometimes called the quest for the historical Jesus (which uses insights from Jewish scholars to gain insight into the historical Jesus for its purpose). He believes strongly in examining the gospels and the figure of Jesus within a Jewish context, preferring to view Jesus as a whole as a Jewish renewal figure rather than the proponent of a new religion. Having an automatically Christian perspective therefore, may skew analysis of Jesus within a Christian framework, rather than a Jewish one, and John Crossan, another scholar in the third quest, has summed up many Christian scholars' analysis of the gospels as 'do[ing] autobiography'.⁹

The process of analysing the potential historical basis for the atonement therefore begins with faith in the Bible as revelation may start from a very different set of assumptions than those of an individual, and proceed with their analysis from that standpoint, whether historians or theologians. For those like Hick who believe the character of Jesus needs to be analysed and tempered by historical criticism, they begin with much more radical doubt about not only the divinity of his figure but his historicity. For those who take the gospels themselves as their starting point, for Hick, a discussion about the atonement cannot begin until it has established its logical coherence within the concept of a Christian God, and not whether the atonement is revealed fact mediated through the actions of Jesus in the gospel narratives.

Moving towards a Transformational Analysis of Atonement

Hick argues that Swinburne automatically assumes a Latin tradition interpretation of atonement at the centre and to be overcome on the path towards salvation. Instead, he re-examines atonement, considering in more detail what he identifies as the Eastern Orthodox 'transformational' view of atonement, where human beings are gradually raised through moral and spiritual growth closer to the divine. In particular he notes:

If one sees salvation/liberation as the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to participation in the ultimately divine Reality, the transaction theories of salvation then appear as inadequate and in question. (167)

Therefore, rather than seeing atonement as a single victory or satisfaction of human sin, it is more broadly seen as a part of a salvation process extending throughout human history. Jesus is an important figure who perhaps initiates the process, but the stage or frame of spiritual understanding is behind the perceived world. For Hick, avoids the impossible to resolve quest for a final atonement achieved a complete satisfaction or victory over human sin, and instead refocuses the atonement as a metaphor for spiritual growth. Jesus, on the cross, reflected important moral teachings away from the human self-centred impulses and reorient their moral focus around the needs of other human beings and the potential purpose and benevolence of the divine Reality (of God).

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⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (1993), p. 18

In his earlier 1966 book *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick proposes a 'soul-making' theodicy, built off the work of Irenaeus, that proposes a reason for the existence of evil only as an encouragement towards human growth. Human beings have free will, but exist at an epistemic distance from God so cannot be certain about his existence. Rather, they at least partially rely on faith in order to see the divine presence within the world, and, through struggle, experience and perception into the world, human beings develop into spiritual maturity, or the likeness of God. In later works Hick shifts this emphasis from an explanation of evil to a developed soteriology fitting into a Kantian framework; for example, advocating universalism and, in the case of atonement, looking towards transformation as an answer not only to traditional Christian concepts but also for other religions such as Buddhism which believe in reincarnation.

This is, arguably, a tall and difficult task to undertake, and Hick doesn't claim to be underpinning all religious belief, but it can be asked whether the transformational approach is more successful, as Hick argues, or whether it is simply gutting certain areas of Christianity for consistency. One of the main criticisms Hick has faced is that if Jesus is not divine, is salvation guaranteed to anyone? Or what reason is there to be a Christian specifically?

Discussion Point 14

Does Hick in advocating pluralism simply reduce God to anything that human beings can understand and experience? Is there any real way of evaluating between competing religious claims without reference to an outside source?

Keith Ward, for example, criticises Hick generally on a number of points. The main criticism is that Hick does not embrace other religions but reduces them to a most analytic formula: a claim about the Real towards an ineffable Real to which no direct truth claims can be made. But Ward argues that the Real is ineffable, and cannot be known, making a truth claim about its existence to which only negative descriptions can apply. Similarly, he points out that Hick claims that all major religions are based around the Real, and while Hick would say each person's experience is filtered through their cultural context, how would one know whether a religion has a genuine connection to a false one? Ultimately, Hick seems to make a number of religious claims (for example, that there are actual differences between many religions, and within each perhaps reduce it to a formula that suits the metaphysical structures of his thought).

How does this affect atonement? Well, many Christians would say one of the defining features of the cross and that this forms one of the central truth claims at the heart of the religion. If we no longer have Christianity, but a basic spirituality that recognises the moral virtues and the possibility of actual divinity. When Hick cannot demonstrate epistemologically why human beings should have an understanding of the Real above the real faith of many Christians in the salvational history of Christianity, the attractive. Despite the potential logical issues at the heart of atonement theory, the salvational history that Hick offers has similar logical issues, and that it too can only be understood through faith.

Yet Hick, arguably, is also simply advocating a longer project that cannot be solved by a single person's logical issues at the heart of atonement are not just a by-product of one person's inability to solve a logical problem, but are symptomatic of a need for a greater change in the way Christianity is understood. Hick, atonement is just one of the greater flaws within orthodox Christianity. In other words, in other ways, including the issues at the heart of the Christian Trinity, incarnation and the nature of God. Hick is also making a descriptive claim which orthodox Christianity fails to address which Christianity is distinct from other religions. The concept of the Real, or a central feature of many religions, as is religious or spiritual experience. A pluralistic approach looks towards the differences between religions, but rather their similarities, and by focusing on epistemological issues at the heart of Hick's use of Kantian categories, this does not solve the problem of pluralism based on descriptive analysis of comparative religions.

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Therefore, atonement as a certain form of transaction might be distinctive in Christianity, but the theme of a prophet acting in God's will to bring about the salvation of humankind certainly isn't, and Hick's transformational concept may have not only a firmer logical basis, but also a closer resemblance to the soteriological claims of other religions.

A Comparison with Atonement Theory in Karl Barth

Hick presents quite a radical deconstruction of 'natural' theories of atonement, and criticises Swinburne's attempt at justifying a transactional theory of atonement, though that have built on Aulén's original definitions.

One in particular, in extract 3, is Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, so named because it is often made a transactional theory of atonement. For Barth, God is wholly transcendent, but rather than Jesus being a man of special insight, he is instead the divine revelation between God himself and the human world. His message, then, is not simply one found in the gospels, but rather God's self-revelation to human beings, witnessed by the earliest books of the New Testament. In this sense, while the Bible is not inerrant, it accurately records the actions of a person who was uniquely divine, and the process Hick demands is redefining the Bible according to human ideology. The only way atonement is through the self-revelation of the divine Jesus Christ, and such study is a free one of God's reaching down to the world, not human beings reaching up.

Therefore, while both theologians presuppose the existence of a transcendent God, they have very different approaches to how one might discover him. For Barth, natural theology is prone to error; only the knowledge of God revealed through Jesus Christ can be trusted. It is more amenable to adjusting Christian views based on not just the experiences of everyday life, but also scientific enquiry and the reasonableness of certain theological propositions (although the importance of natural theology). This leads Hick to doubt many of the claims of orthodox Christianity, such as the divine incarnation and the Trinity, whereas Barth reaffirms these orthodox Christian beliefs and theologically justified.

Therefore, there is the strong sense that the atonement does not simply represent a moment of human beings moving towards salvation, but is a distinct moment in history at which human beings are saved by Jesus Christ being a representative and substitute for humanity as a whole. He was a human being, an act that led to human beings once again being able to have hope. However, there are a number of ways Barth arguably avoids some of Hick's criticisms.

1. He stresses the atonement as a free act of God, rather than God being constrained by the fall of humanity. In other words, God foresaw the fall of humanity and the act required to bring them back to God, therefore was an act of free benevolence, and God was never required to reconcile humanity.
2. The atonement itself is not reducible to a transaction or satisfaction, although it is a transaction within it. Nor is the atonement similar to a punishment, although an aspect of it is eliminated. Some have argued Barth draws closer to the victory model of atonement, but this way is unsatisfactory, as human beings are imperfectly trying to comprehend something that has not yet reached. Many have accused Barth of simply being evasive or dodging the question, but if the atonement is stressed as a free divine act, it is arguably partially beyond the transactional terminology around atonement to describe it fully.
3. The eschatology in Barth's writings does not point to a direct heaven or hell, but rather, it points towards a hope in humanity, knowing that God will atone for humanity's sins, that reconciliation with God is a potential future. It is not a guarantee of victory over sin, but a moment of triumph that gives human beings a sense of peace beyond death.

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What does this mean? It was noted that Hick criticises Swinburne for applying human concepts to the relationship between human beings and God, a move which Barth avoids by redefining atonement in wholly human categories. Instead, for Barth all one can do is analyse the relationship through the figure of Christ himself, and what his death meant in the wider framework of human action on Earth. This does not exclude criticism of the reliability of the New Testament, but still convincingly make a case that despite Barth seeking to move beyond transactional atonement, it comes back to relying on it or ignores the human aspect of the atonement (see Explanatory Notes). Barth retains a scepticism about the reliability of the New Testament, and argues that concepts of incarnation and atonement are inventions of the early Church. Let alone the atonement, which radically challenges the apostles' way of dealing with the death of the man they believed to be Messiah), the fact that Barth has little evidential support for his views. Nevertheless, what Barth at least does is to move transactional atonement to a wider breadth and scope than Hick gives it credit for. He has formulated a theory that moves beyond simple human understanding of what atonement means.



Discussion Point 15

Is Hick's criticism of Swinburne's concept of atonement as 'anthropomorphic, potentially indicative that orthodox Christianity has to turn to a triumph or victory over evil? Or does it indicate that Jesus should simply be seen as a human moral exemplar?



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Taking It Further

Atonement within a Global Theology

Hick conceives of an overturning in the way investigation into religious belief and the analogy of the Copernican Revolution as an example. Orthodox Christianity as a religion he conceives of as the Ptolemaic understanding of the solar system, with Earth at the centre, just as each religion believes all other religions are at best only a partial truth about God and salvation. However, he argues that theology should look to a new system of religious enquiry, where each religion is viewed as revolving around a central experience and revelation. Such a system could not be known from simply analysis from a single perspective, and so Hick calls for a new 'global theology' where the different traditions are examined in isolation, but alongside each other, and religions as a whole can work together as the source of their revelation. Elements of such an approach are arguably already present in the 'scriptural reasoning' movement, where members of different religions gather each other on various important parts of each other's Scripture.

But is there any room for atonement in global theology? Many would seek the resurrection and atonement as making a very specific, exclusive truth claim: that Jesus satisfied or atoned for the sins of humanity on the cross. It could be possible to argue that this victory was not singular, and other great religions have achieved similar victories through their religious struggle, but this is difficult to reconcile unless we move beyond Hick where atonement is understood broadly as salvation, and individual sacrifices as a means to the presence of God on Earth. But, equally, it may be that atonement, as Swinburne and others see it, is part of the moral growth that Hick envisions, and great religious figures, martyrs and the saints play in the overall spiritual development of humankind, such that each could be said to contribute to a theory of atonement that moves human beings as a whole further towards theosis, or divine union. Arguably only a theory that could be developed through cooperative theology with other religions. Christian figures look to engage in such forms of discourse, but such pluralism can never be a

What this underlines is that not only does Christianity, has the doctrine of atonement been underdeveloped in Christian theology compared to wider concepts of salvation, but the discussion of what atonement and salvation may mean will remain under-analysed. The effort to engage in a global theology that allow for the potential similarities in different religions may be unearthened. Hick criticising Swinburne's idea of God in atonement as 'antiquated and unimaginative', the counterargument is to look beyond the boundaries of Christianity. What God and how he might interact not only with those who happen to be Christians, but with all of humanity. Whether Christianity can ever really develop an idea of how the atonement might be understood by non-Christians will be looked at briefly in the next part, but there is a strong case to make that, despite a lack of willingness to endure due criticism, why Christianity should be unwilling to engage in atonement in light of other religions' truth claims.

Atonement in Inclusivist Christianity

It has been explored so far how the narrow concept of atonement in Christian belief can lead to an exclusivist attitude about salvation. Jesus taking the place of humanity's sins is hard to fit in with a concept of salvation that could equally apply to people of other religions, yet there have been attempts by Christian theologians to justify how the people of other religions might be saved through Jesus despite seemingly believing in a completely different set of principles.

One particularly prominent theologian who proposed a solution is Karl Rahner, a Catholic theologian who argued that non-Christians could participate in the atonement offered by Jesus through their implicit faith. They had not explicitly believed in Jesus, but they had not explicitly denied themselves to being Christians in practice. In this sense, they had a 'anonymous Christianity' and their lives but had not heard of Jesus could accordingly be saved through the grace of God. Rahner argued that people could be condemned simply for being born in the wrong time or place. Rahner termed these people 'anonymous Christians', arguing that Jesus died for all of humanity, even if they were not aware of it. Therefore they might share in certain truths of Christianity, and so long as they lived a good life, they too could be saved.

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A similar position has at times been adopted by the Catholic Church, and Rahner's reducing the specific transactional component that only applies to those who see Jesus truly dies for all people's sins and is not tied to a strict doctrine of election. To see such views as yielding to the idea that Christianity cannot assert itself as exclusive is to see a range of religious views that present similar ideas of God to Christianity, not to mean that Christianity can be seen as abandoning the narrow idea of atonement in favour of a wider idea of salvation for all people.

Yet such a view has been criticised equally by conservative and liberal Christians. The view of atonement and salvation might be seen as simply presenting man as saved regardless of his actions. Rather than the atonement that requires, prompting specific religious action for humans to live a good life and be saved. One could effectively renounce Christianity for helping others throughout one's life. Equally, liberal Christians such as Hick argue that other religions are anonymous Christians by ignoring the variation and concepts of their religious belief and practice. Anonymous Christians, a title they are unlikely to accept. Hick in particular argues that designating them as such devalues their beliefs when Christianity potentially does not. While anonymous Christians therefore, might be a short-term fix for the problem of atonement and salvation, it hardly fits the global theology Hick seeks to build in the future.

However, it is important to consider that Hick's criticisms of traditional views of atonement do not necessarily lead down a hard path to pluralism, and there are numerous ways in which his view can be understood as an inclusivist form of religion, sharing in certain truths of other religions while maintaining its unique claim to salvation in the Christian God.

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Form and Justify an Argument

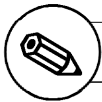
Throughout this section, the themes and ideas behind the arguments of Hick against ransom and victory theories of atonement have been explored, and it is now time for you to form your own opinion. You are not required to memorise the extract itself, but you are required to be able to identify its core ideas and arguments based on the work of secondary authors and sources. If encountering a section of text like this, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Is Hick correct in dividing between 'narrow' and 'broad' concepts of atonement?
- Are ransom or victory theories of atonement ultimately unsatisfactory ways of understanding atonement?
- Does Swinburne effectively present a way in which atonement could be understood within modern Christianity?
- Are there problems with moving from an understanding of atonement between God and humankind to an understanding of atonement between God and humankind?
- Are reparation and penance necessary within an act of atonement?
- Is Hick overly sceptical about the truth of the New Testament? Does his project require distinct historical grounding for it to be a valid Christian theology?
- Does the atonement require distinct historical grounding for it to be a valid Christian theology?
- Why does Hick seek to move towards a transformational understanding of atonement?
- How does Hick's idea of atonement compare with Karl Barth's? Are both men seeking to move towards a transformational understanding of atonement?
- In what way does Hick seek a global theology to better understand the Christian faith and its salvation?

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Summary Activity – Hick

Below is a table summarising Hick's arguments within 'Atonement by the Blood of Jesus' and, using your own interpretation of the anthology, the extract and the blank sections of the table.

'Atonement by the Blood of Jesus?' John Hick	
Hick argues:	Argument
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional 'transactional' theories of atonement are unacceptable. Whether they be satisfaction or penal-substitution theories, they all present a morally unacceptable view of atonement that cannot be reconciled with a benevolent God. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similarly, theories of atonement that imply some victory of the forces of good over evil can only be viewed as myth from a modern, scientific understanding of the world. As such, it is necessary to develop a new understanding of what atonement can mean for ordinary Christians. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While Swinburne might correctly identify the ways atonement works between human beings, this is not a model that can be applied between God and the world. Therefore, his understanding of atonement still suffers from the traditional difficulties associated with transactional theories. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically, there is little or no indication that Jesus in the gospels understood the theological implications of his own death, let alone that his death was a necessary sacrifice to atone for human sin, so there is not solid biblical evidence for an understanding of Jesus's death as a sacrifice. 	
<p>Conclusion: The traditional 'narrow' understanding of atonement should be abandoned in favour of a broader understanding of it in the general context of salvation. Jesus's death provides a way of further realising the moral and spiritual growth of humanity, and salvation can be understood as being closer to the Eastern Orthodox idea of theosis.</p>	

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Exam-style Questions

Read the extract below and answer the questions that follow.

But is there also scope, specifically in relation to God, for reparation and the expiation of sin? I suggest that when we have offered reparation-plus-penance to the injured, there is no further reparation-plus-penance to be made solely for God's repair matters with our wronged neighbour. We are doing what genuine repentance requires.

In relation to God the truth is that the person, genuinely resolving to do better, receives forgiveness as a free gift of grace, undeserved and unearned. It may well be Jesus who prompts one to do this. But it is not, in my view, appropriate to express this as an atonement sacrifice that benefits God and so enabled God to forgive humanity.

1. Outline and clarify the ideas expressed in the extract about atonement, penance.
2. Analyse the argument that orthodox, transactional models of the atonement are incompatible with a transcendent, benevolent God.

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Mark Scheme

Level	Descriptor
Level 1	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language inaccurately or inappropriately. Only a surface level knowledge of important concepts is displayed, and religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a limited variety, always correct, or sufficiently connected to the extract.
Level 2	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language although with a few mistakes. A thorough knowledge and comprehension of concepts is displayed but with room for further development. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a limited variety, but generally correct, and sufficiently connected to the extract.
Level 3	There is a broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language rigorously presented throughout an appropriate and justified response to the question. A thorough and fully developed knowledge and comprehension of important concepts is displayed. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a wide variety and pertinently connected to the extract.

Question No.	Indicative Content (10 marks AO1)
1.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terminology, when responding to the question.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionally, many theories of atonement have supposed that in sinning, human beings offend against the will and goodness of God as creator in some way by sinning towards him, and so must offer something to him in reparation or payment. This means the sacrifice of Jesus is the only appropriate atonement that can be offered, and the reasons why this atonement is specifically required have been debated throughout Christian history. Swainson in the extract proposes there are four parts to atonement in human interaction: reparation and penance – however, for human sin towards God, there is nothing that human beings could make reparations or penance towards God – there is nothing that can be done other than a perfect human life. In this way, Jesus is an individual who lived a perfect human life, and offered himself to God as a gift of reparation and penance for human sin. This atoned for and so could be reconciled and enjoy a relationship with God. However, Hick in the extract argues that it is unnecessary to propose that human beings must offer penance for human sin on top of that which human beings already give to God. This would not benefit a transcendent God in any other way. To do so would be to make God beholden to the actions of human beings. Therefore, it is not necessary to propose atonement for human sin.

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Level	Descriptor	Mark
Level 1	There is a very limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, often inaccurately or inappropriately. Some topics and details are chosen with rudimentary links made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Any criticisms or judgements are only substantiated by general or non-specific evidence.	
Level 2	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, sometimes presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with links made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, but with little substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 3	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, generally well presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed with a basic progression of reasoned arguments throughout the answer. Links are made between a lot of the aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, with some substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 4	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented with a few mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments developed throughout the answer. Links are made between a broad variety of the aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements are made of almost all of the aspects of the question and are substantiated by a reasoned evaluation of some supporting evidence.	
Level 5	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented, correctly and rigorously, throughout a justified response. Relevant topics and details are critically deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments strongly developed. Criticisms, judgements and links are made of/between all of the aspects of the question and completely substantiated by a thorough and reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	

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Question No.	Indicative Content (5 marks AO1, 15 marks AO2)
2.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding using specialist language and terminology in the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orthodox models of the atonement have often focused on the requirement of human beings to have sinned through history, to pay back or satisfy God for this sin. These are identified as 'transactional' models of atonement. Some modern liberal theologians, such as Hick, have proposed that the idea of atonement makes little sense when considering a transcendent, benevolent deity who would require anything from human beings. In this sense, atonement should only be understood in the broader concept of Christian reconciliation and theosis. <p>AO2 requires candidates to develop their answers showing analytical and evaluative skills. Their responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding of the atonement.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critics of transactional theories of atonement might argue that there is nothing a benevolent deity would require of human beings other than reparation to other human beings to owe God something implies God is deficient as a being in some way, below the level of human concerns. It is not possible to extrapolate what a transcendent deity might require or desire from human interaction. Beliefs that atonement is oriented around punishment, transaction, or imposing human ideology on a divine being. The idea of a transactional atonement is not supported by a historical-critical analysis of the Bible. There is not enough evidence to suggest Jesus saw atonement as necessary in appeasing a transcendent God. If God is benevolent, he is concerned with the betterment of human beings as a whole, not punishment or satisfaction. This supports not only universalism but the idea that atonement should be focused around the moral and spiritual transformation of human beings. All human ideas of atonement have varied, such that it is not possible to develop a single model of atonement. A transaction would be required. For example, in the case of Swinburne, it is not clear if atonement always requires reconciliation, apology, reparation and penance. Supporters of traditional atonement theories might argue that Jesus did conceive of atonement as payment, and that this is a reflection of God's investment in the world – reconciliation through the sacrifice of human beings' transgressions in order to progress. If one agrees with the concept of atonement as an action of a free, transcendent deity, it is not the case that God is beholden to human sin; rather, through his own benevolent action, reconciliation with humanity. Alternatively, it can be argued that since God made humankind in his image, human beings reflect the goodness of God. An idea of how human beings atone therefore, might reflect the goodness of God from human beings also. God is transcendent, but also radically immanent. This immanence may mean that human affairs requires some response from human beings in the created world, and that God acts towards his transcendent nature.

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Mark Schemes – Discussion Points

Discussion Point 11:

- Students might argue this depends on whether one approaches the New Testament with high/low Christology – one issue, naturally, is that different levels of significance in different gospels that might be explained away by the authorial intentions; however, there is always bound to be an issue explaining the explicit intentions of Jesus' accounts – and so while one can affirm Jesus's death as atoning, it may not be clear if atonement is completely known – especially if it involves some divine reason.
- If students support natural theology – it might be argued that what atonement means is not more understood as human beings learn more about morality from natural theology. The Bible and other sources of Atonement isn't confused; just knowledge of what it is.

Discussion Point 12:

Students might argue that it is necessary to look at what atonement means independently (e.g. Barth) from biblical revelation only. This might lead to atonement being reinterpreted as reconciliation rather than as a distinct concept in itself. However, others might argue that the meaning of atonement for human beings – if it can only be understood as one moment between God and human beings, what relevancy does it have to one's normal moral life and other concepts?

Bonus: Students might link Hick's scepticism about Swinburne's theory of atonement to natural theology in general – that it is possible to move from human observations of the world to God. It may well be that human beings' analysis of beauty and morality is difficult to understand the divine.

Discussion Point 13:

Some students might contend that the very living faith of Christianity presents truth that is not subject to enquiry. In this sense, the death and resurrection of Jesus are not topics suitable for scientific enquiry to be modified/captured by the way science proceeds. Investigation into the truth of the resurrection, if it is to be a scientific enquiry, is problematic. Others might disagree, arguing that other religious claims can be investigated by modern science, as well as general historical events. There is no methodological barrier to why the same can be said of Christianity – and more may be revealed of the truth of the resurrection.

Discussion Point 14:

Students may note this as a key difficulty with Hick's thought – once one dismisses the idea of God as not useful for being able to mediate or compare different ideas of the divine, and instead, it becomes difficult to separate what is genuine experience of the transcendent from what is psychologically determined. It can, therefore, be argued that in the case of the atonement, the narrow meaning but in doing so removes all significance from it entirely, as from one moment between God and human beings, there is no concrete way of knowing how moral or spiritual transformation perhaps is a being higher in existence than human beings.

Discussion Point 15:

Students may look towards Barth, who has been argued to embody a more victorious Christology and such an emphasis avoids the charge that the atonement of Jesus proceeds purely from a reactive measure in response to human sin. Certainly, it can be argued that greater care should be taken to analyse the atonement as a proactive measure and not a reactive measure in response to human sin. However, others might argue that anything about a triumph in the atonement, or that such an action would imply a moral exemplar for human beings. Students may, therefore, note that even a moral exemplar with a Christology higher than that of Hick.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Theosis	A process/doctrine taught in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the importance of working through Christian teaching to achieve union with God.
Satisfaction	A theory of the atonement, put forward by Anselm, which argues that the cross was necessary to fulfil the payment of honour due to God for human disobedience.
Penal-substitution	A theory of the atonement, popular in the fifteenth century, which argues that Jesus accepted on humanity's behalf the punishment due to them from their sin, atoning for it in the process.
The Historical Jesus	The term used to describe the human first-century Jewish life, separate from the potential myths and teachings.
Demythologisation	A process of analysing the Bible, favoured by Bultmann, which emphasises the importance of separating what might be historically accurate from later mythological additions by biblical authors.
Pluralism	The belief that no religion has an exclusive claim to truth; that all religions should be considered equally in spiritual matters.
Noumena	The Kantian term for the 'things-in-themselves'; the reality as it is, independent of perception.
Phenomena	The Kantian term for the world human beings experience through their senses.
The Real	Hick's term for the ultimate reality behind the world, which is not subject to concepts of God, such as Deity, which do not have concepts of God.
Global Theology	A concept of theology, advocated by Hick, which incorporates insights into its thought and framework.
Soul-making theodicy	A response to the problem of evil that proposes the existence of evil is necessary so that human beings can spiritually and morally develop.
Anthropomorphism	The process of giving God or other objects human characteristics; the move is valid or not.
Election	The belief that some human beings are chosen or predestined for salvation.

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Extract 3: Karl Barth, 'Jesus Christ, the Lord'

What you need to know before starting...

1. The influence and importance of Barth's theology in the twentieth century, and as a response to liberal theology that became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century.
2. The foundations of Barth's theology, including his emphasis on the transcendence of God and how beings can only come to understand God through revelation in Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
3. How such foundations influence Barth's approach to atonement theory, and how this contrasts with Hick's approach to transactional theories of atonement.



Overview

This extract by Karl Barth draws on Section 5.2: A Comparison of Key Ideas in the work of Karl Barth and John Hick, on the syllabus and you are advised to read and revise this part of the anthology. In particular, the extract focuses on the different theories and the theological discussion of atonement in Christian belief, with the passages being drawn from Barth's larger work. Barth develops a doctrine of reconciliation and atonement within a distinctively Christological framework.

Barth's theology is both dense and difficult. *Church Dogmatics* is a 14-volume work of systematic theology, with *The Doctrine of Reconciliation Part 1* itself being over 800 pages long. It is taken, therefore, when analysing Barth, and while the extract gives a good overview of the key emphases of his theology, such as the obedience of Christ and the Judge judged, but there are many interpretations of Barth and much disagreement about whether his atonement can be understood as substitution, one of satisfaction or one that moves beyond conventional categories. You should critically examine the extract in relation to Barth's overall theology, highlighting the key themes before scrutinising them in light of relevant criticism and analysing their ramifications for the discussion.



Note: Section 5.2 directly compares the thought of Hick and Barth, and it is recommended that Section 3 and Extract 4 are read alongside each other.

Summary of Ideas

Preface – Barth, Reconciliation and Atonement

Barth is a testing and difficult read at the best of times, and there are two ways in which understanding of his views is often hampered. The first is that the technical language Barth uses in his systematic theology. While systematic, he will often use personal, theological and philosophical terms in a way that is not encompassing a wider or narrower scope and definition to his work. In the case of atonement, Barth has historically identified different models such as the 'satisfaction' or 'substitution' theories, but when Barth uses similar terminology. Despite his theology following the work of other theologians, Barth arguably does deviate significantly from their ideas on atonement, and, approvingly, Barth's theology should be recognised as having its own unique context and contribution to other theologians. This will be especially important when examining how Barth develops the concepts of 'Representative' and 'Substitute'.

The second issue is the translation. Earlier translations of Barth's work perhaps used the term *Versöhnung* for 'atonement' rather than 'reconciliation', leading English-speakers to not quite grasp the extent to which Barth emphasises the death and resurrection of Jesus as the means of atonement rather than a specific punishment or satisfaction. However, equally, as the translator Geoffrey Wainwright notes elsewhere, *Versöhnung* has a rich and varied use in Barth such that it can include ideas of atonement, even if that is not the central emphasis of the term.



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The true meaning, nevertheless, is also perhaps revealed best by its place in the wider context of the guide, as well as the key concepts contained within the extract. At the heart of the atonement is a free action of God, not constrained by necessity nor by the actions of human beings. We must understand what the incarnation means, and the subsequent actions of the incarnate Christ, and what this free divine action of atonement means for humanity. Barth's theology is centred around Christ, and a good rule for analysing or discussing his theology is to focus on the relationship and union of God and man on Earth.

The Obedience of the Son

The extract begins with Barth addressing the first aspect of his theology of reconciliation: 'the fact that which God interests Himself in is man in Jesus Christ'. One of the main characteristics of Barth's theology emphasises God's transcendence, and this transcendence means ultimately that God is neither in time nor in space, neither in the world of nature nor in the souls of men. It must not be confused with the idea of God being known or knowable.¹⁰ This means that God is not classically immanent in a way that allows us to understand his existence from reasoning about the external world, and that the only way we can have with God is through revelation mediated by Jesus Christ. Therefore, Barth takes the view that

The atonement is an act of grace, of God's free will, not of human deserving. God acknowledges that we are sinners, but he does not punish us for it. He only punishes us for our sin.

This is the first important thing to note, and one of the main ways that Barth's theology differs from the classical models acknowledged by Aulén (see **Extract 4, Theological Context**). In the classical model, the atonement is a call for God to reconcile human beings, but in Barth's theology, the emphasis is shifted to God's reconciliation with humankind purely of his own free will and love. In a similar way to the classical model, an inherited condition of sin. Rather, Adam is the corporate man who revolted against God, and as such, humankind fell out of God's grace from their original state. However, in Barth's theology, God, and find their own salvation independently (although scholars disagree to what extent). Barth's theology of 'reprobation' – the idea that some of humanity will be rejected by God – is not central to his thought, and this reprobation is temporary until election, or eternal life.

This is the basic backdrop to the Epistle to the Romans §59, where Barth broadly describes the atonement as

... a satisfaction made for us as our conversion to God, and therefore as our redemption from sin.

For Barth, ultimately human beings are unable to pull themselves up from their lives of sin, and he broadly agrees with Calvin that humanity as a whole is in 'total depravity'. It is, therefore, only the free action of God that allows for the possibility of human beings being rescued from judgement of this sin and brought back into a relationship with God. Yet Barth at times also makes it clear that nothing is altered for God. He, before anything, was favourable to human beings, and so had decided to save them. The atonement is for humanity's benefit only, to awaken their awareness of the presence, grace and love of God in the world and enable reconciliation. This is what is meant when Barth describes atonement as, 'The very special history of God with man and of man with God'. He notes the divide between the noetic history – the way human beings mentally understand the place of God in the world – and the ontic history of Jesus Christ – the physical fact of his existence. In this way, the atonement is not just a physical and psychologically, although God is not just simply a part of human history.



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¹⁰ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford University Press (1933), p. 36

In this way, Eberhard Jüngel describes God's being as in becoming, meaning that God's being is an 'activity' that plays out both eternally and within the temporal world of history. This is one special part of this continuing activity, and the major act of reconciliation in which God brings beings into communion with himself. This is important to understand within Barth's theology as reconciliation does not simply occur through one transaction, but is a continuing activity that continues in his being. This is reaffirmed throughout Barth's work. He states that 'the history is essentially the history of the passion'.

Moving back to the idea of condescension, Barth addresses what this means with regard to God becoming human, God humbles himself and this shows the atonement as a whole necessity. There is nothing about God's divine nature to suggest why God requires to seek of reconciliation with humankind. In a similar way, one can observe that Jesus is the 'God' because he is completely obedient. The economic Trinity (how the persons of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit relate to each other and the world) is unified in its will, and so a truly divine being would only be if it is obedient. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the Son, he is necessarily obedient to the Father. Furthermore, the titles given to him are not human reflections on Christ, but the titles given to him delivered through revelation. For Barth, Jesus is in the mould of the suffering servant who undergoes his own destruction in order that others might be reconciled and saved. The New Testament, in its telling of 'flesh: unfaithful, disobedient, fall, sin, enmity versus God', shows humankind's negation of God, before the intervention of God. Therefore, Christ's atonement engages in 'self-humiliation', highlighted most of all by his suffering of the most humiliating death.



Useful Term: Economic Modalism

This refers to the idea that each person of the Trinity should be understood in terms of three modes of one person. However, this is often thought to deny the Trinity as three distinct personalities or persons of the Son and Spirit.

Useful Term: Subordinationism

This asserts that the Son and Spirit are subordinate to God the Father, when one denies any person of the Trinity is inferior, and they are all equal.

An important part of this, however, is that Jesus in becoming human bore the burden of sin that have been for humankind. While it has been noted so far that Barth wishes to avoid the idea of atonement, it is going too far to suggest that he abandons the concept of punishment. As argued more broadly he instead focuses on a legalistic emphasis to the sufferings of Christ. For example, he states that in Jesus Christ 'God did not merely affirm the divine sentence of sin fulfilled on himself.' Going further, Barth even argues rather than a divine self-emptiness (economic modalism, or subordinationism), God actually undergoes humiliation as exemplified by Jesus's obedience. At the same time, orthodox theology would argue that God is immutable, so why does Barth affirm this?

The answer primarily lies in how Barth approaches theology as a whole. In the end, Barth's presuppositions to questions about Jesus Christ: that he is the mediator of reconciliation, that he entered the world, and that God's presence cannot be differentiated as the subject of the world and human Jesus. Here, therefore, Barth puts the revelation through Christ before the preconception of God, derived from philosophical traditions outside the gospel. Simply put, God chose to enter the world as Jesus Christ; Christ suffers on the cross as part of atonement. As Barth describes the essence of this:

And so, in Jesus God has declared himself identical with the crucified Jesus. Therefore, God is suffering the Father who gave his Son over to suffer death.¹¹

¹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, p. 357

The last part of this first section of Barth ends with him emphasising the unity of the Father and Son in Jesus Christ is held together by the Holy Spirit. For Barth, of God, but is rationally comprehensible and debatable within the revelation of Jesus. He reasons that it is important to stress how God is triune, not threefold. Each action must not be understood simply as the action of one Trinitarian person, but an act of will best understood by the obedience of Jesus Christ to the will of God, even at the moment of humiliation. All three persons of the Trinity act in the same will and harmony, and designating what can be regarded as proper acts of a triune God.



Discussion Point 16

Is it even possible to fully identify the atonement as a special moment in the history of the world when it is affirmed by New Testament authors who are writing from humanly fallible but infallible witness to note undoubtable divine action in the world?

The Judge Judged

In the first part, Barth outlines how God became flesh for the purposes of reconciliation. The second part asks why. This question is especially pressing for Barth since the atonement ultimately was a completely free act. The first question Barth asks in this way is *Cur Deus Homo?* or 'Why did God become a man?' – a reference to Anselm's 1098 book of the same name, and an indication that Barth is addressing the same fundamental questions that Anselm was just under 1,000 years earlier. Yet a key difference between Anselm's and Barth's views is that the former believed the atonement was a gift from God, and was required to settle the offence of human sin. On the other hand, Barth contends that God is completely free and unbound by human sin. A change from atonement would be for human beings towards God, and not the other way round. God is to be satisfied towards God, so the question still remains: why did the descent of God?

One immediate answer is that the atonement as reconciliation is necessary in order for God to be with us. This is echoed in Barth's definition of '*deus pro nobis*' or 'God is with us'. God's love is not a question of a reality which only needs to be explored. Therefore, from this understanding, the atonement must be explored within the context of God's overall plan for reconciliation. In his own situation, Barth argues God shows that he has 'not abandoned his unlimited need of his situation'. Furthermore, in this God takes the place of humanity and takes the sins and faults of humanity upon himself. Yet, equally, Barth notes that the Son's humbling, directed towards salvation rather than atonement. This is understood as the Judge, the divine authority who has the power and ability to judge sin and evil. If Jesus Christ were not the Judge, but only the judged, the atonement would lose its soteriological meaning or impact. This is where Barth's well-known phrase of 'Jesus for us' takes hold.

This means that, as Barth notes, Jesus Christ represents 'us without any cooperative endeavour plays no part in the atonement as a freely willed divine act, and so Barth sees him in a similar way as the 'Representative' and the 'Substitute'. Due to the atonement, all human beings require his input in order to be saved, and all of us are required to appear for humanity in the final judgement, and the person who is required to appear for humanity in the final judgement is the person who is the consequences of this judgement through the substitution of himself.

In this, Barth's argument effectively 'destroys our pretentious self-judgement'. This is because, by humanity reckons it has the capacity to morally judge the self, but this would be baseless in light of the judgement of the atonement. This not only exposes the human beings ('the abasement and jeopardizing of every man'), naturally throwing the world into chaos, but also properly allows for real joy and liberation now humankind is aware of being reconciled and saved through Jesus Christ.

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Barth frames in particular the judging in terms not of punishment but of 'responsibility'. Responsibility for humanity's sin means that it is alleviated for humankind, and peace is made with God. Unless Jesus Christ took this responsibility, Barth argues humankind would not have been saved. It, and, furthermore, now the atonement has happened, human beings can no longer sin. They have radical freedom to sin, exposed to the loving free act of grace in the atonement. The atonement is 'coincident' with the free act of Jesus the man, meaning that human beings could see the divine figure and understand its significance in relation to their own lives. He lives as the 'righteous man' as well as being wholly obedient to God's will in being the representative of humanity in the judgement.

Barth as a final but important note states that 'all theology depends upon this the cross). This is with the assertion of the atonement as a special moment in the history of the world. The main way human beings understand why God came down to Earth, and lets him know the importance and significance of the resurrection that follows the death of Jesus Christ. To have an effective theology that describes the meaning and purpose of the cross, Barth comes up with the theology that follows.

The Place of the Father

The third section of the extract is, therefore, dedicated to this issue: how can one build theology effectively on the knowledge that Jesus Christ took responsibility for human sin? Barth acknowledges that people naturally are inclined to think there are issues in identifying with Jesus Christ's action considering current human beings are now 2,000 years into the future and culturally separated from its occurrence, but Barth argues that the real distance people overlook is the infinite distance between the transcendent God and man (infinite qualitative distinction). Considering how one can relate to the temporal history of the atonement only by looking at the bigger question of how human beings consider themselves beyond the atonement act, after their death and their meeting with Jesus Christ in a space beyond the temporal context of their lives.

Barth is particularly enigmatic in these passages stating '... that Christ had died for us, not have to die, but that we have died in and with him'. The fifth volume of *Church Dogmatics* by Barth before his death and was meant to cover his doctrine of redemption, but it is possible to get a broad idea of his thought from the previous four volumes. Important to note is that the finite lives human beings experience now persist after death. There is no end after death, rather only participation with God to which human hope is directed and Barth highlights his declaration that 'In Jesus Christ, judgement, death and end have collapsed into one'. A distinction in Barth that human beings before the atonement would fear empirical non-being caused by sin, in comparison to natural death, which is a fulfilment of a desire for an awareness that it is part of a wider reconciliation with God.

However, before further consideration of such ideas, Barth clarifies the five conditions for something to fulfil in order to count as one 'beyond judgement'. The first condition is that it must be a part of God that relates to and is unified in the first act, which Barth takes to mean that it must be a part of the life of Jesus Christ. This naturally fits the event of the resurrection, which Barth describes as the 'second act of God' and forms the second basic act of God in history after the atonement. But, resurrection and atonement are intimately connected in the reconciling will of God. Where the first act of judgement is the first act of the resurrection is the 'justification' of the death of Jesus Christ. To be a positive intention towards the future salvation of those who are still alive, for Barth, it shows Jesus Christ to be 'for all time'. His status as 'Mediator between God and man' by his temporal life on Earth, but continues for all time as a fundamental alteration in the way we perceive their situation and purpose in life.

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In this way, after the resurrection the perspective of humanity changes from one of 'expectation and hope'. Barth argues that human existence in essence mirrors the Jesus Christ and his resurrection. At once, human beings are aware of a fundamental reality, also of the potential hope of salvation in the future. It is a spiritual limbo, or what Barth calls 'between times'. The Christian emphasises the change in the world that has already occurred but also the future change and time that are to come, modelled in the resurrection. Barth describes the death of Jesus Christ as 'not an end but a beginning'.

The final considerations that Barth makes are in two parts of the resurrection act. First, he returns to the historical understanding of the resurrection itself as an event. Barth acknowledges the actual resurrection itself but states that this is secondary to the magnitude of the event in the 'living presence of Jesus Christ'. In this sense, Barth does not seek the historical accuracy of the resurrection as the basis for his conclusions on it, but rather the 'faith' developed in the early Christian community. The apostles testify enough to justify not only its uniqueness but its part as the '*telos*' or purpose of the act itself.

The second consideration of the resurrection act is its unity with the crucifixion act, such that both must be understood as one in Jesus Christ. There was never an intention for the crucifixion without the resurrection and vice versa, and Barth even states that they are together in a 'unity of sequence'. In this sense, the temporality of the two events, the time between them, is necessary but does not mean the two acts aren't unified. Therefore, Barth declares that in Jesus Christ, in both the crucifixion and resurrection, he is the 'One Word of God' that human beings must respond to, 'God's Yes to man and the world'.

So what next? This is the question Barth roughly asks in the final part of the extra important aspects that must not be overlooked in the explanation of the Christian faith.

- (1) The affirmation from God to man. This step emphasises the victorious aspect of the resurrection. In this sense for Barth perhaps there is more than a substitution but an agent who, through the resurrection, effect a victorious shift in human existence from comprehending death as epistemic to a new way of being, a new way of non-being through the reconciliation with God.
- (2) Christology. Christ is regarded as risen and transcendent for faith to be meaningful. For Barth, Jesus Christ for Barth is a moral exemplar, or even a simple messenger of God. The resurrection and for him it is required that the Christian faith recognise this divine act.
- (3) Barth did not regard religion as a key way of understanding God, viewing it as a human construct. He had no way of comprehending a transcendent God outside space and time or a human community is the only exception in carrying the Word of God down through history. The living community of Christianity is testament to God's investment in the world.
- (4) After the atonement and resurrection, Jesus Christ fundamentally alters the human condition (ontic) and in the way human beings mentally perceive the world (noetic). Therefore, it is no longer possible to understand human existence separately from this altered state.
- (5) When Christians identify themselves as being with the living Jesus Christ, they are participating in the significance of the free, divine act of the resurrection, not just his moral message.

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Activity 9

Barth uses a lot of difficult and often confusing terminology in his writings that is when reading him for the first time. Therefore, it is important not only to be able to write, but also to be able to discuss it in your own words. Complete the following to show your understanding of the extract:

1. In your own words, write down your interpretation of the phrases below. Try to highlight any differences and difficulties there may be in describing Barth's interpretation of the atonement.
 - i) 'The true God is suffering. That is, he is the suffering servant of God, not without reason or purpose.'
 - ii) 'Christ took our place as Judge; he took our place as the judged; he was the Judge judged in our place. He was the Judge judged in our place.'
 - iii) 'The resurrection decided that what Jesus Christ was then he is for all time between God and man.'
2. In pairs or groups, discuss the figure of Jesus and how he is perceived in Barth's interpretation. Is Jesus less human in Barth's interpretation than in other theologians' interpretations? How does this relate to Barth's interpretation of the transcendent God?
3. Finally, discuss why Barth might use less-conventional language and terminology. Is theological enquiry as a whole restricted by traditional linguistic barriers?

Final Considerations

This extract is one of the most difficult due to Barth's unconventional style of writing. He writes more liberally so that Barth's thought isn't reduced to misleading Christian categories. When writing about Barth, it is important to understand the reasons why Barth uses unconventional language to avoid the constraints of ordinary theological language. This is especially true in atonement. Consider how different theories have been bracketed or typecast into particular categories that Barth wishes to avoid (see **Extract 1** and **Theological Context**). In many cases, Barth uses terms literally, only to qualify them later with a different term. Therefore, be careful with the terms 'satisfaction', 'punishment', 'satisfaction' and 'victory' within Barth. The extract suggests that Barth's views on atonement draw close to different theories centred on the cross (see the **Detailed Analysis** section), but many scholars of Barth have argued his view of atonement through these terms immediately suggest.

A quick overview of Barth therefore, might run as follows:

- Any doctrine of atonement can only be understood from the revelation of Jesus Christ and nature.
- Atonement is best understood as reconciliation; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means by which God as a free act, enabled human beings to become aware of their sin and become hopeful for salvation in the future.
- This reconciliation was first enabled in the condescension of God into the human world, taking human form as Jesus Christ, who became the mediator between God and humanity.
- In the death of Jesus Christ, an act of both freedom and complete obedience, taking on human sin as a representative and substitute, liberating humankind from sin.
- In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there became the justification and alteration of human nature. Jesus Christ is established as the eternal mediator and the future judge of all.
- This resurrection act obliterates the epistemic fear of death and non-being in the future, giving hope and expectation for the coming time of God.

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Theological Context

Barth, Politics and Liberal Theology

The theology of Barth is so deep and complex that it cannot be reduced to its history. We do not know in what way Barth was responding to the perceived faults of liberal theology in the 1920s to the 1940s, when Nazism was a prominent force in the country. Barth was a member of the Confessing Church, and during the rise of the Nazi party was particularly critical of those elements of the Church that capitulated or even reconciled themselves with Nazi principles. He did not see the Nazi state as a whole. In this sense, the ideology of German liberal Protestantism was not on human terms, but allowed the very essence of Christianity to be reformed under modern human terms. Religion itself was an indication of a fundamental bankruptcy at the heart of liberal theology.

This opposition to liberal interpretation of the Christian faith can be seen in many of Barth's writings, particularly his insistence on the sovereignty and otherness of God. Barth was a theologian, believing that God has only revealed himself to human beings through his Word. Liberal religion as human beings normally understand it was false in thinking that human beings could have a direct cause of communication with God. Liberal theology in this sense for Barth, beginning with Friedrich Schleiermacher, was the slow divinisation of human thinking: falsely equating human intellect with the power of God such that, rather than human beings being influenced by God, they transformed theology into another field of human ideology.

However, equally, it would be wrong to say Barth is a fundamentalist. He did believe that God reveals himself through the witness of his mediator Jesus Christ, but at the same time did not believe in an inerrant, for this would make Scripture identical to Jesus Christ as God's self-revelation. He wanted to analyse how human fault may have made its way into the Bible, even if the central teachings of Jesus can be regarded as reliable. What this means is that compared to theologians who arguably are more prominent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Barth held a more radical position that God is, and has self-disclosed himself through Jesus Christ. All theological discourse around this self-revelation of a personal God, from which human beings derive their continuing preaching of the gospel as a witness to this self-disclosure. Any human ideas or core ideas of this self-disclosure are a case of human ideology infiltrating theology. Barth was arguably more fundamentally orthodox in his theology, even if radical in his approach. The tension between the orthodox elements of Barth and the deep and radical way that he thought should be taken into account when comparing him with pluralistic scholars such as Hick. No doubt the core set of orthodox truths at the bottom of Christianity, Hick displays that their methodologies are as arguably different as their conclusions.

Discussion Point 17

Is Barth correct to be distrustful of liberal theology, when arguably fundamentalism has been responsible for contributing to significant violence and conflict in the history of the Christian Church?

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Detailed Analysis

What Form of Atonement Does Barth Advocate?

It was examined in **Extract 4** how Gustaf Aulén in the early twentieth century noted that there were a number of interpretations of atonement throughout history, with all being unsatisfactory in various ways at capturing the atonement as not only a specific event in history, but also as an act by Jesus that fits with a Christian understanding of morality and moral action. Hick identifies these models as 'transaction' forms of atonement, and it is fair to say, at least that Barth initially adopts the core idea of the transaction model, that Jesus is a substitute who somehow pays for or justifies humanity's sins.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Barth's theology of the atonement fits into these categories. While some early interpretations of Barth's work argued he advocated the penal-substitutionary model, it is hard to justify this interpretation with the emphasis on judgement rather than punishment. It is true that later in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth exclusively deny an aspect of punishment within the atonement, but this is likely because beings cannot completely define the work of a free, transcendent God. To exclude an idea of punishment is as fallacious as denying that there were no aspects of punishment, as observed in the extract, because Barth still uses the term 'Substitute' as the judged. While, therefore, 'Substitute' potentially does not capture exactly the nature of humanity, it would be wrong to completely remove the idea that Jesus Christ for us in a very important way. To remove this idea would likely be to abandon the 'narrow' view that Hick identifies in his writing.

One important thing to note is that the substitution does not occur in a vacuum. Graham notes 'the judicial theme must be interpreted against the background of the covenantal relation with humankind'¹². The action of God for Barth is not limited to a single act, but is free by nature. When considering substitution, it is not something necessary to do, but rather an act that takes place within God's benevolence towards fallen humanity. This emphasis on atonement as part of a wider sphere of divine involvement with humanity in the case of crisis is a key point. It is arguable that they take the concept of atonement too far and can be examined and deconstructed, whereas Barth would argue atonement cannot be removed from within the entire history of God and humankind.

Why, though, does Barth though not settle on a particular model for atonement? Barth rejects traditional models of satisfaction or substitution requiring some action from God for humanity. For Barth there is nothing that humanity has done that requires God to act for them; rather, it is God's benevolence. In this sense, viewing God's honour as tarnished, or holding that some human sin, is applying some human ideology onto the act of a transcendental God. As Swinburne's analysis of atonement in **Extract 4**, Barth might argue there is nothing about atonement could ever be applied to God. Rather, Christologically one can understand God as standing in for humanity in some momentous triumph over human sin in order that humanity can be reconciled with God. Whether this can be understood as a victory perhaps depends on one's perspective. It may be a decisive and important act, but not one that is victorious for humanity, but rather a victory of victory in their renewed expectation and hope for the future. Either way, it is in Barth's position and to not directly argue that he supports a satisfaction or substitutionary model despite his readiness to reference such models in his theology.

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¹² Jeannine Graham *Representation and Substitution in the Atonement Theologies of Dorothee Sölle*, p. 225



Activity 10

The question of what sort or category of atonement theory Barth outlined is one for debate today, and it is worth developing your own ideas on how Barth fits in with the rest of the whole. Complete the following activities to help identify your own views:

1. Work through the extract and identify passages you believe support a vicarious substitution theory of atonement. Which do you think is the closest model to Barth's?
2. Discuss in pairs or groups how you believe Barth has potentially sought to address aspects of each of the traditional theories. Does he succeed?
3. To what extent do you think Barth actually avoid addressing the issues in these models, and into which theological debates around atonement? Are discussions around atonement hampered by Aulén's analysis?

Is the Human Aspect of Reconciliation Ignored in Barth?

It can be noted in the extract that Barth pays a great deal of attention to the divine Jesus and the way in which reconciliation is predicated on the divine sacrifice as the only way to be saved. What seems to be of greatest importance, therefore, is how the internal composition of Jesus Christ makes his sacrifice significant; to simply view the crucifixion as a morally significant event is to remove not only its impact, but also its eternal relevance to humanity. This is particularly true when examining the resurrection, where Barth states: 'the resurrection decided that what Jesus Christ was then he is for all time; the Mediator between God and man.'

Yet it can be questioned within this idea of divine reconciliation what place human beings have. Barth asserts, the new covenant formed between human beings and God is eternal and unbreakable. Is a free transformational act of God, not caused directly by human sin, are human beings seriously in their own works in also reconciling with God? It may be that Barth, in viewing reconciliation as a victory, partially ignores the continuing works of humanity in this process. Looking at Hick's emphasis on the transformational view, the atonement is simply a wider way of identifying human theosis, and what is required in a human being is to inspire people to become a greater moral example to others, towards the divinisation of the self. It can be argued that Barth overlooks this possibility of atonement in emphasising reconciliation as a free divine act. Although he notes to God that we must hear, that we must trust and obey, both in life and death' and 'we must and proclaims the divine will and act for reconciliation', it can still be asked what this has for individuals as human beings, and not just as members of the Church of Christ.

This issue can be seen as one of human autonomy. Barth takes very seriously the fact that God chooses some people to be saved. However, he equally states that it is not possible for humans to make determinations about who the elect are. It may well be the case that God, in his sovereignty, equally one cannot be certain that is the case, and one should live one's life in dependence on the fundamental absence of knowledge. Yet looking at Hick, who emphasises the importance of the transformation of human beings through their own efforts, it can be argued that Barth undervalues the importance of human agency and moral action. Instead of a real call to be reconciled with God, human beings' fate is left up to the whims of a transcendent God. The sacrifice brings an expectation of a reward to human beings after death, but, equally, it does not endorse an unacceptable reliance on human agency and moral action are greatly valued.

Therefore, there is a tension at the heart of Barth's views. Some scholars have identified this as a problem, arguing everyone will be saved, which for many Christians devalues their personal efforts. The look at the doctrine of election in Barth that shies away from universalism may undermine the value of human moral action, and efforts in becoming reconciled with God in their own lives. This is a criticism with victory-influenced theories of atonement as a whole.

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Rather than place the human being at the centre of reconciliation, they emphasise a form of abstract sin that fails to acknowledge the potential centrality of human action reconciled with God. For Barth, this may arise from his desire to avoid human idealism in theology, but, as will be seen in later criticism, it may be the case that Barth places too much emphasis on his depiction of God.

Discussion Point 18

Should the atonement of humanity by Jesus be considered an act beyond categorical aspects might be identifiable to humans, or is how it mechanically worked beyond human understanding?

The Humanity of Christ in Barth

Leading on from the previous criticism about the agency and autonomy of human beings, we can ask whether Barth does not accord enough significance to the humanity of Jesus. He states 'Jesus Christ was fully human, but qualitatively different' and throughout his work emphasises the importance of the Jewish character of Jesus, stating also in the extract 'The Word became flesh' that he be asked how Barth's strong adherence to the Chalcedonian definition is expressed. The humanity of Jesus is equally stressed along with his divinity. He often makes clear that the work of God, but he is less emphatic on how the resurrected Christ is an ascended being. The details of Christ's humanity are detailed, but not its significance in identifying God as a being who acts in human affairs. In particular, it can be argued that if Jesus Christ is simply a mediator between God and human affairs, then what is the necessity of Christ becoming human apart from a function of God as human as part of the atonement?

Cornelius Van Til makes a similar, famous criticism of Barth: that in Barth's attempt to identify God's self-revelation in Christ only, he has to make the case that Jesus Christ's act precedes all time and history (or rather, Adam). The act is eternal, but, equally, if God willed that human beings would be created before history began, then the atonement and reconciliation are eternal events, not human ones. Barth's wish to identify self-revelation with human history collapses, as it cannot be said to be a specific event in time, but equally it cannot be said to be an eternal event, that removes the specificity of when Jesus Christ's act of atonement actually occurred. In a nutshell, Barth cannot accurately define the moment of atonement in any form of history. By being both a historical act on Earth and an act foreseen by the transcendent God, it does not fulfil the criteria of being a historical or eternal event, and rather occupies some strange transcendent place that would have to be regarded as out of human reach. In a sense, therefore, Barth sacrifices not only the humanity of Jesus as a historical individual, but also the ability of the human Jesus to be the vehicle of self-revelation and relate atonement and reconciliation.

This may especially be the case considering how Barth denies the validity of natural reason for human reason to interpret God, but, equally, the way Barth describes the historical act makes it difficult to understand how a transcendent God actually related himself to the world. Other scholars have pointed out Barth did anticipate this criticism, and is aware of the tension between historical reconciliation against eternal ideas of reconciliation and election. Darrell Koopman, a Barth scholar, argues that Van Til's criticism ultimately rests on a failure to appreciate both the transcendent person of God the Father as the Son of God and the historical person of Jesus as the Son of Man. For example, in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth states:

If we speak of Christ, we also assert a human and therefore, temporal presence. Every human presence is also a temporal moment, i.e., a present with a past behind it and a future in front of it, in the sequence of which we exist ourselves. 'The Word became flesh' also means 'the Word became temporal'.

¹³ Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Part 2, p. 50

Yet even if Barth does identify a way in which the transcendent God effectively becomes present in history, this does not affirm necessarily a specific form of humanity which can understand Jesus's self-revelation. For many critics, in Barth there is a dwelling in the transcendent God could possibly have delivered revelation to human beings and human beings could have used their reason to identify with Jesus as a human figure, particularly in regard to the atonement. It might be possible to understand in a broad sense in Barth that Jesus Christ enabled an expectation and hope in human beings, but it is more difficult to say that human beings as a whole cannot identify with the human figure of Jesus on the cross and the truths that may be missing or difficult to understand 2,000 years after the atonement. Many have argued Barth's insistence on a radical theology hampers the ability for human beings to understand self-revelation in Jesus Christ. However, Barth can offer some argument to describe how communication is possible with ordinary human beings.

In this sense, theological arguments about the potential for God to occupy both heaven and earth through the figure of Jesus answer specific theological questions, but not radical human questions which may well be answered by greater acknowledgement of the human significance of the atonement. Theologians such as Hick often do. Instead, once again, there is the tendency to see God as detached from the atonement event in Barth, without any real human connection.

The Victory, the Holy Spirit and the Future of Humanity

One final criticism that will be covered briefly, as it is not featured extensively in the main discussion around the role of the Holy Spirit in the atonement. Barth states:

The cross shows the true humiliation of God. So, in Jesus Christ we speak of an obedience of the one true God himself in his proper being. He obeys and is obeyed. The third (Holy Spirit) holds these together. (156)

However, while Barth identifies the Holy Spirit through the atonement as holding the Father and Son together, he does not develop the concept equally, instead focusing much more on the way that the Son is obedient to the Father, leaving out the potential role the Holy Spirit has not only in the binding but also as the being who allows human beings to be continually reconciled to God throughout time. In a sense, Barth identifies the Spirit as that which brings into human lives not only the reconciliation between the Father and the Son, but the fulfilment of the new covenant between God and mankind and their reconciliation.

Critics, however, have argued that this says little about the way the Spirit draws into reality (the atonement event), but into the future of human beings' communion with God's action on Earth is transmitted throughout history, such that human beings can understand the reconciliation, and participate in the expectation and hope for the future. This reluctance to elucidate this potential future role for the Spirit, instead often speaking of the past event, perhaps stems from his opposition to natural theology. Were the Spirit to be seen as an active presence of the Spirit, an idea which would counter Barth's suggestion that the atonement is the only source of reconciliation. Yet, equally, it can be argued that by insisting Christ is the only source of reconciliation, Barth outlines a binitarian God rather than a Trinitarian one. The Holy Spirit becomes a functional role designed to fulfil the role of uniting the Son and Father, without a real presence of the Spirit.

Comparing Barth's views to those of Hick, who argues that the incarnation should be seen as a paradox (how three persons could be one), and much of Christian theology at least exploring the economic Trinity if not the immanent Trinity (the nature of the Trinity and relation to the world). However, if the Holy Spirit only performs a functional role from a perspective, one can ask why the Holy Spirit is needed at all in a model of atonement.

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In a metaphorical sense, Hick would argue that Jesus was victorious on the cross, but such an interpretation means that it is very possible to understand the crucifixion as a reference to the triune God, and Barth's attempts to define all divine action in terms of the cross lead to more difficulties than solutions.

The Holy Spirit as a whole is generally used to describe how God retains his presence of Jesus, but this is less of an issue if one imagines a pantheistic or more immanent proposed by liberal theology. While Barth may perceive such ventures as submitting ideology, it may equally be true that concepts such as the Holy Spirit cannot be understood by theology as being any more than mere words devoid of substance, conjured up to solve problems by theologians' insistence on philosophical concepts such as the Trinity. Barth describes the absolute and eternal nature of humanity, but such a definition at times risks relegating past historical attempts at reconciliation, without giving due attention to the ways that human affairs at any moment in history, whether this be through a continual hand of humankind, or through a person such as the Holy Spirit.



Discussion Point 19

Is there a natural difficulty in describing the atonement as a specific event in time that holds eternal meaning or relevancy for humanity? Or is this an issue for any significance partially lost to history?

A Comparison with the Theology of Hick

A comparison between Hick and Barth is given also in **Extract 4**, where it was noted that Hick's criticisms of transactional theories of atonement, and this section will tie these criticisms to the issues facing Barth in light of Hick's theology.

Barth and Hick both identify God as a transcendent, other being, removed largely from the world of human affairs, and both express strong doubt about the general validity of natural theology, not least because it has only produced competing conceptions of what God is based on human ideology. However, while Barth locates all revelation within God's self-disclosure in Christ, Hick argues that the broader idea of religious experience has to be considered, not just within Christianity but across all religions. For Hick, there is nothing to suggest that Jesus was unique, let alone the only Son of God, and it may well be the case that God chooses to reveal himself in a multitude of ways that are interpreted differently across different cultures and religions. Therefore, for Hick, the doubting of human reason leads him down a path of pluralism, whereas for Barth, religion as human work becomes just that and nothing else. Christianity as it transmits the legitimate revelation of God in the figure of Jesus Christ

But it can be asked why Barth determines that God's self-revelation is the transcendent one. Partially, this comes from his biblical analysis, which will be looked at in the **Taking**. Others have argued that Barth, despite saying that God is inherently unknowable, seems to know God in certain knowable ways. Not only is God transcendent, but also perfect, wholly good and loving, and the attributes of God given to him in orthodox theology. Yet at the same time, the fact that God has revealed himself diverged from the classical model of God. Analysing God on this classical model is deeper perhaps than human knowledge. While Barth seems to identify God through his self-disclosure in Christ, this is precisely what is promised in the Bible, and perhaps more contentiously, on the way the early Church interpreted the Bible through their own reason and philosophical framework. The 'Jewish character' of Barth's theology cannot be overlooked, but, equally, it cannot be supposed that the revelation of God is in a vacuum, and not influenced in some way by the natural biases and dispositions of the human mind.

Discussion Point 20

Is it fair to say the primary difference between Hick and Barth is their approach to the question of God? Are there other major factors that separate their beliefs once the question of biblical interpretation is set aside?

It was analysed in **Extract 1** how early theologians not only took God to be unchangeable but also approached him through philosophy rather than textual analysis. Similarly, it may be the case that the transcendence of God concept filtered down at least partially through human reasoning both at the time of the apostles and in later reflections on the meaning of the words of the early apostles. Some might even argue that this is due to Barth's moral opposition to German liberal theology in the twentieth century. What Barth says about God as transcendent may not be objective, and may be just as influenced by human culture and liberal Christian theology. This might be especially true for thinkers such as Hick, whose idea of God is inevitably filtered through human cultures and patterns of thought. In the real world, all human beings can experience of him is in the phenomena, and any talk of God is shaped not only by the patterns of language and thought present at any time in history. The exclusivist understanding of Christianity, or identify the work of a transcendent God with the works of a human being.

Barth addresses these concerns, both by a refusal to place limits or boundaries to God's revelation and through his development of how human beings come to have faith in Christian revelation. It is difficult to compare Barth with Hick especially around the idea that one has a certain exclusive access to God through a certain person or figure. For Hick would well argue this idea is central to all religions, Christianity, and it is wholly difficult for Barth to give outside reasons (those of naturalism) why the Christian God should be preferred over the God of another religion.

Activity 11

It is important in the Christian tradition for students to be able to compare and contrast different theological views and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each. Complete the following activities in order to understand the differences between these two theologians:

1. Create a table listing Barth on one side and Hick on the other. Pick out key theories, and where they disagree and where they agree. What is the greatest difference between them?
2. Both Hick and Barth emphasise the transcendence of God, and often use the idea of God who must or must not interact with the world. Why do you think they differ in their views? What common ground? Read through the extracts and note down the different views.
3. In pairs or groups, discuss which theologian you think provides the strongest case for faith. Why? Is it possible to reconcile their views, or do they present fundamental differences in their understanding of atonement and salvation?

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Taking It Further

Barth and Biblical Interpretation

Many scholars have proposed that Barth is primarily a biblical theologian. Since natural theology cannot come to knowledge of God, the only way God can be investigated is through Scripture, the witness to the unique mediator of God's self-disclosure, Jesus Christ. However, Barth, unlike many fundamentalist theologians, does not regard the Bible to be inerrant. Ongoing effort needs to be made to identify what is genuine within the revelation in Christ and what might be human additions. One of his most famous early works is his commentary *The Epistle to the Romans*, written while Barth was still a pastor between 1918 and 1922.

Nevertheless, it can be asked to what extent Barth is capable of drawing out his thoughts and other early Church figures. The project of demythologisation that Hick embarked upon would indicate that the Bible should be judged not only on its historical reliability, probability and merit. If one is willing to abandon creation myths as described in the Old Testament, one should be equally willing to abandon myths expressed in the New Testament if they conflict with the natural laws which human beings follow in their everyday lives. It might be possible to argue for the resurrection on faith, but, as noted in **Extract 4**, it is much more difficult to discern the death as an atoning sacrifice.

There is a strong argument that if looking towards Christology as the central source of revelation, one should look towards the gospels as the first and foremost source of revelation. Yet in doing so, as in Hick's analysis, which puts forward a sceptical, historical view of Jesus as a person, one is faced with the doctrine of the atonement, this instead being elaborated only by Matthew and the Gospel of John, and Jesus's failed eschatological vision. There is not enough time or space to delve deeper into the historical Jesus, but it is important to note that a potential weakness of Barth's position is that the New Testament to provide an authentic witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ, despite the fact that this is a deeply troublesome case. While Barth accordingly acknowledges that the Bible may well not be the best source as he requires in order to derive his depiction of God and his understanding of the world.

This may be especially true in not only the atonement, but also key Christian concepts such as the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit is outlined as being a potential force in the gospels, it is not depicted as a person of a triune God. Similarly, the Chalcedonian definition, in Jesus being both fully human and fully divine, is far from affirmed in much early scripture, and while Barth contends these aspects are derivable from Scripture, alternative readings of the New Testament challenge this. One of the strengths of natural theology is that God is no longer a mess of ideas derived from early scripture, but is identifiable through the wider world and creation. While this may lead in natural theology to disputes, it can be contended that there are still irresolvable disputes over the New Testament. These have been glossed over by the developing orthodoxy of the early Christian Church. The issues of the Arian controversy (whether the Son was coeternal/cosubstantial with the Father) and the Nestorian controversy (Nestorians maintain that Jesus's human and divine natures are separate) were not settled amicably or satisfactorily at the time. Similarly, issues about whether God suffers (see **Extract 1**) and whether God is more radically with the world than we thought suggest that even orthodox ideas about God are difficult to completely uphold.

Therefore, when analysing Barth, be aware that it is possible to criticise his ideas not only on a biblical basis, but also on a historical basis. What importance one gives historical analysis of the New Testament can lead to one disputing key areas of Barth's theology, which is often seen as an inflexible whole. It comes to key questions about the divinity and purpose of Jesus Christ.

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Form and Justify an Argument

Throughout this section, the themes and ideas behind Barth's theology of atonement is now time for you to form your own opinion. You are not expected to be able to you are required to be able to identify its core ideas and develop a critical analysis of secondary authors and sources. If encountering a section of this extract in an exam

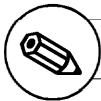
- How does Barth reanalyse atonement as a doctrine of reconciliation, and how with traditional models of atonement?
- What does Barth mean when he describes Jesus Christ as the 'Judge judged'?
- How is Barth's theology of the resurrection and eschatology important in understanding reconciliation?
- Why was Barth opposed to liberal theology, and how might this opposition have influenced his theology?
- Why is Barth's idea of God as wholly transcendent and other important to understanding reconciliation?
- Does Barth fit in better with a victory model of atonement than a satisfaction model?
- Does Barth ignore the human aspects of both reconciliation and Jesus Christ's humanity?
- What role does the Spirit play, if any, in Barth's atonement theology and eschatology?
- Are the difficulties in identifying the kind of atonement theory Barth sets out the issues of previous models, or are they ways that he avoids setting out what he thinks is wrong with the transactional model of atonement, with all the difficulties that brings?
- How do the views of Hick challenge the assumptions Barth makes?
- Is Barth correct in identifying natural theology as an invalid route to understanding God?
- What role does biblical analysis play in the theology of Barth, and is it possible to understand his theology from a different interpretation of the New Testament?

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Summary Activity – Barth

Below is a table summarising Barth's arguments within 'Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant' and 'The Lord as Judge'. Using your own interpretation of the anthology, the extract and the blank sections of the table.

'Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant' Karl Barth	
Barth argues:	Argument
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The atonement is not an act from the transcendent God, rather it is formed out of a need to restore honour or satisfy some infraction caused by human sin, but rather to reconcile fallen human beings with God through Jesus Christ. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus Christ represents the Judge judged, and as the Son of God is able to be both the representative and substitute for humanity in his death, which enables reconciliation between human beings and God. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus's death has to be understood always in the context of the resurrection. This second event completes the reconciliation, such that human beings come to realise God's action in the world, and develop a new attitude of 'expectation and hope' for their lives after death. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The death of Jesus cannot simply be analysed and criticised historically. Greater attention has to be given to the way Jesus and his mediation of revelation from God flourished in the early Church, such that recognition of the greater distance between God and man should be prioritised over the distance between man and history. 	
<p>Conclusion: The atonement can not be simply defined in terms of satisfaction or penalty, although both these elements are partial, each a part. It has to be seen in the wider context of the reconciliation with man that God sought through Jesus Christ, and his actions within the world.</p>	

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Exam-style Questions

Read the extract below and answer the questions that follow.

Cur Deus homo? Why become a servant? What purpose, end scope, meaning and revelation of the whole inward riches of his deity in all its height and depth world as its loyal Creator, taking up its cause. There is no necessity to this. The salvation of the world is included in the self-expression of this divine action.

'The Judge judged for us.' This does not mean a general 'with us'! 'Jesus Christ man Jesus Christ' has taken the place of us men, of many, in all the authority of God, in that he acts in our name and therefore, validly and effectively for us in our place with God, therefore, of our redemption and salvation, representing us with God. He is our Representative and Substitute.

1. Outline and clarify the ideas expressed in this extract about judgement.
2. Analyse the argument that Barth successfully avoids the issues with substitutional and penal-substitution models of atonement.

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Mark Scheme

Level	Descriptor
Level 1	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, inaccurately or inappropriately. Only a surface level knowledge of important concepts is displayed, and religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a limited range, always correct or sufficiently connected to the extract.
Level 2	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, although with a few mistakes. A thorough knowledge and comprehension of beliefs is displayed, but with room for further development. Religious ideas and beliefs are of a limited variety, but generally correct, and sufficiently connected to the extract.
Level 3	There is a broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, rigorously presented throughout an appropriate and justified response to the question. A thorough and fully developed knowledge and comprehension of important concepts is displayed. Religious ideas and beliefs addressed are of a wide variety, and pertinently connected to the extract.

Question No.	Indicative Content (10 marks AO1)
1.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terminology, when responding to the question.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barth in analysing atonement draws on many different models proposed in Christian theology. The main thing he stresses, however, is that the atonement is a transcendent God, and was not a reactive or necessary measure to human sin. The main act of the atonement was the incarnation of God to the human world to help the world by becoming human and taking the place of human beings. Through this, God is able to fully represent human beings in becoming human. This is necessary as human beings are still fallen, and unable to be reconciled to God on their own terms. <p>This means that God is the only being capable of leading the reconciliation of man as the judged he becomes the 'Judge judged' – the person capable of judging and granting them their atonement. Barth arguably expresses the reconciliation in language to avoid any direct connotations of satisfaction or punishment theories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is what Barth means when he describes Jesus as the 'Representative of humanity' – atonement is taken up by God without human action or need, and was the creation of humanity – such that, in his benevolence, human beings can be reconciled to God.

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Level	Descriptor	Mark
Level 1	There is a very limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, often inaccurately or inappropriately. Some topics and details are chosen with rudimentary links made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Any criticisms or judgements are only substantiated by general or non-specific evidence.	
Level 2	There is a limited amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, sometimes presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with links made between a small variety of aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, but with little substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 3	There is a moderate amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language, generally well presented, although with some mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed with a basic progression of reasoned arguments throughout the answer. Links are made between a lot of the aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements of a few aspects are made, with an attempt at substantiation by a reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	
Level 4	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented, with a few mistakes. Relevant topics and details are deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments developed throughout the answer. Links are made between a broad variety of the aspects of the question. Criticisms and judgements are made of almost all of the aspects of the question and are substantiated by a reasoned evaluation of some supporting evidence.	
Level 5	A broad amount of knowledge, terminology and technical language is well presented, correctly and rigorously, throughout a justified response. Relevant topics and details are critically deconstructed, with rational and logical progressions of reasoned arguments strongly developed. Criticisms, judgements and links are made of/between all of the aspects of the question and completely substantiated by a thorough and reasoned evaluation of supporting evidence.	

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Question No.	Indicative Content (5 marks AO1, 15 marks AO2)
2.	<p>AO1 will be used by candidates to underpin their analysis and evaluation. Candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding using specialist language and terminology in the question, and in meeting AO2 descriptors described below.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gustaf Aulén and other theologians identified a various models which Christian theology could be categorised into, but also argued that these models were unsatisfactory Jesus atoned for human sin without resorting to morally difficult ideas of punishment Barth in his theory of reconciliation re-examines atonement, but does not dwell on punishment, substitution or satisfaction. Equally, Barth does not rule these concepts out. Barth followed a more victory oriented model of atonement, others have not escape the difficulties of satisfaction or penal-substitution models. <p>AO2 requires candidates to develop their answers showing analytical and evaluative responses. Candidates' responses will be underpinned by their use of knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Candidates may refer to the following in relation to AO2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It can be argued that Barth still commits fundamentally to a penal-substitution model as 'Representative and Substitute' – in this sense it has to be asked in what way Jesus being punished for human sin or disobedience, a morally abhorrent concept in itself, arguably does not clarify this fully in talk of judgement. Barth stresses the atonement as a free act of God, but equally does not specify why disobedience exactly needs atoning for with an extra sacrifice – it can be argued, significant repentance and apology for human beings is enough. It can be proposed that Barth does not effectively deal with the human elements of the human Jesus accurately represents humanity. Instead, the atonement is an act in a stage in which human beings have no investment. In this way, God might be satisfied, but human beings not. Barth ignores the developments of liberal theology and thought, and in morality of Jesus taking on punishment or satisfaction for humanity is not a morally positive free act. It is hard from this perspective to see why sacrifice and death are necessary for redemption. On the other hand, it can be argued that the atonement was undertaken in the full knowledge of Jesus' freedom and benevolence. Whatever act is necessary is determined by God and human beings as affirming Jesus' awareness of the importance of the cross in the gospel. Barth does not commit to the words 'Representative' or 'Substitute' in describing his model of atonement draws closer to one of victory – identified in his theology as the second stage of the act of reconciliation with God. Substitution/satisfaction is reframed as judgement, and Barth makes clear that earlier atonement such as Anselm's are unsatisfactory. Reconciliation has to be analysed in light of human reality rather than human ideology, and Barth looks at what the cross means in light of Jesus' action. Barth speaks of the atonement as the affirmation from God to man. In this way, the atonement is phrased simply in terms of human sin, as in earlier models, but in the eschatological hope established by the reconciliation between God and man from Jesus's action.

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Mark Schemes – Discussion Points

Discussion Point 16:

Some students might assert Barth's belief that Scripture is not inerrant but a valid sense, an infallible view is not required, but work is required to harmonise each sense of Jesus, and the meaning of the risen Christ. However, other students might look to Hick, arguing that modern scholarship has exposed various elements of the gospel as additions, and question whether one can assert Jesus to be God himself, or even to have some greater divine meaning to his death. This may be debated, furthermore, what is the role of faith in the Bible as an authentic witness to God?

Discussion Point 17:

Students may note the potential for immoral actions on the part of the Christian Church through the Crusades, the Inquisition or its support of slavery, and note that obedience to a secular authority is potentially troublesome as the liberal Church yielding to secular ideology. The debate is about how to interpret Christian teaching itself, and whether the Bible, if not read with caution, can potentially foster immoral attitudes from both from a liberal and a conservative standpoint.

Discussion Point 18:

Students may argue the most important part is simply noting that Christ's death has reconciled human beings to be reconciled with God, such that had it not happened, there would have been an existential loss for humanity in not being able to form a relationship with God. However, along a moral exemplar route, that Jesus's death does not require being on some sort of a path for people to seek out God in their lives, and there is a burden of proof for Christians that the Bible biblically and logically is consistent with other teachings in Christianity.

Discussion Point 19:

Students may note that the death of Jesus, while maybe holding eternal significance, is a part of history as with any other event, the role of the Christian Church arguably being to preserve it. However, in this it is noted that there has never been any fixed definition of what it means, and it is likely that its original or true meaning could at some point be distorted. In this sense, it can be questioned whether human beings can be truly reconciled to God, and how this reconciliation was made possible. Other students might agree with Barth that the real distance is between the transcendent God and humankind, not humanity. Some might even contend the role of the Holy Spirit is to keep the meaning alive for future generations.

Discussion Point 20:

Students may contend that since both authors are sceptical of natural theology, their approach to the Bible – Barth more literal, Hick more liberal – since they both assume a transcendent God. However, other students might point towards Hick's emphasis on arguing that as a source of inspiration/knowledge across all religions, this differs from the idea that religion is simply human work. Similarly, even in his analysis of the Bible and other religious texts, he might argue Hick is guilty of letting human ideology impact on Christian belief.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Reconciliation	The term Barth uses to encapsulate the process of God reconciling himself to humanity through the cross and resurrection.
Reprobation	The theological position that some of humanity will inevitably be condemned through their sinful, fallen nature.
Condescension	The phrase by which the Son entered the human world to save humanity and the world.
The Judge	The phrase Barth uses to describe the unique action and atonement of humankind.
Universalism	The theological position that because God is benevolent, every human being will eventually be saved.
Liberal Theology	Theological inquiry that focuses not just on Scripture, but on historical studies and other investigative tools to influence its interpretation.
Biblical Inerrancy	The belief, generally held by Christian fundamentalists, that the Bible is without error in its teaching and narrative.
Natural Theology	A field of theology that puts forward that God and his character can be partially discovered through observation of and reasoning about the natural world.

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