

**2016 specification**  
first exams in 2018

# Course Companion

for Edexcel Paper 4: Christianity  
(A Level Year 2)

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# Teacher's Introduction

This resource provides concise and comprehensive coverage of the A Level Year 2 Edexcel material for Paper 4: Christianity.

The material is covered in the order given in the specification:

- **Social and Historical Developments** (Science, Secularisation, New Movements in Theology)
- **Works of Scholars** (Atonement Theory, Comparison of Key Ideas: Barth and Hick)
- **Religion and Society** (Pluralism and Diversity, Equality and Discrimination)

Each sub-topic has '**Activities**' in boxes, which are mostly questions to stimulate class discussion. There are also '**Exam Prep**' boxes, which provide activities to directly prepare students for the exam.

Also included are '**Quick Quiz**' sections throughout each topic, which should provide a fun way to check comprehension and help students remember key information. **Answers** for the Quick Quiz sections are also provided at the back of the resource.

**Key terms** have been defined in boxes and highlighted in bold.

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## 4. Social and Historical Development

Christianity has been a faith in the world for over 2,000 years – over the course of and with it people have changed. The kind of people practising Christianity today are in a different society and environment from the early Christians of the first and second centuries. Modern Christians have developed new ideas and developments in different forms of encountering challenges to their beliefs. Modern scientific developments have made explaining the universe and how it came to be. Many have questioned whether it is necessary to explain the origins of the universe. This has caused much debate with modern Christians, about the ability to understand these new developments within their context.

Furthermore, modern society in which modern Christians are living is becoming increasingly secular. It poses challenges itself to the Christian faith in terms of the way in which it navigates modern society which has transferred responsibilities traditionally performed by the state (education, healthcare, etc.).

### 4.1 SCIENCE



#### Starter Activity

1. Think of one major scientific development in the last 200 years. Write down what it is and the ways in which you think it might have challenged Christianity.
2. Swap your piece of paper with your neighbour and read over their thoughts. Discuss to what extent you agree or disagree.

Scientific developments have become one of the most polarising issues when discussing modern Christianity. The question of whether or not science has 'killed God' has become a common discussion point.

What we now think of as modern science found its roots in the development of the eighteenth centuries. In modern understanding belief in Christianity is often presented as separate from scientific belief. That is to say, the general idea is that the two ideas are mutually exclusive. Those who were at the very helm of these developments were themselves Christians and did not view their beliefs as being contradictory to their developments in science.

The main challenges that are argued to be a challenge to Christian beliefs are **empiricism** and **logic** – the basis of science is whether or not something can be reasonably proved. The understanding of the world is through reason rather than faith.

For example, the scientific method is a good example of the rational basis of the modern world. It is based on the ideas of Galileo Galilei, a highly influential Italian astronomer, physicist and engineer, who lived from 1564 to 1642. He was a mathematician and his method of approaching scientific enquiry placed an emphasis on measurement and testing as being accurate. His emphasis on gathering evidence through experimentation influenced the scientific method hugely. It was also hugely influential in that it broke with the traditional methods of scientific enquiry. He broke with the traditional viewpoint that scientific enquiry was made in a way in which the scientific method is made, and laid a higher emphasis on the importance of evidence to the development of the scientific method. This fed into the development of empirical science, logic and proof as the result of experimentation are now considered to be the way in which beings garner what is considered to be true. This links strongly to how modern people interpret the world – evidence through experimentation is key.

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As Bertrand Russell put it: 'It is not what the man of science believes that distinguishes him from the man of religion. He believes it. His beliefs are tentative, not dogmatic; they are based on evidence, not faith. Generally speaking, there are two forms of the scientific method:

- **Inductive** – gathering information through observation, analysing that information to form a hypothesis based on the information at hand. The hypothesis should then be tested. Should there be issues with the hypothesis then these amendments can be made. At the end of the process, a hypothesis should be posited.
- **Deductive** – this is the method of coming to a conclusion by deducing it from a proposition.

**Scientism** is the term for a view that science is the only way to truly understand the world. It is often said to be true or false and determined through the scientific method.

**Deism** was one such reaction. This is the belief that science and religion need not be in conflict. To the idea that while an ordered existence can be proved, the cause of such an order is unknown.

**Existentialism** is another reaction philosophy which developed around the same time. It is a mainstream method of thinking about the world.

In addition to changing attitudes within theories, scientific discoveries have also been made. These include:

- The theory of evolution
- The Big Bang theory
- Neuroscience
- Quantum theory

### *The Theory of Evolution and the Big Bang Theory*

One large challenge to the modern Church has been navigating the wake of scientific discovery. In the last couple of hundred years, the Church had traditionally held the authority of the Bible as the truth; however, during the Enlightenment period and the escalation of scientific discovery, this position now challenged by scientific discovery.

Cosmologies are theories about the origins of the universe. There are many different theories about the mystery of where the universe came from, the discussion of which has found itself at the heart of the debate between religion and science; the clash appears between those who posit that science can explain the universe came to be without the need for God to exist, while religion has traditionally held that the cause of the existence of the universe.

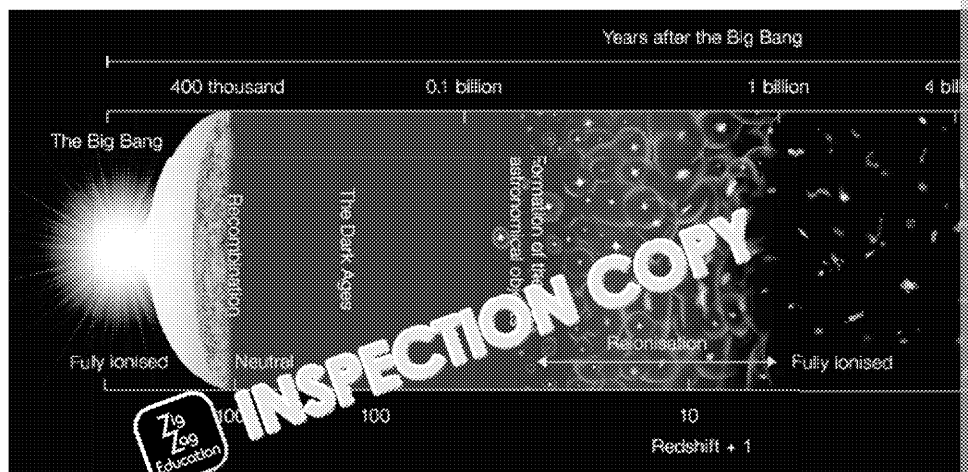
Scientific cosmologies are scientific theories about where the universe came from. The Big Bang theory is a theory developed around the origin of the universe. This theory posits a distinct *beginning point* that occurred billions of years ago. Scientists currently estimate that the beginning with the Big Bang is approximately 13.8 billion years old. There is evidence for the Big Bang – known as the 'red shift' and the 'cosmic microwave' theories. These are believed to be the need to know for the sake of examining the interaction between religion and science.

It is commonly held by the scientific community to be the best explanation of the universe.

The Big Bang theory is the most dominant and well-known cosmology within science. It posits that the universe is approximately 12–15 billion years old. Notably, this challenges the traditional view of the earth's age posited by the Church traditionally based on accounts in the Bible. Further detail regarding Christian responses to this ideas later in this chapter.

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The theory has its origins in the observation that there was movement within the universe which appears, through observation, to be outwards from a central point, away from the centre of the universe, expanding, which would indicate a central point.

Einstein's posited theory of general relativity would indicate that around 14 billion years ago, a central point was a small ball of concentrated energy which was very hot. This small ball expanded quickly. According to famed physicist Stephen Hawking, this hot concentrated ball of energy expanded into space which was already there, but this rapid expansion created the universe. According to Hawking, this was the point at which both space and time came into existence. This event was called the Big Bang.

Before this point, according to the theory, there was nothing.

The theory is based entirely on empirical evidence. It is based on the observation of the movement of galaxies away from one another as measured by the basic background radiation. The discovery of the Hubble effect, the speed of galaxies moving away from one another as measured by the basic background radiation, support the theory of the Big Bang on the basis of evidence of movement outward from a central point. This indicates that there had to be an event which caused the movement – this being the Big Bang.

## Spotlight on Scholars

Another of the most important of these developments is the theory of evolution, proposed by the biologist **Charles Darwin** (1809–1882). In 1859, Darwin published a book titled *The Origin of Species* in which he posited the idea that when one looks at the world, one can see that the world is governed, which Darwin terms 'natural selection'. Basically, when you look at different species, you can observe slight differences between them, which are located geographically. *The Origin of Species* posits that these slight differences are due to genetic advantages in the environment in which they live. Darwin argued that these differences are caused by mutations which have been caused throughout generations of breeding.

The debate about the origins of species has often been posited as one of religion vs science, or lenses of evolutionism vs creationism. However, as will be discussed, not all Christians disagree with the theory of evolution, such as Catholic theologian Karl Rahner who argued that evolution and creationism are not mutually exclusive. He stated that the laws of evolution were indicative of a divine design. One of the major issues within the debate is that the theory of evolution would remove ideas of a specific purpose for humanity.

In *The Origin of Species* he put forward what is now understood as the theory of natural selection, following his discoveries in the Galapagos Islands. While on this voyage

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Galapagos Islands, Darwin noted variations among the beaks of the finches (a type of bird native to South America).

He observed that depending on their location on the island, the shape and size of the beak varied. This gave them an advantage regarding their food and the food that was available on the island.

From this observation he developed a theory of evolution. He argued that within a population, there are genetic mutations. Some of these mutations are advantageous, such as an animal to more easily access food. This enables the animal with the genetic mutation to procreate, passing on the mutation to its offspring. Those who do not have the genetic mutation cannot procreate and die without passing on their genes. In this way, the mutation will become a permanent part of the whole species of animal.

The idea that those with the advantageous genes thrive and those without die is known as natural selection. It seems to be observable across many species, leading to the acceptance of the theory within the scientific community due to the large amount of empirical evidence supporting it. This is the dominant theory of how animals and mankind have come to be within the modern scientific theory which has become juxtaposed with creationist theories.

### ***Christian Responses***

So, given that science is posited in the modern world to have 'killed God', why do Christians still believe?

This is because there are a variety of ways in which religion has responded to recent scientific theories. Firstly, we will examine how Christians have responded to the Big Bang theory.

Many Christians view the Big Bang theory as not in any way opposing their faith. It is seen as consistent with their faith. It explains the 'how' of the origins of the universe with the 'why' which many Christians believe is where God fits in.

*The Big Bang theory does not come out for divine explanation. It forces the conclusion that nature cannot explain how nature could have created itself. Only a supernatural force could have done that.*

Francis Collins, Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute

Furthermore, it confirms the account of Genesis insofar as it confirms that the universe had a beginning. The Roman Catholic Church holds and espouses this view. Examples of someone who holds this view are the Catholic priest and physician Georges Lemaitre.

Furthermore, many Christians have posited that the idea of the Big Bang created constants (i.e. DNA proteins, the way the universe developed, constants of the force of gravity) which suggest a 'fine-tuning force', such as a God. This view is reflected in the response to the irreducible complexity as posited by Michael Behe, which will be discussed later in the course.

However, some Christians do reject the idea of the Big Bang theory and evolution. They are known as **creationists**.

They believe that the history of the world and of humankind can be found in a literal reading of the Bible. They believe that any scientific theories or evidence which contradict the account in the Bible are incorrect. They also posit that the Bible is the main source of historical fact regarding the universe, specifically the accounts of creation as outlined in Genesis.

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*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

*And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day,' and the darkness he called 'night.' And there was evening—and there was morning—the first day.*

Generally speaking, there are two types of creationists:

- (1) Young Earth Creationists
- (2) Old Earth Creationists

Young Earth Creationists can also be referred to as six-day creationists. Science puts the earth at approximately 4.5 billion years old as previously stated. Young Earthers, however, believe the earth is only 6,000 years old. Their system of dating is based on the Bible rather than from any scientific evidence. They hold a literal interpretation of Genesis, with God creating the whole earth and resting on the seventh. They believe that all humans can trace their lineage back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, who then populated the earth. They believe that God created all the animals observed now and are were subsequently named by Adam.

There is a creation museum in Kentucky, USA, run by Ken Hamm. He is an Australian who moved to the USA. He argues that the Bible is a literal history of the world and aims to provide scientific evidence to support his beliefs. He is a proponent of creation science. For example, he believes that the tale of Noah's Ark (Genesis 5:32–10:1) was a literal historical event that occurred 2348 BC, according to a dating system based on a literal interpretation of the Bible. He argues that the Ark had sufficient biodiversity to represent all the species that we see and enjoy on the earth today.

They believe that dinosaurs existed at the same time as humans did as they were created on the sixth day of creation. Hamm and his creation museum is a testament to the beliefs of Young Earth Creationists and their attempts to scientifically justify their beliefs among American Evangelical Christians.

Old Earth Creationists believe that the earth is 4.5 billion years old. They hold that the scientific evidence described in Genesis is true. However, they translate the original Hebrew word 'yom' (day) as a period of time. In other words, they believe that rather than a literal day, the story of creation as told in Genesis represents bursts of creative energy, or periods of creation rather than a literal creation week.

They also reject evolution. They believe God created every species with intent. They believe that species that have appeared which differ genetically from previous species have appeared through direct creation. Interestingly, some do accept some forms of evolution; however, this is limited. They believe that evolution has occurred among 'lower species', but certainly not within the human species. They believe that human beings, pre-human humanoids, which are evidenced by archaeological excavation, are not the same as modern humans. They believe that Adam was the first human whom God imbued with a soul. They also believe that the flood of Noah was a local event, rather than a global one. They believe that the flood was a historical event, however they believe that it was a localised event only occurring in the region of Mesopotamia.

However, it should be noted that there is no more scientific evidence or basis with which to support the Young Earth view. There is no current scientific evidence for new species appearing on the earth. The scientific evidence empirically or substantiates that pre-human humanoids were without souls. The flood of Noah was a local event, which is potentially appearing more reasonably appropriate to the view which Old Earth Creationists hold to interpret literally.

It is important to note that these are not fully mainstream Christian views held by both the modern day and historically. Literal interpretation of the Bible as a fully literal history is generally the mainstream belief, and is more popular in certain cultural and geographical areas, such as the United States rather than within British Christian practice and belief.

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Intelligent design is a school of thought which accepts evolution as a theory to explain processes such as evolution are guided by the intent of an intelligent designer, rather than a process of random chance as posited by atheist evolutionists. While the biblical view as posited by many philosophers does not specifically point to the Judaeo-Christian God adopted by many Christians.

One example of a theist who posits this view is biochemist Michael Behe. He posits that a biological system which is 'irreducibly complex' at a molecular level (that should be a variable out of the equation would not be able to function), the case for intelligent design is strengthened.

Intelligent design is at the heart of the Christian responses to evolution; in addition, Christians who reject evolution as not fitting with the truth of their Scripture. How, then, can evolution be reconciled with maintaining belief in God?

**Teilhard de Chardin** is one such theist. He was a palaeontologist and Jesuit priest, somewhat discombobulating to learn at first within the context of the evolution of life. His ideas have largely been rejected by the creationist community, but were popularised with the idea of evolution. He believes and argues that science and religion are compatible. He believed that evolution is not just a scientific process, but also a religious one, and viewed science as being a part of the process of evolution for a religious purpose. In his view, the process of human evolution is leading towards a point where we will evolve into an 'Omega Point' – a being morally perfect, like Jesus.

Chardin is just one example of those who have accepted evolution but have maintained their faith. Another example of a theist who is also a scientist is John Polkinghorne, an Anglican priest and physicist. He argues that science and religion cannot dictate to one another what is truth and what is not, but rather involve some form of a leap of faith in the ideas of Polkinghorne; faith, he argues, is of religion.

There are even theists who use science to argue against the theory of evolution. Theists such as irreducible complexity and intelligent design.

However – it is important that many religious people still do not see inconsistency between scientific and religious belief. For example, star of popular sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* explains how she remains a practising Jew while also being a neuropsychologist. She says, *'I have science and religious tradition that goes back thousands of years...understanding equation and science, and that's amazing, but having a spiritual connection with that information and relationship with God!'*

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## Neuroscience

Up until the last fifty or so years, the ideas of dualism regarding the mind and the way of thinking. This kind of thinking can be traced all the way back to Plato and Aristotle and believed that the psyche (a term which can be interchanged for soul or mind) was a separate entity from the human body. Aristotle believed that the presence of a soul was that of an individual who was alive and one who was not. The Church has long held that these are separate entities.

However, scientific development in recent years has challenged these long-held ideas. The idea of the body being separate. Activity in the brain demonstrated through the undertaking of neuroscience has shown that certain areas of the brain are associated with the feelings of awe.

Therefore, it could be argued that things which were previously considered to be outside the realm of the soul – awe inspired by God, the feeling of being loved by a God – could in fact be explained within the brain. It could simply be explained by natural chemical brain reactions and the interaction between human beings and God.

This has bridged the gap which might have been occupied by the God of the Gaps, stating that science could only go so far. It could explain that our appreciation of the divine is a chemical reaction. Our idea of the self, of the soul, could simply be a bunch of chemicals.

### *Christian Responses*

Many might believe that such scientific developments have the potential to completely undermine belief, Christianity included.

However, this could still simply be a possibility and has not conclusively disproved the existence of the soul. It is a theory, which proves one thing (brain activity) which some might argue is a logical fallacy. It disproves the existence of the soul.

Furthermore, this could be challenged by the idea that those with no brain activity can still have an experience. Surely, if there is no brain activity observed, there should be no awareness. The near-death experiences over time combats this, however. This might point towards the existence of the soul, however, this is fully based on anecdotal evidence rather than scientific theory.

## Quantum Theory

From the beginning of the twentieth century, there have been huge developments in many fields. One of these fields is quantum theory. It was first posited in 1900 by Max Planck, a physicist of science which addresses extremely small matters – particles such as atoms and subatomic particles.

Energy here can be quantified in units, hence the use of the term 'quantum'. These units, in scientific investigations, can be observed to appear to show changes, which are believed to occur without cause.

This causes issues with the idea that the universe is created by an intelligent designer. This is a teleological argument by William Paley, in which he bases his entire argument on the existence of a creator because of the observable order in the world. This method of looking at the world from a scientific perspective may appear to be a large problem for those of a religious faith as it appears to suggest that random chance governs the events. Physicists such as Niels Bohr argue that this uncertainty is an inherent part of the reality of nature.

### *Christian Responses*

However, there are religious responses. It seems to be that there are strong arguments which challenge the notions of religious belief. However, the continued existence of the world and the human race suggests that there is a creator.

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those who would consider themselves to be scientists may indicate that the theory seems.

For example, physicist John Polkinghorne argues that quantum physics is a way that Polkinghorne is also a priest, and, therefore, he is simultaneously a Christian and occurrences within the quantum level stop being random when they leave the micro level – they then translate into the laws of science and nature. He argues that in this way, science brings order from disorder, using the quantum disorder to create the order of the scientific world.

Furthermore, the existence of quantum physics may give the basis for many to argue. While this has not been scientifically proved and perhaps cannot be, the space in which it supports the idea that free choices can be made. Within Christianity the idea of miracles as a scientific theory which may support this would be considered to support Christianity.

## Quick Quiz

- 1) Briefly describe the influence of Galileo on modern scientific process.
- 2) What is scientism?
- 3) How does the Big Bang theory challenge Christianity?
- 4) How might a Christian respond to this challenge?
- 5) How does evolution challenge Christianity?
- 6) What are the two general Christian responses to this challenge?
- 7) What is neuroscience?
- 8) How might a Christian respond to the challenge of neuroscience?
- 9) What is quantum theory?
- 10) How might a Christian respond to the challenge of quantum theory?

## Exam Prep

Draw up reasons to believe that science has...

1. proved the existence of God
2. made the existence of God more likely
3. disproved the existence of God

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## 4.2 SECULARISATION



### Starter Activity

1. Draw a pie chart representing what you think the proportions of religion in the United Kingdom.
2. Show your pie chart to your neighbour or a group; discuss with them what numbers you have and discuss any differences you can see between you.



### The Secularisation of Society

Historically, religion has been integral to the way in which society functions. Traditionally, the role of organising key social functions such as healthcare, education and welfare.

In the modern day we are seeing a steady decline in those who claim to be religious. Statistics are recorded as being regular attendees at churches across the UK on Sundays is declining. People are relying less on the need for religion to inform their morals, rejecting traditional religious structures to play a central role in society. The number of those who identify as having no belief (i.e. identifying as atheist or agnostic) has greatly risen in the modern age.

Pre-Reformation, the Church assumed the role of authority over most aspects of society. Following the events of the Reformation the established power of the Church was challenged by other social challenges. The Reformation allowed a split from the Catholic Church in England, and following this people started to practice different Christian beliefs in Britain, breaking the impact of one cohesive church. It afforded people more religious freedom of choice, with a lack of religious belief being socially acceptable. Furthermore, the impact of the loss of faith as a result of the witnessing of such suffering and devastation. The 19th century saw a decline of people adhering to religious belief, leading to a more secular society and the process of secularisation.

Religion in general, but in the UK specifically Christianity, functioned as a part of public life. The head of the Church and state there is a symbolic unity of the public nature of religion. As the process of secularisation has occurred over the course of the past century, the role of religion has evolved from being viewed as a public affair to a private one.

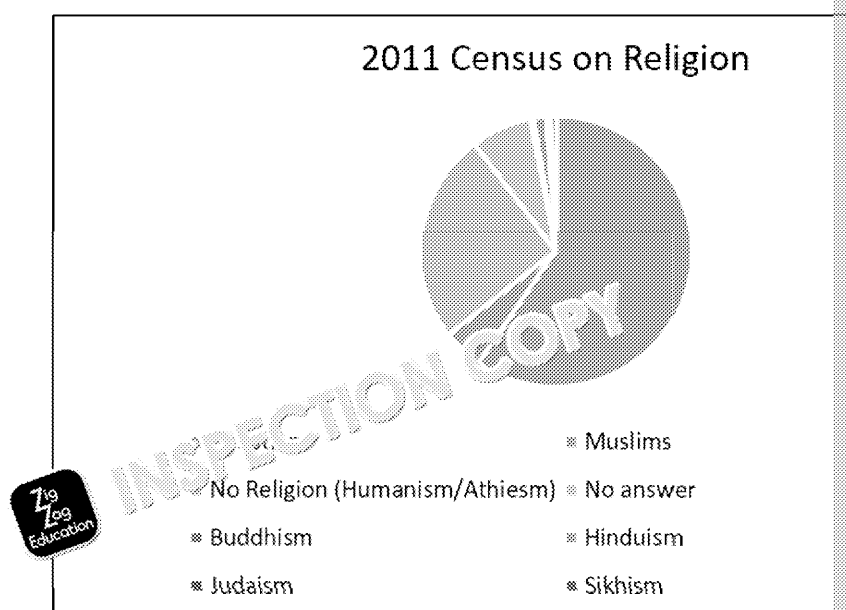
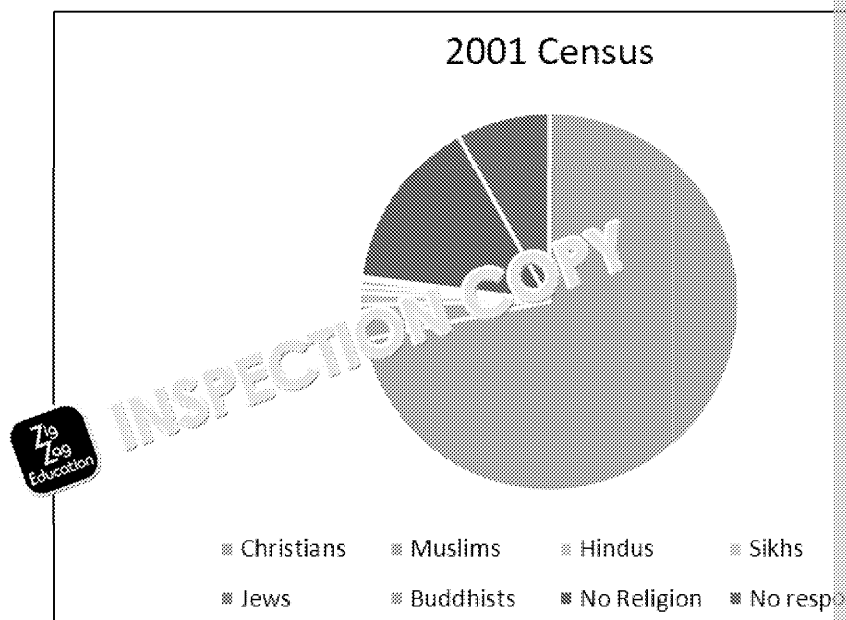
The ONS survey is a survey which takes place once every 10 years within the United Kingdom. The survey is enquiring regarding religious beliefs. The last census was taken in 2011, and the results of the 2001 and 2011 censuses are represented below in two pie charts. From the charts, you can see that the number of people who are identifying as Christians are declining. Furthermore, the number of individuals who identify as having no religion, (i.e. being atheist or having a humanist ethical system) has vastly grown over the 10 years. While the data for the next census will be collected as we must wait until 2021, general trends are suggesting the decline in Christianity that we may be expecting to see a further decline in the future.



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## New Religious Movements

There has been a marked rise within the last few hundred years of new religious movements, including the idea of spirituality as a conceptual movement. For the sake of this course, as the term is somewhat vague (Judaism is older than Christianity; however, Christianity can fairly be considered established), so it will be considered to be the rise of religious movements which have emerged in the last few hundred years or so.

In the 1830s the Mormon Church was founded. This is a church whose teachings include some American prophets. They believe that God gives special revelation to the Mormon Church and he follows its guidance. In the 1930s religious movement the Witnesses were founded. The Witnesses are a non-Trinitarian branch of the Christian faith who do not believe in the Trinity. These are both modern expressions of Christianity which have emerged from mainstream Christian ideals, such as the Trinity and revelation.

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## Disillusionment with Traditional Religion

One important aspect of the secularisation of the UK has been the rising popularity of not having a religion. There are, also, increasing numbers of people who feel disillusioned with the structures of traditional organised religion and, therefore, have begun to identify with alternative belief systems.

An example of this is the distinct rise in those choosing to identify themselves as spiritual. An individual may choose to identify as spiritual, which has no specific definition, but is often described as 'something more', believe in souls and a spiritual realm, without adhering to organised religious faith. Before the Reformation, it was a term which referred to an aspect of faith, more on the Holy Spirit. However, in modern times it has become a term which refers to a spiritual realm or something beyond the physical realities we can experience in the particular religious faith. This may take many expressions, including mindfulness.

The idea of spiritualism in Britain largely emerged during the Victorian era, with seances and mystics becoming increasingly popular as a method of entertainment as well as a way of life. It was perhaps more accessible to those of lower social classes who viewed the traditional religious hierarchy to be inaccessible. The more general ideas of spirituality saw a spike following the First World War as many found it difficult to consolidate the idea of an omnipotent and omniscient God in the events of the war. Therefore, many turned away from traditional modes of faith, and began to practise spirituality in order to express their spiritual dimension.

Many people in today's society, as indicated by the falling numbers of those who are attending church or profess to be attached to a particular religious belief, points to the issues of disillusionment with some aspects of traditional religion. One such aspect is the idea of the problem of evil, the **inconsistent triad** has still to be conclusively proved, and despite many theologians trying to attempt to solve this issue throughout history it continues to be an issue with which many people grapple. The reality of suffering in the world appears to be too great, especially following historical events such as the Holocaust and 9/11, to believe in a benevolent God.

The development of science and scientific theory has meant that there are many things that we can explain now that there had previously only been God. Many people now feel that a belief in God is not necessary for the world.

Furthermore, in today's society there are some aspects of traditional religion which are seen as outdated. For example, traditional Church teaching on the role of women within leadership of the Church contrasts with the ideas of equality and egalitarianism posited by British society today. It appears that the Church, as an institution, has seen a steep decline in recent years showing that not only are people not marrying, but some are choosing not to marry at all. In 2018, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled that same sex couples should be able to take part in civil partnerships legally, following a case where a couple was viewed marriage as being too outdated and associated with a religious tradition to which they did not feel attached. The issue of gay marriage has also been a particular point of conflict between the modern society's values of equality and morality and the traditional teaching of the Church on the nature of marriage. Many have questioned that the rules by which our society were dictated by a book which is centuries old in a society so focused around scientific development. As science progresses, this seems jarring.

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## Development and Popularisation of Hard-line Atheist Views

With the popularisation in recent years of hard line atheism, as posited in the work of Richard Dawkins (discussed next in this section), it seems that a large proportion of people are influenced by such arguments which are strongly made in their works. Their arguments appeal to a reason which appeals to the modern world and the approach our society has developed. Therefore, it makes sense that in a world of access to the internet, the decline in the attendance at church and profession of faith might be a result of a disillusionment with an agreement with the arguments of hard-line atheists.

Others may choose to identify with secular ethical systems such as humanism, which emphasises a fair treatment of human beings and animals beyond the realm of religion. Of course, but it is useful to be aware of this, as many people, as Richard Dawkins, adhere to the ideas of humanism.

### *The Influence, Strengths and Weaknesses of These Views*

The rise of influential atheist scholars such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins has led to a reconsideration regarding religion. Together, they have been influential in the popularisation of atheism and the acceptance of the rise of anti-religious sentiments among academics as well as the general public. They have openly written and published works which criticise not only religious ideas but also the role of religion in society. The popularisation of their books and ideas among the general British public is seen in the fact that, at the beginning of 2010, Dawkins' work *The God Delusion* had sold over two million copies. Clearly, there is appetite for his ideas.

## Spotlight on Scholars

**Christopher Hitchens (1949–2011)** was a highly influential British antitheist. One of his most famous works is the controversially titled *God is Not Great* in which he took a critical view of religion. Notably, he was critical not just of the monotheistic traditions as tends to be the case with secularist and scholastic criticism of religion, but also took a critical and negative view of the role of religion in society. He argued that the God of the Old Testament was evil, and in a specific chapter, he argued that the God of the New Testament exceeds this evil.

In *God is Not Great*, he condemns religion in the following statement:

*Religion has run out of justifications. Thanks to the telescope and the microscope, the explanation of anything important. Where once it used to be able, by its total monopoly, to prevent the emergence of rivals, it can now only impede and retard—or try to—our advances that we have made.*

*Sometimes, true, it will artfully concede them. But this is to offer itself the choice between obstruction, impotence or outright reaction, and, given this choice, it is programmed to choose the first two.*

*Meanwhile, confronted with undreamed-of vistas inside our own evolving consciousness, the known universe, and in proteins and acids which constitute our nature, religion has no answer. The name of god, or else the false promise that if we take a knife to our foreskins, or if we eat the smallest pieces of wafer, we shall be 'saved.'*

Here he is pointing to the development of scientific endeavours as well as development of modern society having rendered religion outdated. He believes that society has moved on from the ancient foundations of religious thought put their ideas forward.

As an antitheist, Hitchens believed not only that there was no God but also that belief in God was immoral and that religion should be dismantled as he believed that not only does religion harm society, but that the place it occupies within modern society causes harm to those who come into contact with it.

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## Spotlight on Scholars

Professor Richard Dawkins is a well-known biologist and outspoken anti-theist. He is agnostic on the basis that he believes it is impossible to disprove God; however, he is almost completely sure there is no God. In his popular work he critiques the God Hypothesis, which he argues is flawed. Religion is belief that something exists (the God Hypothesis); however, Dawkins argues that since this belief cannot be proved and this hypothesis has significant flaws.

He is a proponent of evolution and the process of natural selection, as he believes this is the explanation for how life came to be. He believes that this is an explanation for life that does not need the existence of God to explain. In his own work *The Selfish Gene* he adds to evolution by suggesting his own theories of the development of individual genes. He believes that science has shown that there is no need for God's existence.

In the book he states,

*The majority of us don't cause needless suffering; we believe in free speech and press freedom; we believe in what is being said; we pay our taxes; we don't cheat, don't kill, don't commit incest; we follow the good principles others we would not wish done to us. Some of these good principles can be found in the Bible alongside much else that no decent person would wish to follow: and the holy books are good at distinguishing the good principles from the bad.*

He has also challenged various theories of God's existence which are rooted in ideas of a designer (discussed later) in works such as *The Blind Watchmaker* in which he argues that if God is responsible for the creation of the world then such a God must be blind or cruel in view of the suffering experienced within the world.

Therefore, he believes that religion is outdated and indeed advocates the idea that science has replaced religion. He believes that the new developments of modern science insofar as they are evidence-based and how it can be used to explain the world, there is no need for religion or belief in God and, therefore, religion should no longer be something which individuals believe or take part in. He believes that people should be able to be moral any more, and indeed this is reflected in his own stance as a secularist. He believes that religion in his view has no role within modern society.

It is considered widely by atheists (and non-atheists) to be an eloquent, logical and rational argument against religion and belief in God.

Dawkins' work is not without response from the Christian community, however. Theologian Alister McGrath wrote a reply, titled *The Dawkins Delusion?*, in which he makes the case for religion (specifically Christianity).

Once an atheist, McGrath converted to Christianity having in the past considered religion as a teenage rebellion and while at university.

McGrath does not attempt to subvert Dawkins' assertion that science explains the world; however, he does object to the claim that religion and science are at odds with each other. In *The Dawkins Delusion?*, he attempts to challenge the individual points raised by Dawkins' case for the incompatibility of faith and science. He argues that Dawkins' view of the relationship between the two phenomena is far too narrow in scope to be able to have a nuanced discussion.

*For there is, of course a third option – that of 'partially overlapping magisteria' – in which science and religion offer possibilities of cross-fertilization on account of the different domains and methods.*

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In layman's terms he is arguing that science and religion cover and answer different questions in the middle.

He points out too that Dawkins chooses specifically to attack a very fundamentalist form of faith. This form of religious faith is generally not that popular, as liberal and more moderate forms are more popular and widespread. Dawkins does not address these expressions of religion. McGrath believes is the easier side of religion to attack.

He argues too that Dawkins makes the same flaw which is to accuse the religious of bias. Given a set of data, he refuses to acknowledge that any individual of scientific background might reach a conclusion which is different to Dawkins'.

McGrath underlines this point by citing various distinguished and well-recognised scientists who are of faith. In *The Dawkins Delusion*, Dawkins has made (in the view of McGrath) the leap of faith of assuming that things such as logic and science lead only to atheism. He juxtaposes logic with faith, and this in itself is a product of Dawkins' bias as he assumes that those who work from a position of reason and logic would naturally become atheists. This does not fit, however, with the fact that many scientists have religious faith.

### Exercises

Draw up reasons to argue

1. Hitchens was successful
2. Dawkins was successful
3. McGrath was successful

He also challenges the way in which Dawkins addresses religion. Indeed as an atheist he is in a position of bias – and indeed, in McGrath's thoughts, cognitive bias. His opinion would be written. Dawkins' work is informed by his previously held opinion as well as by logic. His work being biased towards the view of favouring atheism.

It should be stressed that in his book McGrath is not attempting to prove that God exists or that Christianity is true. He is simply working to show that Dawkins' work is not as argued by Dawkins believes it is. By stating that he is killing 'God' when he is killing the argument. McGrath is attacking Dawkins' ideas within the book rather than attempting to prove that God exists.

## Quick Quiz

- 1) What is secularisation?
- 2) How do Church attendance figures reflect this?
- 3) What is spiritualism?
- 4) Give an example of a world event in the last 100 years which has affected religion.
- 5) What is antitheism?
- 6) What was the view of Christopher Hitchens regarding religion?
- 7) What is the view of Richard Dawkins regarding religion?
- 8) How does McGrath challenge Dawkins' ideas?
- 9) What is meant by 'partially overlapping magisteria'?
- 10) Give an example of how traditional Christian values have clashed with modern values.

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## 4.3 NEW MOVEMENTS IN THE



### Starter Activity

1. Draw two lines onto a piece of A4 paper, dividing it into four equal sections, bullet point your knowledge about the following new movements:
  - a. Feminist Theology
  - b. Liberation Theology
  - c. Black Theology
  - d. Evangelical Christianity

Christian thought has evolved throughout time. This has continued into modern times with Christian thinking and theology developing. As the aforementioned process of secularisation and society's values have changed. Within Christianity today, new ways of thinking have emerged, developments of liberation theology, feminist theology and black theology. Furthermore, with it a new wave of a type of Christianity – Evangelical Christianity – specifically under the umbrella of Evangelical Christianity there are other groups such as Pentecostal and Charismatic. Broadly speaking, these are all forms of Protestant Christianity.

### Feminist Theology

Feminism as a movement has grown in momentum over the last few hundred years. Within Christianity, feminist thinking has traditionally taken issue with the faith. It has been argued that thought, teaching and practice are sexist against women. The argument is that Christianity underlines the societal gender roles that have kept women subservient – for example, as submissive wives and mothers. They also believe the Bible and the God of Christianity are oppressive of women.

Feminist theology, however, has been a developing form of theology along with the movement. It is a way of thinking for women who do not see a contradiction between their Christian values. It should be emphasised that there is not simply one strand of feminist theology, but many strands. It is important too to address that there are many issues with concepts of God traditionally held which some feminist theologians share with secularists.

### *The Secular Feminist Critique of Christianity*

Regarding the feminist critique of Christianity as a faith and social force – what secularists have taken issue with this concept. They argue that God the Father, the masculinised male God is inherently patriarchal and the role of God and humanity in a master/slave relationship is patriarchal subjugation of women under men. As humans serve God, so too do females culturally become expected to serve men.

There are issues too taken with the holy text of Christianity – the Bible. Secular feminists see the authoritative text the Bible as sexist and supportive of the patriarchy. Mary Daly, in her book *Beyond God the Father*:

It might be interesting to speculate upon the probable length of a 'depatriarchalised' Bible. It would be enough scholarly material to comprise an interesting pamphlet.

### *Feminist Theological Responses*

Rosemary Radford Ruether is a good example of a feminist theologian. She is a Roman Catholic theologian which is a phrase that would strike many as odd – surely, if the ideas of feminism are reasonable then it would prove difficult to be both a Christian and a feminist. She argues that Christianity has been mistakenly interpreted and practised which is sexist and repressive.

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the essence of the faith itself is not sexist. Feminist theology also seeks to achieve addition to social and economic equality.

With a background in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the USA, she joined the Church in 1983. This functions as a collective community which is not centralised leadership.

She argues that in order to understand the way in which the world has changed and how religion have influenced our understanding we must examine the way in which God is worshipped. She argues that polytheistic faiths (faiths in which more than one God is worshipped) are more patriarchal and women fare better within these societies. Additionally, she posits that Christianity has roots – Jesus Christ was a Jew) has historically become far more patriarchal.

In particular, she points out the issue posed by the emphasis on God the Father. In Christian discourse, she is not challenging the role of God as a father figure, but rather the formal, respected Father, rather than what she believes was the true, countercultural 'Abba' (more closely translated as 'daddy' or 'Papa'). She argues that this picture of God in Scripture such as John 15:14–15 which states,

*You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you my servants, for a servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for I have told you everything that I have heard from my Father.*

Obedience to God, Reuther argues, should be emphasised; however, historically it has been emphasised from within the Church. She argues that it is correct to return to this view as it is important to not elevate human beings to the same level as God.

One counter argument made is that feminism, when taken by the commonly held view of equality of genders. Traditionally this would mean the advancement of women; however, it is based on equality. Some have, therefore, argued that one issue with the concept of the equality of genders in the faith could potentially be viewed as being exclusionary to traditional Christians.

It should be noted that historically feminist theology has had a bias towards white women. In reaction to this there has been a recent discourse of women of colour and ethnicity, such as *mujerista* theology, which is beyond the scope of A Level; however, it is important to note there is an ongoing discussion around this issue.

## Spotlight on Scholars

**Sallie McFague** is an American Christian feminist theologian and writer. She has written books on the topic of God, gender and bodies. She specifically underlines the importance of analogy in understanding the way in which Scripture is to be understood. Her relationship to human beings is to be understood.

She argues that an immanent, transcendent, all-powerful God cannot be understood in terms of gender. Gender is something which is flesh and bone – it is something which is not human, God is greater than and beyond what is human. Therefore, we should not believe that God is male.

She takes this further using the metaphor of God as a mother in order to describe a relationship which she believes that God is to human beings. For example, when discussing the differing words in order to posit the idea of God being understood as a mother. Rather than using the traditional terms such as 'creating the world ex-nihilo' or 'bodied forth'. By using the idea of a bodily motion when discussing the relationship between God and creation, she is creating life and the universe in the same way that women give birth. It is an intimate portrait of a God who loves his creation as a mother. She is using analogy here to make her point.

Furthermore, those who hold to the views of feminist theologies generally tend to hold an egalitarian viewpoint. This will be defined and discussed further in the section of Gender Discrimination (6.2).

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## Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is a form of theology emerging in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is a form of Christianity that found its roots within the socially and politically tense situation of Latin America. Liberation theology was born from what was that of the plight of the poor within El Salvador.

The poor commonly lived in a socio-economic climate where there was, and continues to be, a sharp distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. The poor commonly live in 'favelas' which are commonly constructed from scraps of metal such as tin and iron, which are not safe for the inhabitants. There is no suitable sewage and sanitation system and running water is often illegally obtained. There is a high infant mortality rate, and the children often have to search or even farm in order to find food. With crime, gang violence, and military presence, in El Salvador, it is estimated that there is an average of one death per day. Contrastingly, in the same geographical location, the rich live in luxurious high-rise apartments in sharp distinction to the poverty and hardship experienced by those in the favelas. The situation is wholly unequal – approximately 50% of the gross income of the country is possessed by the top 10% of the population.

As a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadorian People.<sup>1</sup>

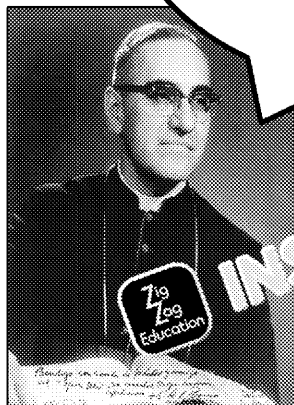


Figure 1 Oscar Romero

This is a situation into which Christianity would seemingly have no compassion – Jesus often spoke of the poor and helping the 'least of these' throughout the Gospels. The Christian teachings would be seen as a call to care for the sick and the happiness of other people. In the context of El Salvador, the teachings of liberation theology with its focus on the poor and the oppressed.

Liberation theology is directly opposed to the idea of a secular government where they are seen as the only authority. Obviously, the situation in El Salvador is a direct result of this.

A case study of an outstanding example of liberation theology is Oscar Romero. Born and raised in El Salvador, he practised as a priest. He was shot and killed while joining in Communion (Mass). Before his death he had delivered an impassioned sermon on the need for the army of El Salvador to desist killing and submit to the people.

His sermon had resulted in those in power assigning him the label of 'communist' and his murder. He is now considered a martyr for the people of El Salvador. He had been outspoken and tread carefully regarding politicising his theology; however, following the murder of his close friend Rutilo Grande (another priest who lived in the region who had spoken out against the poor), he became far more outspoken.

As evidenced by Grande's murder, Romero was not the only martyr for the cause of liberation theology. In 1989 alone the forces of the Salvadoran army were responsible for the death of six Jesuit priests who had been killed by terrorists in opposition to the government. The government was seen as the cause of the injustice suffered by the poor.

### Exam

Draw up reasons to believe that the Bible is inherently flawed.

1. The Bible is inherently flawed.
2. The Bible only reflects the views of the people who interpreted it wrongly.
3. The Bible views all people as equal.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972074?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972074?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

Oscar Romero is not the only influential individual regarding liberation theology.

## Spotlight on Scholars

**Gustavo Gutierrez Merino** (1928–present). He is a Peruvian philosopher and later life a Dominican priest. He distinguished between two forms of poverty in this nation – spiritual poverty as well as physical poverty. He argues that it is not just for food but also for spiritual succour and grace (citing the biblical bread of life).

It is the responsibility of Christians in his view to liberate the poor from both physical and spiritual poverty.

He believes that the correct teaching of the New Testament and the Gospel of El Salvador and Latin America as a whole leads to certain practices based on the teachings of Jesus.

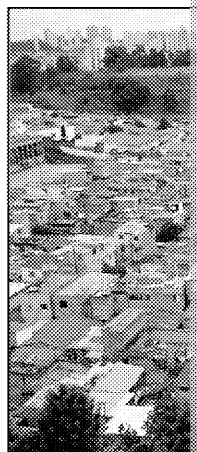
In his article 'Theology and Poverty' he argues that in attempting to follow the Gospel, which Christians should respond – caring for and standing up for the poor, which is central to the Gospels.

He argues that this displays the fundamentals of Christian life and practice in three ways:

1. A clear display of the Gospel and how the Gospel condemns poverty and gives a way out of it.
2. It demonstrates the intelligent nature of the Gospel.
3. That following Jesus and his teaching should be the basis of Christian life.

It is important to understand liberation theology as having its roots within El Salvador. It is specifically and knowingly contextual theology. It is not a situation-specific context. The main aim of liberation theology tends to function is to first, then discuss the theological implications or reasoning afterwards.

The dialogue between traditional Western theology and liberation theology has led some liberation theologians to critique the traditional stance. They have argued that the Western cultural practice of divorcing religion from politics is wrong – that religion should be very much a part of politics, and a driving force behind working towards social justice.



There is here a theological challenge to those who identify as Christians while also being part of the world – the teachings of Jesus are clear within the Bible. Matthew 19:23 states that, 'Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven".' He continually targeted the rich to give away their wealth to help the poor – certainly a challenge for Christians posed both by the Bible and by the teachings of Oscar Romero.

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## Black Theology

In much the same way that liberation theology is contextual theology founded in the understanding that black theology was founded within the context of the aftermath of slavery for black people in the United States of America.

This was a development of a particular brand of Christianity that found its roots within the history of slavery in the United States. It was founded in and developed in response to the realities of the lives of Africans brought over to the United States against their will in the eighteenth century. Under these conditions, African Americans suffered huge injustices and brutalities. During this time, a practice within the United States where there were some Christians who argued that slavery was on a specific interpretation of the Bible.

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2018, the Formal Declaration of Repentance declared that racism is a part of the history of racism and support for slavery within the Church in America. The southern United States historically supported slavery as a concept.

Those who argue for the view of black theology argue that Christianity as it was practised in some, continues to be practised in some countries and Christian communities, has not changed and is supposed to be. They argue that Christianity was never intended to be as Malcolm X described it as 'the religion of the white man'.

## Spotlight on Scholars

Professor James Cone uses the story of the exodus of the Jews as told in the Bible, the Exodus in the Old Testament in order to frame his theology. In his book *Black Theology and the Lynching Tree* he drew a comparison between the use of crucifixion in the Roman Empire and the use of lynching in the white racist Southern America. He argued that the white racist groups responsible for the lynching of black people following the end of the American Civil War. He argued that both groups used the method of execution and the display of a dead body as a method of deterring those living in the community from taking any action which they would consider to be incorrect – so to speak, to keep them in their place. Within the Roman Empire as within the American South – the same was done in order to control these communities. They are similar in their visual and spectacle nature – just as postcards of lynchings were commonly distributed, so 'spectacle lynchings' were a practice, so the Romans lined their major roads with crosses along which people would travel, with those being crucified on crosses in order to make a clear statement about what happens to those who disobey.

One hugely important facet of black theology is the emphasis placed by its proponents on the necessity for reconciliation between the white and black communities.

## Evangelical Christianity

Following the 2016 American election, it was hard to hear the term 'American Evangelical' conjuring a specific picture of what it meant to be an 'evangelical' Christian – that of an opinionated, stereotypical white American. Most likely, it would be a person with a strong belief in America. However, Evangelicalism as a Christian theology is a worldwide belief and not just America's culture. It is beyond the scope of the stereotyped American Evangelical Christianity that manifests within different denominations.

In America, the evangelical movement began approximately in the eighteenth century and was mostly a process begun by anti-intellectuals and anti-elitists.

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Evangelical communities have become cross-denominational; however, they are not denominations. Historian and scholar David Bebbington posited that there were five characteristics of Christianity that can be observed within the majority of those who practise: conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism and activism.

A common term used within the realm of Evangelical Christians is the idea of being born again, which finds its roots in the biblical passage as follows:

*Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless someone be born when they are born again.' Nicodemus asked, 'Surely they cannot enter the kingdom of God without being born a second time?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.'*



It is the idea that when belief occurs, the person experiences a spiritual rebirth with God. This is generally tied to the principle of conversionism. It is the idea that to be reborn, one must undergo a process of conversion.

- **Conversionism:** this is the facet of Christianity which addresses the idea that a marked change of repentance, turning away from sin in response to grace and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Biblicism:** this is the belief within the vast majority of those who hold to believe that the Bible is hugely important, authoritative and in some cases inerrant or infallible.
- **Crucicentrism:** this is the idea within Evangelical Christianity which addresses the atonement of Jesus on the cross for human beings.
- **Activism:** this is the notable difference within evangelical Christianity which is to be more engaged with things such as social action. They take a more active role in their faith.

Evangelical Christianity is distinct from other forms of Christianity in the way in which it worships, and lives out the faith. It lays emphasis on worship which is physical, including raised hands and praise. It also practices such as 'slaying in the spirit' or speaking in tongues. These are two practices which are believed to be induced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. An individual may become so overpowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit, that they are believed to fall over due to the force of this experience. This is referred to as being slain in the spirit. Speaking in tongues is an experience when an individual who does not have the ability to speak another language suddenly has this ability. Such an individual would have no knowledge of another language and it would need to be successfully interpreted in order to make sense.

The idea of being slain in the spirit does not necessarily have basis in Scripture; however, speaking in tongues does have basis in the story of Pentecost and is within the Bible connected to the Holy Spirit.

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### Quick Quiz

- 1) What are the four aspects of Evangelical Christianity according to Bebbington?
- 2) Define conversionism.
- 3) What is feminist theology?
- 4) How might a feminist critique it?
- 5) What is Mary Radford Leuther's position?
- 6) How do McFague and McFague navigate this issue?
- 7) What is liberation theology?
- 8) Define 'black theology'.
- 9) How does Prof. Cone use the Old Testament to illuminate his teaching on black theology?
- 10) What is Evangelical Christianity?



## 5. Works of Scholars

There have been huge numbers of scholarly works written and published throughout the centuries of and issues relating to the religion of Christianity, both from those within the faith and from a secular perspective.

### 5.1 ATONEMENT THEORY



#### Starter Activity

1. Discuss with your neighbour what you think is meant by the word atonement.
2. Why do you think atonement is such an important concept within Christianity?

The term 'atonement' within the context of Western Christian thought refers to the state of reconciliation between humans and God. In their original nature, humans have been separated from God. This was the situation of humans after the Fall of Man, because of the Fall of Mankind. As a result of this, reconciliation was required. Exactly how this reconciliation has been achieved is the idea around which atonement theory revolves. Atonement as a phrase refers to the possibility of humans to be reconciled with God, as the English term 'atonement' ('at-one-ment') meaning represented a state of harmony via reconciliation which refers to the state of atonement.

There are various different models of atonement theory, about which theologians have debated for centuries. There is disagreement among those who hold to the ransom theory of atonement, whether or not the ransom was paid to God or to Satan – this will be discussed further in the next section.

It has traditionally been a view that is held by the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Reformed churches within the West.

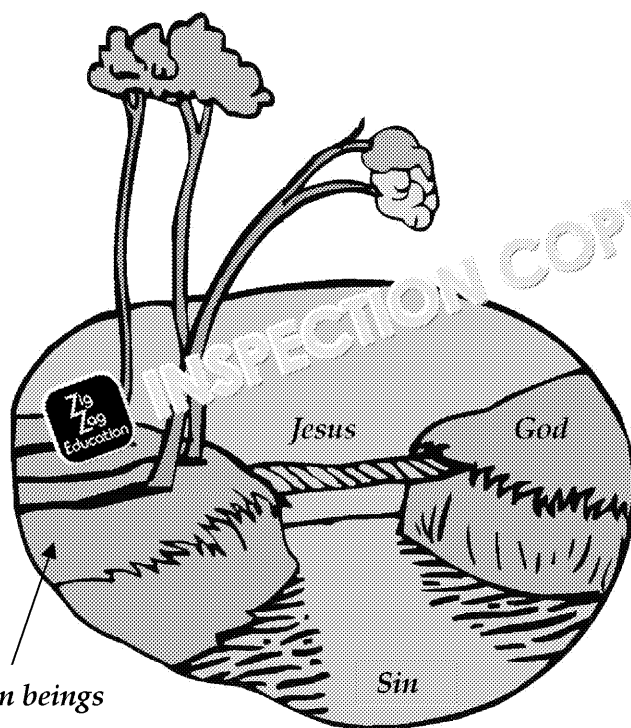
Within common Christian dialogue, the way in which salvation from sin can be achieved is a central theme. Jesus can be well represented by the following image. The unifying factor is that the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the individual who is at the centre.



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It is through atonement that they can achieve salvation. The theory of atonement is the umbrella of salvation (salvation), which is the work of scholars and theologians. The importance of this theory is that it is the work of scholars and theologians.

Generally there are three main theories of atonement:

1. Ransom theory
2. Satisfaction theory
3. Moral influence theory

**Ransom theory** is a theory within Christianity. It is within the writings of Anselm of Canterbury (AD 1033–1109) in the 11th century. It revolves around the idea that Jesus' death was a ransom paid to the Devil for humanity.

Christ of Nazareth on a Roman cross. The theory posits that Jesus' death acted as a ransom paid to the Devil for humanity.

Robin Collins in his work *Understanding Atonement: A New and Orthodox Theory* follows:

*Essentially, this theory claimed that Adam and Eve sold humanity over to the Devil. Hence, justice required that God pay the Devil a ransom to free us from the Devil. Christ's death as a ransom, for the Devil did not hold in the end. Once the Devil accepted Christ's death as a ransom, he was satisfied and God was able to free us from Satan.*

A common word used to describe Jesus within Christian dialogue is the word 'redeemer'. In other contexts in life also – for example, when you buy something with a gift card – the word 'redeem' refers to the buying back of something – to redeem is to buy back. Within the context of the practice of Christianity, the concept of Jesus as redeemer is central to Christian belief and dialogue. For example, songs referring to Jesus as redeemer include phrases such as 'Jesus, My redeemer', 'Gracious Redeemer'. Biblically, this refers to the character of Jesus – Christians who hold that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 refers to this character as 'Our Redeemer – the LORD Almighty is his name – is the Redeemer of Israel'.

## Spotlight on Scholars

It would be remiss to discuss atonement theory without mentioning the work of Anders Nygren (1893–1977) surrounding his classical work on atonement theory. He was the author of *Agape and Eros* and most importantly he was the author of the classic work on the topic of salvation, *Christus Victor*. This has highly influenced modern thinking on atonement and as the title would indicate is centred around the idea that the person of Jesus has achieved a moral victory. In the description for the text, Nygren states:

*the work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold sway in the world and the devil*

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In this text he identified the three main theories of atonement theory – what he termed the idealistic theory and the classic theory. The scholastic theory is the theory of atonement developed by Anselm of Canterbury. The idealistic view is the moral exemplar theory which he ties to the classic theory is the one which he himself believed to be the correct theory of atonement.

In *Christus Victor*, he presented the three theories and then went on to show that the classic theory was the one he believed to be correct. He argued that the scholastic and the idealistic views both placed too much importance to the actions of humans. He argued for a return to classic rationale to understand salvation.

In this theory of atonement, the story of the Bible takes centre stage. It relies on the sinful choices of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, human beings have submitted to the Fall as contained within Genesis 3. Therefore, because of this situation, God sent Jesus into the world in such a way that Jesus was used as a kind of bait, as without the knowledge that he would rise again. Therefore, as Christ has died in the Garden of Eden, the Devil has lost his hold on humanity, restoring them to God as a result of the resurrection.

**Anselm** did not see ransom theory as being sufficient to explain the way in which forgiveness and salvation. He instead laid emphasis on a model of atonement theory known as the **satisfaction theory**.

## Spotlight on Scholars

**St Anselm of Canterbury** was a Benedictine monk who lived from 1093 to 1109. In his life he had great influence on the Church as a whole and on writing texts that have remained influential in some branches of the Church today. He was canonised after his death, becoming a Saint. He posited what is known as the satisfaction theory of atonement in his work *Cur Deus Homo – Why God Became Man*. His theory is based wholly around the sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of mankind. The satisfaction theory goes as follows:

Due to the occasion of the Fall and the inherent sinful nature of humankind, humans have justly deserved divine judgement and justice. Because God is divine, he cannot be affronted by human sin or recompense; however, human beings are not capable of doing so on their own. We will always fall short of the infinite measure of justice that we owe to God. In the display of his infinite mercy and fulfilment of his infinite justice, this debt was paid on the Roman cross. God has taken this judgement upon himself in his mercy towards humankind so that they can now live justified in the state they were intended to be in. Justice has been satisfied via the substitution of Jesus in taking the punishment for our sins; hence, this is termed satisfaction theory.

This theory is notable because it marries two ideas which can occasionally be at odds: the idea of ultimate Divine Justice and Ultimate divine mercy. Interestingly also is that because of this theory, Anselm completely rejected acts of penitence as having any value. He viewed such actions, even ones which are extreme and painful such as self-flagellation, as being self-serving rather than God serving. Such actions are therefore insufficient.

**Moral exemplar** theory was one of the theories regarding atonement, and is arguably the most popular. This idea sees Jesus not as a moral exemplar: the moral standards shown by Jesus in his lifetime and his teachings are the means by which humanity is to be saved.

The idea for this theory is that by following the teachings of Jesus – such as loving others more than yourself, emphasising the importance of caring for the needy etc. – you are able to achieve salvation. It was an argument which was heavily featured in the thoughts of **Augustine**. It lays the responsibility to a certain extent on humankind to follow the example – the teaching has been given, and now it is up to humanity to follow it. This particular form of ethics lays emphasis on facets of the character of the person of Jesus, a moral teacher, a martyr for all mankind, an example and a leader.

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### Discussion Question

Discuss with a friend or your neighbour which of the three theories of atonement is most convincing. Give reasons for your answer, and make sure to challenge any claims using your knowledge from this course (or beyond!).

### Quick Quiz

- 1) What is meant by atonement?
- 2) Give the three main atonement theories.
- 3) Define the first.
- 4) Define the second.
- 5) Define the third.
- 6) What did Aulen put forward in his classic atonement theory?
- 7) How did St Anselm of Canterbury understand atonement?
- 8) What two ideas does his theory marry together?
- 9) How is the moral exemplar theory different?
- 10) How might this theory be critiqued?

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## 5.2 COMPARISON OF KEY IDEAS: BARTH



### Starter Activity

1. Use the Internet to make a brief fact file on the following figures of influence. This will help support your understanding of the comparison of the ideas of:
  - a. Karl Barth
  - b. John Hick



### Karl Barth

Karl Barth (1886–1968) was a Reformed theologian from Switzerland. He is highly regarded as one of the best Protestant theologians of the twentieth century. His work on atonement theory and the process of salvation is of particular interest. Barth's atonement theory stands in direct and stark contrast to the second scholar's view which will be discussed – that of John Hick.

He discussed his ideas on atonement in his highly important and influential work which has already been discussed within this Course Companion – *Church Dogmatics* (discussed in Section 1.2 on the Trinity). In this text, atonement was one of four main doctrinal focuses. Translation into English of Barth's discussion within English-speaking countries, during which it was argued perhaps that the word was mistranslated as the English word 'atonement'. It has been argued that instead 'reconciliation'.

In Barth's view, he posits more emphasis on the reunion offered to humans than on the removal of sin. Barth posits a picture of Jesus as 'representative' of the most important. When drawing a comparison between the two scholars (Barth and Hick), he emphasises the full divinity and deity status of Jesus.

One of the main ideas coming from Barth's understanding of atonement theory is the idea of Jesus having the position of the 'Judge judged in our place' – this is the idea that Jesus as wholly divine and part of the Trinity is God. God within Christian (and traditionally Jewish) understanding is the moral arbiter – he is the judge of the world.

*the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgment on us men by Himself taking our place as man and in our place undergoing the judgment under which we had passed (222)*

He engages to an extent with traditional viewpoints on atonement, such as Anselm's.

Barth justifies his idea by showing how the biblical context supports the idea of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew has an account of Jesus crying out on the cross 'My God, My God, where art thou?' (Matthew 27:46). For Barth, the use of these words on the cross by Jesus is significant.

This is in fact a quotation of an Old Testament passage – these are the opening words of the Psalms. Barth is showing how Jesus, in his forsaken nature of human beings, aligning himself with their sin during the life of Jesus. He is demonstrating also how the prophecies and ideas posited in the Psalms and thus salvation can be offered through his sacrifice.

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This passage, in addition to Isaiah 53:4–5, is posited by Barth to be the biblical basis taken on the transgressions of humankind in his death, being judged in the place morally blameless.

This view is further backed up within biblical passages in the Epistles, such as in 2 Corinthians 5:21: 'God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become righteous'. However, while musing on the passage in Isaiah 53, Barth states that the idea of atonement is not discussed in the New Testament passages on the matter, he states that

*The decisive thing is not that we have suffered what we ought to have suffered so that the destruction to which we have fallen victim by our guilt, and therefore the guilt itself, is cancelled. But it is true only as it derives from the decisive thing that Jesus Christ it has come to pass that in His own person*

*He has made an end of us as sinners and therefore of sin itself by going to death as sinners. In His person He has delivered up us sinners and sin itself*

For Barth, the central message of the Bible is clear – Jesus took the place of mankind and sin upon himself. Stark is his language here regarding the ending of sin – within the ideas of guilt and sin were absolved by a priest and by donations, specific prayers, arguing that justification for sin has already been dealt with on the cross. This language is in terms of the context in which he was writing. It was a situation for Barth in which the judgement for the wholly fallen mortal human beings.

### **Strengths of Barth's View:**

- Fits with biblical narrative
- Is generally consistent with the common view
- Works well with the idea of Jesus as wholly divine
- It was relatively uncontroversial and seemed to fit the narrative of the Bible and the practice of the Reformation Church.

### **Weaknesses of Barth's View:**

- If Jesus is not wholly divine, then this entire theory does not hold.
- It could have been a choice made by the Bible writers to attribute the Psalmist's historical occurrence.

## **John Hick**

John Hick (1922–2012) was an English philosopher and theologian. His work regarding the person and role of Jesus of Nazareth was somewhat controversial within the realm of Christian thought. He posited that Jesus was not, as many Christians posit, God incarnate, but would be better described as a 'moral exemplar', in his book *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

Hick's Christology (the theory/study of the person of Christ) is somewhat controversial within traditional Christianity as he posits that Jesus was not God incarnate, but he is traditionally understood to be. This understanding of Jesus is completely key to understanding the meaning of atonement. This is a reading of Hick's Christology and his approach to atonement theory.

Regarding the meaning of atonement within Christology, Hick differentiates between two types of atonement. These are as follows:

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

Hick makes this distinction for a reason – he wishes to emphasise that it would be wrong to have ideas of atonement based on our understanding of the world. We have a very transactional view of the world. We do not go to the shops, for example, and eat something off the shelves. We pay something, and then we are able to partake in food. Hick argues that in this transactional experience we have developed the view we have of salvation within Western society and within the Western Church. He argues that if we lived in a world where everything is transactional, it would make sense for this view to spill over into our understanding of salvation. However, in Hick's thoughts, this view is incorrect.

He does not believe that the Bible itself supports what he views as the Christian idea of atonement, which he outlines in the opening chapters of his book. Hick puts forward the view of the Orthodox Church and the Western Church and their ideas surrounding salvation. In Hick's view, the **Eastern Orthodox Church** has traditionally taken the view that salvation is a 'transformational conception of salvation', that a human gradually develops spiritually and manages to accomplish oneness with God, and likeness to him. In Hick's view, the Western Church has traditionally held that, 'salvation requires God's forgiveness and that this in turn requires a sacrifice to satisfy the divine righteousness and/or justice'. He argues that this has resulted in the idea of atonement (the idea that Jesus died for our sins, when there was undue emphasis placed on the sense that the person was freed from their sins due to the death (and resurrection) of Jesus.

He argues that the Western understanding is largely the result of the influence of church fathers such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, who posited that salvation was a payment to Satan to free humanity from their rightful punishment for sin. While the early church creeds such as the Nicene Creed, it is an idea that is generally familiar to most Christians. Although it should be noted that the Nicene Creed does involve reference to Jesus dying for our sins, it does not specify a ransom paid in his death.

He views the current view on salvation within modern Christianity as being problematic because of the development of human intelligence. According to Hick, humans have evolved past such ideas and such ideas are not logically sound. Specifically, he takes issue with the idea of original sin (Genesis 3).

*Today the ideas of an actual human fall resulting in a universal inheritance of sin are unbelievable for educated Christians (164)*

This clearly has an impact on the practice and belief in such ideas within modern Christianity. Then those who consider themselves 'educated Christians' in the modern age have developed their viewpoints. The cross is for many Christians a symbol of sacrifice on which Jesus died for our sins, and salvation could be offered. However, if Hick's theory is to be believed, then the cross is not a method for a holy man who is a good moral example, but one that does not and cannot offer salvation.

Hick's views which he posits himself on the topic of atonement rather than his criticism of the controversial within the Christian community; however, they have largely withstood criticism and discussion. In order to understand his ideas on atonement it is important to understand his Christology and his view of the Trinity. Controversially within Christian thought, as mentioned earlier, Hick believed that Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God. This extends to his somewhat pluralistic view that Jesus enjoyed a particularly close relationship with God, which imbued him with the power to perform the miracles and healings as described within biblical texts. He does not believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

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Therefore, his view of atonement is starkly at odds with Barth, whose entire theory is not wholly divine, he cannot offer salvation. How then does Hick navigate the issue?

For Hick, salvation and atonement are achieved via **soul-making**. This is the idea of an exemplar, which human beings should strive to emulate and be like. Unlike Barth, this is rather achieved through a process of transformation of the self and of the soul to which happens over the course of a lifetime and also in the afterlife where the soul will continue until it reaches the point of moral equivalence with God.

Hick's viewpoint is pluralistic in its approach to salvation – it is not only offered through the lens of interfaith dialogue, this is a very open position to come from. In Hick's view, you can achieve soul-making as long as you are following his teachings or the same teachings from a different source – for example, moral ideas such as not killing or not lying are generally universal within religion, so following such ideas would help an individual to develop in the soul-making process.

It does not close off the possibility for salvation for those who do not believe in Jesus – which would make this a view which takes the position of inclusivism towards salvation and truth within Christianity, as will be discussed next.

### *Strengths of Hick's View*

- Appeals to the open idea of salvation rather than a closed one
- Appeals to the modern sense of universality
- Hick's pluralism leaves the dialogue for interfaith relationships very open which

### *Weaknesses of Hick's View*

- Renders the cross meaningless and slightly pointless – why would God allow suffering for no reason?
- Does not necessarily seem as biblically consistent as Barth's view.
- Very unpopular and controversial within Christian thought.
- Inconsistent with the majority of Christian narratives.
- The biblical standard for morality is so high it seems relatively unfair to expect people to achieve it in how much time they have.

## Quick Quiz

- 1) Briefly explain Barth's atonement theory.
- 2) Why is Psalm 22:1 significant to Barth's interpretation?
- 3) What view did Barth take regarding the place of Jesus?
- 4) Give one strength of Barth's theory.
- 5) Give one weakness of Barth's theory.
- 6) Briefly describe Hick's theory of atonement.
- 7) How does Hick view Jesus?
- 8) Why is this view controversial?
- 9) Give one strength of Hick's view.
- 10) Give one weakness of Hick's view.

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## 6. Religion and Society

Speaking anthropologically, religion and the practice of religion are social phenomena. Religion is practised, experienced and lived out among communities. Across the staggering diversity of religions, there is always some element of the communal. Therefore, it is important to examine how religion interacts with society and the way in which it interacts within the collective, regarding those who practice a religion and those living within the same geographical location but who do not practice within the specific religion.

### 6.1 PARTICULARISM AND DIVERSITY



#### Starter Activity

1. Discuss with your partner how multicultural you think the UK is.
2. How can you see this shown in the UK? Write down as many examples as you can.

#### Key Concepts and Terms

<b>Particularism</b>	This is the view that a shared set of values or culture for everyone is either not a feasible reality or not one that should be.
<b>Inclusivism</b>	This is the idea that more than one religion may reflect aspects of a single form of salvation.
<b>Exclusivism</b>	This is the idea that one religion has a monopoly on truth and salvation.
<b>Pluralism:</b>	This idea refers to the maintenance of cultural identity of minorities existing within a society of larger social groups. In this instance, religious traditions of minority groups are known and permitted by the state, as long as their practices are within the boundaries of the law of the land.

#### Multicultural Society

The reality of modern life is that we are living in a multicultural society, with many different cultures within society. Immigrants are living in a cultural diaspora – often living in close proximity to their religious groups. Countries such as America have emerged as a result of immigration and are described in its formation as a ‘melting pot’ of cultures.

Studies have shown it is not uncommon for religious groups within immigrant communities to live closely. On a practical level this functions well – especially with religions such as Judaism. Living in a close community helps with adherence to certain religious codes and rules. Observance is aided by being in a community with those also fasting; eating kosher and halal food. Those also doing so, probably resulting in local shops stocking a large amount of kosher and halal food.

In the most recent census on religion, which took place in 2011, the findings of religion in the UK are as follows:

*An overview of religion in England and Wales, looking at age, sex, ethnicity and religion. The focus is given to Christians, Muslims and people with no religion as these groups are the largest. However, statistics are given for all the main religious groups. Christianity was the largest group with 59% of the population, followed by Muslims with 5%. The proportion of the population that they did not have a religion reached a quarter of the population.*

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Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, all those within it (of which the UK is one) are afforded the rights to **freedom of religion**. Article 18 states that:

*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*

Freedom of religion is one of the key foundations of the UDHR, as it was formed under the Nazi regime. Freedom of religion results in the diversity of religion; when people follow the way they wish to and interpret religion in a way that makes sense to them, there are many different interpretations of religion.

### Interaction with Other Religions

As a result of increasing multiculturalism within the United Kingdom there have been increased levels of interaction with other faiths. Historically, this has been the case worldwide as Christianity was born in a Hellenistic culture, which was itself a melting pot in the Middle East of Roman, Greek and Jewish tradition.

From the beginning, Christians have interacted with people of other faiths and the writings of the early Church reflect this.

The same physical and cultural social interaction with people of other (or no) faiths is evident in the multicultural society of Britain today. Christmas is celebrated across the country by people of other faiths as a national holiday. Not all people choose to observe Christmas, not actually believing in the birth of the holy child in Bethlehem. In all those years ago, it was a question for non-Jews to attend a neighbour's Seder meal, especially as it is customary to invite everyone.

One of the issues which is associated with multiculturalism concerning religion is exclusivity. Christianity, Judaism and Islam make claims to be the one exclusive way to achieve salvation. Jews are God's chosen people, Islam claims that Muhammad was the final prophet given had been misinterpreted. Christianity is no different.

John 14:6 is a Bible verse which does in effect demonstrate an exclusivity in terms of salvation within Christianity – Jesus proffers himself as the only vehicle through which salvation can be attained. Therefore, any religion which does not follow Jesus, such as Islam or Judaism, could not, in the view of this verse, be considered as a religion which would give human beings access to God. Therefore, the exclusivist view of other religions would consider any other religion to be false, or to not fully show the way through which salvation can be attained.

*Jesus and the Father  
Truth and Life  
I am the way to the Father*

Judaism and Islam are both monotheistic religions within which the declaration of God is a sin. While Christianity is also monotheistic as indicated earlier, the issue here which is not present in these other faiths is the concept of Tawhid to the religion. Within Judaism, the idea of one God is so ingrained in the social code that it cannot even say the name of God for fear of it being too holy, opting instead for a vowel-less monotheistic God. Within Islam and Christianity, the concept of Tawhid as being God is more explicit, as believed by Christians. Therefore, pluralistic views between these religions are slightly tricky to navigate.

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## Spotlight on Scholars

Not all Christians, however, view Christianity in this way. **Karl Rahner** is a Catholic priest whose work was well respected, he developed a theory of

In his thought, the idea of God's grace is wholly central. He was a Catholic who challenged traditional Catholic teaching and understanding regarding the idea of exclusive Christianity was the one true faith; however, he also posited the idea of what he called 'anonymous Christians'. This is the case of people who, emphatically within Rahner's view, are not Christians. This teaching does not apply to those who have been exposed to the Christian message and the opportunity to respond to the grace.

He believes that human beings were inherently fallen and flawed as a result of the traditional view of the Church. He believes that goodness and moral correctness can only be achieved through God's grace.

The Old Testament shows God, in Rahner's view, acting and giving grace pre-Jesus. Grace could be achieved through him. Goodness could only be achieved through God's grace. To see goodness and moral correctness in people who are not Christians this challenge can only be achieved through God's grace. Therefore, within Rahner's thought, this means that God's grace despite being unaware of it. He termed such people as being anonymous Christians. They were acting as Christians without realising this. Such people would be afforded

He rejects the idea of the Church teaching of 'extra ecclesium nulla salus' (out of the church there is no salvation) as being a visible church, but rather an invisible church which leaves the door open for anonymous Christianity to work.

## Spotlight on Scholars

**John Hick** is another theologian whose ideas are important to consider here. Hick began his theological life as a proponent of inclusivism, arguing that all religions lead to the same God and that no human beings go to hell. He continues in this vein throughout his work, moving more and more towards a pluralistic method of thought.

In his works, he challenged the idea that Christianity was the one, true religion that could produce people who are wholly moral. However, there are many people who perhaps do not embody the best moral character. In Hick's view this means that Christianity is the one moral true path.

In *God and the Universe of Faith*, Hick challenged the idea that Christianity is exclusive. He argued that depending on your walk of life, individuals would interpret religious experience as being indicative of a particular religion based on the one that they had experienced. The common denominator in his view is the experience of the divine, rather than proof of a religion itself. Therefore, he argues, all religious experiences have validity but it cannot be said that one proves a religion to be true – a Christian and a Buddhist could easily interpret the same religious event entirely differently based on their background. This conclusion led Hick to his position as a pluralist in religion.

However, it is important to just the reality of interaction between different faiths which is within the reality of multiculturalism. The term 'Christianity' encapsulates a myriad of different beliefs and practices under an umbrella term which covers a vast number of denominations with differing beliefs and practices. There are 2.2 billion Christians currently inhabiting the planet, and they all understand God in different ways, leading to a vast array of different denominations. The diversity of Christianity is therefore, important.

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## The Diversity of the Church

The Christian Church has never in its history been a wholly unified body agreeing on all matters. The letters of Paul in the New Testament display a picture of a geographically spread Church, with the disputes and differences they were experiencing, for example the interactions between Paul and the early Church. The modern Church is no different, with differences such as:

- Issues of authority
- Traditions
- Church governance
- Differences of scripture
- Worship (styles)
- Creeds

It is important to remember the historical context of the Reformation when understanding the Church as a whole. Some theological differences cause conflict and friction among different branches of the Church as a whole. For example, Protestant Christians gained their name through those who broke with the Church were protesting the viewpoints and ways in which faith was practiced in the traditional Catholic Church. What has since followed has been years of division, and at times violence. The history of the monarchy of the United Kingdom, for example, is still marked by violence motivated by the differences between Catholics and Protestants, each claiming to be the true Church. While the violence is, thankfully, largely a thing of the past, the division between communities of Churches and, therefore, work is needed in order to heal these divisions in the context of the ecumenical movement.

Another side to the diversity of church is the way in which individual churches interact with each other. For example, one church might view another as not being Christian due to differences in those listed above.

Furthermore, there is the differentiation between inclusivism and exclusivism. The Church's stance towards the validity of other religions, and on occasion (depending on the denomination) the other branches of the Church, varies.

For example, within the Catholic Church one source of authority is the Pope. The Pope is the representative on earth. He enjoys the position of having the highest earthly authority within the Church, which as such a large institution has historically (and continues to have) a status of respect and power. Following the Reformation rooted in the ideas of Martin Luther, Protestant churches rejected the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and the Pope, instead laying their authority in the Scriptures.

A source of importance and authority within the Catholic Church is the Catechism, which is a document which outlines the beliefs and practices of the Church in accordance with the Bible and Scripture. This enjoys an authority within Catholicism which it does not within other denominations. A Catholic will view this document as having authority over their life, whereas a Baptist will view it with little authority while perhaps viewing it with respect. For a Baptist, the Bible is the Word, which they view to be his Word.

Furthermore, within denominations there are differing forms of worship. Within the Catholic Church there are set responses to scripture and during a service – for example, 'The people respond' and 'and also with the people'. There is a set structure to the service which changes little over time. Other branches of the churches may not follow this structure but these might be less strict, and perhaps without the same level of authority.

Some churches will choose to worship by taking the sacrament of Eucharist every week. Worshippers in the High Anglican tradition, for example, take the Eucharist every week. However, traditions such as Baptists or other Protestant branches may choose to take the Eucharist less frequently or not at all.

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In recent years, there has been a movement within some of its branches to attempt to heal divisions between denominations because one of the key ideas of the Church is to see it as a community of believers.

This is known as the **ecumenical movement**. It can be denominational or non-denominational. It can either be trying to heal divisions between denominations or within denominations.

This is a movement within different branches of the church which is attempting to heal divisions between denominations within the church. They lay emphasis on biblical teachings such as Ephesians 4:3 and argue that such teachings lay an emphasis on the importance of the unity of the Church. The spreading of the Gospel as being seen as a concern for modern Christians.

Ephesians 4:3 '... effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace'  
Matthew 24:14 '... and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world and then the end will come.'

There are some Christians who oppose the efforts of ecumenical movements as they believe that by having discussions, they run the risk of theological compromise. Issues which cause controversy are differences on teachings such as contraception, abortion and gay marriage. Such issues are considered by some Churches to be so important that they do not wish to attempt to engage in discussions towards the end of the unity of the Church as they believe it to be more important to hold to their interpretation of the teachings of the Bible.

## Quick Quiz

- 1) Define 'particularism'.
- 2) Define 'inclusivism'.
- 3) Define 'exclusivism'.
- 4) Define 'pluralism'.
- 5) How does John 14:6 impact interfaith relations?
- 6) What was Rahner's view of inclusivism?
- 7) What is meant by the term 'anonymous Christian'?
- 8) What kinds of diversity of practice are seen in the wider church?
- 9) What is the ecumenical movement?
- 10) Why might some Christians reject the ecumenical movement?

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One of the key issues within this debate is the issue of the ordination of women, to become ministers or pastors and preach the Gospel. The two opposing stances on this are the liberal (egalitarianism) and the conservative (complementarianism) view of women. This discussion tends to revolve around certain pieces of Scripture regarding the place of women in the Church. These verses are universal and eternal instruction as relevant to the Church today. The question is whether Paul, or whether or not these are specific to the situation which St Paul was addressing.

Proponents of the liberal view often quote biblical examples of women who are recorded as having held positions of high esteem within religious communities. Sections of Scripture in the New Testament make reference to women holding positions of influence within the early Church. For example, St Phoebe was a first-century Christian woman who filled the role of a deaconess of the Church in Cenchreae, at the Port of Corinth. She is referenced in Romans 16:1-7.

The traditional or conservative view is that women should not have a role in preaching. This view has a variety of roots within Scripture. Beginning in Genesis where the narrative alludes to God for men as a 'helper', this narrative is used by traditionalists to posit that women should be in a secondary place to men – that their role should not be in leadership but rather to support men. This view is also referenced in the New Testament; it is referenced in Timothy in which there is a reference to the prohibition of women from teaching. This passage is also referenced in the discussion of women in ministry and leadership. As part of a letter to the church in Ephesus, it states:



*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam is the head of the church, the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through the church, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

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Another key verse which is used in support of women not having a role within a church is:

*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must listen, as the Lord commands the church, his body, of which he is the head, himself saving the church, cleansing it by the word of water by the word, so that he may present the church to himself in splendour, without a stain or wrinkle or anything of the kind, so that he may present the church to himself in splendour, without a stain or wrinkle or anything of the kind, so that he may present the church to himself in splendour, without a stain or wrinkle or anything of the kind.*

Obviously such a verse is somewhat controversial in the modern age as it posits that women should not assume a role outside of leadership, but shouldn't even speak within the context of church.

What is important to consider within the interpretation of this verse is the context. Many more liberal modern Christians have contextualised this verse in order to not apply it to a specific situation within one early church rather than being a rule taken from a letter written to a church that was experiencing an internal problem. Some have argued that this was intended as a solution to that church's specific issue rather than for the whole Christian community; however, this is a selective interpretation.

However, there are many New Testament verses which include other ideas that contradict the ideas of egalitarianism, such as the following verse from Galatians:

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 26–28)*

Those who take this view argue that this verse would indicate that gender ceases to be a service of the church and the ends of Christianity.

### Discussion Question

To what extent do you think the teaching of the Bible can support or oppose the ordination and role of women in the church?

## Different Opinions on the Role of Women

There are two main different opinions that have formed within Christian thought on the role of women. These are the egalitarian view and the complementarian view. The egalitarian view posits that men and women are completely equal and there should be no difference in their roles within society and within the Church. The complementarian view of the relationship between the genders posits that the genders are different and form different roles within the Church.

The Catholic Church holds the view that the genders are both equal under God's design but have different roles as per the design of God.

This is a provocative view – if women take a different role in the Church, does it then mean they have a different role in life? How then does this apply to women in roles such as lawyers, police, etc.?

This also affects the role of women within the institution of marriage. Within some interpretations of the verse cited in Genesis, along with other parts of the letters from St Paul, women are seen in a subservient position to her husband, as it indicates that she should love her husband as Christ loves the church. However, while this is there in the Scripture, it has been historically abused, and at the end of the bargain – with them being commanded to love their wives as Christ loves his church and himself – with them being commanded to love their wives as Christ loves his church and himself.

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There has historically been a conception of women as being 'temptresses'. This theme developed and cemented itself within the writings of the early Church between the second and fourth centuries. For example, this theme can be found in the writings of Augustine, Jerome and Tertullian, all having been indicative of the fault of sin laying within the human physical body. The human body as being the source of sin, or, at the very least, something that causes sin – specifically, women's bodies as a temptation, meant sexually. Tertullian used women's bodies as 'the devil's gateway'. This could have been influenced by the ideas surrounding the active choice of an individual to abstain from sexual intercourse, commonly with women. Many Christians have opted to become celibate. The apostle Paul in his letters spoke in favour of celibacy. Paul explicitly stated 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman' (1 Cor 7:1). He also goes on to say 'To the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for you as I do. But if you cannot control yourselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be consumed by passion'.

From this teaching, ideas of celibacy are found in the practice of nuns and monks. Within religion, this practice offered relative equality to women within society. Women were encouraged to chastity and to serve God.

Fundamentalism has become a modern movement which largely involves a power struggle. It is seen as taking something of a back seat. Beginning at the start of the twentieth century, fundamentalism has grown in both British and American cultures. Generally speaking, it promotes the traditional role for women within the Church, within society and within the home. It focuses on women as mothers and wives rather than promoting the idea of women entering the workforce or, definitely not the pulpit.

Some Christian thinkers have made a point of drawing a distinction between the Church and Christian doctrine being in their nature oppressive of women in its nature, and the Church as it has historically been oppressive towards women. One of the arguments, is a core part of an argument, is the result of culture.

## Ordination

So, with such a wealth of scriptural basis for both sides of the argument it is no wonder that it has become a contentious issue even to this day. It is important to establish how different groups have chosen to live out this issue within their religious traditions.

Within a modern society such as the United Kingdom, this causes problems with gender equality. Today, it is illegal to discriminate regarding employment based on gender. If a woman is called to work of ministry and the employment of being a minister or priest, it could be considered discrimination based on gender and deny a woman a position she is qualified for simply because of her gender.

The first main formal discussion regarding the ordination of women took place at the Second Vatican Council in 1962. During this conference there was a commission of archbishops tasked with the issue, and the decision was decided against.

In 2010, the Vatican declared that to 'ordain a woman was a serious crime'. This is a profound statement condemning the ordination of women; therefore, it is no surprise that the ordination of women does not take place in Catholicism.

It is a significant debate within Christianity both for individuals and the community. It especially resonates with women who say that they are called to preach and to be ministers. The impact that this has on them at a large level as they would be unable to do their job. Traditional roles and emphasis on these as found within fundamentalist communities may impact negatively on women based on her circumstances – e.g. a woman who cannot have children may feel that her inability to fulfil the role which her community has stressed is her place. However,

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believe in the teachings in Timothy, they may feel it is a betrayal of their faith and their principles which they may spiritually and emotionally struggle with.

On a community level, it may mean that the best person is not doing the job and, therefore, the community is not benefiting from the best form of preaching possible. They may also find that disagreement about these ideas becomes a source of division, as we have seen within Christian communities in the past. Many churches, such as the Catholic Church, have been vocal in their opposition to the decisions of other branches of the Church to introduce the ordination of women. Division within the Church, as mentioned in Section 1.3, is a direct contradiction to the goal of unity within the Church and, therefore, this is obvious source of conflict.

### **Prominent Figures:**

- Elizabeth Lane (1966–present) was the first Church of England female bishop and was consecrated into the role in 2015.
- Antoinette Brown Blackwell was the first American woman ordained to a denomination, in 1853.

### **Quick Quiz**

- 1) Why is gender a complex issue within Christianity?
- 2) What is meant by complementarianism?
- 3) What is meant by egalitarianism?
- 4) Give a Bible verse which supports the ordination of women.
- 5) Give a Bible verse which opposes the ordination of women.
- 6) What is the view of the Catholic Church?
- 7) Why has ordination of women become an issue within the Church?
- 8) How has this become a direct tension between religion and secular culture?
- 9) How is the teaching of St Paul important here?
- 10) Give the name of an important female figure in this debate.

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# ANSWERS TO QUICK QUIZ

## 4.1 Science

- 1) Galileo was an influential philosopher and astrologist whose thought process and method of gathering information became hugely influential in developing what is now understood as being the scientific method.
- 2) Scientism is the belief that truth can only be found within the field of science.
- 3) The Big Bang theory challenges Christianity in that it gives an alternative explanation of the origin of the world without the need for God to have made it, which was previously held by Christianity.
- 4) A student could give any relevant response to this – for example, a Christian might respond that the theory proves the Christian belief that the world had one original starting point. They might also respond that the theory shows how the world came to be and not why, meaning God could have created the world.
- 5) Evolution challenges Christianity by giving an explanation of how mankind came to be without the need for God to have intentionally made them. It challenges insofar as it has a large amount of evidence which suggests that evolution may be true and potentially disproving of the account of the creation of the world in the Bible.
- 6) The first general response from Christians is to argue that the theory of evolution contradicts the account of intelligent design and that the evidence of the irreducible complexity of life would in fact support the idea of God. A second general response is to reject the theory as being untrue, and hold that the story of creation in Genesis is wholly true, which is known as creationism.
- 7) Neuroscience is the development of the study of the brain.
- 8) Christians might respond to this challenge by pointing out that this remains simply a challenge to certain Christian beliefs about the soul. Examples of ways in which it might be challenged include the accounts of people who claim to have had near-death experiences but have had no measurable brain activity.
- 9) Quantum theory is the study of incredibly small matter, shown to act in a random and unpredictable way.
- 10) Students could give any relevant defence of Christian thought on the issue of quantum physics. For example, physicist John Polkinghorne argues that quantum physics is a way through which God can interact with the world, and, therefore, he is simultaneously a Christian and a scientist. He argues that quantum level stop being random when they leave the micro level and go to the macro level, where the laws of science and nature apply. He argues that in this way, God brings order from disorder and creates the order of science which is observable in the world.

## 4.2 Secularisation

- 1) Secularisation is the gradual process of society moving away from previously held religious beliefs and practices, which are being largely abandoned in the modern world.
- 2) Church attendance figures reflect this in that they have been declining steadily in the modern world, moving away from traditional religious ideas.
- 3) Spiritualism is a new religious movement of a kind in the modern age. An individual may believe in something which has no specific definition. They may believe in simply 'something more', believe in a higher power, without adhering to organised religion or a specific religious faith.
- 4) Students could give any relevant example, including the Second World War or the 9/11 attacks.
- 5) Antitheism is the belief not only that God does not exist, but that religion itself is harmful to society.
- 6) Christopher Hitchens was an atheist and believed that religion was harmful to society in many ways in which it is encountered.
- 7) Professor Richard Dawkins identifies as an agnostic on the basis that he believes it is impossible to know for sure whether God exists; however, he has stated that he is almost completely sure there is no God. In his popular book, 'The God Delusion', what he terms the God Hypothesis, which he argues is flawed and compares religion to a delusion.
- 8) Students could here give any of McGrath's challenges to Dawkins, including his challenge to the idea that science and religion are mutually exclusive, and his argument that 'The God Delusion' deals only with fundamentalism rather than mainstream religious beliefs.
- 9) This is a term posited by McGrath which puts forward the argument that science and religion are asking different questions, with some meeting in the middle.
- 10) Students could give any relevant example, e.g. the issue of abortion, and gay marriage.

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### 4.3 New Movements in Theology

- 1) Historian and scholar David Bebbington posited that there were four main aspects of Christianity observed within the majority of those who practice: conversionism, Biblicism, crucicism and activism.
- 2) Conversionism is the facet of Christianity which addresses the idea that to be a Christian requires repentance, turning away from sin in response to grace and salvation as offered by the deity.
- 3) Feminist theology is a form of theology which has been developing along with the social movements of feminism. These are generally forms of theology which are developed by women who do not see Christianity as incompatible with Christian faith and their feminist values.
- 4) Students could give any of the following relevant examples of secular feminists' criticisms of Christianity:
  - Regarding the concept of God – many secular feminists have taken issue with the traditional view of God as the Father, the masculine and the idea of describing the entity of God as inherently male. The relationship between God and humanity in a paternalistic relationship feeds into the patriarchal subjugation of women. So too do feminists argue that women have culturally become the 'other'.
  - The Bible – issues too taken with the Bible. Secular feminists have argued that as a text it is not neutral and supportive of the patriarchy. Mary Daly, a radical secular feminist, in 1968 wrote 'It might be interesting to speculate upon the probable length of a 'depatriarchalised' Bible. It might be enough salvageable material to comprise an interesting pamphlet'.
- 5) Rosemary Radford Ruether posits that it is the way in which Christianity has been modified over time which is sexist and reinforces the patriarchy, and that the essence of the faith itself is not sexist. She seeks to achieve spiritual equality for women in addition to social and economic equality.
- 6) Sallie McFague specifically underlines the importance of the use of analogy in understanding God. God is to be understood and how God's relationship to human beings is to be understood. A transcendent, all-powerful God cannot be constrained by the human ties of gender and bone – it is something that is human. God is not human, God is greater than and beyond human. As she argues it is erroneous to believe that God is male.
- 7) Liberation theology is a form of theology emerging in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s that found its roots within the social and politically tense situation of El Salvador. The theology was born from was that of the plight of the poor within El Salvador.
- 8) Black theology, much like liberation theology, is contextual. This was a development that found its roots within the historical occurrence of slavery in the United States. It addresses the realities of the enslavement of thousands of African Americans brought over to the states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In these communities, African Americans suffered huge injustices.
- 9) Professor James Cone uses the story of the exodus of the Jews as told in the book Exodus to frame his theology. He makes a comparison between the use of crucifixion in the Roman Empire by the white Americans responsible for the lynching of black people for Civil War crimes. He argues that both groups used the method of execution and display of a body to deter those living in the community from any action which they would consider to be incorrect or against their place. Within the Roman Empire as within the American South – these were dominant communities. They are similar in their visual spectacle nature – just as postcards of lynchings and 'spectacle lynchings' were a practice, so the Romans lined their major roads, along with those being crucified in order to make a clear statement about what happens to those who defy the dominant.
- 10) Evangelical Christianity is a movement which began in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is a branch of Christianity which has certain distinctive worship practices.

### 5.1 Atonement Theory

- 1) Atonement is the state of reconciliation between human beings and God, who had provided a way for humans to be reconciled with God.
- 2) The three main theories of atonement are ransom theory, satisfaction theory and moral exemplar theory.
- 3) Ransom theory revolves around the idea that atonement is gained for humans through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Nazareth on a Roman cross. The theory posits that Jesus' death acted as a ransom.
- 4) Satisfaction theory is the idea that God's just wrath demands satisfaction for the sin of Adam and Eve in the Fall and throughout generations. As we were unable to satisfy ourselves, God paid the price. The death satisfied the wrath of God, enabling humans to be reconciled with God.
- 5) Moral exemplar theory is the idea that one will be found through Jesus by the following of his teachings by Christians. By doing this they will live a better life and distance themselves from sin.
- 6) In his 1847 book, *Christianity and its Progress*, Augustus Hare compared the three main atonement theories and then argued that the satisfaction theory was the most important in order to understand salvation.
- 7) St Anselm of Canterbury was a proponent of the satisfaction theory of atonement.
- 8) His ideas married together the occasionally juxtaposed ideas of the justice of God and the mercy of God.
- 9) The moral exemplar theory is different in that it leaves the responsibility for atonement on the individual rather than on the interjection of God.
- 10) It might be critiqued in that it relies too heavily upon human beings, who are fallible, to achieve the standards necessary for atonement.

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## 5.2 Comparison of Key Ideas: Barth and Hicks

- 1) In Barth's view of atonement, he posits more of an emphasis on the reunion offered rather than on the atonement for sin. Barth posits a picture of Jesus as 'representative' most importantly when drawing a comparison between the two scholars (Barth and Hick) and the full divinity and deity status of Jesus.
- 2) These are the words which are quoted by Jesus on the cross in the Gospel of Matthew. Barth intentionally said by Jesus in order to draw attention to the Psalm and underline his presence within it regarding salvation.
- 3) In Barth's view, Jesus was fully divine.
- 4) Students could give any strength; for example, it fits with biblical narrative.
- 5) Students could give any weakness; for example, if Jesus is not wholly divine, then this challenges the core ideas of Christianity.
- 6) For Hick, salvation and redemption are achieved via **soul-making**. This is the idea that which humans being created to strive to emulate and be like. Unlike Barth, it is not offered through a divine transformation of the self and of the soul to be more like Jesus. It is a lifetime process in the afterlife, where the soul will continue to evolve, if you will, on an equivalence with Jesus.
- 7) Hick's Christology is somewhat controversial within Christian thought. He posited that Jesus was God incarnate, but would rather be better described as a man who had a close relationship, therefore, was able to give prophecies and perform miracles.
- 8) This view is controversial as it challenges the deity of Christ, which in turn challenges the central tenets of Christianity.
- 9) Students could give any strength; for example, it appeals to an open idea of salvation.
- 10) Students could give any weakness; for example, it renders the sacrifice of the cross as a challenge the core ideas of Christianity.

## 6.1 Equality and Discrimination (Gender)

- 1) The view that a shared set of value or culture for everyone is neither feasible nor desirable.
- 2) The idea that more than one religion may contain or reflect aspects of truth and provide salvation.
- 3) This is the idea that only one religion can truly provide both truth and salvation.
- 4) This is the maintenance of cultural identity within minority groups when they are in societies where they are a minority.
- 5) It presents a picture of Christianity as being the only religion which can offer salvation.
- 6) Rahner was an inclusivist, who put forward the idea of Anonymous Christians.
- 7) Anonymous Christians were individuals who, whilst not being Christians, did good, which was possible without God's intervention. Therefore, such people could be considered to be Christians.
- 8) Authority includes traditions, church governance, Scriptures, Worship styles, Creeds, etc.
- 9) The ecumenical movement is a worldwide movement amongst Christians of different denominations, whilst witnessing their truth of the Gospel.
- 10) Some Christians might oppose this on the grounds that their beliefs and theology are too important to compromise.

## 6.2 Equality and Discrimination

- 1) Students could give any relevant reason, e.g. the history of gender segregation in the history of the Bible.
- 2) The complementarian view of the relations between men and women and the roles of different and form different roles within life, as within a church context.
- 3) The egalitarian view argues that men and women are completely equal and there should be no difference in how they function within society and within the Church.
- 4) Students could give any relevant Bible verse, including Galatians 3:28.
- 5) Students could give any relevant Bible verse, including 1 Timothy 2:8–15.
- 6) The Catholic Church takes a complementarian view, stressing that men and women are equal, and specifically stresses the dignity of women.
- 7) This has become an issue within the church due to different interpretations of Scripture. Verses which reference those similar to the deacon in the New Testament should be permitted to preach in the early Church. Therefore, should be permitted to now. Others argue that the New Testament clearly states the authority of men over women.
- 8) This has become a source of tension between religious and secular culture because as women have become more equal with the place of men in society. Therefore, the teaching of women within Catholic or Christian thought as being oppressive or misogynistic, due to her gender.
- 9) The teaching of St Paul is important here because he specifically prohibits the authority of women in a church context in 1 Timothy 2:12.
- 10) Students could give any relevant example, e.g. Elizabeth Lane (1966–present) who was the first female bishop. She is the Bishop of Stockport and was consecrated into the role in 2000.

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